

Financing Special Education in New Jersey

New Jersey School Boards Association

September 2007

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Executive Summary

Statement of Work. This study was commissioned by the New Jersey School Boards Association to address actual costs of special education, special education programs delivery, and policies and procedures.

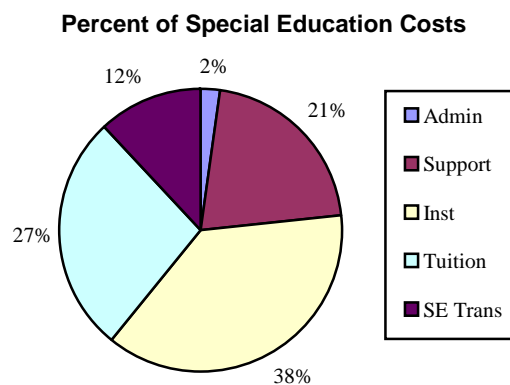
Methodology. The study used an empirical approach to special education financing in New Jersey. The researchers collected actual data, covering years 2005 and 2006, from the New Jersey State Department of Education (NJ DOE), as well as from school districts through a survey and site visits that included interviews with directors or coordinators of special education. They analyzed the information for central tendency, or frequency of occurrence, and distribution according to state, region, district operating type and district factor grouping (socio-economic status). Districts also were asked to nominate exemplary special education programs as examples of effective practices. Federal and State DOE regulations regarding special education were reviewed with respect to their impact on costs. This information was collectively analyzed to determine the status of special education service delivery in New Jersey.

Findings

The study found that special education costs for over 230,000 students with disabilities (including speech) are above \$3.3 billion per year in New Jersey and are driven by tuition and transportation to out-of-district schools, preschool programs for students with autism, related services and resource programs. The intensity of special education services has increased over the last ten years as evidenced by the smaller student-staff ratios and the implementation of highly structured programs and additional related services. It also found that state and federal funding does not cover the “excess cost” of special education, defined as expenditures above the cost of regular education that districts must absorb. These and other trends in staffing, classification, placement, and cost saving opportunities are described below and discussed in more detail in the body of the report.

1. Cost of Special Education. *Special education costs over \$3.3 billion dollars a year in New Jersey with 59% of the funds dedicated to district instructional and support services, 39% to tuition and transportation to out-of-district schools and 2% for administration.*

In 2005, districts spent \$3,311,059,650 on special education services. When

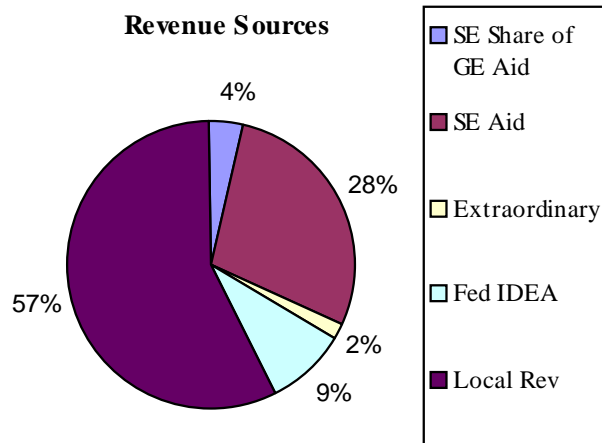


divided by the 205,897 students Eligible for Special Education and Related Services (ESERS), it represents an average of \$16,081 per pupil, or about 1.6 times the amount spent on general education. (In total, 232,894 students received special education services in 2005. This higher overall number includes students who received speech-language services, which are supported by funding for the general education program. These students are not counted in the ESERS total – 205,897 – which the study used in determining the cost per pupil for special education.)

Instruction and support services constitute 59% of the costs. Tuition and transportation to out-of-district schools consume 39% of the costs. Administrative costs are only 2% of the total. These costs do not include staff (non-salary) benefits, equipment or vocational special education since these data were not consistently reported on the audit summary submitted to the NJ State Department of Education.

2. Special Education Funding. *Local school districts support 57% of the cost of special education. The State funds approximately 34%. Federal aid accounts for 9%.*

In 2005, state aid covered just over one-third of New Jersey’s expenditures for special education. This amount includes special education aid (28%), a small portion of general education aid (4%) allocated toward services for special education students, and “extraordinary special education costs aid” (2%), a program established in 1996 to help districts pay for individual placements that exceed \$40,000 but which has never been fully funded.



Federal aid (\$293 million) covers another 9%, leaving 57% (\$1.9 billion) to be borne by local districts through property taxes. Since state aid has been essentially frozen for four years while expenditures have increased, the state share of special education costs has decreased. Transportation aid has been frozen for seven years even though gasoline prices have almost tripled. Federal aid increased, but the formula for dispensing it changed from an amount per student with disabilities to one based on three factors: A base amount; a census factor; and poverty, a factor that may be only tangentially related to disability. The change shifted funding toward districts with higher poverty rates and decreased federal aid for more wealthy districts.

3. Cost Drivers. *The main cost drivers in special education are tuition and transportation for out-of-district placements, programs for students with autism, related services and resource programs.*

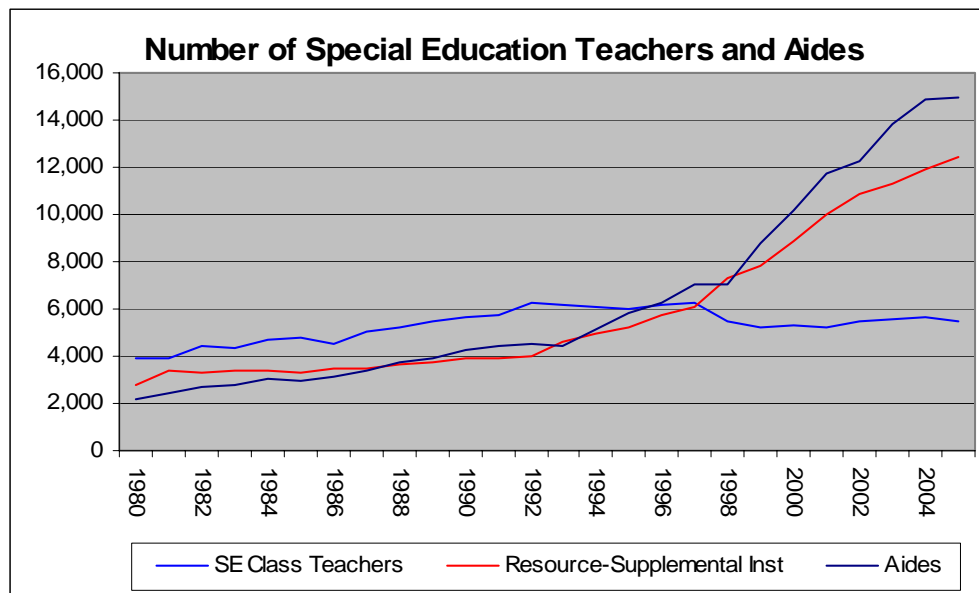
According to directors of special education, one of the predominant reasons for the high cost of special education is tuition and transportation for out-of-district

placements in public and private schools for the disabled. Tuition and transportation consume 39% of the special education expenditures. Other cost drivers include preschool programs for autism, related services (counseling, occupational therapy, and physical therapy) and resource programs. The classification rate (excluding speech) has leveled off at about 15% of the entire student population. The placement rates have remained essentially unchanged over the past ten years. Since the classification and placement rates have not changed, the cost increases are due to the increase in intensity of the programming and to the annual increase in the costs of the services themselves (e.g., tuition, transportation, related services).

4. Quality and Intensity of Services. *Increases in the quality and intensity of services (staff-to-student ratios, highly structured programs, and more related services) have also contributed to costs over the last ten years.*

Districts are acutely aware of the requirement to make Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind law. The requirement is putting pressure on special education providers to enable students with disabilities to pass the statewide assessments. As a result, they are examining their curricula and looking for research-based instructional methods to enhance achievement. This increase in the quality and intensity of services is also reflected in the decreased student-staff ratios, increased provision of related services and use of assistive technology (i.e., computers, software, amplification systems and recorded books). Orton-Gillingham, Wilson, and Applied Behavior Analysis are examples of the highly-structured programs that are more intensive than the special classes of ten years ago. The recent emphasis on Highly Qualified Teachers and certification for aides is also adding to the quality and cost of instruction. Results of this investment are seen in the increasing passing rates for students with disabilities in statewide assessments (although they still lag behind those for general education). The improvements in instruction have been costly.

5. Staffing Trends. *The average statewide staff-student ratio for special education increased from one staff member for every seven students in 1995 to one for every five students in 2005.*



The change in staff-student ratio has been affected by increased numbers of preschool teachers, resource teachers, aides, and related service providers. For example, the number of preschool teachers more than doubled from 436 in 1995 to 943 in 2005. This may reflect the increasing number of preschool students with disabilities and the severity of their disabilities. Since 1998, the number of aides has doubled to address the needs of the preschool autism programs as well as the needs of students with disabilities in general education, resource and special classes. At the same time, the number of resource teachers increased 70% to meet the needs of the students with disabilities in general education classes. The number of students receiving related services (counseling, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech, and other) has increased by 26% over the last five years. The number of students receiving speech-language services increased only 12% during that time; however, since the mid-nineties, speech-language services are more likely to be provided as a related service twice a week, rather than once a week. Students with disabilities are more successful in learning the mechanics of reading due to teachers who are trained in the various phonics methods. Staff members have improved special education instruction through the use of assistive technological devices, such as computers, software, amplification systems, and recorded books.

6. Shared Services. *Districts already share a number of services (transportation, related services, and classes for low-incidence disabilities); however, opportunities for additional savings are limited by logistical difficulties and “territoriality.”*

Sharing services is often considered a way to reduce costs. In fact, it is already occurring to a large extent in transportation, classes for students with low-incidence (or severe) disabilities, related services, child study team services, and professional development. In the same vein, many small school districts combine in-district special education administration with other responsibilities, such as part-time coordinator and part-time child study team member. These efforts should continue; however, there are impediments that work against additional sharing. The distance between districts causes problems for scheduling. The differences in curricula among

districts cause problems in coordinating programming. Territoriality may result in an unwillingness to give up control to a host district. The research also showed that several districts faced parental opposition to sharing services with districts of different socio-economic backgrounds. These difficulties will be hard to overcome. While shared services can reduce administrative staffing, coordinating the efforts demands administrative attention, thereby lessening actual savings. Nonetheless, efforts to share services should still be pursued.

7. Least Restrictive Environment. *Current funding formulae do not directly increase more restrictive placements or impact the overall classification rate; however, their current design inadvertently encourages school districts to place students in more restrictive settings.*

The U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Programs cited New Jersey for having the highest proportion of students with disabilities in separate settings (both public and private). New Jersey also has the fourth highest classification rate in the nation. In response to the federal agency's concern about New Jersey's progress toward educating special education students in the least restrictive environment, the state changed its funding formula in 1996 to one designed to provide the same aid regardless of the setting in which the services were delivered. In spite of this alteration in funding, there has been no change in the proportion of students in separate settings nor has there been any appreciable change in the classification rate. The design of future funding formulae should ensure that school districts are not inadvertently encouraged to place children in more restrictive settings.

8. Funding Weights. *The current and proposed funding formulae for special education have multiple tiers with different funding levels that result in incentives to count students in the higher tiers where overall costs are much greater.*

The New Jersey State Department of Education recently conducted a study, "The Cost of Education," for use as preliminary research in the development of a new school funding system. The study proposes two sets of funding weights – one for K-8 school districts, the other for K-12 districts – for the following categories: speech-language services, moderate disability, severe disability, preschool special education programs, and extended school year. The proposed weights for special education were not specifically reviewed in this report because the underlying data supporting the recommendations were not available.

The weights proposed in "The Cost of Education" were not defined as to which students would be counted in each, but presumably they would continue to be setting-neutral to conform to federal requirements regarding least-restrictive environment. The very large weight for severe disabilities for K-8 districts (7.39 times base cost of general education) as compared with the much lower rate for K-12 districts (4.08 times base cost) is somewhat puzzling, especially when one recognizes that students at the secondary level are the ones more frequently sent out of district to the most expensive programs. Since preschool programs carried their own funding weight, the justification for the larger K-8 factor for the severely disabled is problematic.

In judging the effect of the multiple funding weights proposed in the Cost of Education, it is instructive to examine the five-year trends in the number of students in each Tier of the current funding formula. That formula defines four levels of support for students depending on their classification or the nature of the services they

Number of Students in Each Tier				
Year	Tier I	Tier II	Tier III	Tier IV
2000	129,123	113,544	39,543	19,026
2001	141,068	112,509	45,096	22,502
2002	153,209	112,717	50,184	25,089
2003	154,557	112,048	54,548	28,424
2004	163,086	108,905	58,334	31,566
Pct. Change 2000-2004	26.3	- 4.1	47.5	65.9

receive. The number of students in the lowest tier (for related services), where the smallest amount of aid is provided, increased by 26.3%. The number of students reported in Tier II (mildly disabled) decreased slightly, while the number in Tier III (moderately disabled) increased by 48%. In Tier IV (severely disabled), which provides the highest level of State aid, the number of students increased by 65.9%. Because the aid amounts for Tiers III and IV are two to four times higher than that in Tier II, there is an unintended incentive to maximize the number of students reported in those categories. A similar incentive could emerge from the funding weights proposed in “The Cost of Education” if they were to be enacted without safeguards.

9. State and Federal Aid. *State and federal funding does not cover the excess cost of special education.*

As far back as 1911, state aid was established to cover the excess cost of special education, i.e., those costs that exceed expenditures for regular education. State funding initially covered half the cost of special education. Later the funding was based on the category of disability. Reports by the state (1986) and by the New Jersey School Boards Association (2000) have recommended that state and federal aid cover the full excess costs.

In 1996, state funding shifted from categorical aid allocated by program to one distributed according to four tiers defined by disability. Additional aid for extraordinary circumstances was added in 1996 and refined by a law enacted in 2002. State funding for speech-language services was built into general education aid because it was such a common service that separate special funding was not needed. Since 2001, however, expenditures have increased faster than state funding (due in large part to stagnant state aid). As a result, the percentage of special education costs covered by the state aid dropped by about one-quarter.

Federal aid was initially based on a per pupil reimbursement but changed in the nineties to a formula that included a base amount, a census factor to reflect enrollment growth, and a poverty factor. Federal aid was intended to cover 40% of the costs; however, in spite of recent increases in aid, it only covers about 9% of special education in New Jersey today.

Recommendations

This study developed the following recommendations concerning state and federal funding, reallocation of resources, classification and placement rates, accountability, development of in-district programs and data collection. Discussion of the recommendations follows:

1. Funding – State and Federal Aid. *All excess costs of special education should be funded by state and federal aid. The state should implement annual incremental increases in the overall level of special education aid, with the goal of moving toward full funding of the excess cost of special education.*

The expenditures needed for special education in excess of general education costs totals \$3.3 billion statewide. New Jersey's local school districts currently fund approximately \$1.9 billion (57%) of these excess costs through local property taxes.

Several factors should be considered in establishing state and federal policy on special education funding. First, although school districts are managing to support the general education portion of special education students' education, stagnant state aid to education has resulted in more reliance on local property taxes to fund all aspects of education. Second, this funding situation has exacerbated the competition between general and special education programming for limited resources. Third, special education is governed by detailed state and federal regulations.

State and federal payment of full excess costs is not new concept. A 2000 study by the New Jersey School Boards Association – and a 1986 report to the state Legislature – urged such a policy. The state of New Jersey could begin moving toward greater support for excess costs – without overextending itself during this period of financial difficulty – by incrementally increasing the overall level of state aid to special education.

A significant first step would be full funding of Extraordinary Costs Aid – that is, state support for the cost of individual education programs above \$40,000 a year per student – to the level districts applied for in the previous school year. Using applications from 2007 as a reference, this could increase special education aid next year by \$171 million.

2. Funding – Single Rate. *It is recommended that the State DOE use a single funding formula for special education, instead of the current multiple-tier structure.*

A single, adequately funded per pupil special education stipend should be established by the State to cover all the excess costs of special education. It would be easier to administer than the multiple tiers in the current system. The single factor would eliminate unintentional incentives to place students in the higher tiers that produce more state aid. When different funding levels are defined, there is a tendency to try to maximize the aid received by shifting to categories that yield a higher return. The distribution should be done fairly and exclude extraneous factors, such as poverty, that are only tangentially related to the causes of disabling conditions.

3. Funding – Classification and Placements. *State DOE aid should be distributed in a way that (a) minimizes incentives to increase the classification rate and (b) promotes placements in less-restrictive settings.*

The manner of aid distribution could be designed to minimize incentives to increase the classification rate. For example, districts with classification rates that exceed the state average by five or more percentage points could have their aid capped.

For educational, social and fiscal reasons, aid should be distributed regardless of placement, so that it would foster placements in less restrictive settings. Providing start-up funds for in-district programs for students with substantial disabilities could promote placements in less restrictive settings.

In addition, general education aid should support instructional interventions for at-risk students (frequently identified as being eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) to reduce any incentive to classify such students as disabled. *Students with educational difficulties should not have to be called “disabled” in perpetuity just to receive the help they need.*

4. Funding – Accountability. *Accountability for student achievement must be a consideration of the State’s school district monitoring process and not built into the funding formula.*

The President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education raised the issue of accountability. Although New Jersey has increased participation in statewide testing, accountability for passing those tests has not been totally embraced. Since most students with disabilities lag behind their peers, passing the statewide tests at the same rate should not be the only accountability criteria. Graduation rates, dropout rates and fulfillment of individual education program goals and objectives are possible indices of a successful special education program. Classification rates, placement rates, and racial-ethnic disparities have been cited as important considerations as well. These different accountability measures cannot be applied uniformly across all districts because the different operating types and sizes make direct comparisons impossible. Tying accountability measures to the funding formula would be an administrative nightmare and inherently unfair because implementation could not be evenly applied to all districts. The debate on accountability should not be on whether it is needed, but how to best implement it. This is better accomplished through targeted monitoring and corrective action on a case-by-case basis.

5. Reallocation of Resources. *The state and local school districts should invest in the development of more in-district options with all the needed transition services and support that are now provided to students currently sent out of district.*

Students in out-of-district placements account for above 10% of the special education population but use almost 40% of the expenditures. Reduction in special education costs is a challenge since the services are mandated and parents have become more knowledgeable about the elements of a successful program. The trend toward more intensive services over the last ten years is an indication of that. The pressure to

place students out of district often comes from parents who believe that placement in a private school setting would be better for their children. They may seek more than an appropriate education to remediate the disability and instead hope for more of a cure. Smaller districts find it difficult to start programs because they have too few students at any grade level. Yet, the tuition and transportation costs of sending a student to an out-of-district private school can often amount to \$60,000. If a district has three or more students with similar needs within the same age range, it could be more cost effective to open an in-district program than to place the student in an out-of-district facility. If they start an in-district program, school districts should not expect that they would initially save an amount that would be equal to the entire cost of out-of-district tuition and transportation since they would have to make a substantial investment.

For example, districts statewide could reallocate millions of dollars if some students now in out-of-district placements were moved to in-district programs. Such reallocation would also enable districts to maintain more control over students' education.

Often, the "high cost of special education" is used synonymously with out-of-district schooling. However, it is unrealistic to think that a school district could recoup the entire tuition and transportation costs for each student who returns from an out-of-district placement. An appropriate in-district program cost would be about 70% of the tuition and transportation expense. Administrative costs would be much lower, and there would be no need to transport students great distances.

Students sent out-of-district are our more severely impaired and, therefore, need the most services. Returning them to the district would mean providing all the appropriate supports and transition services to meet their special education needs. It would also mean securing sufficient classroom space to conduct the new programs, a concern in many densely populated districts. Initiation of an in-district autism program provides a good example of the financial and logistical impact. There would be start-up costs for equipment and professional development that would diminish as the program matures. Initially, the only cost difference resulting from the students' return may be a savings on transportation. However, the students would now be in the home district's program and, with time, additional savings would accrue because other students could be educated in the district school, instead of being sent out of district.

New Jersey has the highest proportion of students with disabilities in out-of-district placements in the country. Unfortunately, this statistic has been consistent for many years and resulted in a federal corrective action plan. It stems from New Jersey's role as a groundbreaker in providing special education services years before the enactment of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the mid-seventies and before other states' special education efforts matured. In those early days, both public and private agencies provided special education only in separate settings. This legacy continues with over 200 such providers today. States that began the bulk of their special education programs after the passage of the federal IDEA did so using less restrictive environments. Returning some students with disabilities to the district would benefit them programmatically by increasing the opportunities for interaction with their non-disabled peers, paving the way toward a higher degree of

social skills and acceptance.

6. Employment of Aides. *The State DOE should provide training and support for instructional aides to help school districts maintain the quality of special and general education programs for students with disabilities.*

School districts are hiring instructional aides in greater numbers to assist in providing special education in both special and general education settings. To be effective, the aides need appropriate training from the State DOE on the nature of disabilities and the instructional modifications needed to ameliorate them. Whether aides receive benefits as part of their remuneration is a topic that should be examined further. To lower costs, some districts have adjusted the hours per week to below 30 for aides, so that the aides are part-time employees for whom the district is not required to provide health benefits. One district indicated that aides have been its fastest growing employee group due to the return of more severely disabled students to the district's classrooms. If this district also provided benefits to its 130 aides, the costs would add \$1.5 million to the budget. Other special education directors have said that they provide aides with benefits because it is difficult to retain quality staff if they are not included in their compensation. During our site visits, many special education directors also said that they believe students with disabilities need continuity in their programs. Therefore, having to adjust to different part-time aides throughout the day can be difficult. This is an item to consider seriously by every district.

7. Regulatory Review. *It is recommended that special education rules and procedures be revised regarding the permissible age range of students within the same special education class, class size, Alternate Proficiency Assessment, due process burden of proof in challenges to a student's placement, and Individual Education Program goals and objectives. All of these issues affect efficiency and have significant financial implications for districts.*

Age Range and Class Size. Although the New Jersey State Department of Education recently revised its special education administrative code, the adverse impact on programs in districts was substantially underestimated. About half the districts reported that they would have to hire additional staff, increase the number of classes and find additional facilities in which to house them because of the new requirements regarding age range, single-subject resource programs and class-size restrictions. (The age-range restriction was to have taken effect in the 2007-08 school year. However, it was voided by the state's Council on Local Mandates as an unconstitutional, unfunded state mandate.) The study found that smaller districts in particular would have extreme difficulty with the age range and class size requirements, resulting in substantial increases in costs.

Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA). The APA process is cumbersome, labor-intensive and actually reduces instructional time for students with disabilities. Federal regulations permit states to establish APA standards and processes. New Jersey should streamline its process for the benefit of the more severely disabled students.

Multi-year Goals and Objectives. Federal regulations permit the use of multi-year goals and objectives in students' Individual Education Programs. This would be particularly appropriate for students with disabilities in in-class support programs in general education since their programs differ more in instructional modifications than curriculum goals.

Mediation/Due Process. The U.S. Supreme Court decision of 2005 (*Schaffer v. Weast*) shifted the burden of proof to the plaintiff (usually parents) in due process cases, i.e., challenges to a child's placement or IEP. The study found that directors of special services support this decision since it will help clarify the issues in dispute earlier in the process, thereby increasing the possibility for resolution. Reduction of conflict will reduce the cost to both parents and districts.

8. Autism Spectrum Programs. *The State DOE should expand the Governor's 2007 Autism Initiative funding to start quality in-district autism spectrum programs.*

Over the last few years, a number of highly successful research-based programs for autism spectrum disorder have emerged in our schools. These programs provide models for districts that are looking to start quality programs in the least restrictive environment. A mechanism, including a funding source, needs to be created that allows for a flow of information and opportunities for visitation and consultation with staff among these recognized programs. This opportunity would allow districts to select the research-based approach that is most comfortable for their community and ensure inclusion of all the key ingredients of a successful program. The visits would help districts gain insight into the acceptable benchmarks for related services.

Many resources are available to address this issue. For example, Parents of Autistic Children, a New Jersey-based non-profit organization that provides services to children with autism, their families and service providers, could be a significant contributor to this concept. In addition, U.S. Representative Chris Smith (NJ-R-4) is the co-chair of the Congressional Autism Caucus. The State DOE also has issued guidelines for various autism instructional programs.

9. Professional Development. *General education teachers should receive State DOE supported pre-service and in-service training on special education topics such as differentiated instruction and the nature of various disabilities and their amelioration.*

The initiation of a statewide staff-training program for general education teachers on special education topics from the State DOE was, by far, the number one recommendation made by each special education director interviewed for this project. Educators often talk of blurring the lines between regular and special education. Even after classification, students are likely to continue receiving most of their instruction in the general education class. No longer is a referral for special education guaranteed to remove a child from the general education class. Since finances for day-to-day operations are stretched beyond their limits, training beyond a one-day presentation is scarce. Yet teachers are being asked to differentiate more, adapt to in-class support models, and spend more time on IEP accommodations in general education classes. While it is appropriate and proper to hold teachers accountable, it

is also imperative to provide them with the necessary tools through extended professional development. Training for general education teachers on special education topics is needed to support appropriate accommodations for the students in their classes who have disabilities that must be addressed either through Individual Education Programs or Section 504 plans. (Section 504 refers to federal civil rights legislation, which requires that a child with a disability have equal access to an education.)

10. Intervention & Referral Services. *It is recommended that middle and high school teachers receive State DOE supported training in all phases of intervention services and responsibilities.*

The New Jersey State Department of Education (NJ DOE) recognized that students who are experiencing learning and/or behavior difficulties can be helped when intervention occurs and appropriate action plans are developed, implemented and evaluated. The NJ DOE also provided more technical support for this initiative. There is anecdotal evidence that Intervention & Referral Services work best at the elementary level. However, more emphasis is needed at both the middle and high school level. There is also a new requirement to assess a student's Response to Intervention (RTI) in order to determine the nature of the learning obstacle and programming needs. Students need more accommodations within general education in order to prevent the needless classification.

11. Multi-Sensory Phonics-Based Reading. *Elementary special education teachers and general education teachers in grades K, 1, 2, & 3 should receive State DOE supported pre-service or in-service training in a multi-sensory approach to reading.*

The last 20 years have seen the emergence of a variety of multi-sensory approaches to reading. These programs have gained popularity due to their wide degree of success with children who are having difficulty in reading. Special education directors who were visited for this study felt strongly that any emphasis on literacy needs to include a multi-sensory approach (visual, auditory, tactile cues). Since in-depth training is required for all teachers who implement one of these programs, professional development funding becomes an issue. Elementary special education teachers and general education teachers in grades 1, 2 & 3 should receive training in a multi-sensory approach to reading. College teacher training programs should incorporate this in their programs as well. These efforts should be fully supported by NJ DOE.

12. Data Collection – Audit Summary. *It is recommended that the NJ DOE collect audit summary data in a way that would enable funding decisions to be based on actual expenditures.*

The State DOE's audit summary collects information by special education program, but the students are reported on the Application for State School Aid by special education tier. As a result, it is impossible to tell whether the current tier amounts are appropriate or sufficient. In order for the NJ DOE and the Legislature to have accurate information on which to base their funding decisions, the audit summary should be revised to reflect the actual costs within each of the four tiers, or whatever levels of special education funding are established in the new funding structure.

13. Data Collection – Staffing. *The NJ DOE should collect audit summary data on support services and benefits that distinguish between special and general education expenditures.*

The current audit summary does not distinguish the cost of support services between general and special education. For example, counselors, librarians and nurses are included along with child study teams and related services providers. Also, the cost of benefits is not consistently reported for special education programs. For example, the 2005 audit summary listed benefits for special education programs in just a few districts. The remaining districts apparently incorporated these costs under unallocated benefits along with general education benefits. Reporting on the audit summary should clearly differentiate general and special education costs for staff benefits and support services.

14. Data Collection – Federal. *It is recommended that the NJ DOE and elected representatives work to reduce the amount of data required by the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.*

Recent additions to federal data collection on special education have reached an astounding level of detail that is required of every district in the country every year. The December Annual Data Report now exceeds 28 pages. District data management systems have difficulty recording basic information and prepared IEPs, let alone new information, such as the various reasons why it took longer than 90 days to evaluate and determine eligibility for special education placement (e.g., parent vacations, missed appointments by family, staff shortages, parental consent delayed or refused, incomplete enrollment information, specialized evaluations needed, etc.). It is hard to understand to what federal purpose this information is needed from every school district throughout the country every year. Periodic studies on a sample of districts or students would be more efficient, without sacrificing timeliness and accuracy.

Exemplary Programs

The following is a list of those programs reviewed and considered to be exemplary, organized topically with contact information. A description of each exemplary program is included in the body of the report (p. 111).

Alternative Education

- Shared Alternative School – Manasquan and Wall Township School Districts – Clement Bramley, Jr. Director of Pupil Personnel Services, 732-528-8833 and Wall Township - Sharon Cox, Director of Special Services, 732-556-2121
- CAP – Cranford Public Schools - Dr. James McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent, 908-709-6218; Stephen F. Izzo, Manager of Grants & Special Programs, 908-709-6207
- BD Work Study – Collingswood School District – Gina Scharff, Director of Special Services, 856-962-5725

Autistic

- Verbal Behavior Instruction – Brick Township Public Schools – Alan Ferraro, Director of Special Services, 732-785-3080
- Freehold and Douglass Partnership – Freehold Township Schools – Barbara Selikoff, Director of Educational Services, 732-866-6866
- Stepping Stones – Fair Lawn Public Schools – Dr. Joyce Beam, Director of Special Services, 201-794-5500

HSPA Prep

- HSPA Prep - Passaic County Technical Institute - Candace Chaleff, Supervisor of Special Services, 973-389-4197

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)/Inclusive Education

- CBIS – Jersey City Public Schools – Priscilla Petrosky, Associate Superintendent, 201-915-6079
- AIMSS - Jersey City Public Schools - Priscilla Petrosky, Associate Superintendent, 201-915-6079
- Franklin Township School – Franklin Township, Warren County – Mary Sullivan, CST Coordinator, 908-689-2958 x 404

- Collaborative Educational Services – Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission (MRESC) – Mark Finkelstein, Superintendent, 732-777-9848

Literacy

- RAISE - Jersey City Public Schools - Priscilla Petrosky, Associate Superintendent, 201-915-6079
- Cranford School District Academy – Cranford Public Schools – Dr. James McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent, 908-709-6218; Stephen F. Izzo, Manager of Grants & Special Programs, 908-709-6207
- Project Read – Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School District – Dr. John Marciante, Assistant to the Superintendent, 732-786-2750

Multiply Disabled Programs

- High School Business Buddies Program – Lindenwold School District – Susan Beal, Director of Special Services, 908-996-2132 x 2741
- Employment Transitions – Delaware Valley Regional High School District – Dr. Frank Guenther, Director of Special Services, 908-996-2132 x 2741
- MD – High School Program – Sterling High School District – James Gallagher, Supervisor of Special Services, 856-784-1840

Preschool Handicapped

- Project Excel – Wall Township – Sharon Cox, Director of Special Services, 732-556-2121
- Preschool Program – Lincoln Park – Grace Marinello, Director of Special Services, 973-696-9150
- Inclusive Preschool – Englewood Cliffs Public Schools – Joseph Spano, Principal, 201-567-6151 x 212
- S.P.F.O.W.T.S. - Washington Township Schools, Mercer County – Christine Sevilla, Director of Special Services, 609-632-0944 x 4410

Professional Development

- Social Services and School Partnership – Brick Township Public Schools - Alan Ferraro, Director of Special Services, 732-785-3080

Support

- BEACON - Jersey City Public Schools - Priscilla Petrosky, Associate Superintendent, 201-915-6079
- Central Core of Support – West Essex Regional – Judith Ulchinsky, Director of Special Services, 973-228-1200 x 221