

OVERVIEW

Under the direction of the Superintendent, The Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) Department of Special Education (DSE) proudly serves a growing special education community of learners, ages birth through twenty-one, and their families.

The DSE is comprised of three major offices:

- Early Intervention Services,
- School-based and Transition Services, and
- Countywide Services

This report will provide summary information about student demographics, organizational structure, special education services, highlights and accomplishments as well as updates on strategic initiatives and plans to address critical needs. The major section headings include:

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A listing of the links referenced in this report are noted in Appendix A. Website addresses are also included.

The *HCPSS Strategic Call to Action (SCTA)* urges staff to ensure academic success and social-emotional development for each student in an inclusive and nurturing environment that closes opportunity gaps. As stewards of the Superintendent’s vision to uphold the four overarching commitments (i.e., Value, Achieve, Connect, Empower), the DSE strives for attaining the desired outcome of high quality special education services. Likewise, DSE aims to incorporate student-centered practices, establish inclusive relationships and build responsive and efficient operations.

The DSE strives to address equity, access, and progress gaps for students receiving special education services. Key areas describing the strategic initiatives found in the [DSE Strategic Plan](#) (Appendix B) continue to support efforts toward continuous improvement. Hence, the work of DSE is carefully aligned to these initiatives as well as other priorities driven by state and local expectations.

With strong, mutual interest between the community and school system staff to improve the achievement and well-being of students receiving special education services, our community of special education stakeholders is working together to achieve better results

Philosophy and Demographics

HCPSS is acknowledged across the state and nationally for the services provided to students with disabilities. Oftentimes, recognition is given for the comprehensive early intervention services offered and the cultural mindset to educate students with more significant needs within inclusive classrooms in their neighborhood schools. DSE believes in presuming competence of all learners and addressing our students' individuality through varied approaches.

When speaking about *special education*, DSE is committed to making sure that attention is given to the fact that the HCPSS special education student population is comprised of students with many different disabilities and each has very unique strengths and needs. Moreover, it is important to note that the term "student" in the area of special education also includes HCPSS students who are receiving special education services in nonpublic schools and other environments, such as a hospital setting. We have 220 students represented in this population. They are accounted for in the numbers reported below.

According to Maryland's October 2018 Special Services Information System (preliminary) Census Data for HCPSS, there are approximately 5,703 students receiving special education services ages 3-21 in HCPSS. Data from the 2017 Maryland Special Education/Early Intervention Services Census Data & Related Tables indicate 5,592 HCPSS students ages 3-21 were served at that time. In recent years, the trend shows increases in student enrollment over time. Overall student growth must be emphasized in the area of special education as we are obligated to serve children who require services even as infants. In HCPSS, an average of 878 children birth through three years of age have been served from 2016-2018. Services for these children may occur in the family home as well as community-based or childcare provider settings and are not accounted for in the enrollment growth markers.

Students may be identified with any one or more of 14 different educational disabilities established by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The majority of students with disabilities in HCPSS fall into the following disability categories: (1) Speech/Language Impairment, (2) Specific Learning Disability, (3) Other Health Impaired, (4) Emotional Disability and (5) Autism as shown in Figures 1-4 below. All data displayed on these graphs are taken from Maryland's October 2018 Special Services Information System (preliminary) Census Data for HCPSS.

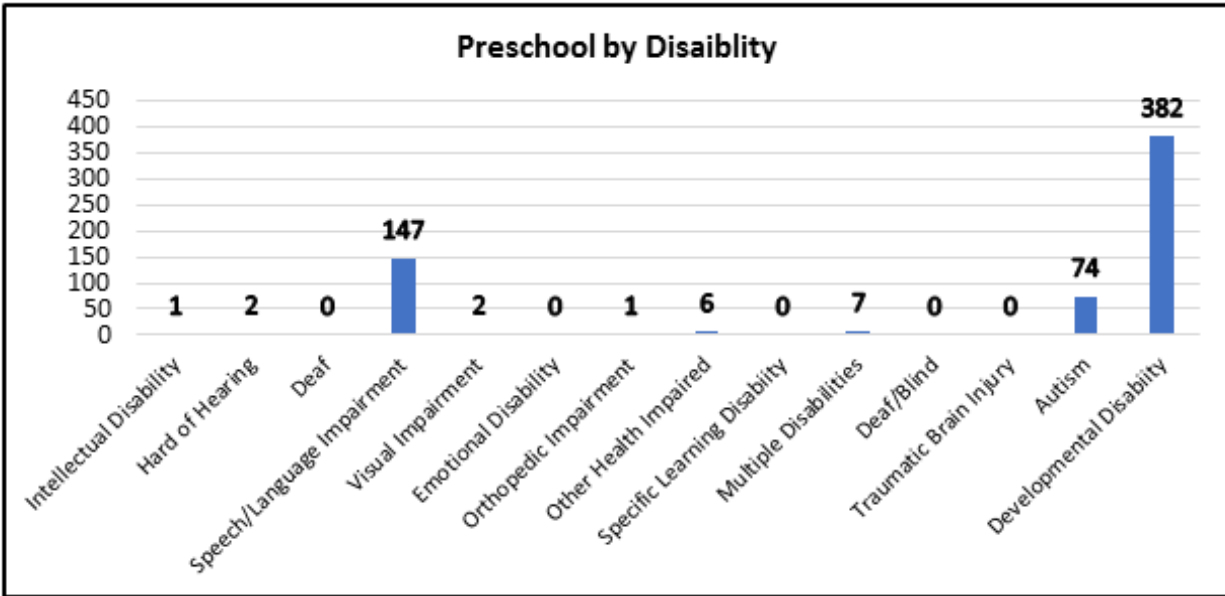


Figure 1. This chart shows the number of preschool students in each educational disability category. Generally, preschool represents students ages 3-5 years of age.

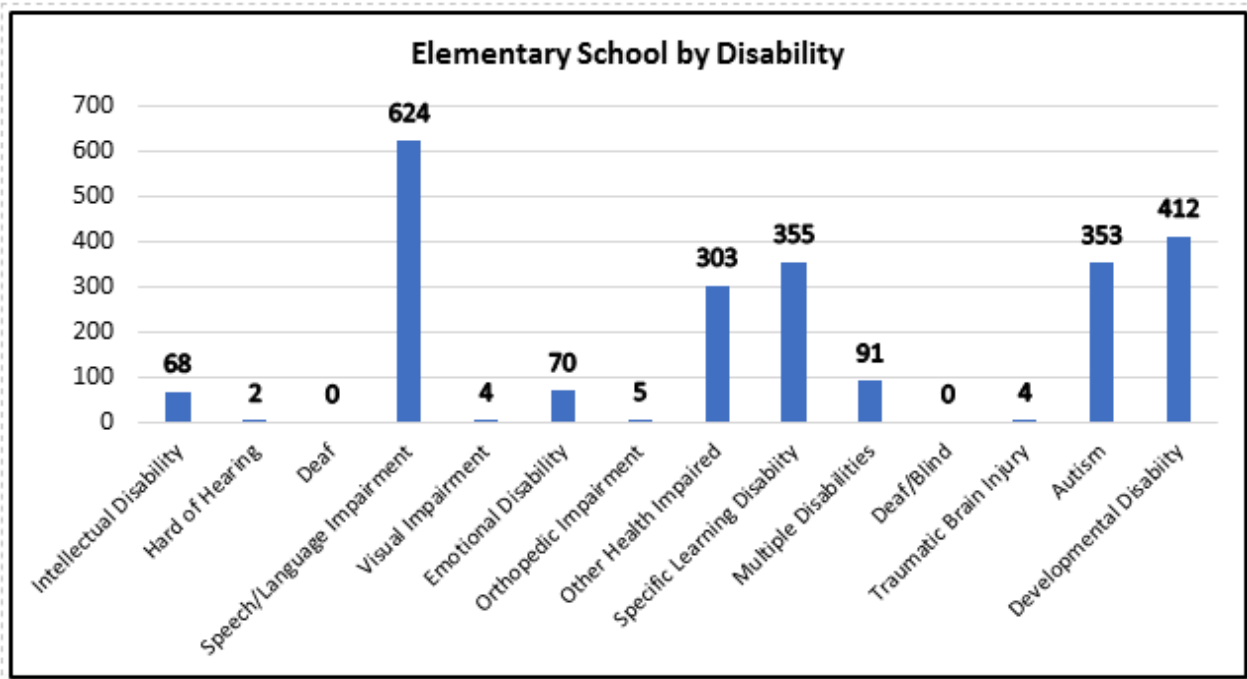


Figure 2. This chart shows the number of elementary school students in each educational disability category.

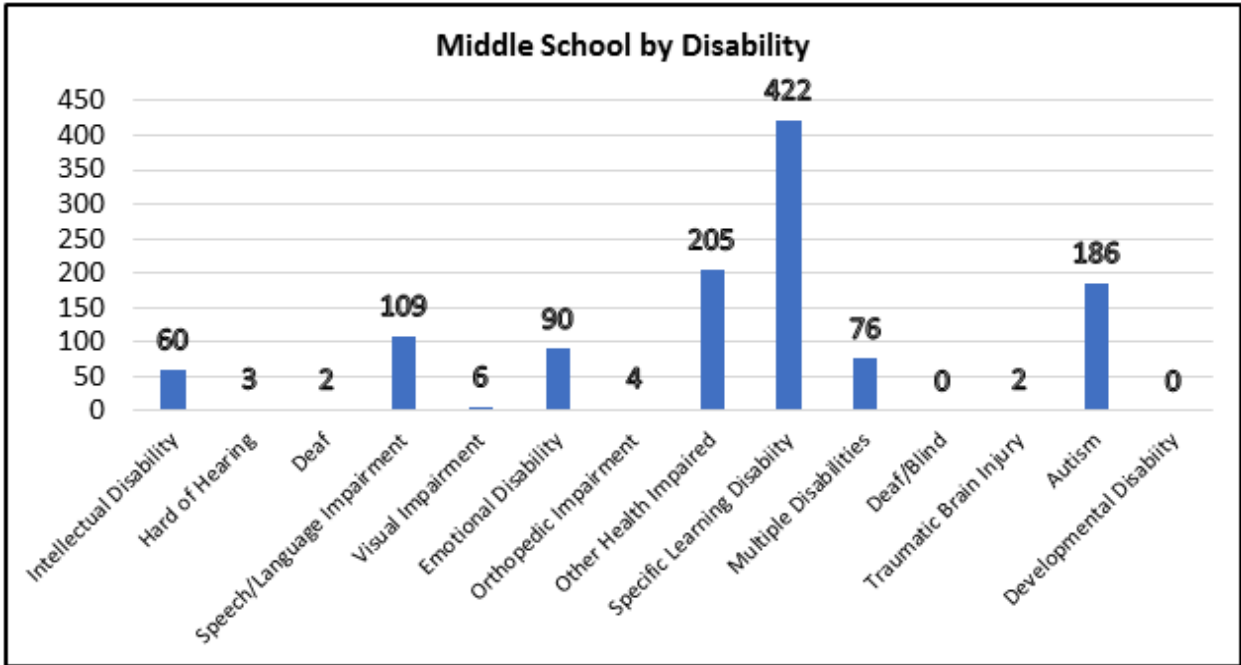


Figure 3. This chart shows the number of middle school students in each educational disability category.

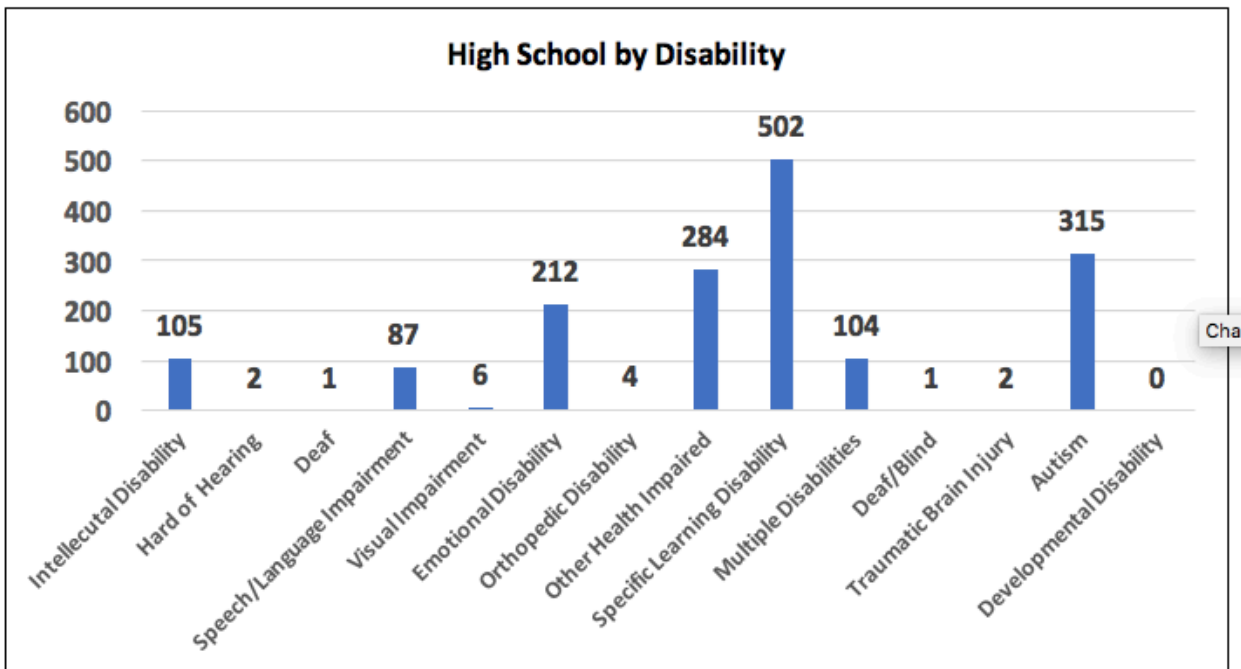


Figure 4. This chart shows the number of high school students in each educational disability category.

Across all levels, the percentage of males receiving special education services is similar. However, disparity exists between genders. Far more males (66-72%) qualify for services than females (28-29%) in HCPSS. Forty-four percent of HCPSS students with disabilities on average are White while African-American/Black students represent approximately 33% of the population of HCPSS students with IEPs. Twelve percent of the students are identified as Asian and 13% of HCPSS students with IEPs are identified as Hispanic/Latino.

HCPSS holds strong values around inclusionary programming for students with disabilities. Although a continuum of special education programs and services are available to students, IEP teams are expected to make provisions for serving students alongside their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. Every effort is made to build in supports that will alleviate the need to move students to more restrictive settings. In HCPSS, seventy-five percent of students with disabilities in elementary, middle and high schools receive services in the general education environment 80% or more of the time. Only thirteen percent require services outside of general education environments 40-79% of time. The remaining students receive services in more restrictive settings throughout their school day.

Organizational Structure

Led by the Executive Director and Director of Special Education, the department is built upon the work of three major offices: Early Intervention Services, School-based and Transition Services, and Countywide Services. Other critical support teams include the Instructional Access Team in addition to the teams in the Nonpublic Services and Special Education Compliance and the Medicaid Billing offices. The DSE central office team includes Coordinators, Instructional Facilitators, Resource Teachers, Behavior Specialists, Board Certified Behavior Analysts, an Autism Specialist, Paraeducators, Program Heads and a host of administrative support personnel. The organizational chart is found at [DSE Organizational Chart, p. 18](#) (Appendix C) and a detailed explanation of each office is described below.

As noted in the HCPSS Strategic Call to Action, we are striving to align operations and practices to be more responsive, transparent, fiscally responsible and accountable while serving students and families. Mirroring the Superintendent's path toward stabilization, we have begun examining the existing organizational structure within the department in order to identify ways to create efficiencies and achieve more positive results. Priorities for this work include:

1. Strengthening oversight for staff and students in regional/specialized programs.
2. Providing more direct support to school teams and coaching to staff.
3. Refining support for fiscal and technical operations through adjustments to essential job duties.

PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Office of Early Intervention Services (Birth to Five)

Early childhood is one of three action imperatives discussed in the Maryland State Department of Education's [Moving Maryland Forward](#) (Appendix D) This imperative emphasizes a seamless and comprehensive system of coordinated services for children with disabilities, birth to kindergarten, and their families in home, community, and early childhood settings to narrow the school readiness gap. HCPSS provides a full continuum of prekindergarten services for children and families through the Office of Early Intervention Services (OEIS).

Early childhood experiences can profoundly influence how the brain will develop as well as how children will interact with the world around them. Early intervention and education builds on the natural learning occurring during the first few years of life. The supports and services provided through Infants and Toddlers and preschool special education can help children make the powerful connections to improve their ability to learn and play. With the right system of support services during this time, children with disabilities enjoy an important head start for gaining critical school readiness skills needed to succeed in kindergarten and throughout their lives.

Decisions regarding services, service locations, and program placements are made following the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team processes. The IFSP serves children birth through age three and the IEP is for children ages three through five. Ultimately, the goal of early intervention and preschool special education are to:

- Enable young children to be active and successful participants during the early childhood years and across a variety of settings including in homes with their family, in child care settings, preschool or school programs, and in the community in the future; and
- Enable families to provide care for their child and have the resources they need to participate in their own desired family and community activities.

The Infants and Toddlers Program

The Howard County Infants and Toddlers Program collaborates with local hospitals, pediatricians, Department of Social Services, and community childcares to locate infants and toddlers in need of special services. Early intervention services for infants and toddlers and their families are outlined in Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs). The program uses the evidence-based practice of reflective coaching to work with children and families. Intervention from a primary service provider happens within the child's everyday routines in the natural environment where they live, learn and play. Year-round intervention is provided by teachers, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, community health nurses, social workers, and psychologists.

PALS: Community-Based Services

Children between the ages of three and five years who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) may receive services through the PALS program, a community-based services

model. Consultative or direct services are provided for children enrolled in community preschools or childcare centers. Services may include special instruction, speech-language therapy, and occupational therapy/physical therapy, as needed.

Prekindergarten

The Preschool, Multiple Intense Needs Classroom (MINC) and Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) school-based programs provide comprehensive special education and related services for three and four year olds. Classes are located within elementary schools, typically in a Regional Early Childhood Center (RECC). Children receive services in classes with children who do not have disabilities. Co-teaching models with early childhood general education teachers are often utilized.

Highlights and Accomplishments

Over the past year, the DSE has overcome many challenges and begun to pave the way for achieving a number of objectives. Below are a few examples to highlight accomplishments of the Office of Early Intervention.

Kennedy Krieger Research Study

Staff from the six MINC-Early Learner programs are engaging with the Kennedy Krieger Institute's Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD) and Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine to investigate early intervention practices. Dr. Rebecca Landa, Ph.D., CCC-SLP serves as the investigator. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effects of the Early Achievements Intervention for Preschoolers with autism spectrum disorder. Early childhood and special education teachers implement intervention aimed at addressing the learning challenges of young children ages three to five years old in authentic public preschool educational settings. The intervention has been designed to improve school readiness skills. Language, communication, social, and concept development are the areas where greater growth may be expected.

Connect 4 Learning Curriculum Pilot

Connect4Learning[®] (C4L) is a set of supplemental curriculum materials that follows national standards for early childhood instruction and has a strong emphasis on social-emotional learning. C4L was developed through funding by the National Science Foundation and includes materials and resources to support all developmental areas found in the HCPSS prekindergarten curriculum. To date, several schools have implemented the C4L curriculum and have significantly outperformed control classrooms on measures of math, science, literacy, and social-emotional learning - including number sense, early geometry skills, vocabulary knowledge, and name writing. C4L is also aligned with current research on strategies to best support dual language learners and children from socio-economically impacted communities in an early learning environment.

Early Childhood Local Implementation for Results Plan SFY 2019

Four pilot schools were chosen to work directly with the OEIS team to strengthen the educational services for their youngest learners. The prekindergarten staff create natural and inclusive learning environments where every child is supported by all room staff in order to learn, play, and grow together. These environments are critical for developing skills necessary for meaningful participation in their home/school communities. Evidence-based practices, such as team-based reflective coaching and designated times for collaborative planning are central to this plan.

State Systemic Implementation Plan Team

The Infants and Toddlers Program is in the third year of implementing evidence-based practices with additional support and resources from MSDE. This past year, the priority has been engaging all staff in professional learning and implementation of the Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (SEFEL) Pyramid. We have trained 32 program providers and special educators across six days of training. Plans to complete an additional session to address trauma-informed strategies and parental mental health are underway.

Office of School-based and Transition Services (K-21)

The remaining two action imperatives discussed in MSDE's [Moving Maryland Forward](#) are Access, Equity, and Progress (AEP) and Secondary Transition. AEP is described as the implementation of effective, equitable, and culturally-responsive education services to increase access to instruction, improve educational achievement and functional outcomes, and reduce gaps between students with and without disabilities. The secondary transition imperative will ensure seamless evidence-based transition programs and services are implemented to increase the number of youth with disabilities who are actively engaged in post-secondary activities (e.g., education, technical and career training, and employment) after exiting HCPSS.

In HCPSS, the Office of School-based and Transition Services supports students, families, and school-based teams. DSE provides a full continuum of services for students in elementary, middle and high schools. Additionally, instructional services are also available in a variety of classroom and work locations for adult learners.

School-based Services

School-based services refer to the programs, supports and services that special education teams provide to students with IEPs in elementary, middle, and high schools. Services are provided to students with varying disabilities within comprehensive settings as well as regionalized programs housed in many schools across levels.

Services in the comprehensive school setting across all ages and grades address the individual needs of students as they work within the Maryland College and Career Standards (MCCRS).

Through the IEP team process with parental consent, some students receive services within the Maryland Alternative Framework which is aligned with the MCCRS grade level standards. Special educators in collaboration with other service providers develop and implement specially designed instruction including supplementary aids and services to ensure teachers reduce learning gaps for students and provide access to the curriculum alongside same age peers when appropriate. This is accomplished by collaborating with general educators, administrators and support staff to communicate the unique needs of each student as outlined in the individualized education program.

Services in comprehensive elementary, middle and high schools are provided within the general education classroom, in small group settings, or in some cases individually. The IEP team including the parent, reviews the student's needs annually to determine the amount of time needed to accomplish the identified goals and objectives in academic, behavior, social, and emotional domains. In a co-taught classroom, the special educator and general educator plan and implement not only the grade level curriculum standards, but also adapt and modify instruction as outlined within the IEPs of students within the class.

Regional Programs

Regionalized programs follow the same implementation model as in comprehensive school settings, however, additional resources are allocated for students who may require different and/or more services in academic, behavior, social, and emotional areas. These programs are available at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Regional programs for students with emotional and other related behavior needs, commonly referred to as ED regional programs, have additional staff for crisis intervention and small group instruction throughout the school day. Monthly professional learning is embedded for teachers in these programs. This includes information on evidence-based practices as well as collaborative problem solving.

Students who are working in the Maryland Alternative Framework and require additional services are considered for regional academic life skills (ALS) programs. Students may receive services for part or all of their instructional day within a small learning environment with other students with disabilities. Special educators provide direct, extensive, explicit, and repeated instruction individually or in small groups to address IEP goals and objectives that align to Core Content Connectors (CCCs). The CCCs identify the content, knowledge and skills needed by grade level to guide the instruction for students working on alternative achievement standards or participating in Maryland's alternate assessment.

Other functional skill areas including communication, social skills, and behavior may also be identified, embedded, and taught throughout the day.

In elementary schools the Primary Learner (PL) and Upper Learner (UL) programs are specially designed for students who learn through Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) techniques. Primary learners (grades K-2) and intermediate learners (grades 3-5) are identified through the IEP process as being responsive to intensive and specialized learning techniques (e.g., Errorless

Teaching) as an integral part of their instructional day. Targeted professional learning and guided data discussions are hallmarks of this model.

Public Separate Day Programs

Some students require direct and explicit intervention throughout their school day within highly specialized learning environments. Within HCPSS, there are two such programs at the Homewood Center and Cedar Lane School. Although students at Homewood and Cedar Lane receive instruction separate from their non-disabled peers, students participate in activities with their peers at other times. For example, students at Homewood may participate in afterschool clubs, activities, and sports. Some students attending Cedar Lane attend classes and lunch shifts with same age peers at comprehensive schools on the same campus.

The Bridges Program at Homewood Center is a therapeutic, public separate day program for students with emotional disabilities and other related disabilities. Placement in the Bridges Program is determined through the IEP process within a Central Education Placement Team (CEPT) meeting in collaboration with the parents, home school and Bridges teams. In addition to small group academic instruction, students can receive additional social, emotional, and behavioral supports through individual and group counseling and crisis intervention.

For students with the most significant needs, Cedar Lane School offers a range of services and resources to address academic, social, emotional, communication and behavioral needs. Additional specialized resources and services in occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech language therapy, and adapted physical educational are provided. Specialized programs (e.g., Cornerstone, SEAL) are housed within Cedar Lane and incorporate specific methodologies and other behavioral supports. Like Homewood Center, placement at Cedar Lane School is determined at the Central Education Placement Team (CEPT) meeting.

Highlights and Accomplishments

Expanding service options for students and providing more in-depth professional learning for professional and support staff have been a central focus for the 2018-2019 school year. Below are examples of accomplishments achieved in the area of school-based services.

Expanding Services

To further meet the unique learning needs of students, initiatives at the elementary, middle, and high schools have been implemented to address both academic and social emotional learning. In the 2018-2019 school year, regional ALS, ED, PL, and UL classrooms were added in five school locations to expand the continuum and address increases in student needs across the district.

For middle school students requiring specialized instructional intervention in English/Language Arts and math, services have been provided in a small group setting at a middle school site and taught by a special educator. The special educator transitions

with the students into the general education setting to ensure generalization of skills in the grade level classroom.

Instructional Intervention

In 2018-2019 school year, the DSE Instructional Intervention Team focused on expanding reading supports and services for students with disabilities. This includes providing specialized training in structured literacy to not only special educators, but also reading specialists and reading support teachers. Working closely with the Elementary Language Arts and Student Services offices, this team has been integral in researching, identifying, and organizing assessment as well as instructional processes and resources to ensure students with disabilities receive consistent and high quality specialized instruction.

At the high school level, Principles of Mathematics and Integrated Reading and Writing courses have been implemented at Mount Hebron, Howard, and Oakland Mills High Schools for students requiring intensive intervention beyond Tutorial and Seminar. Taught by a special educator, these classes utilize strategies and direct instruction in individually determined skill areas to support progress and participation in the grade level curriculum. Expansion to additional high schools in 2019-2020 is anticipated.

Restorative Justice

To address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students in Regional ED Programs, HCPSS has consulted with Dr. Malik Mohammed, an expert in Restorative Justice. During countywide and site-based professional learning sessions, Dr. Mohammed and his team have facilitated training on restorative circles as well as trauma informed practices. Additionally, the restorative coaches have visited each regional program to observe community building using restorative practices and provide coaching to staff to further develop their restorative tools. Sessions have also been provided for families.

Middle School Girls Group

As recommended by the Middle School Workgroup, a girls' group was developed in the 2018-2019 school year to provide opportunities for middle school girls with disabilities to meet. Each month this small group has met to develop social connections and practice communication and social skills with one another. Each themed gathering has been well attended by several girls each session. Not only has this provided connections for the girls, these gatherings have also provided parents an opportunity to support one another and share their experiences.

Professional Learning: Principles of Applied Behavior Analysis

A comprehensive professional learning plan for all special education teachers, related service providers and support staff was developed. Expectations for staff learning were first shared with all staff in August 2018 as part of the vision message from the Executive

Director and the expert keynote, Dr. Tamara Marder, BCBA-D, from Johns Hopkins University. All staff attended a mandatory breakout session during the same timeframe. Paraeducators and student assistants received behavior trainings during scheduled sessions throughout year. ABA-based training for temporary employees will continue into a third year of implementation. The next series of sessions for teachers will be launched this spring and access to a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course will be available in the future. The DSE behavior team comprised of behavior specialists, Board Certified Behavior Analysts and behavior paraeducators supports this effort. The autism specialist in the department also supports this work. Plans for expanding this model are underway.

Transition Services

Post high school opportunities for students with developmental and intellectual disabilities have expanded due to changes in legislation and advancements in programming. It is important that all students with disabilities in HCPSS are prepared for the college, career, and community success whether they exit at 21 with a certificate of program completion or graduate with a high school diploma.

Formal transition planning begins at age 14 and continues along the [Transition Timeline](#) (Appendix E) until the student exits with a high school diploma or certificate of completion. This student-centered process includes an annual student survey to uncover student strengths and interests that can lead to post school college, career, or community experiences. During middle school, special education case managers initiate these plans. In high school the transition teachers guide this collaborative process with the student, family, and staff and, with parental permission, with adult agencies such as the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). Each Howard County high school is assigned a transition teacher, whose role has expanded greatly to ensure all transitioning youth with IEPs are provided useful information and support. In collaboration with the student, school counselor, case manager, and family, the transition teacher conducts the transition interview, develops the transition goals/activities, and monitors implementation of the plan.

In HCPSS a wide range of college, career, and community experiences are offered to students with IEPs. These experiences include participation in system-wide courses as well as specialized experiences and education. Like their non-disabled peers, students with IEPs access career academies in their home school and at the Applications and Research Laboratory (ARL). Those seeking a certificate of completion also access the ARL to learn career readiness skills. Some students participate in Career Research and Development sited-based work experiences while others complete college coursework through dual enrollment.

For those students seeking employment upon exiting high school, a wide range of work experiences are available. These include:

- *In-building jobs*. This experience offers individualized work experiences within the school building. Students develop targeted skills through modeling and repetitive practice opportunities beginning in ninth grade.

- *Career and Community Exploration.* This option was formerly referred to as the Enclave program. Students participate in classroom instruction and community work exploration to build social, behavioral, and independent skills with support and supervision from special education teachers and paraprofessionals.
- *Work Study.* This experience is for students who seek on-the-job experiences, paid and unpaid, in community businesses across Howard County. It is offered to students ages 19-21 who are within last two years of program completion.
- *Community Connections.* This program provides community-based employment experiences and life skills development. Students participate in a range of activities including child care certification coursework, Howard Community College courses, travel training, and independent living instruction.
- *Project Search Howard.* This is a one-year non-paid internship within the Howard County government for up to 12 interns. Organized and implemented in partnership with the Howard County Government, The ARC of Howard County, the Howard County Autism Society, and the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DORS).
- *Start on Success.* This program includes paid internships supported by Humanim, Howard Community College, and Howard County General Hospital. It offers pre-employment transition services and provides instruction and job coaching for students earning high school diplomas and eligible for DORS services.
- *Customized Employment.* This approach is used for students significantly impacted by their disability. It involves a more thorough informal assessment and matching of the type of supports and accommodations (e.g., personal, physical, social, emotional, behavioral) needed to provide a meaningful work experience. This is an option considered for students in their last 1-2 years of high school who are seeking a paid or unpaid employment experience within the community.

Highlights and Accomplishments

Continuing to expand options, build awareness, provide professional learning, develop curriculum models, and improve parent communication have been the focus for the 2018-2019 school year and aligned to the MSDE Secondary and Transition initiatives and guidelines. Below are a few examples of accomplishments achieved in the area of transition services.

Employment First

The Employment First initiative is nationally led by the United States Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy to guarantee full participation in competitive integrated employment and community living for youth and adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Maryland's adoption of this initiative can be found at [Employment First](#) and explained through a [Maryland Employ ABILITY](#) video featuring many Howard County businesses. Not only are employment opportunities expanding for youth and adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities, so are options for post-secondary education. Many college campuses now provide two to four year programs of study ([Think College](#)) for degree and non-degree seeking students with developmental and intellectual disabilities. In August 2018 not only did two exiting

students from HCPSS attend a college experience program out of state, two additional students also attended the newly state-funded program at Coppin State University.

Transition and Resource Fair

The DSE collaborated with several community groups to host a Transition Fair and Symposium over the years. This event provided a plethora of resources for students and families. In an effort to expand outreach to all parents of students across the levels, the Transition Fair and Symposium was combined with the Family Resource Fair in October 2018. Over 100 students and families attended this full day of vendors and speakers who shared information regarding transition services, community organizations, and other supports.

Transition Resources

To build transition awareness from kindergarten to age 21, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) transition resources were provided to every school in HCPSS. These materials were reviewed with elementary, middle, and high school Instructional Team Leaders and recommended to be posted in every IEP team meeting room for student, family, and staff reference. Encouraging college, career, and community conversations across all age and disability groups supports students and families plan for a meaningful future.

Career and Community Exploration

This course, formerly known as Enclave, has undergone a name change to reflect an expansion in the types of school and community activities students experience. While students continue to work in a variety of employment settings, they also visit other employment and community sites aligned with their specific interests and needs. This year students have traveled to the Columbia MVA to acquire state identification cards as well as explored various careers in culinary and animal care.

Pre-employment Transition Services

For six weeks in January and February 2019, Humanim and HCPSS provided pre-employment transition services for students after school at Oakland Mills High School. Students eligible for Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) voluntarily participated in this free course taught by Humanim instructors to further develop social skills, self-advocacy, and employment skills. The Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) partnership program is the first of its kind for HCPSS with anticipated growth to other interested schools and adult agencies.

Curriculum Writing

In order to provide direct instruction in self-advocacy skills, a group of high school special educators developed model lessons during the summer of 2018. These materials

were made available to all tutorial teachers and piloted the first three weeks of the 2018-2019 school year. With consultation from community agencies, additional lessons will be developed for tutorial and CCE (Career and Community Exploration) courses for the 2019-2020 school year. At one high school, students who were not enrolled in either CCE or tutorial participated in self-advocacy lessons during a flexible instructional block. Feedback from staff and students will guide further exploration of this instructional model.

Student-led IEP Meetings

DSE has a goal for every student to actively participate and/or lead their IEP meeting in high school. In collaboration with community agencies, HCPSS will continue to develop self-advocacy curriculum and instruction to prepare students for this role. Additionally, HCPSS is currently developing the implementation model for the [Maryland Digital Portfolio](#). Special educators and students from Lime Kiln MS, Reservoir HS, Cedar Lane, Community Connections, and Project Search are collaborating with the Johns Hopkins Center for Teaching in Education to learn and implement this web based tool to capture the skills and interests of students with disabilities as they progress through school from age 14 through 21.

Office of Countywide Services

The Office of Countywide Services is available for families of young children/students suspected of or identified as having an educational disability. The County Diagnostic Center (CDC) serves as the point of entry into the Infant & Toddler/Child Find Program for children age birth to three and preschool age, and school age students attending private or religious schools in Howard County who are suspected of having an educational disability. Child Find and Infant and Toddler Assessment Teams include educators, speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychologists, and other specialists including Audiologists, as needed.

In addition to these services, the CDC is also home to the In-depth Team. This team is a multidisciplinary team that provides assessment services and collaborative support to school-based teams for complex cases. CDC provides assessment support for students attending nonpublic school settings as well.

Countywide Special Education Instructional and Related Services

Countywide Special Education Instructional and Related Services provide assessment, direct intervention with the student, environmental or equipment adaptations and technology to ensure accessibility within the school environment, and consultation to staff members and parents. Special education services are provided to learners with IFSPs/IEPs who are seen in the home or school environment. Providers include Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and Orientation and Mobility certified specialists (O&M), Work Study/Transition teachers, Adapted Physical Education (APE) teachers, OT services, Physical Therapy (PT) services, and Speech Language

Pathology (SLP) services, Instructional Access Team (IAT) supports, assistive technology needs, and Audiology services.

A brief description of some related and support services provided to learners from birth through 21 years are listed below:

Hearing Services

Hearing services include itinerant Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Audiologists, and Interpreters. These individuals provide consultation to other staff members working with the students and assist staff with planning and implementing instructional plans. As consultants, they offer resources for embedding technology for low-incidence disabilities and other teaching tools into classroom instruction. A hearing services team member also acts as a “cultural attache” at times in order to strengthen understanding, acceptance and communication for students and staff. Interpreters provide direct access to first instruction for students by interpreting classroom instruction and discussion into American Sign Language.

Vision Services

Vision services include Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI), a Brailist, and paraeducators. They provide itinerant services to learners who have been identified as having a visual impairment which adversely impacts their educational services. TVIs review eye reports and assess as needed. They conduct Functional Vision Assessments, Learning Media Assessments, and Orientation and Mobility Assessments. TVIs provide direct instruction either in the home environment or the school setting, consult with school teams, make materials accessible, including braille, large print, digital media and tactile graphics. Specialists provide Orientation and Mobility Services.

Speech Services

Speech services are provided by Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs). They provide therapeutic interventions that allow children/students to become successful listeners, speakers, and functional communicators so that all students can effectively communicate in academic, social, community, and vocational settings. SLPs provide assessment and services in the area of articulation, voice, fluency, language, augmentative and alternative communication, feeding, and bilingual support.

Adapted Physical Education

Adapted Physical Education (APE) services are provided by Adapted Physical Education Teachers. It is specially designed physical education for students with significant gross motor deficits. APE provides student-centered support and advocacy to general physical education teachers and paraprofessionals through specifically designed instruction and a continuum of collaborative services to students with gross motor skill delays and their families. Students who receive adapted physical education services will have acquired essential movement skills with increased levels of independence to actively engage in the physical education curriculum. The Adapted Physical Education Program is committed to the development of appropriate,

challenging and meaningful physical activities to ensure that all students receive proper physical education instruction.

Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy services are provided by Occupational Therapists (OTs). School-based occupational therapy supports academic achievement by advancing early development of fine motor skills within the home setting and foundational skills that are required for school routines, including recess, classroom, and cafeteria time. OTs utilize assessment, collaborative practices, and direct intervention strategies to support students.

Physical Therapy

Physical therapy services are provided by Physical Therapists (PTs). The PTs design and perform therapeutic interventions, including compensation, remediation and prevention strategies and adaptations, focusing on functional mobility and safe, efficient access and participation in educational activities and routines in natural learning environments which may include school and home environments. The school-based PT promotes motor development and the student's participation in everyday routines and activities.

Instructional Access Team

The Instructional Access Team provides support to staff and families to identify instructional barriers that might exist for students learning functional communication. Empowering students and families to use assistive technology tools (e.g., communication device) to access education and communication is a main function of this team. They also provide professional learning opportunities for staff as well as other flexible supports (e.g., modeling, coaching) for students, families, and staff to help increase their knowledge of how to use assistive technology. They assist the family with understanding communication across the home and school environments.

Highlights and Accomplishments

Natural Aided Language Modeling

Members of the instructional access team have been supporting classroom staff participating in the Natural Aided Language Modeling Grant. Ongoing professional learning sessions around promoting functional communication for all students have been provided to special educators, paraeducators and related service providers working with students in the program. Outcomes of the professional learning sessions include exploring best practices for teaching and supporting students who use augmentative and alternative communication systems.

Inclusive Physical Education: Student and Parent Panel

On February 5, 2019 during the countywide professional learning day, a group of HCPSS parents, along with their students who receive APE Services, participated in a panel on

inclusive Physical Education and the impacts it can have on student growth and school communities. Parents and students shared their experiences with APE services in HCPSS and how students with disabilities have benefitted from being included with their general education peers in Physical Education. Parents and students highlighted improved motor skills, growth in social skills, and forming of friendships as some of the benefits.

Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance

This year all Speech Language Pathologists participated in professional learning to develop high quality present levels of academic and functional performance (PLAAFPs). In addition to professional learning, the Instructional Facilitator for Speech Language Pathology led a team to review and analyze the implementation of these standards. Examples of HCPSS guidelines and statements were celebrated by MSDE as exemplars for the state of Maryland.

SUMMARY OF DATA

MSDE Annual Data

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires state accountability on indicators defined by the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). MSDE develops State Performance Plans (SPP) and Annual Performance Reports (APR) for the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program (Part C) and the special education program (Part B). Part C includes 11 compliance and performance indicators for early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families and Part B includes 17 indicators for special education services for children with disabilities ages 3-21 years. MSDE evaluates each local agency's Part C and Part B services to determine a status of "meets requirements", "needs assistance", "needs intervention", or "needs substantial intervention. HCPSS currently has a determination status of "meets requirements" for Part B and Part C indicators. The annual report for federal fiscal year (FFY) 2016 is attached (Appendix F). Results for FFY 2017 are expected to be released no later than June 2019.

HCPSS Student Performance Data

Students with disabilities participate in Maryland's assessment program. Students who are seeking a diploma participate in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), grades 3-8 and 10, while the remaining students participate in the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) for math and English/Language Arts for the same grade levels.

In Figures 5-7, the percent proficient is a combination of MSAA and PARCC data. Growth percentiles are shown for students across levels in both elementary and middle school mathematics and English/Language Arts for PARCC only. Growth percentiles indicate how student scores are changing compared to similarly performing peers and are limited to student data in certain grades at each level. Growth Percentiles of 50th or above indicate that the group is growing at a similar pace to similarly performing peers. Percentiles of less than 50th indicate that

similar peers are growing faster than the group. There is no growth indicator for MSAA due to the statistically small comparison population.

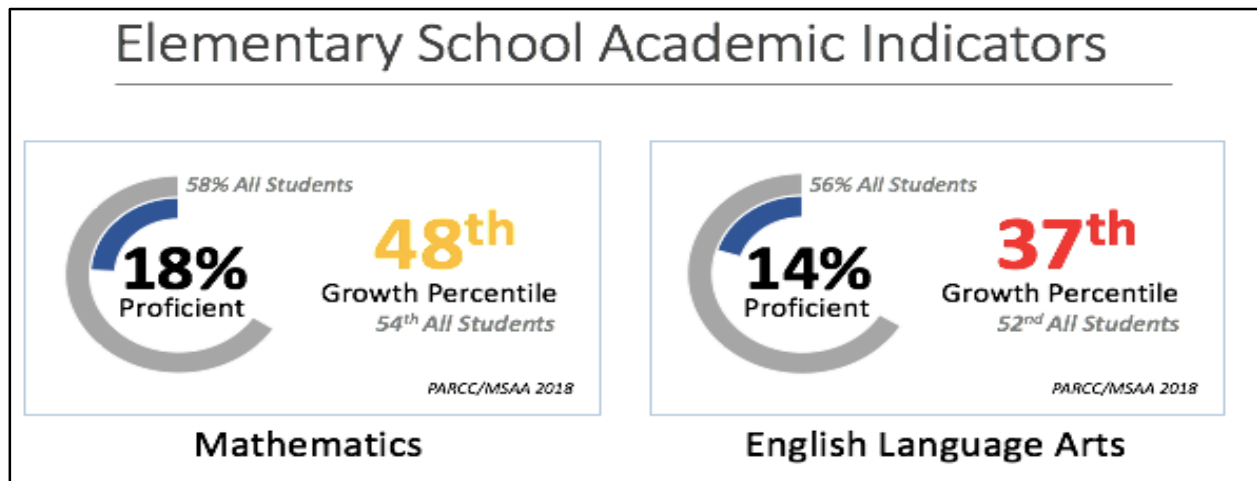


Figure 5: This chart shows the percent proficient and growth percentiles in mathematics and English/Language Arts for elementary school students receiving special education services.

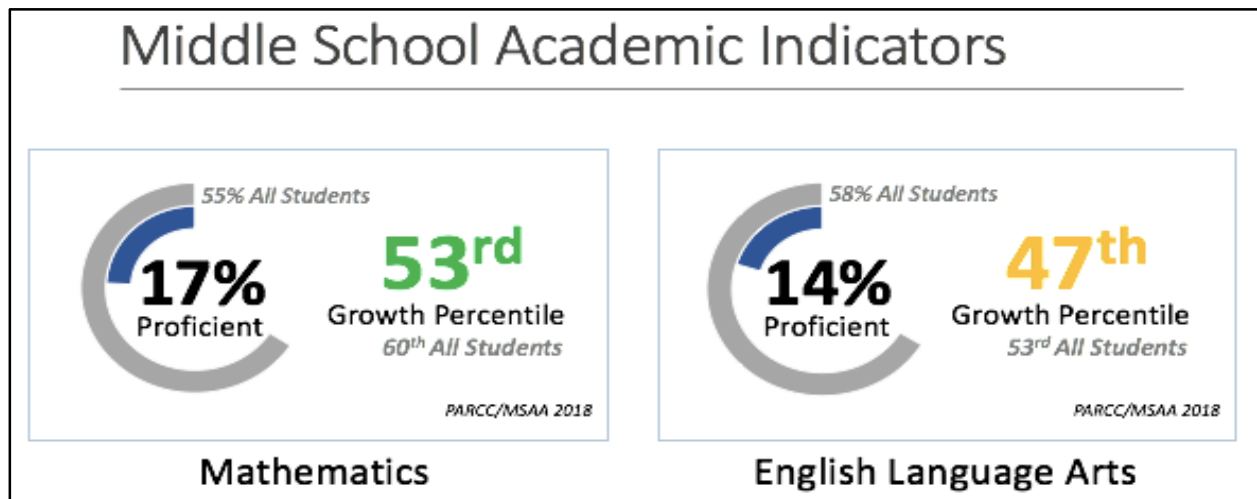


Figure 6: This chart shows the percent proficient and growth percentiles in mathematics and English/Language Arts for middle school students receiving special education services.

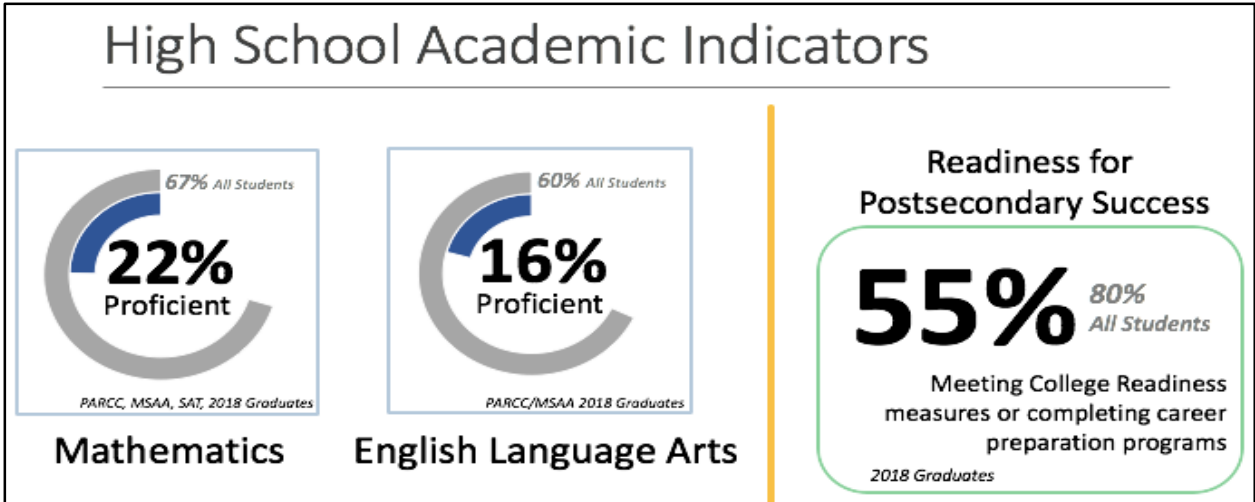


Figure 7: This chart shows the percent proficient in mathematics and English/Language Arts for high school students receiving special education services. Percentage of students demonstrating readiness for postsecondary success.

Graduation rate is a familiar indicator that reflects cohorts of students grouped by their 9th grade entry year. The graduation rate for 4-year cohort students is 67.4% and 74.1% for 5-year cohort students. A new indicator referred to as “access to well-rounded curriculum” is now an accountability measure. As shown in Figure 8, fifty-one percent of students receiving special education services are either enrolled in an AP course, dually enrolled, participating in a Career and Technology Education program or enrolled in a credit bearing course for students pursuing a certificate of program completion.

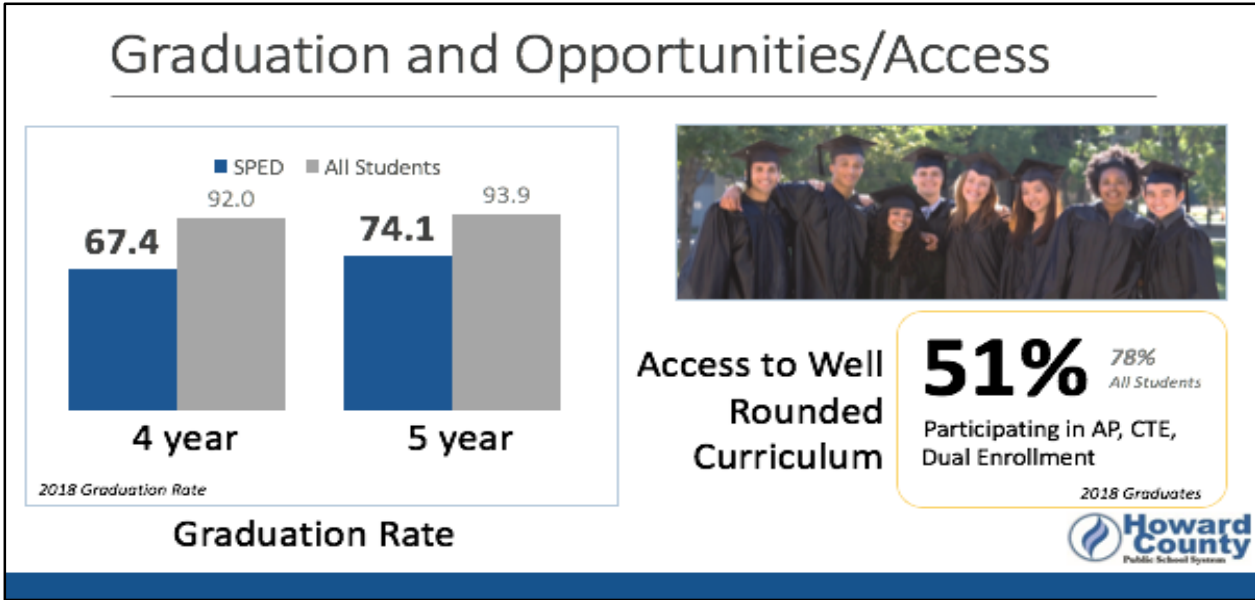


Figure 8: This chart shows the comparison of graduation rates between 4th and 5th year student cohorts and percentage of students accessing courses defining a well-rounded curriculum.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Special Education Strategic (Plan) Initiatives

The DSE Strategic Plan, more commonly referred to as the strategic initiatives, was created from July 2017 to January 2018. The document is used to denote the priorities that will be guiding the ongoing work necessary for continuous improvement in the DSE. All efforts are closely aligned with the strategic plan from the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services and the HCPSS Strategic Call to Action: *Learning and Leading with Equity*.

A cross-functional team of more than 100 stakeholders, including parents, teachers, advocates, HCPSS students, school system staff and other experts in the area of special education collaborated to develop the initiatives and strategies. The development process was open to everyone and smaller teams were co-facilitated by staff and parents.

Ultimately, six key areas were identified to capture critical areas of work important to the HCPSS staff and stakeholders within the special education community. These include:

Instructional Practices/Data Driven Results. This area focused on improving instructional interventions to better meet individual student needs. Appropriately matching interventions to student needs and implementing those interventions with fidelity was emphasized. Professional learning on specific technology devices/tools for students, staff and parents were also emphasized in this group's work.

Social Skills. This area focused on the need for curriculum development to address social-emotional learning. Many students struggle with interacting with other students in social settings, even though they have a desire to be included in more social events and activities.

IEP Compliance and Accountability. This area focused on special education compliance and related data for accountability. The Office of Nonpublic Services and Special Education Compliance is responsible for ensuring that mandates and procedures are carried out by IEP teams in a compliant manner. In addition to emphasizing the need to increase the number of staff for this team, the need for improved data collection, analysis and reporting related to special education services, staffing and programs was a focal point of discussion.

Training. This area focused on expanding the professional learning opportunities for various staff who support the IEP process and implementation. This includes administrators, special education teachers, general education teachers, and

paraprofessionals. The team identified training based on the Principles of Applied Behavior Analysis as being a critical need for all teachers and paraprofessionals who work with students with disabilities. Additional emphasis was placed on building staff capacity for better understanding learner characteristics that may require special education referrals.

Case Management/Continuum. This area focused on expanding services and placement options within the school system for students with various disabilities. Some parents expressed interest in exploring ways to provide multiple supports and services within each school considering the level of student need, available resources, and facility space. The team also discussed a need for reviewing of nonpublic placement data in order to examine the feasibility of developing programs or services within the district.

Staffing. This area focused on case management for special education teachers and other providers. The team discussed increased workloads for special education staff and recommended the staffing formula be revised to include student needs. Other considerations include number of students and professional responsibilities such as testing for evaluations and preparing for IEP team meetings. Consideration for establishing more non-teaching special education instructional team leaders to assist with compliance, staff training, case manager assignments, and scheduling was also given.

To achieve success, the 22 initiatives and 65 strategies are organized to aligned with these areas to ensure understanding, promote ownership, and facilitate steady progress for continuous improvement.

Additional information about the development process and implementation of the strategic initiatives is referenced in the HCPSS Board Document entitled *Special Education Strategic Plan Update* which was issued on May 17, 2018. Contained in that report is an overview of the planning process, list of team members, data sources, explanation of initiative areas and strategies, and a summary of next steps for implementation.

2019 Special Education Strategic Initiatives Update

The table below consists of strategies that have been prioritized for implementation March 2018 to present. For easier reference, both the strategy and corresponding number are noted below. . The description of work provides a brief explanation of the task, charge, and/or desired outcomes. The last column indicates the status of implementation. Only strategies addressed up to this point are included which creates gaps in the numbering.

Strategy	#	Initiative	Description of Work	Implementation Status
Improve professional learning sessions for specialized instruction, including: accommodations, modifications, and technology	1	Offer training on specialized instruction including evidence-based practices that are required to meet the needs of most students (e.g., structured literacy training)	Professional learning sessions with focus on specially designed instruction Focus on technical assistance bulleting - Improving Academic Outcomes for Students with Disabilities with administrators.	Completed, will continue Professional learning sessions held August 29 and Feb 5 for teachers and providers. Held 4 administrator sessions.
Provide opportunities for gaining knowledge and skills for specialized instruction (e.g., phonics-based approaches/multisensory approaches/Orton-Gillingham, Specialists, Autism, etc.)	2	Offer training on specialized instruction including evidence-based practices that are required to meet the needs of most students (e.g., structured literacy training)	Professional learning sessions provided to teachers on the following: Visualizing & Verbalizing, Really Great Reading and Using Instructional Tech.	Completed, will continue
Deliver training for instructional interventions with an emphasis on fidelity of implementation	3	Implement evidenced-based interventions aligned to student need and taught with fidelity.	DSE Instructional Intervention team maintains Really Great Reading training and implementation data.	Completed, will continue DSE will designate funds for professional learning as part of the 2019-20 Local Implementation for Results (LIR) grants provided by the MSDE.
Increase access to evidence based-practices and instructional interventions in mathematics	5	Implement evidenced-based interventions aligned to student need and taught with fidelity.	Implemented Number Worlds in select elementary and middle schools.	Completed, will continue

Utilize fidelity checklists to ensure consistency of implementation for interventions and provide on-going training for staff	6	Implement evidenced-based interventions aligned to student need and taught with fidelity.	Incorporated focus on fidelity of implementation within Really Great Reading training.	Completed, will continue
Co-develop a systemic tool for student growth and time in intervention.	7	Implement evidenced-based interventions aligned to student need and taught with fidelity.	Workgroup formed to begin development of tool to capture individual student intervention information/data. DSE completed prototype for customized HC IEP progress monitoring tool.	Ongoing Project temporarily suspended
Increase access to evidence-based practices for specialized programs in areas of English Language Arts for students receiving instruction aligned to alternative education framework standards	8	Implement the use of instructional materials for students being instructed on the alternate education framework	Teachers completed professional learning that included: ELA strategies for students who are non-verbal, use of curriculum-based tools, core content connector data tools, and functional communication. Job-embedded training session followed.	Ongoing

<p>Increase access to evidence-based practices for specialized programs in areas of mathematics for students receiving instruction aligned to alternative education framework standards</p>	<p>9</p>	<p>Implement the use of instructional materials for students being instructed on the alternate education framework</p>	<p>Teachers completed professional learning that included: using number routines/talks at lower developmental levels, use of curriculum-based tools, core content connector data tools and promoting use of core vocabulary. Select teachers attended statewide math conference on aligning core content connectors within general math instruction.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Identify Instructional Access Coaches at all schools</p>	<p>11</p>	<p>Build capacity of assistive technology implementation with students, staff, and families</p>	<p>Teachers, speech/language pathologists, media specialists, administrators and others self-identified to become coaches. They support other staff with using universal tech tools that support to access for all students with a focus on students with IEPs.</p>	<p>Completed, will continue</p>

<p>Provide professional learning for students on use of their assistive technology tools/devices</p>	<p>13</p>	<p>Build capacity of assistive technology implementation with students, staff, and families</p>	<p>The DSE Instructional Access Team members provide instruction to students upon receiving their device. 370 AT devices issued to students this year, supporting total of 800 across two years. They model how to support device usage by students for teachers and support staff throughout the year.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Provide professional learning for staff and parents on assistive technology tools/devices</p>	<p>14</p>	<p>Build capacity of assistive technology implementation with students, staff, and families</p>	<p>Provided professional learning to HCPSS and nonpublic families, students and staff. Focus on use and implementation of AT in the school, home and community settings. Site-based consultation & professional learning including KidTalks, Home visits and schoolwide training 443 Assistive Technology Consult Referrals (8/2018-3/2019) Countywide sessions (In-Person & Virtual Sessions Online) Natural Aided Language Modeling Functional Communication (4 sessions) LAMP Communication System (4 sessions) TouchChat</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

			<p>Communication System (8 sessions) Read & Write (10 sessions) Go Talk Now Communication System (1 session) Technology Tools to Support Reading & Writing (4 sessions)</p>	
Provide guidance to administrators to create schedules for special education staff collaboration	15	Expand opportunities for collaborative planning with special and general educators	Need to create a document that school administrators, special education team leaders, and other staff schedules can reference to consider common factors that impact scheduling. Co-chairs were identified Spring 2018, but work needed to pause temporarily.	To begin April 2019 - also integrated into coaching process for SIP and discussed during January 2019 administrator session
Identify special educators to participate on curriculum writing teams for summer planning wages	17	Expand opportunities for collaborative planning with special and general educators	A listing of special education teachers who may be interested in participating in curriculum writing will be compiled and maintained.	Completed, to be updated
Provide awareness training for school staff on social competencies, classroom management, and restorative justice	18	Provide differentiated training for all staff, students and parents on social competencies across all levels and in a variety of settings and environments	Targeted professional learning for staff in elementary ED regional programs - focus on restorative practices, social skills, classroom management and behavior management	Completed, will continue Professional learning sessions held August 29 and Feb 5 for regional teachers and support staff. Multiple school-based sessions.

Provide awareness training and mentoring for parents	19B	Provide differentiated training for all staff, students and parents on social competencies across all levels and in a variety of settings and environments	<p>Program entitled <i>Awareness of Differences</i> (created by a parent) started Fall 2018. Parent meetings with SLSs and Parent Support Group at MHHS as well as one with Chinese families.</p> <p>DSE began Parent Ambassador training in select elementary schools. Essential skill training for parent mentors.</p>	Completed, will continue
Create differentiated social competencies curriculum, explicit and integrated, provided across all levels.	21	Provide differentiated training for all staff, students and parents on social competencies across all levels and in a variety of settings and environments	A group of parents, HS special educators, speech-language pathologists, work study teachers, occupational therapists, and others have convened to work on a social skills curriculum that can be used to create a high school course. Group researched available curriculums, programs, and materials.	Course to be developed by August 2018 - planned for 2019-2020 school year
Expand extracurricular activities for all students in middle school (Best Buddies, Allied Sports, and modified programs)	25	Expand social skills programs and opportunities to students with special needs	Best Buddies programs expanded in middle and high schools. Some schools established similar programs. DSE began a middle school girls' group and met several times to focus on social skills development.	Completed, will continue

Provide compliance and procedural training to Instructional Team Leaders (ITLs) to ensure consistency with all schools for compliance	26	Build capacity of school administrators and special education team leaders, and other case managers	Compliance staff provides special education legal update and procedural training during monthly ITL m meetings.	Ongoing
Provide compliance and procedural training to administrators (ensuring consistency with all schools for compliance)	27	Build capacity of school administrators and special education team leaders, and other case managers	New administrators received special education procedural safeguards training.	Completed
Leverage the capabilities of TIENET to maximize the capability for data collection, sending reminders for compliance, and creating reports	29	Establish a highly effective data collection system to enable the Department of Special Education to collect, analyze, take action, and report compliance data	School-based staff receive compliance reminders. There are more than 800 reports across 40 categories currently accessible in TIENET. All reports are customized for HCPSS staff needs. Multiple reports are used often by DSE.	Completed
Develop a multi-faceted monitoring tool for IEP compliance and IEP quality	31	Establish a highly effective data collection system to enable the Department of Special Education to collect, analyze, take action, and Report compliance data	IEP development, implementation and evaluation should be monitored on a regular basis. Compliance team created draft monitoring tool based on the State tool.	Target implementation date is Fall 2019
Improve communication with parents before, during, after meeting from all members of the IEP Team.	33	Improve communication among and between all members of the IEP Team and evaluate special education IEP process for parents	Design Team completed IEP team meeting survey card. Superintendent's Special Education Advisory Council examined 2018 MSDE Parent Survey data.	Target start date to test is Spring 2019

			Council began working on IEP team meeting/informational resources for communication.	October 2018 - present
Review parent feedback to ensure consistency for sharing IEP progress with parents	35	Improve communication among and between all members of the IEP Team and evaluate special education IEP process for parents	Survey data from IEP team survey card and the MSDE parent/family survey will be examined. Patterns of issues will be noted and addressed.	Ongoing
Offer differentiated professional learning for all paraprofessionals including accommodations, modifications, principles of Applied Behavior Analysis	38	Provide access to timely, meaningful, consistent, and ongoing professional learning to all paraprofessionals (includes: paraeducators, student assistants and temporary employees)	Paraeducators, student assistants and temporary employees attended sessions incorporating principles of ABA. Connections to students' IEP accommodations were emphasized along with data collection.	Completed, will continue
Provide resources to special education ITLs to utilize for paraprofessional training	39	Provide access to timely, meaningful, consistent, and ongoing professional learning to all paraprofessionals (includes: paraeducators, student assistants and temporary employees)	A training kit for orienting paraprofessional staff into their job assignment to be developed. Content in kit will focus on Knowing the Learner, and Supporting Instruction with an emphasis on understanding information from IEP, including behavior, sensory, and evacuation plans.	Development to start Summer 2019

<p>Create professional learning for special education teachers to support students across all environments</p>	<p>43</p>	<p>Develop systemwide behavior training sessions for administrators, general educators, special educators, related service providers, parents and other members of the IEP team to learn about ABA based techniques and other approaches (e.g., restorative practices, Life Space Crisis Intervention)</p>	<p>Session content for special education teachers under development. Techniques that can address students' academic, social/emotional, behavioral, and communication needs through specially designed instruction. Based on <i>ABA in the Inclusive Classroom</i>.</p> <p>Professional learning workshops will be offered afterschool.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Beginning May 2019</p>
<p>Create professional learning for general education teachers to support students in general education environments</p>	<p>44</p>	<p>Develop systemwide behavior training sessions for administrators, general educators, special educators, related service providers, parents and other members of the IEP team to learn about ABA based techniques and other approaches (e.g., restorative practices, Life Space Crisis Intervention)</p>	<p>Content for general education teachers to be developed for continuing professional development credit course. Techniques that can address students' academic, social/emotional, behavioral, and communication needs through specially designed instruction. Based on <i>ABA in the Inclusive Classroom</i>.</p>	<p>Development to start Summer 2019</p>

<p>Provide paraprofessionals (paraeducators, student assistants and temporary employees) behavior training</p>	<p>47</p>	<p>Develop systemwide behavior training sessions for administrators, general educators, special educators, related service providers, parents and other members of the IEP team to learn about ABA based techniques and other approaches (e.g., restorative practices, Life Space Crisis Intervention)</p>	<p>Paraeducators, student assistants and temporary employees attended sessions incorporating principles of ABA. Connections to students' IEP accommodations were emphasized along with data collection.</p>	<p>Completed, will continue</p>
<p>Provide professional learning opportunities and follow up with staff in specialized programs/classrooms that must acquire knowledge in ABA-based/other research-based strategies (e.g., instructional sequences, reinforcer assessments)</p>	<p>49</p>	<p>Develop systemwide behavior training sessions for administrators, general educators, special educators, related service providers, parents and other members of the IEP team to learn about ABA based techniques and other approaches (e.g., restorative practices, Life Space Crisis Intervention)</p>	<p>Staff working in regionalized programs for special education require more specific information and techniques to address needs of students who have extensive challenges.</p> <p>Needs addressed during countywide PL days and through school-based/program sessions (e.g. Academic Life Skills, Primary Learner)</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

Review and analyze data on students placed in non-public schools by disability, age, and level in order to determine gaps in curriculum and develop action plan	51	Conduct research to inform the expansion of continuum of services for students with autism and other disabilities and ensure consistency for program implementation	Information is monitored monthly. Recently captured and examined for budgeting and 2019-2020 program planning.	Completed, will continue
Assess needs for other programs or flexible delivery models at the MS level	52	Conduct research to inform the expansion of continuum of services for students with autism and other disabilities and ensure consistency for program implementation	Extending current programming for students who require intensive services across grades and levels. Classroom started July 2018 is now established. Needs (e.g., transition class for current students in Upper Learner classroom) also reflected in two separate workgroups that submitted recommendations.	Will continue Completed. Recommendations submitted, posted on HCPSS website - special education
Establish scheduling guidelines in collaboration School Management and Instruction Leadership to assist administrators with setting up class composition, opportunities for collaborative planning time for co-teachers	55	Develop guidelines to assist administrators in prioritizing and developing schedules to ensure the intensity of needs of students is considered when placing students in general education classes	Need to create a document that school administrators, special education team leaders, and other staff schedules can reference to consider common factors that impact scheduling. Co-chairs were identified Spring 2018, but work needed to pause temporarily.	To begin April 2019 - also integrated into coaching process for SIP and discussed during January 2019 administrator session

Review current staffing plan and formula in order to make necessary revisions to ensure consideration of intensity of needs of students when staffing.	57	Evaluate and revise the current staffing plan/formula for all service providers to reflect number of students, intensity of needs of the students and hours of service	Initial committee was charged with examining staffing needs and implications to begin informing budget needs. Next committee will begin revising existing formula to guide allocations, address student needs and support case management responsibilities.	Completed. Recommendations submitted.
Create a long range plan to increase the number of paraeducator/student assistants in order to decrease the number of temporary employees.	58	Evaluate and revise the current staffing plan/formula for all service providers to reflect number of students, intensity of needs of the students and hours of service	Maximize support in regionalized program classrooms with permanent staffing. Refine use of paraeducators to provide adult support while also strengthening direct instructional services provided by teacher.	Completed, initial steps taken in FY20 budget requests
Increase staff to support nonpublic services	62	Expand the compliance team within the current Office of Nonpublic Services and Compliance	Realigning staff resources in this office is necessary for more efficient and effective nonpublic case management, HCPSS school support, and responsibilities related to the preparation, implementation and follow up for staff training.	Request made in FY20 budget for one RT, position eliminated

Identify 3 special education compliance resource teachers and consider alignment (e.g., by level or area Community Superintendents)	63	Expand the compliance team within the current Office of Nonpublic Services and Compliance	Realigning staff resources in this office is necessary for more efficient and effective HCPSS school support to administrators and school staff.	Request made in FY20 budget for one RT, position eliminated
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There is an abundance of work conducted by the DSE that is not represented in the current strategic initiatives. As a result, there are instances when target dates may be modified in order to attend to other priorities. Thus, we continue to balance critical work (e.g., advisory needs, IEP meetings, MSDE driven improvement activities, teacher observations, nonpublic school visits) with efforts to continuously address these strategic initiatives as written.

Tracking and Reporting

The DSE intends to post updated progress on the strategic initiatives annually. The DSE Leadership Team will continue to monitor progress on the strategic initiatives, as written, during various office and committee meetings. Additionally, regular updates will continue to be provided to parent and community advocacy and advisory groups.

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY GROUPS

The DSE receives family and community input from various advisory groups. One such group is the Special Education Community Advisory Committee (SECAC). According to the Code of Maryland Regulation (COMAR), the purpose SECAC is to advise the local school system on the needs of students with disabilities. The DSE collaborates with the SECAC Board and its members throughout the year to discuss critical areas of need, problem solve, and co-create opportunities for parents to receive support and training. This year, SECAC and DSE staff have joined together to plan and host a major event for parents and families. This forum will feature expert keynote speakers and a number of interesting sessions including topics such as home/school collaboration, estate planning and guardianship, and instructional accommodations and modifications in mathematics. Other sessions feature support for siblings of students with disabilities and information on social/emotional learning. The DSE also works closely with the Howard County Autism Society (HCAS) in a similar manner to strengthen community collaboration. Each year, the HCAS hosts an event where parents receive DSE updates and information from department staff about special education supports and services. HCAS is also instrumental in providing recommendations and guidance to the department.

The Superintendent established a special education advisory council to include fluid groups of stakeholders who have an interest in sustaining and developing high quality special education services. The council is charged with providing critical feedback to assist the HCPSS and DSE leadership in examining current structures and practices, highlighting areas of success, identifying opportunities for improvement, and offering input for strengthening accountability. Currently, the council is focusing on the IEP team process and the impact on student achievement, as well as the parent and family experience.

The DSE's Family Support and Resource Center staff as well as the HCPSS Special Education Parent Liaison provide continuous support to parents and families. These individuals offer support and advice through phone calls, email communication and meetings. This communication results in additional opportunities to collect feedback from parents about resources they need. The center staff and parent liaison are expected to design and facilitate training and information sessions for parents and families based on HCPSS and MSDE parent/family survey data.

The department encourages involvement from all parent, community and educator stakeholders. For the past year, there has been a noticeable increase in participation across these groups. Stakeholders have made requests to join various committees and the DSE has actively cast a wider net for recruiting parents and others. Those interested may indicate preferences on the [HCPSS Special Education Strategic Plan-Preference for Participation](#)

FUTURE DIRECTION

Ending a full year of observation, numerous strengths about the DSE programs, services and operations are notable. However, several opportunities for improvement also exist.

DSE will continue to build upon its successes in the areas of collaboration and communication. Stakeholders have volunteered time to support the department work as partners and the benefits of this level of engagement are significant. In addition to the inclusion of parent partners, DSE is also proud to engage students throughout the year at full staff meetings. HCPSS students with disabilities of varying ages are featured in a "student voice" segment where they share their personal experiences and suggestions for improving special education services. A theme of *equity, access, and progress* unfolds as we listen to our students, families, and staff.

DSE leadership also intends to clarify its department vision regarding the philosophy of inclusion in the year ahead. It is important to express values pertaining to inclusive practices while also sharing our beliefs about the need to customize learning experiences for students. Providing a continuum of supports and services in order to best prepare for addressing program and placement decisions made by IEP teams is essential.

Prioritizing continuous improvement efforts will be imperative. The strategic initiatives set the stage for alignment and action in key areas of identified need. However, several strategies included are consistent with typical daily responsibilities of department staff. Many of the tasks or activities describe the ongoing work of the department and, therefore, will be marked accordingly. In addition, existing key measures need to be refined.

While tracking the initiatives as written will not lead to specific outcomes, it is important to honor the work of the stakeholder group by commemorating the initiatives document. Moving toward a greater level of accountability, DSE leadership will be continuing efforts to examine aspects of the strategic initiatives and work toward aligning elements of the initiatives to key performance indicators driven by the Strategic Call to Action which is consistent with the expectations for all HCPSS departments at this time.

Additionally, DSE will place a greater emphasis on accountability for the SPP/APR indicators reported annually by MSDE. Redirecting time and resources, DSE will work towards instituting procedures for special education compliance monitoring. Compliance monitoring not only includes IEP development, but IEP implementation as well. Institutionalizing such practices will assist us with commending school teams for things that are working well, but also detecting patterns that could become problems.

DSE believes that the achievement of every student receiving special education services is paramount. Data included in this report and other measures convey an urgent need to further examine factors impacting the academic achievement and functional performance of our students. While the central team will continue to address specific needs of all populations within the community of students receiving special education, taking more deliberate steps to address students receiving services due to specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia, will be a major area of concentration. Intensive professional learning in the areas of literacy instruction and collaborative teaching along with strategic coaching for staff and program oversight is warranted. Additionally, more attention will be given to approaches and supports for students identified with Other Health Impairments as well as other student groups (e.g., African-American/Black) significantly overrepresented in the disproportionality data for HCPSS.

Furthermore, DSE will continue to explore creative solutions for providing professional learning to teachers and support staff. Providing face-to-face professional learning is challenging at times due to limitations in securing substitutes and it results in a loss of instructional time for teachers in the classroom. Moving toward job-embedded professional learning models is ideal, but this requires additional central office staff and/or school-based instructional coaches to assist with the follow up necessary for sustaining results. We have clear needs for additional professional learning to include IEP development, IEP teaming, planning and teaching structured literacy lessons, self-advocacy skills, informal assessment and analyzing student work, transition planning, job development, supporting skill acquisition and behavior reduction based on ABA principles and much more.

Finally, plans to overhaul the special education website will continue. An initial mapping of the website content is complete. The first three areas that will be addressed are: (1) updating program information and staff contacts, (2) instructing parents on the referral, evaluation and eligibility process, and (3) upgrading family resources and supports section.

Conclusion

Programs and services for children and students, birth through age twenty-one, in the DSE are multi-faceted. While this report contains some information about aspects of the department, the scope of the work and related data points are vast and may be best discussed in future reports to the Board by individual DSE offices and teams.

The department is fully committed to a cycle of continuous improvement. Thus, parent/community involvement in the DSE work remains a high priority. We value the input of all stakeholders, including students, teachers, related service providers and support staff, and intend to maintain a strong foundation for collaborative efforts to continue.