

**Program Review  
Hanover Public Schools Special Education Department  
February 2022**

In December 2021, the Hanover Public Schools engaged Dorsey Yearley to review the district's special education programs and services. The basic charge of this review was to gather information about all aspects of special education programming with the purpose of identifying any areas that may require more extensive information gathering and strategic planning in order support improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

Based upon conversations with the Director of Student Services, the following guiding questions for this review were identified:

- 1) What are the identified concerns, if any, related to special education programs and services from a variety of stakeholders, including parents, administrators, and faculty?
- 2) Has the context and need for the substantially separate programming in the district changed since the programs were developed, and if so, what adjustments should be explored?
- 3) Does the current administrative structure support compliant, effective, and collaborative special education programming?
- 4) What is the experience of families as they enter and engage in the IEP process and collaborate with school staff in the planning and delivery of special education services for their children, and what, if anything, would support a stronger collaborative partnership?

**Format**

In order to respond to the guiding questions, the reviewer gathered qualitative information by interviewing key stakeholders. Interviews were conducted in December 2021 and followed a structured interview protocol, allowing for comparison of responses among stakeholders. The specific interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

The following groups and individuals were interviewed:

Central Administration:	Superintendent Assistant Superintendent Director of Student Services
Building Based Staff:	Principals Special Education Administrators Special Education Staff School Counselors and Psychologists Related Therapy Staff ABA Tutors
Parents:	SEPAC Board Parent Focus Group

Interviews were conducted on site, allowing the reviewer to take a tour of the programs in each building. In addition to the interviews, the reviewer focused on an analysis of quantitative data gathered from publicly accessible information, and the Hanover administrative team made a variety of additional data specific to special education programming available for review.

## **Qualitative Analysis: Findings from Interviews and Visits**

### ***Findings from Interviews***

Administrative staff and service providers at all levels indicated that the strength of the special education program is the high quality, experienced staff and the collaborative and collegial culture within each school. They described parents as engaged and invested in their children's educational progress and stated that there was generally strong and positive communication between the school and home.

Challenges were related in part to the recent restructuring of the district to two grade level schools at the elementary level, and many stakeholders, including parents, identified transitions and the need for consistent practices and procedures between schools as areas that needed attention. Several stakeholder groups expressed concern that this lack of consistency could lead to lack of confidence on the part of parents, who sometimes seemed uncertain about the planning and communication that happened between schools as their children moved from grade to grade. All stakeholders spoke favorably about the current focus of the district on the acquisition of literacy skills and the goal to continue to improve literacy supports for all students, but it was clear that this is viewed by stakeholders as a work in progress that needs continued attention.

Some stakeholders identified the change at certain levels regarding the assignment of special education staff responsible for formal assessments as an area that needs more support. Others cited the identification process itself, including the use of data from regularly scheduled screenings and other sources, as an area that needed improvement. Administrators and school staff talked about the current work at all levels related to both problem-solving teams and tiered levels of support for students prior to referral to special education, sharing that this is a current goal and a valuable area for continued focus.

All stakeholders were positive about the presence of the various strands of special education programming for students with more intensive needs, but they also identified areas for improvement related to this programming. Some stakeholders suggested that the programs could be better aligned from level to level, and others worried that there were groups of students whose needs might be better served by creating different kinds of programs. Several stakeholder groups commented on the multi-faceted role that was required of the lead teacher in these programs, especially in terms of managing and assigning paraprofessional staff, highlighting that this is a task that has been made much more complex during the pandemic, but adding that this has generally been an additional responsibility for these teachers.

Finally, most stakeholders agreed that there was a need to develop a stronger and more collaborative working relationship with parents throughout the entire IEP and service delivery process for students with certain disabilities. Several stakeholders, both in schools and in the community, described the possibility that IEP meetings could become tense and potentially adversarial when parents did not agree with the recommendations of the school staff and felt the need to advocate strongly for their children. Additionally, school staff sometimes felt that their voice and expertise were not being valued and their recommendations were being overridden by outside experts, whose evaluations or advocacy were often a part of these meetings.

In closing each interview, stakeholders were asked if there was any critical information that had not been shared. Almost without exception, school staff responded that they were grateful and proud

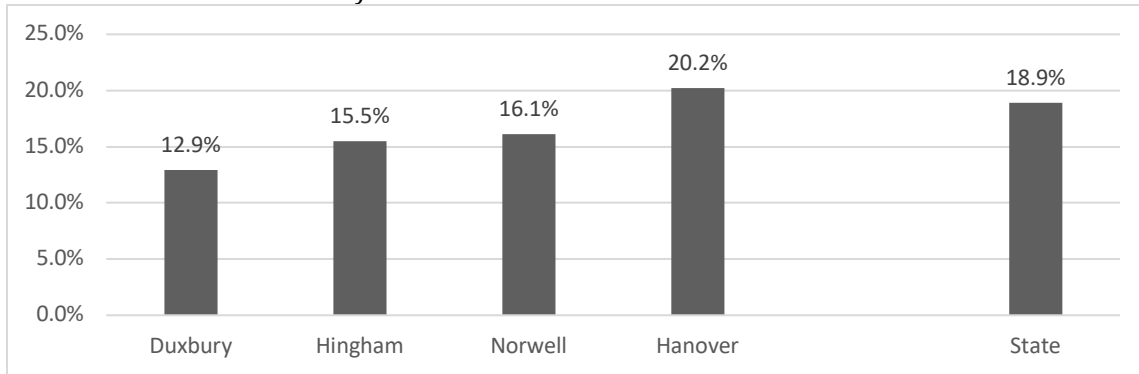
to be working in Hanover; that they felt well supported; and that despite the areas of identified improvement, it was a positive place for both children and teachers.

**Quantitative Analysis: Findings from Data and Document Review**

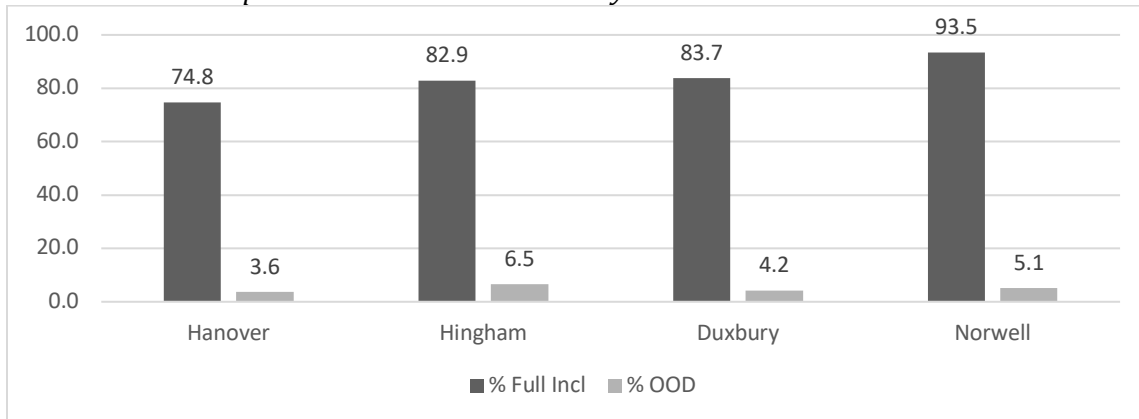
Using publicly available data from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), special education programs and services in the Hanover Public Schools were compared to selected districts using a variety of indicators. The selected districts, which include Duxbury, Hingham, and Norwell, are comparable in size and demographics to Hanover and were identified by the administration as districts often used for comparison. In addition, data specific to Hanover, including descriptive documents, special education roster data with personally identifying information redacted, and parent surveys, were analyzed. Comments related to this data will be included in the discussion section of this review.

**Publicly Available Data: District Comparisons**

*Table A: Comparable Percent of students eligible for special education by district as of Oct. 1, 2021  
Source: MA DESE School Profiles*

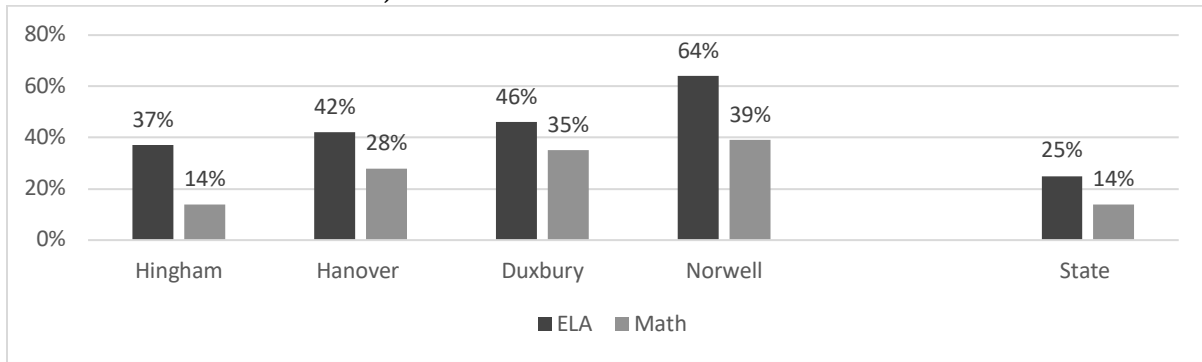


*Table B: Comparable Placement Patterns in Full inclusion and Out of District Placements: SY21  
Source: MA DESE Special Education Enrollment by Educational Environment: School Year 20-21*

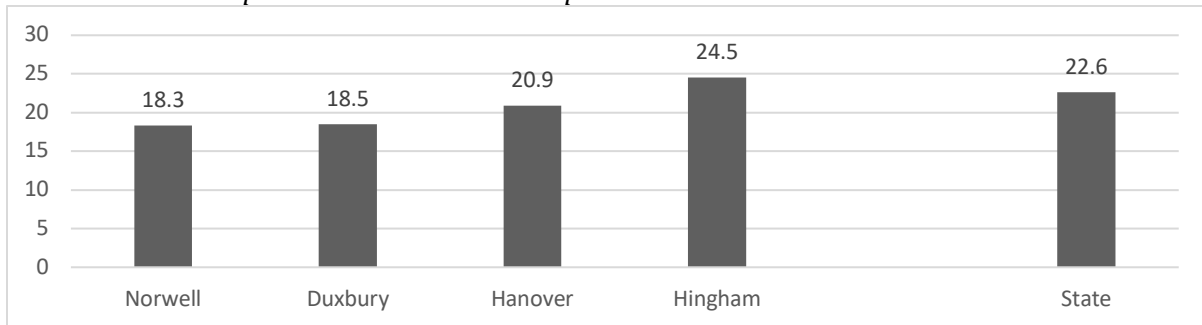


*\*Data is for students ages 6-21*

**Table C: Comparable Performance of Students with Disabilities: SWD’s Meeting or Exceeding Standard-2021 MCAS Grade 10; Source: MA DESE Next Generation MCAS Results 2021**



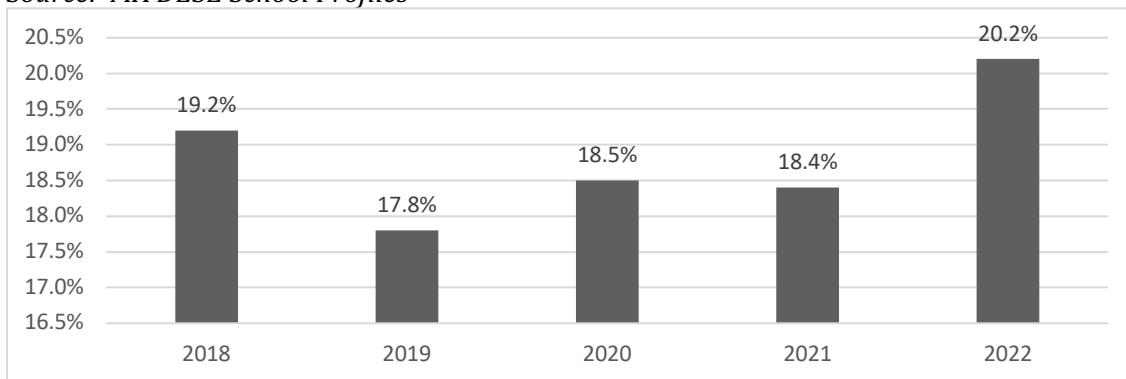
**Table D: Percent of Total Budget Spent on Special Education: FY20 Source: MA DESE Special Education Direct Expenditure Trends**



**Hanover Specific Data: Special Education Roster**

The following data is based upon a review of the Hanover special education roster dated October 2021, with personally identifying information redacted. In this roster, the total number of students with disabilities was 535, including 26 students placed out of district. It should be noted that this data represents a moment in time. Actual caseload numbers vary slightly over time; therefore, while this data is representative, it will also vary slightly over time. However, even with anticipated changes, it describes the basic patterns related to special education programming.

**Table E: Change in special education eligibility over time in Hanover: SY 18 to SY22 Source: MA DESE School Profiles**



*Table F: All SWD's Disability Distribution*

*Source: Hanover Oct. 2021 Special Education Roster; N=535*

*MA DESE Special Education Enrollment by Disability, School Year 2021-2022*

	<b>Hanover SY22</b>	<b>State SY22</b>
Intellectual	1.1%	4.0%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	0.6%	0.7%
Communication	<b>13.3%</b>	13.5%
Vision	0	0.3%
Emotional	5.0%	9.6%
Physical	0.6%	0.4%
Health	<b>17.4%</b>	14.9%
SLD	<b>26.5%</b>	23.9%
Deaf/Blind	0.2%	0.1%
Multiple	1.9%	1.1%
Autism	11.4%	15.0%
Neurological	6.0%	5.4%
Developmental Delay	<b>16.1%</b>	11.0%

*Table G: Percent of SWD's with Selected Disabilities by School*

*Source: Hanover Oct. 2021 Special Education Roster*

	<b>Cedar</b>	<b>Center</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High</b>
Develop. Delay	<b>51.3%</b>	<b>31.9%</b>	0.6%	0
Communication	<b>18.4%</b>	15.6%	13.9%	7.9%
Health	3.9%	10.6%	<b>21.7%</b>	<b>30.2%</b>
SLD	0	<b>29.1%</b>	<b>41.0%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>

*Table H: SWD caseload by School*

*Source: Hanover Oct. 2021 Special Education Roster*

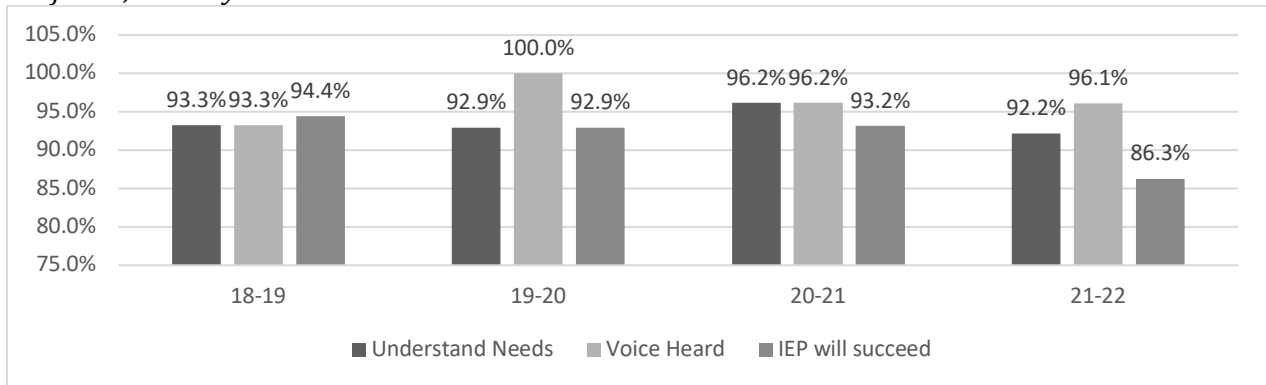
	<b>Number of SWD's*</b>	<b>SWD's as % of Total School</b>
Cedar	76	15.9%
Center	141	23.0%
Middle	166	20.8%
High	126	17.8%

*\*does not include out of district students*

**Hanover Specific Data: Parent Survey**

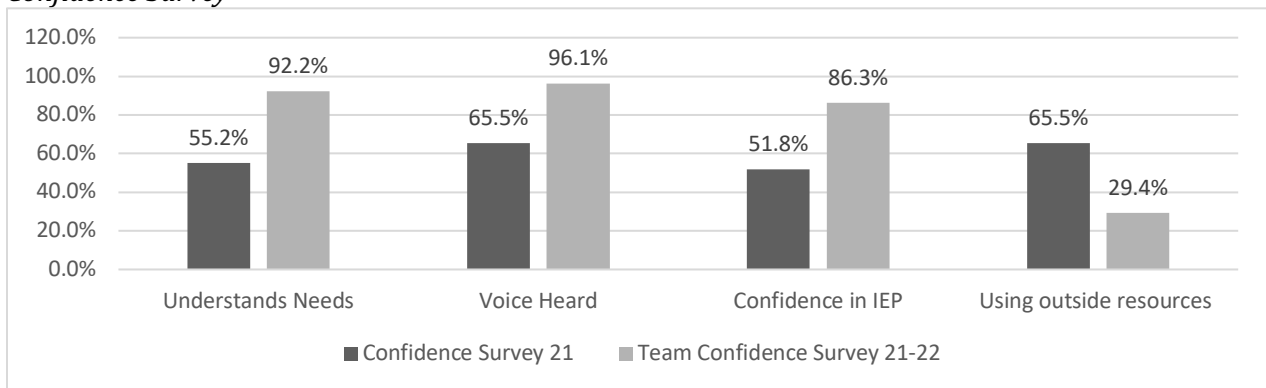
Since 2018, the district has sent a survey to all parents immediately after participating in their child's team meeting. This survey is titled the Team Meeting Confidence Survey. In addition, in September 2021, the district sent out a separate survey to all parents of students with disabilities to gather new information concerning the use of outside resources. This survey was titled the Special Education Confidence Survey. Summary information from these surveys is described below.

**Table I: Team Meeting Confidence Survey Responses: Percent of Responses Confident or Very Confident; School years 18-19 to 21-22 to date.**



SY19: N=89; SY20: N=28; SY21: N=26; SY22 as of 1/15/22: N=51

**Table J: Comparison of September '21 Special Education Confidence Survey with '21-'22 Team Confidence Survey**



Special Education Confidence Survey: n=58 as of 1/15/22

Team Confidence Survey: n=51 as of 1/15/22

## Discussion

In general, both the qualitative and quantitative data concerning special education reveals programs and services that are functioning well, with only a few areas that warrant further review. Comparative data with similar communities supports the frequent feedback from stakeholders that overall Hanover provides effective services for students with disabilities. Whether the measure is the performance on MCAS, the management of the special education budget, or out-of-district placement patterns, Hanover's programs are comparable, if not more successful, than those of the identified comparison communities. Areas that warrant further discussion, which have been identified as issues supported by both quantitative and qualitative data, include the special education eligibility process, substantially separate programming, roles of paraprofessionals, home-school relationships, and the administrative structure of the department.

### **The Special Education Eligibility Process**

Based on a review of comparable communities, Hanover the highest eligibility rate, at 20.2%, and higher the state average of 18.9%. In addition, this rate has increased by over two percentage points since 2019. In any district, the eligibility rate is impacted by a variety of factors, including the beliefs and instructional practices of the district, the culture and expectations of the parent

community, the procedures and interpretation of special education laws and regulations, and the actual number of students with qualifying conditions. In addition, these variables may change, as districts review practices and procedures, research about effective instructional practices becomes available, and parent expectations increase. Most often, it is a combination of these variables that impacts the eligibility rate in any given district; the measure of effectiveness of the eligibility process, therefore, is the extent to which these various factors work to complement each other rather than compete to ensure that students are appropriately identified.

A review of recent initial evaluation data in Hanover shows that within the grades kindergarten to grade 12, the Center School performed the greatest number of initial evaluations (Source: Hanover eSped data). Preschool data is separated in this consideration because the referral process for preschool is very different from the K-12 process. Based upon publicly available data (MA DESE Special Education RADAR, 2021), this pattern is similar in the identified comparable districts, where an analysis of the K-12 referral pattern shows that the highest percentage of initial referrals occurs in grades 2-4. This pattern was also described in the recent monograph from the DESE, "Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines" (2021). This is a typical pattern, in part because students with a variety of disabilities related to the acquisition of basic skills are most frequently identified in the early to mid-elementary grades; therefore, a higher identification rate is to be expected.

The second question that this data raises is the extent to which initial evaluations result in a finding of no special needs, which, based upon a review of district data, appears to be between 20% and 30% of the time, depending upon the level. There are a few core conditions related to the finding of no eligibility for special education to be considered: 1) have the existing general education supports, included tiered interventions, been effective; 2) is there an identifiable disability that is impacting progress; and 3) is there an identified need for specially designed instruction. For each of these questions, there are both instructional practices and procedural guidelines that impact the answers. While it is not unusual in any district for a certain percentage of all initial evaluations to result in a finding of no special needs, it will be important to analyze this data further to better determine if there are any underlying structural issues which are impacting the identification of students in Hanover.

Given this data and based on feedback from a variety of stakeholders, it does seem appropriate to take this opportunity to examine the entire eligibility process. Some parents expressed concerns that certain disabilities were missed or not identified early enough because of the lack of sharing of all the critical data with the Team, and some parents have felt that the evaluation process was not thorough enough to make an appropriate disability designation, and therefore they engaged private evaluators to assess their children. Because of a change in the assignment staff in the evaluation process, there is an opportunity to review the entire eligibility process and make clear the district expectations related to that process, including the selection of formal assessments, the required elements of an evaluation report, the expectation for gathering general education assessment data, and the process for determining a disability. Creating a process that is used consistently across the grades, which includes what information will be gathered and which evaluations will be done based upon the areas of suspected disability, as well as providing ongoing training on both the formal assessments and the informal information gathering process, will help create consistent practice and increase parent confidence.

Currently, the district is engaged in the process of reviewing both the student-centered problem-solving structures, or SST, and the provision of tiered supports for at-risk students prior to the referral for special education, especially as it relates to literacy. In addition, the district has engaged an outside consultant from the Landmark School to support the continued development of

more intensive programs for students who have been identified as having language-based learning needs. There is an opportunity to extend this work to help develop clarity about the early identification of students with reading weaknesses, including appropriate general education as well as special education interventions. The current eligibility data shows that the largest disability group in the district is students with specific learning disability. Working with the consultant to continue to develop entrance and exit criteria for the substantially separate programs is an important task that will be discussed later, but using the expertise of this consultant to help clarify the early literacy needs of at-risk readers could also benefit the district's efforts to provide effective supports pro-actively. Sharing information about these efforts with parents, along with the evidence provided by the district and the consultant, could help increase the confidence of parents who have concerns about the early literacy supports and the special education identification process.

### ***Substantially Separate Programming***

Hanover is a small district that is doing a good job managing the many challenges related to providing supports for students with intensive needs. Although the special education budget as a portion of the overall school budget has remained constant over the past five years, the district has been able to increase its investment in special education programming each year as part of the overall budget increase. This represents the district's commitment to support students in the least restrictive environment by continuing to invest in well developed within-district programming. Based on comparable communities, Hanover has the fewest students placed out-of-district, presumably because students with more intensive needs are effectively supported in these within-district programs. In addition, stakeholders viewed many of the within-district programs very positively because of the skillfulness of the teachers, and their flexibility and commitment to the students. In a small district, there is often a conflict between having the number of students required to create a meaningful cohort and students whose needs are either the same or similar enough that they are appropriately grouped. This challenge is enhanced by both the changing nature of the knowledge base leading to identification and the actual grade levels and numbers of students with specific disabilities. Currently, there are two groups of students who seem to be in these categories in Hanover: students with language-based learning disabilities and students on the autism spectrum. The district has engaged consultants with expertise in these areas from the Landmark School and from the New England Center for Children to help them with the ongoing development of appropriate programs for these students. The district continues to benefit from the expertise of these consultants as they support the refinement of entrance and exit criteria and help identify the continuum of supports for students whose needs do not require substantially separate programming. In addition, these consultants could help to provide information to appropriate parent groups so that they better understand the continuum of services within the district for students with these disabilities.

Many stakeholders also raised questions about the alignment of the substantially separate programs, commenting that because the nature of the substantially separate programs changes from school to school, parents are sometimes confused or concerned about the appropriate programs at the next level. Stakeholders within the district have asked for the opportunity to meet to share information about these programs so that they can describe with confidence what the components are in the receiving program at the next level. The district leadership is aware of this need and is very supportive of continuing to focus on both the alignment and the improvement of services for these learners.



Finally, several stakeholders commented on the unique nature of the role of the lead teachers in these programs, in that they provide both instructional support as well as program management support. While the need for ongoing program management has been made more apparent during the pandemic, the ongoing responsibility for the training, coordination and deployment of instructional support staff is a required role for the lead teachers in these programs that should be both acknowledged and accounted for. In some districts, this is acknowledged by an additional program leader stipend; in others it is managed by creating additional planning and support time by adding professional or support staff. The data supports that these programs provide an essential link in the continuum of services and prevent the need for out-of-district placements. Including the program management role in developing both the job descriptions and the schedules for these teachers would help provide additional support for the effectiveness of these programs.

### **Roles of paraprofessionals**

Currently in Hanover, there are 74 FTE's of instructional support staff, including 36 FTE's of paraprofessionals and 38 FTE's of ABA tutors (source: SY'22 Hanover personnel roster). Given that several paraprofessionals at the primary level are assigned to general education classrooms, the ratio of special education support staff to the total number of students with disabilities is similar to comparable communities (source: MA DESE Special Education RADAR, 2021). However, feedback from stakeholders within the district identified several other issues related to the support staff that deserve attention. The first is clarifying the roles of the two specific categories of staff, including paraprofessionals and ABA tutors. Stakeholders believe that two categories exist because the ABA tutors are required to have a different level of training and expertise, but they also reported that there are some tutors who have roles that do not require a behavioral background, creating confusion about how the decision was made to allocate a position as an ABA tutor rather than a paraprofessional. There is also an uneven distribution of paraprofessionals and ABA tutors across the district, with most of the support at the Center School and the Middle School being provided by ABA tutors, while the majority of the support at the High School is provided by paraprofessionals, lending credibility to the concern that there is not a shared understanding of the roles. Finally, several stakeholders raised a concern that the professional learning provided to the instructional support staff varied by role and building, and that some staff could benefit from more professional support.

It is not uncommon to have multiple levels of paraprofessional positions in a district, often including one job category which is a general position to provide classroom or learning center support under the supervision of a professional, and a second specialized job category that requires additional training to provide the required service, such as a behavior therapist, a tutor trained in a specific reading methodology or an ASL interpreter. Revisiting both the job descriptions and the prerequisite skills and training for each of these positions is appropriate at this time, in order to better understand and support the two roles within the district.

### ***Parent Engagement and Home School Relationships***

One of the prerequisites of an effective special education program is a collaborative and trusting relationship with parents. These relationships must be supported at all levels, including the central office administration, and can be impacted by leadership changes as well as structural changes in a district. Clearly, Hanover has faced both the challenge of turnover in several

leadership positions in the district as well as the significant reorganization of the elementary structure at the time of the pandemic. The current administration is committed to engaging and sustaining positive relationships with parents, but to do so, it is important to understand the nature and the scope of the issues related to parent confidence.

Based on both survey data and input from stakeholders, there is a belief among some parents that they must engage outside experts to secure the services that they feel are appropriate for their children. This belief has, in some cases, led to discouragement inside the schoolhouse, where the professional staff feels that their opinions are as not respected in the planning for the students in their caseload as those of the outside consultants. To gain more insight into this issue, the data from the two surveys sent immediately after an IEP meeting, titled "Team Meeting Confidence Survey", was evaluated to look for trends. These two surveys, including data from 2018 to 2021 and 2021-2022, were compared because they drew upon the same response groups, that is parents who had recently attended a team meeting. Overall, the level of confidence in the process remains high, and although there was a slight decline in the confidence of the success of the IEP, 86% of parents were still confident that the IEP would be successful. In addition, another survey was sent in the fall to all parents of students with disabilities with an additional question concerning the use of outside resources, and that question was added to the 21-22 Team Confidence Survey. A comparison of this survey, titled "Special Education Confidence Survey", with the 21-22 Team Confidence Survey also revealed useful information. In the Special Education Confidence Survey, 65%, or 38 of 58 respondents, reported that they were using outside resources as part of the IEP process for their children, while in the subsequent Team Meeting Confidence Survey, 29%, or 15 of 51 respondents, reported using outside resources. The concern that parents are raising about feeling the need to engage outside resources is important to acknowledge, but it is also important to be clear about the specific issues that these parents are raising and not conflate those issues with the concerns of all parents.

Based upon feedback from all stakeholders, it seems that one concern among the parent community focuses on the identification and proposed services for a student with dyslexia. Many issues related to this concern have been identified in earlier parts of this discussion, but it is important that a concerted effort is made to engage with these parents to re-establish their confidence in the identification process. In addition, it is important to engage with parents as the district builds new programs for students with a variety of needs to solicit feedback about concerns and needs related to these programs. The district should collaborate with the consultants that they have engaged to support their planning to inform parents as these programs are developed. The goal is to encourage a shared process of information gathering about needs as well as frequent communication concerning proposals for improved practice, based upon the expertise of both the teachers in the district and the consultants that the district has engaged.

All stakeholders also expressed concern about the unintended consequences of the expressed lack of confidence of some parents. For the parents, it was the concern that they be seen as difficult or negative, while teachers sometimes felt that their professional opinions were less important than avoiding a conflict with parents. The special education law is a civil rights law ensuring that all students have access to a free and appropriate public education. The legal standard for the identification of free and appropriate education, most recently redefined by the Supreme Court in 2017 (*Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*), describes the standard as an IEP that provides individually designed specialized instruction and related services that are "reasonably calculated for a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances". Occasionally, in all school districts, there is a genuine disagreement about the amount of service that meets that standard. In these cases, generally, the district offers a plan, and the parents may choose to reject

all or part of the district's proposed plan. There is then process which allows the parents and the district to work together to seek an appropriate solution, beginning with a problem-solving meeting within the district. It seems, based on recent data from the Bureau of Special Education Appeals, that Hanover does not engage in this process as often as many other districts. The current five-year state average for rejected IEP's is 6.5%, while the five-year average in Hanover is 4.2%, and that rate has declined in Hanover over this five-year period (Source: Bureau of Special Education Appeals). Clearly maintaining the trust and confidence of parents is critical to an effective IEP process but strengthening the trust between parents and teachers also requires that teachers feel that their voice is valued. Respectful conversation about areas of disagreement from all parties, including agreeing to disagree, is a critical aspect of developing the most successful IEP's for students with disabilities.

### ***Administrative Needs***

Currently, the district divides the responsibility for administration of special education among the Director of Student Services, three building level administrators and one coordinator. The Director of Student Services, who is the special education administrator of record for the district, is also responsible for guidance, nursing, ELL programs, preschool, grants management, and other identified civil rights responsibilities. These are typical assignments for the Director of Student Services. What is unusual in this role, however, is that the Director is also the liaison for students placed out-of-district, a role that requires both case management and meetings off-site. Several stakeholders expressed their confidence in the new Director of Student Services; however, they also felt that it was important that he maintain a presence at each building, both to continue to develop a firsthand understanding of the issues and to help play an active role in addressing them.

In addition, there is a disparity among the responsibilities of the special education administrative supports at the building level, with the positions at all but the Cedar School being administrative positions, allowing for the people in these roles to supervise and evaluate staff and make decisions regarding programs and resources. Clearly, based both qualitative and quantitative data, Cedar is a well-run and successful school, but a special education administrator at this level could not only provide supervisory support to special education staff in the building, but they could also potentially support some of the identified needs across the district. Several stakeholder groups asked for the opportunity to meet regularly with their counterparts in other schools to develop a better vertical articulation of programs and procedures. This would only be strengthened by the presence of administrators assigned to each school, who could work collaboratively to develop, implement, and support shared procedures.

The creation of an administrative position at Cedar could potentially allow for other changes in the administrative structure of the district. Because the caseload at Cedar is relatively small compared to other schools, this administrator could be responsible for students in preschool through grade two and follow students to Center as they make the important transition from first to second grade. The Director at Center School could then potentially share the responsibility for students at grade 5 with the Middle School Director, allowing for a more seamless transition between these buildings as well. The goal of this structure would be to align the IEP processes among buildings, support the programmatic transition to the next school and support parents as they build new relationships. A different possibility is to give the responsibility for out-of-district cases to the Administrators, with the greatest number of these going to the Cedar Administrator. The distribution of these cases could be changed periodically to ensure a more balanced level of responsibility.

Regardless of the model, it is essential that the district-wide Director of Student Services have dedicated time to be present at each building to better understand the issues identified in this review, from both the staff and parent perspective. Whether the structure is to reassign the out-of-district caseload to a newly created part-time position or to reassign of the out-of-district responsibilities to other administrators, this change is necessary to provide the Director with valuable time to support both educators and parents as they strive for continued improvement.

## **Commendations and Recommendations**

The special education programs in Hanover are staffed by experienced and skillful professionals and support staff, who are committed to the children that they serve. The district is to be commended for creating a collegial and collaborative culture where teachers feel supported and are proud to be members of the faculty. There are several strong initiatives currently underway in the district that are addressing many of the identified needs in this review. In addition, the district leadership is both open to feedback and to change, and parents have expressed their optimism in the district's commitment to improvement. All parties are to be commended for their openness and willingness to work together to support the progress of their students.

## **Recommendations**

1. Revise the administrative structure of the special education department by converting the coordinator position at the Cedar School to an administrative position and by eliminating the responsibility for managing the out-of-district caseload for Director of Student Services.
2. Implement a review of the eligibility process, including ongoing support and training for special education staff related to the formal assessment process and the provision of guidelines for determining eligibility that can be implemented with consistency across grade levels.
3. Focus on improving the transition process from school to school by providing greater administrative oversight of the process, opportunity for job-alike meetings across grade levels and attention to consistent procedures, which may require additional staff.
4. Continue to review and refine the substantially separate programming in the district to better align the programs across schools and to meet the needs of students as they progress through the grades. Identify the continuum of supports for students within each disability category who don't require substantially separate programming. Provide additional support to the lead teachers in these programs to meet the administrative needs related to managing the support staff in these programs.
5. Review the current job descriptions related to instructional support staff and revise them to include the various roles that tutors are currently providing. Use these new descriptions to create consistent deployment of support staff based upon job responsibilities.
6. Continue to seek feedback and to collaborate with parents around ongoing procedural and programmatic improvement, including information gathering and sharing sessions with parents, school staff and consultants regarding planned program improvements. Actively engaging with parents to identify and address areas of concern will provide the foundation for improving the trust and confidence of those parents who have expressed their concerns about the IEP process.

## Summary

Based upon the information gathered in this review, the following answers to the guiding questions are provided.

*1) What are the identified concerns, if any, related to special education programs and services from a variety of stakeholders, including parents, administrators, and faculty?*

Based upon the feedback of all stakeholders, concerns were raised about the consistency and alignment of programming and procedures among schools, the special education identification process, the supports for students with more intensive needs, and the role of instructional support staff.

*2) Has the context and need for the substantially separate programming in the district changed since the programs were developed, and if so, what adjustments should be explored?*

The substantially separate programs in the district are for the most part well regarded, but the needs of students within the district continue to change. The district is working with outside consultants with expertise in the areas of language-based learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorder to continue to develop and align these programs with student needs. These programs would benefit from clear entrance and exit criteria as well as clear planning for students with these disabilities who do not require substantially separate programming.

*3) Does the current administrative structure support compliant, effective, and collaborative special education programming?*

The current administrative structure supports compliant and effective programming; however, the structure could be improved by relieving the Director of Student Services of some administrative duties and by creating a full-time administrator at the Cedar School, with the goal of creating an administrative team that can focus on the issues related to both consistent practice and parent engagement.

*4) What is the experience of families as they enter and engage in the IEP process and collaborate with school staff in the planning and delivery of special education services for their children, and what, if anything, would support a stronger collaborative partnership?*

Based upon survey data, most parents are both confident and satisfied with their experience with the special education department. However, over time there has been a slight decline in confidence and a growing feeling among some parents that they need the support of outside resources both in the identification process and to provide supplemental services. The current district leadership is committed to engaging with parents to better understand these issues and to work collaboratively to maintain their confidence.

The time and thoughtfulness of the entire staff of the Hanover Public Schools was enormously helpful in completing this review. I look forward to hearing about the continued success of the special education programs in the future.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dorsey Yearley

## **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

- 1) How would you describe the strengths and challenges of special education programming at this time?
- 2) How well does the current administrative and organizational structure of the special education department support the oversight and delivery of effective special education programs and services?
- 3) How are students identified for special education services and programs, including the placement of students with intensive needs in substantially separate programs, and does this process result in appropriate and effective placements?
- 4) Are there any groups of students who are currently underserved by the current special education programs and services, and if so, what should be done to address their needs?
- 5) To what extent are parents included and actively engaged in the IEP process and in planning for their children's special education services, and what, if anything, could be done to support more effective communication and better collaborative partnerships with parents?
- 6) What other information would you like for us to know about special education programming in Hanover?

## **Appendix B: Publicly Available Data Sources**

Massachusetts Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines*, retrieved at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/links/dyslexia.html>

Massachusetts Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles, <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

Massachusetts Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education, “Special Education Enrollment by Disability, School Year 2021-2022”, retrieved at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/reports/enroll/default.html?yr=sped2022>

Massachusetts Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education, “Special Education Direct Expenditure Trends, FY2009-FY2020”, retrieved at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/>

Massachusetts Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education, Resource and District Action Reports, RADAR Special Education, 2021, retrieved at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/research/radar/>