



Special Education Opportunities Review Howard County Public School System

**PRELIMINARY RESULTS – TO BE USED FOR INTERNAL
DISCUSSIONS/DECISIONS ONLY**

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Introduction

The District Management Council (DMC) has conducted a Special Education Opportunities Review on behalf of the Howard County Public School System. The review focuses equally on the academic achievement of students and on the cost effective use of limited financial resources. The study is conducted under the framework of the continuous improvement model. It does not try to determine what is good or bad, but rather creates a road map to help move a district to the next level of performance. This process acknowledges that all systems can improve and that opportunities for improvement are built upon the district's current strengths, history, structure, and resources.

The review compares current practice in the district to best practices drawn from similar systems around the country. It also incorporates a number of well-tested analytical tools. In all cases, the evaluation recognizes that increasing student achievement, managing costs, continuing to comply with state and federal regulations, and respecting children, parents, and staff are all important. Addressing one, while ignoring the others, is not an option.

The review respects the reality that school districts are complex organizations tasked with a multitude of expectations, unfunded mandates, priorities, and responsibilities. Although a large variety of thoughtful ideas for improvement are possible, a short, targeted plan is more beneficial than a long laundry list of observations, options, and possible actions. To that end, a small number of high-potential, high-impact opportunities are recommended.

Not all opportunities listed in the document can be addressed at once. Additionally, any of these opportunities would typically take 1-3 years of careful planning, research, communication, coordination, and roll-out, with a commitment from the leadership to provide focus and stability during the implementation process.

The research for this project included extensive in-person interviews, an online parent survey, a deep look at hard data, classroom visits, benchmarking against best practices and like communities, and other research.

The Special Education Opportunities Review highlights many of the strengths in the district and pinpoints inter-related opportunities to increase student achievement and utilize scarce resources more effectively.

COMMENDATIONS

The district has much to be proud of and many strengths that create a strong foundation for continuous improvement.

1. The district is committed to providing an inclusive education for students with disabilities.

At all levels, special education teachers, general education teachers, and parents indicated that including students with disabilities in the general education classroom is a beneficial practice and is strongly embraced and widely implemented.

This commitment to meeting the needs of students with mild to moderate—as well as some students with severe disabilities—in the general education setting has had the positive effect of providing most students with disabilities opportunities to be educated alongside their peers.

- Inclusion classrooms are offered at all grade levels in schools throughout the district. All of the classrooms visited included students with disabilities.
- During interviews, teachers expressed that there is shared ownership of students, and there is a clear district message that “we teach all students.”
- In an online survey, 81% of parents of students with disabilities indicated that their students were welcomed into the school community.

2. The leadership in the district is “forward thinking” and the staff embrace a culture of continuous improvement.

Interviews indicated that Howard County Public Schools prides itself on being “forward thinking,” and the district has shown a commitment to continuous improvement. Staff indicated that the district is frequently asked to participate in state committees on curriculum and instruction initiatives. Additionally, staff expressed a genuine commitment to improving their practice with a focus on serving students more effectively.

3. The district has robust capacity and systems to collect and manage a variety of student and staff data.

The district recently completed an audit of its data systems and is currently in the process of updating its student information systems to be more comprehensive and accessible to the appropriate staff. By the end of the current school year, a learning management system for sharing student performance and local common formative assessment data for use by school improvement teams will be up and running. The district was able to easily and accurately provide large quantities of data for this review, easier than many like districts.

4. The district is proactive in seeking opportunities to improve its budget practices and to expand its capacity to analyze financial data.

Howard County Public Schools has taken a series of proactive steps to improve its budget practices. First, the district rolled out a zero-based budgeting process last year to help ensure

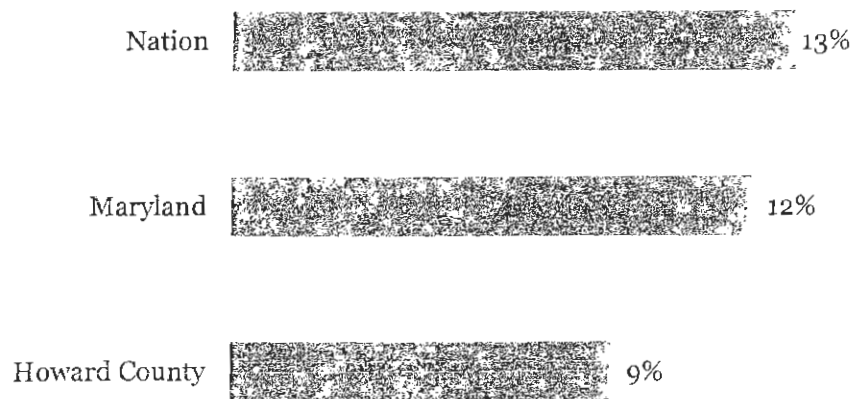
that its investments are aligned with demonstrated need across the district. Second, the budget department added analysts to conduct more rigorous financial analyses than in the past. Third, the district has taken steps to analyze the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of major budget elements to ensure that it is providing high-quality services to students.

These and similar efforts have helped control overall spending in special education, which has grown at a slightly slower rate than overall district spending in the last four years.

5. Students are identified for special education at a reasonable rate.

Across the country, wide variation in identification rates of students with disabilities is common. Identifying a student for special education can have significant implications for his or her learning. In many districts the breadth of general education interventions plays a significant impact of identification rates. The district's strong commitment to serving all students in the general education classroom and commitment of general education teachers impacts the district's identification rate. In the district, students are identified for special education services at a rate that is below both the state and the national averages.

Identification Rate for Students with Disabilities

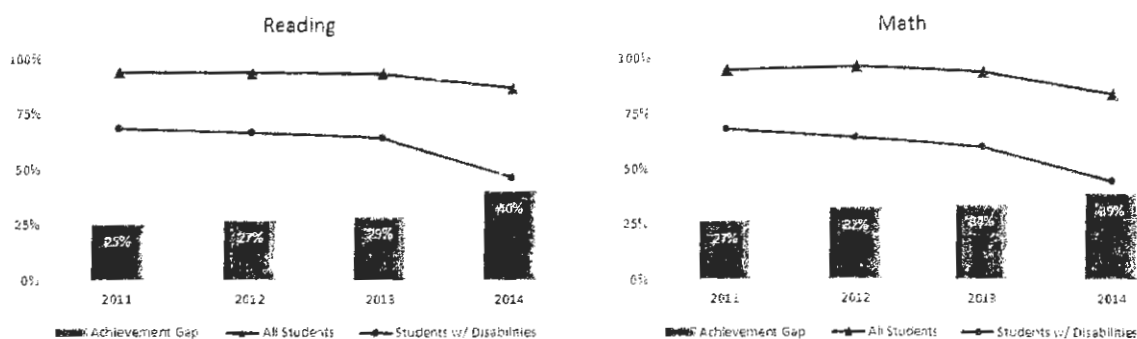


DISTRICT BACKGROUND

Howard County Public Schools is a very high-performing district overall, with achievement levels typically exceeding the state average. During the recent transition to the new Common Core State Standards, overall student achievement in Howard County Public Schools decreased slightly, a trend in the state since the state tests did not transition to the new standards until 2014-15. However, students with disabilities in Howard County Public Schools were disproportionately affected by this transition, leading to a significant increase in the achievement gap between all students and students with disabilities.

Howard County Achievement Gap, 3rd Grade MSA Results

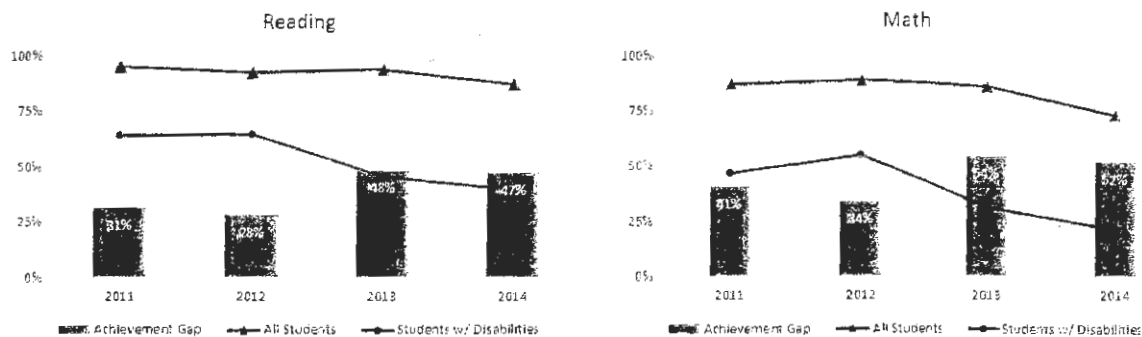
Outcomes for All Students vs. Students with Disabilities



- The achievement gaps between all students and students with disabilities in third grade reading and math have widened by 15 and 12 percentage points, respectively, in the last four years.

Howard County Achievement Gap, 8th Grade MSA Results

Outcomes for All Students vs. Students with Disabilities



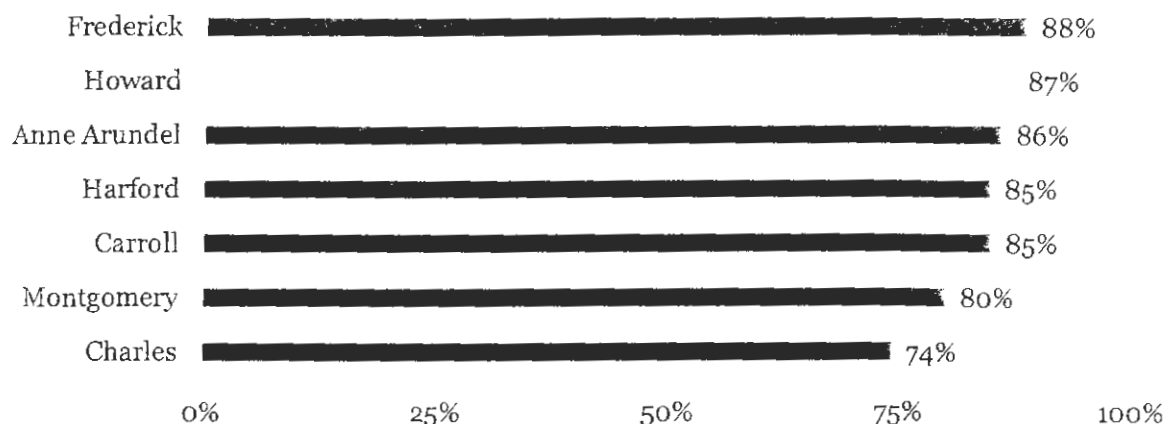
- The achievement gaps between all students and students with disabilities in eighth grade have followed a similar trend as the third grade scores, as reading and math have widened by 16 and 11 percentage points, respectively, in the last four years.

This report seeks to identify opportunities to reverse the growing achievement gaps for students with disabilities.

When compared to similar districts in the state, a similar story is true. Overall the district performs at very high levels, but students with disabilities lag behind both their non-disabled peers, but also students with disabilities in other like districts.

Students Proficient or Advanced on the 3rd Grade MSA Reading Assessment, All Students 2014

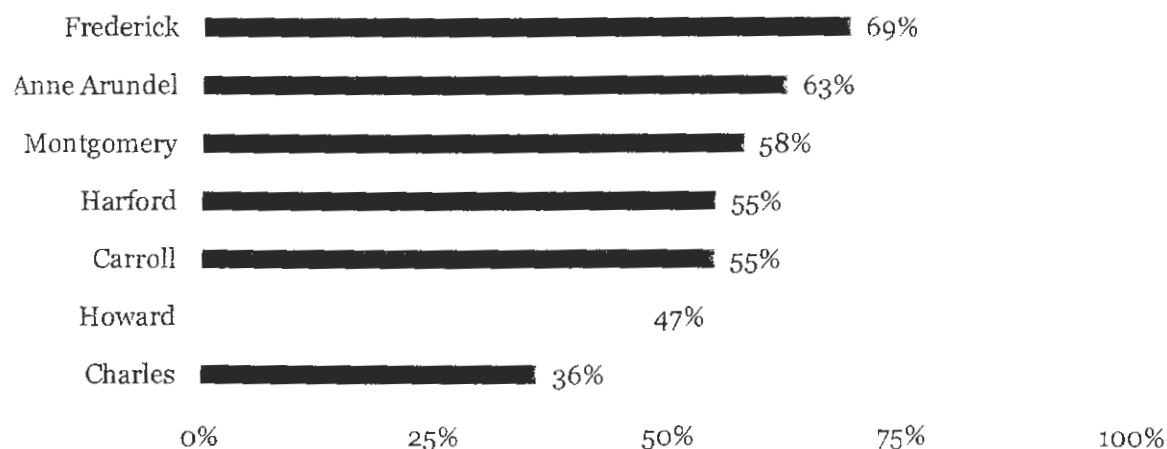
Similar District Data vs. Howard County Data



- Howard County's 3rd graders performed better in reading than many similar districts last year.

Students Proficient or Advanced on the 3rd Grade MSA Reading Assessment, Students with Disabilities 2014

Similar District Data vs. Howard County Data

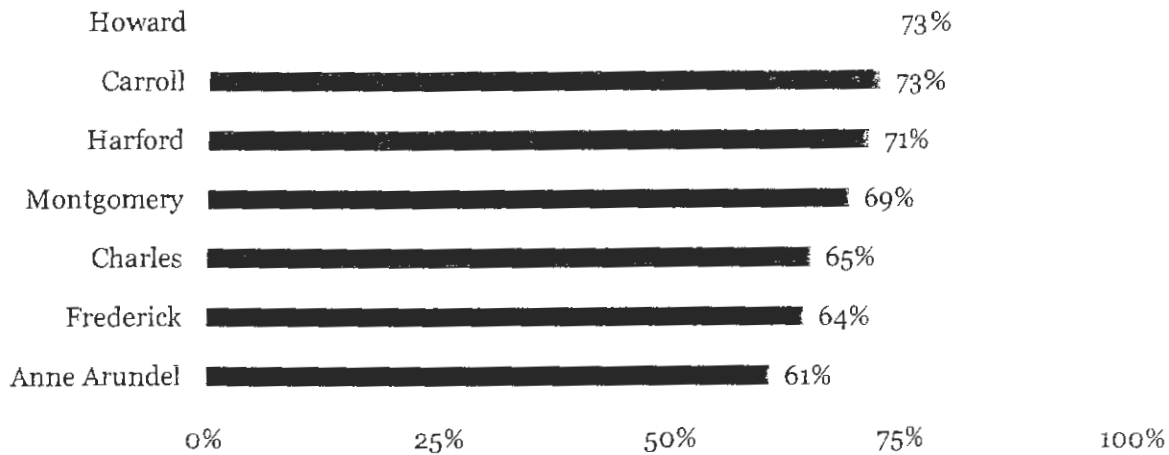


- The district had a significantly lower proficiency rate for students with disabilities than similar districts last year. Additionally, the comparison districts have higher rates of students living in poverty.

At the eighth grade level, a similar situation exists.

Students Proficient or Advanced on the 8th Grade MSA Math Assessment, All Students 2014

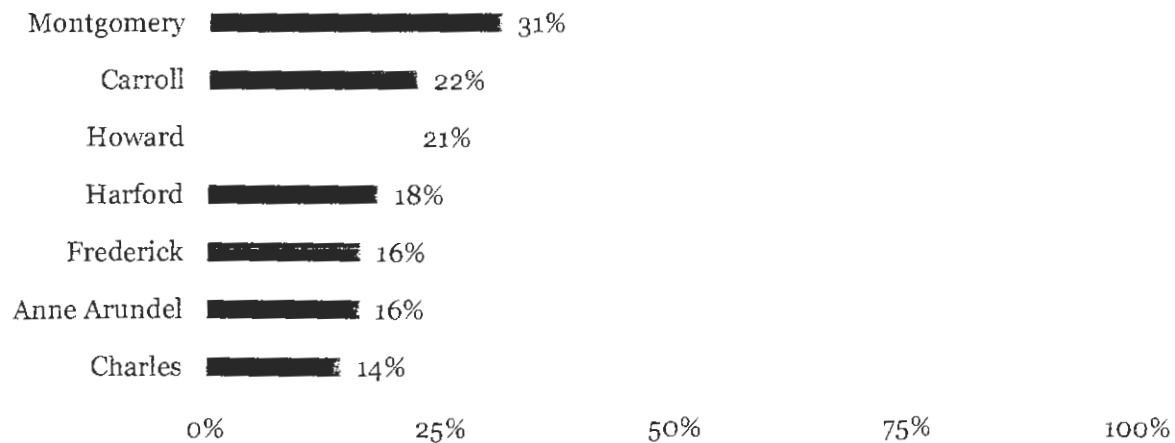
Similar District Data vs. Howard County Data



- Similarly, 8th graders in Howard County Public Schools outperformed students in most other similar districts in math last year.

Students Proficient or Advanced on the 8th Grade MSA Math Assessment, Students with Disabilities 2014

Similar District Data vs. Howard County Data



- However, students with disabilities in the district did not outperform those students in similar districts. Nearly all students with disabilities achieved at low levels.

During our interviews many staff and leaders were aware of the district's overall high level of achievement, but many believed students with disabilities also excelled academically, which is not the case.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Consider providing more time on task for all students who struggle in order for them to master grade level content.

Districts that have closed the achievement gap and significantly raised the achievement of students with special needs—and more broadly, the achievement of all struggling students—provide them with extra instructional time each day to master grade level content.

1a. Elementary Reading

Reading is the gateway to all other learning. Ensuring that all students read on grade level is critical to their future success in school and beyond graduation.

Students who struggle to read on grade level need more time for reading instruction in order to catch up and keep up with their peers. Research has shown that this is true for both students with mild to moderate disabilities and students without IEPs who struggle to read on grade level. Careful planning and scheduling could help ensure that any reading intervention support is over and above the 90 minute core literacy block.

Currently in the district, there is not a consistent practice of providing students who struggle with any additional time on task. The approach to elementary reading varies significantly from school to school, but on the whole extra time to learn is not the norm. For instance, interviews indicated that some elementary schools prioritize pulling students out of individual work time during the core ELA block for supplemental reading instruction and others prioritize push-in for small group or 1-to-1 instruction. Neither approach provides extra time for students. Few—if any schools—consistently use an additional period to provide reading intervention to struggling students.

On a related point, there are not consistent benchmarks or processes used across the district to identify students who need additional time to read on grade level. There is currently no common definition of grade level mastery and no common way to identify struggle readers. Interviews indicated that schools typically use at least one or some combination of a classroom-focused improvement plan (CFIP), program improvement plan (PIP), or instructional intervention team (IIT) process to identify students who are struggling. However, multiple focus groups indicated that there was not a clear benchmark or common assessment used for discussing student data during these processes. Rather, the data used to identify struggling students varies across schools, with many schools using primarily teacher-written assessments, and some using Fountas and Pinnell or MAP.

1b. Secondary Math and ELA

At the secondary level, the extra instructional time required increases significantly relative to the elementary level, up to one or even two hours per day to make up for prior lost years.

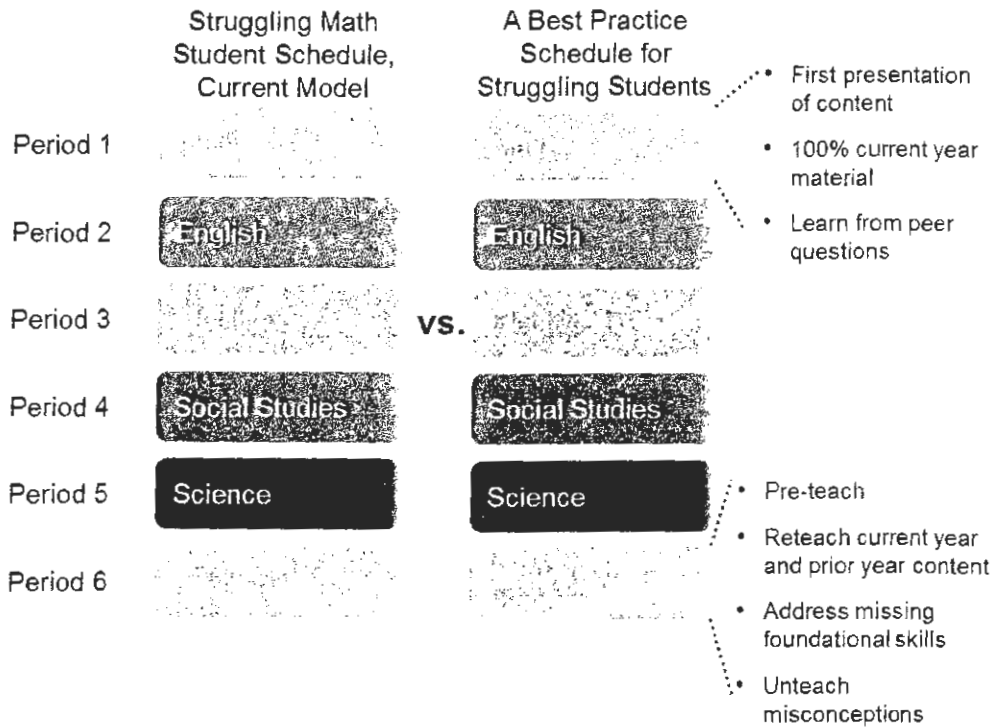
Providing extra time to pre-teach materials, re-teach the day’s lesson, address missing foundational skills, and un-teach misconceptions is a best practice to supporting all students struggling in math and ELA at the secondary schools.

There is not a consistent practice of providing additional instructional time in either ELA or math at the high school level. Interviews indicated that there are no district wide formalized or systematized interventions for math or ELA content at the high school level.

At the middle school level, many schools offer “seminars” in math and ELA, however their use and purpose is not consistent across the district. Interviews indicated that these seminar courses are typically not structured to fill in learning gaps and build skills that the student might have missed in previous years, but they are primarily a repeat of the content from the student’s core math or ELA class.

Schedules for Struggling Students in the Current and Best Practice Models

Current vs. Best Practice Struggling Student Schedule



Similar to elementary reading, there are not clear benchmarks or a systematized approach to identify struggling students at both the middle and high school levels in ELA and math. Rather, schools rely on teacher-written assessments and teacher recommendations, sometimes from the previous year, to identify students who are falling behind.

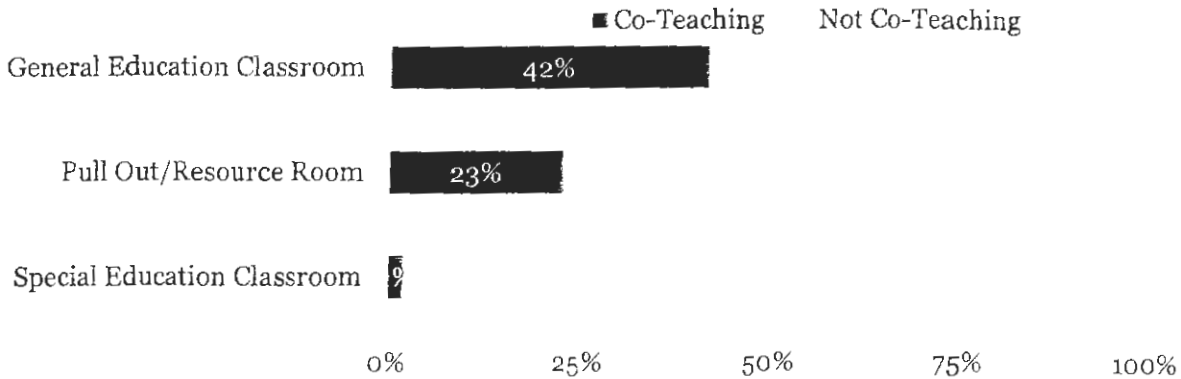
1c. Implications for current practices

In Howard County Public Schools, support for students with IEPs often occurs in the form of “increased adult intensity,” rather than extended time: in this model, students are assigned multiple adults to support them at the same time (e.g., collaboration, co teaching, 1-to-1 support), instead of getting extended time on task. Shifting away from a high-intensity model of student support can maximize student learning and free up funds to support other opportunities to raise achievement.

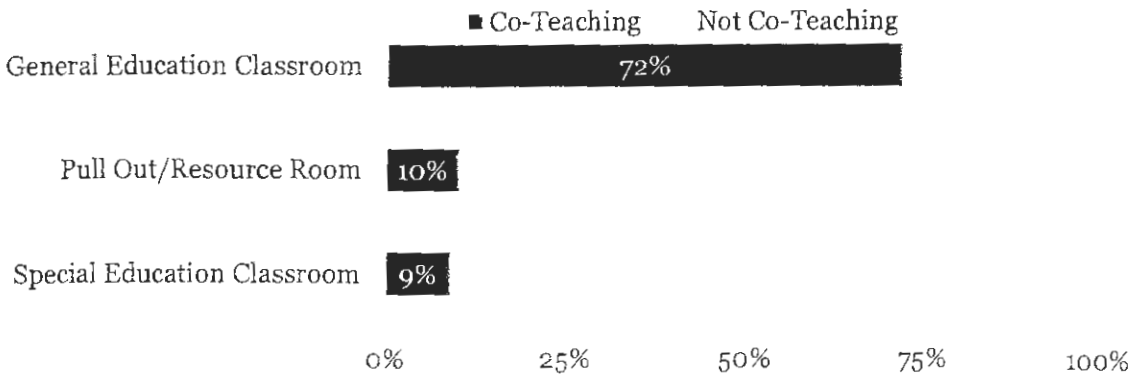
In Howard County Public Schools, “collaboration,” two adults at once, is the most common form of special education service delivery:

- Approximately 75% of elementary inclusion special educators’ direct service time is spent either in a co-teaching or push-in setting.
- Similarly, 81% of secondary inclusion special education teachers’ direct service time is in a setting with a general educator present.

Percentage of Direct Service Time Spent by Inclusion Special Education Teachers
Elementary Level



Percentage of Direct Service Time Spent by Inclusion Special Education Teachers
Secondary Level



The district has placed co-teaching at the forefront of its efforts to help struggling students with special needs. National research, however, suggests that co-teaching seldom raises student achievement. In his 2009 review of educational research, John Hattie notes that no studies have shown student gains from co-teaching and that on average it actually produced less or equal learning than a class with a single teacher, while costing twice as much. This is because while co-teaching represents higher “intensity” of support (i.e., multiple adults providing support at the same time), it does not mean extended time on task with a content-strong teacher for the struggling student.

Interviews with teachers across the country who co-teach suggest that co-teaching, while promising in theory, is often executed poorly. Effective co-teaching requires a high level of collaborative planning between the general education and special education teachers, which requires daily common planning time. Teachers often express not having sufficient time to meet and plan lessons in their teams. Lack of planning results in lack of consistency in the pair’s instruction of content, as the two teachers may have different goals for the students. Providing common planning time, however, typically increases staffing requirements by 20% or more.

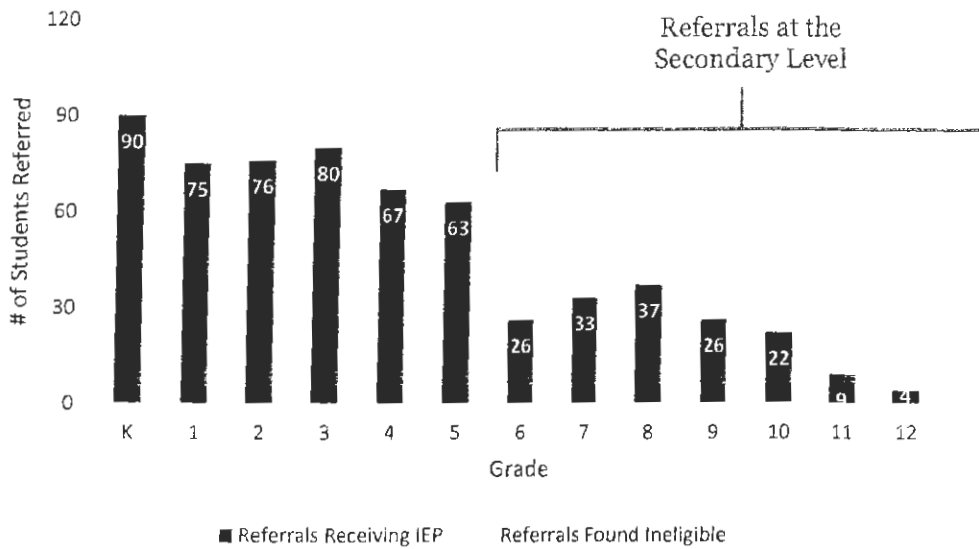
Similar challenges exist in Howard County. Interviews suggested that structures for common planning do not exist consistently across the district, which often renders the co-teaching model frustrating and ineffective. Many staff acknowledged that co-teaching was not being implemented with fidelity due to limited co-planning time and other demands that frequently pull either the general education teacher or the special education teacher out of the classroom. For instance, during DMC’s classroom visits, three co-taught classrooms were observed to be missing either the special education teacher, the general education teacher, or both.

The need for more general education interventions

The IEP and 504 referral rates, especially at the secondary level—in addition to the achievement gaps—in Howard County Public Schools support the premise that current general education interventions need to be expanded.

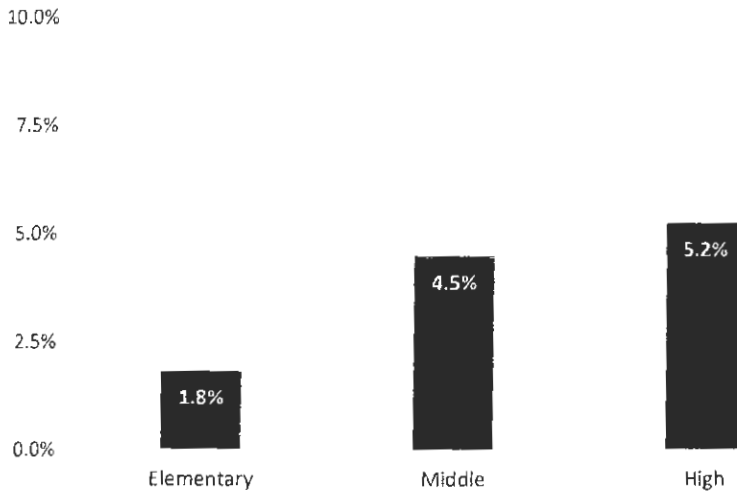
In most districts referrals to special education or requests for 504s peak around 3rd or 4th grade and diminish to nearly zero by the start of middle school. This is not the case in the district.

Students' Initial Referral to Special Education
By Grade Level



- The district refers a significant amount of students for IEPs at the secondary level.
- Only 46% of those students are found eligible for an IEP.

Percentage of Total Enrollment Receiving 504 Services
By Grade Level



- The rate at which students receive 504 services in high school is nearly three times the rate in elementary school.
- The rate at the high school is more than 4 times the national average.

The IEP referral rate and the 504 identification rate both indicate that students in the district need greater support as they move into the secondary level, but the current model within general education does not provide this.

Financial impact

Implementing a double dose, extra model would reduce the need for special education teachers to support students academically, while increasing the need for other staff. Extra time would be a lower cost, or cost neutral option depending on how implemented. Many more students, including students who struggle but don't have an IEP could be served with extra time to learn at no additional cost.

2. Ensure that students who struggle receive instruction from instructors with subject-specific training during core classes and interventions.

Extra time on task is not sufficient for struggling students to master grade level material. The training and knowledge of the teacher also matters a great deal.

2a. Elementary Reading

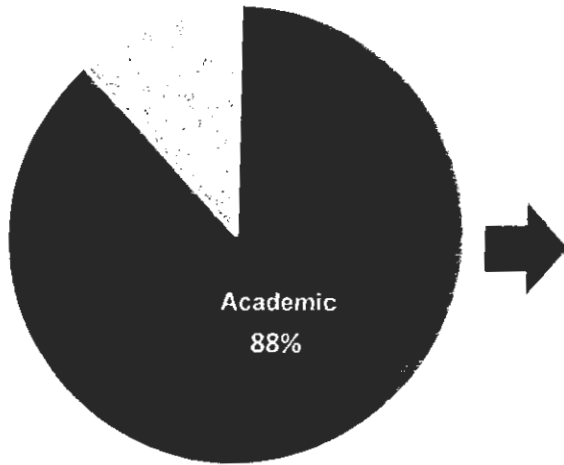
For students who struggle, research indicates that the subject-specific training of the instructor has significant bearing on the student's likelihood of achieving grade level mastery. Effective teachers of reading have extensive training in the teaching of reading. Often, special educators have deep expertise in pedagogy but limited background in the teaching of reading. Districts that have made the most significant gains among struggling readers have done so by providing teachers skilled in the teaching of reading extra time with struggling students.

Paraprofessionals can play an important role in supporting many students with special needs, especially for behavioral and physical support; however, the overuse of paraprofessional support can often limit students' learning and independence, in addition to making the job frustrating for paraprofessionals. When students struggle in reading, it is generally more beneficial for their learning to spend extra time with teachers or interventionists highly skilled in the teaching of reading than with paraprofessionals, who generally do not have extensive training in the teaching of reading.

Interviews, classroom visits, and data from the schedule sharing all indicate that the background and training of staff providing elementary reading instruction varied significantly across the district. Staff in the focus groups explained that reading specialists or special education teachers could both lead reading instruction lessons, and paraprofessionals could provide reading instruction if the materials were prepared by a special education teacher. There is not a consistent approach across the district, and during classroom visits DMC observed all three practices being implemented.

As the data from the schedule sharing illustrates, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and student assistants are all providing a significant amount of core academic instruction in Howard County Public Schools.

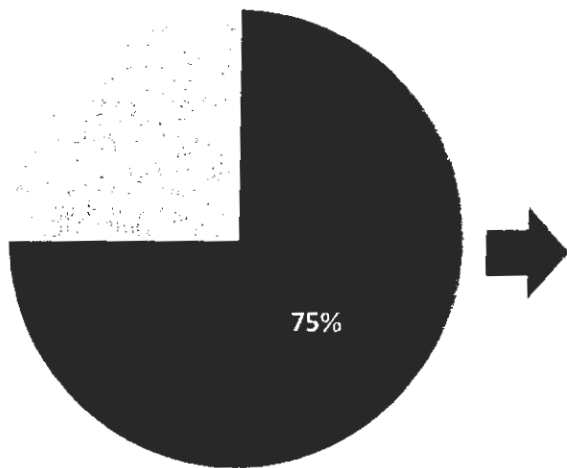
Special Education Teachers (Inclusion) Instructional Topic (141.0 FTE)¹
Elementary Level Only



Academic topic	% time spent
Reading	39%
Math	31%
Writing	10%
Science	4%
Social Studies	4%
Total academic instruction	88%

- Special education teachers are spending nearly all of their direct service time providing content instruction, including 39% of that time on reading instruction.

Special Education Paraeducators (Inclusion) Instructional Topic (110.0 FTE)*
Elementary Level Only



Academic topic	% time spent
Reading	24%
Math	23%
Writing	12%
Social Studies	8%
Science	8%
Total academic instruction	75%

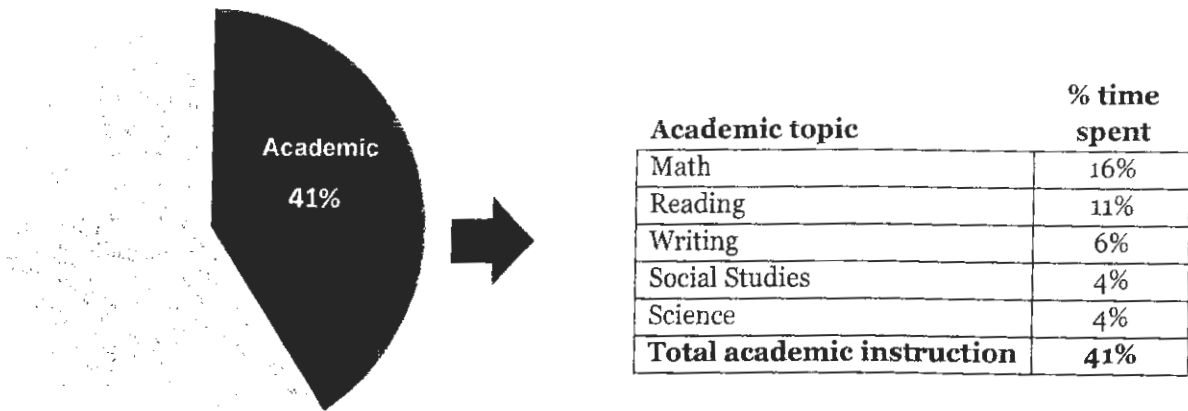
¹ Academic and non-academic support is equal to 100% of student support (direct service) time.

* This study only collected data on special education and early childhood paraprofessional staff. General education paraprofessional staff are not included in this analysis.

- Special education paraeducators are spending nearly three out of four hours of their time spent with students providing content instruction or support, including nearly a quarter of their time on both reading and on math.
- General education paraprofessionals did not share their schedules, but the district has many such staff, many involved in reading instruction.

Student Assistants (Inclusion) Instructional Topic (35.0 FTE)

Elementary Level Only



- Student assistants spend significantly less of their direct service time on core instruction than paraprofessionals, but they are still spending two out of five hours of that time providing content instruction or support.

Potential Financial Impact

At the elementary schools, the district makes a significant investment in supporting struggling students. The current investment totals approximately \$20.8 million, excluding general education paraprofessionals.

District's Current Investment in Academic Support for Struggling Students

Elementary Level Only

Role	FTE invested in academic support	Average salaries & benefits	Total investment
Special education teachers (inclusion)	145.2	\$79,000	\$11,470,800
Reading specialists	74.5	\$79,000	\$5,885,500
Paraeducators (inclusion)	82.5	\$36,000	\$2,970,000
Student assistants (inclusion)	14.4	\$36,000	\$516,600
Total	316.6		\$20,842,900

This represents a sizable pool of funds which could be shifted or redirected to provide content strong staff for remediation and intervention efforts as well as supporting students with mild to moderate needs.

Estimated Investment Required for Best Practice Reading Instruction

Elementary Level Only

Total elementary enrollment	24,795
% 3 rd grade students who did not pass the 2014 MSA reading*	13%
Estimated # of students who struggle in reading	3,200
# of students per reading teacher/interventionist	40
# of reading teachers required	80
Total cost of providing additional time for students struggling with reading from skilled reading teachers	\$6,320,000
Total impact compared to current investment	\$14,522,900

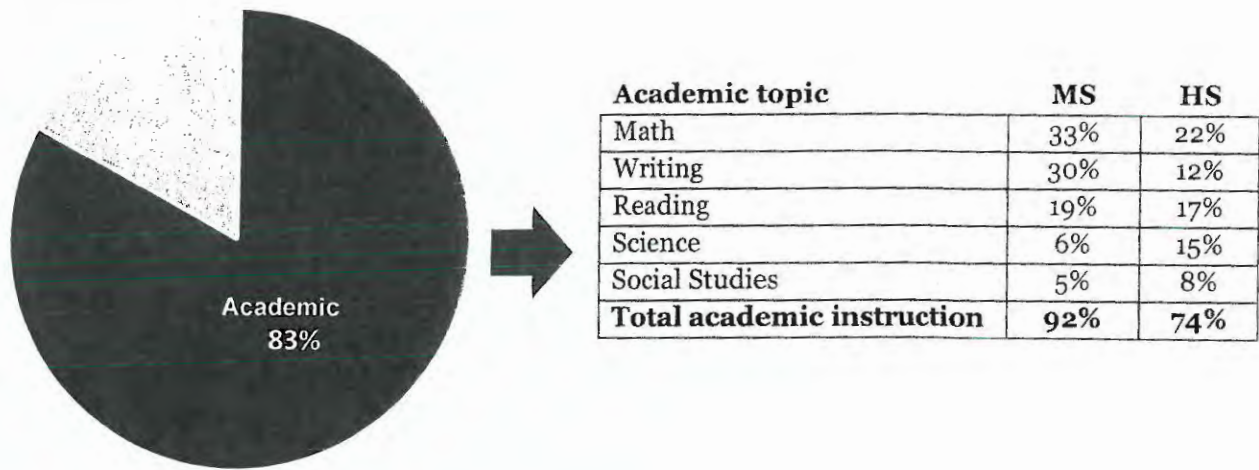
2b. Secondary ELA and Math

Just as the skill and training of the instructor is vital for the reading success of students at the elementary schools, this is just as true in secondary math and English. Typically, a teacher who has engaged in extensive training and study of a subject is more likely to have intricate working knowledge of the subject and an ability to understand and explain the content to a struggling student in a way that will lead to mastery. For students with or without IEPs who struggle at the secondary level, research shows the content expertise of the instructor has significant bearing on the student’s likelihood of mastering the grade level material.

Similar to the reading support at the elementary level, there is a wide variance in what types of staff are providing intervention and support for secondary ELA and math. Both math and ELA instruction can be provided to struggling students with or without an IEP in a variety of settings and by instructors with a variety of backgrounds including in a co-taught classroom, by a reading specialist or a special education teacher, or by a special education teacher and a paraeducator, among other combinations.

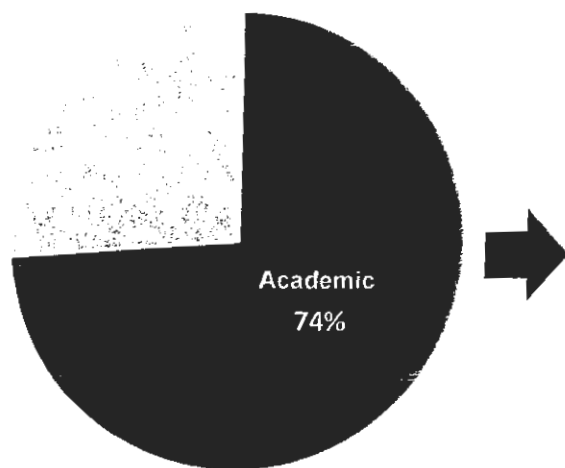
Special Education Teachers (Inclusion) Instructional Topic (231.0 FTE)

Secondary Level Only



- Special education teachers are spending most of their direct service time providing content instruction, including 33% of that time on math and 49% on ELA instruction at the middle school level.

Special Education Paraeducators (Inclusion) Instructional Topic (102.0 FTE)
Secondary Level Only



Academic topic	MS	HS
Social Studies	26%	15%
Science	25%	17%
Math	16%	13%
Reading	10%	12%
Writing	5%	9%
Total academic instruction	82%	66%

- Special education paraeducators are spending nearly three out of four hours of their time spent with students providing content instruction or support, much of it in math and social studies. In many districts support is not provided in these subjects.

Potential Financial Impact

The average reported caseload of secondary special education teachers in Howard County Public Schools was 32 students per week. By comparison, a general education teacher often instructs 60 to 75 struggling students and has more in depth content knowledge and training for supporting students in the core classroom curriculum. By shifting to a double block support model, students could receive an extra period of support from a skilled content teacher in ELA or math.

The current investment in supporting students with mild to moderate needs at the secondary schools totals approximately \$22.4 million.

District's Current Investment in Academic Support for Struggling Students
Secondary Level Only

Role	FTE	Average salaries & benefits	Total investment
Special education teachers (inclusion)	191.7	\$79,000	\$15,146,670
Reading specialists	55.5	\$79,000	\$4,384,500
Special education paraeducators (inclusion)	75.5	\$36,000	\$2,717,280
Student assistants (inclusion)	4.9	\$36,000	\$177,840
Total	327.7		\$22,426,290

By shifting a double block support model, students would receive an extra period of support from a skilled content teacher in ELA or math.

Estimated Investment in the Double-Time Model for Struggling Students with and without IEPs
Secondary Level Only

	ELA	Math
Secondary enrollment	28,054	
% students who did not pass the 2014 MSA/HSA (grades 6-12)*	8%	17%
Estimated # of students who struggle	2,200	4,800
# of students per content-strong teacher	75	75
# of content-strong teachers required	29.3	64
Cost of additional content-strong teachers	\$2,317,333	\$5,056,000
Total cost of providing double time for struggling students	\$7,373,333	
Estimated impact for the district in shifting to double-time with content strong staff	\$15,052,957	

*These rates were calculated from the results of MSA and HAS tests for grades 6-8 and 11, then extended to the 6-12 enrollment.

2c. Implications for current model

Co-teaching does not provide students with full access to a teacher with subject-specific training at the elementary or the secondary level. Although struggling students might be in the same classroom as a teacher with deep content knowledge, special education teachers and paraeducators are also providing a significant amount of their instruction.

Interviews also indicated that within the current co-teaching model some educators, including special education teachers and paraeducators, are lowering expectations for students with disabilities. Focus group participants shared that it is not uncommon for tests and curriculum to be modified, which often “takes the rigor out” of the assignment. For instance, multiple staff members mentioned that assessments are often cut in half for students with disabilities in co-taught classrooms. Providing students with full access to instructors with deep understanding of the standards and content will help combat the lowering of expectations for students with disabilities.

Increasing the role of general education staff is consistent with the district’s commitment to inclusion. It would also serve the many students who are being referred to special education or getting 504s at the secondary level. More students can be helped in a more impactful way at no added cost.

3. Refine the current approach to providing social-emotional and behavioral supports for students, especially at the secondary level.

All districts in the country are addressing the growing social and emotional needs of students. In districts that embrace inclusion (a best practice), finding the balance between providing a broad continuum of services to meet differing student needs and providing services in the least restrictive environment is a complex process.

3a. Timing of Services

The district is committed to inclusion, which is beneficial for students in most cases. However, the district also has a reluctance to provide more intense supports for students when they might be appropriate. The rate of students in substantially separate placements is slightly more than half—61%—the average for similar districts nationwide.

Perhaps a symptom of the low substantially separate rate is the high rate of out-of-district placements for students with emotional disturbances. More than one in three out-of-district placements in the district are students with emotional disturbances.

This is particularly problematic for students with behavioral needs. For instance, interviews repeatedly raised the concern that an unspoken, unofficial policy does not allow students who are new to the district to be placed in a substantially separate setting before a lengthy evaluation period. This is true even if the student has an IEP requiring a setting with more intense supports from his or her previous district.

The online parent survey suggested that a number of parents believe that a broader continuum of services in the district, including more intense services, would be beneficial for some students.

3b. Amount of services

The primary resources for social-emotional supports for students with an IEP in the district are psychologists. Interviews indicated that counselors typically serve students without IEPs, while psychologists serve students with IEPs. The district also employs 8.0 FTE of behavior specialists, but they do not primarily serve students. Additionally, multiple staff members in the focus groups also expressed concern over the growing social-emotional needs of students.

Although the IEP process is an important responsibility for psychologists, how much time psychologists dedicate to the process varies significantly between districts. To the extent that the IEP process can be streamlined, this is valuable time that could be redirected toward counseling services to students.

Psychologist Activities (62.9 FTE)

Activity	% time spent
Counseling - Individual	10%
Crisis intervention	5%
Counseling - Group	4%
Total Direct Service	19%

Due process activities

Attend or facilitate IEP/ IFSP Meeting	9%
Student observation/ data collection	7%
Report writing: IEPs/ FBA/ BIP	6%
Assessment/ testing - initial and re-evaluation	6%
Service documentation	3%
Attend/ facilitate IIT/SST meeting	3%
Attend/ facilitate 504 meeting	2%
Test scoring/ interpretation	2%
Attend/ facilitate coordinated student services team meeting	1%
Total due process activities	39%

Other indirect service

Collaboration and consultation with staff	15%
Planning/ materials preparation	8%
Attend or facilitate meetings (other than IEP/IFSP)	5%
Professional development: planning, prep, delivery	5%
Parent communication (email, phone, in-person)	5%
Personal lunch	3%
Assigned school duties (i.e. bus duty, lunch duty, etc.)	2%
Parent counseling/ training	1%
Attend staffing (i.e. RECC, I&T)	1%
Agency coordination of supports and services	1%
Travel	1%
Over reported	-5%
Total indirect service	42%

- Psychologists in the district are only spending one day per week counseling students. The other four days consist equally of evaluations (two days) and other indirect service activities (two days).

Volume of evaluations conducted per psychologist

The district's psychologists currently conduct approximately 40 evaluations per FTE per year; while no national data exists, compared to a study done in Massachusetts, this is less than to a typical psychologist, who conducts 75 evaluations per year, while also utilizing 30% of their time to counseling students. A broad array of DMC clients suggests 85-125 evaluations a year to be typical, if little counseling is provided.

If the district took steps to match the median of psychologists in the Massachusetts study the district could free up the equivalent of approximately 20 FTE, or 3,600 extra days of counseling, without any additional staff.

4. Consider shifting the roles of paraprofessional staff to emphasize providing nonacademic support, rather than content instruction, for students with mild to moderate disabilities.

The district has invested significantly in providing paraprofessional support for students with disabilities. Interviews indicated that there are three main types of paraprofessional staff that provide services to students in the district: special education paraeducators, student assistants, and temporary employees. This study collected extensive data on paraeducators and student assistants. The distinctions between each position are explained below, although each role performs similar functions overall:

- Special education paraeducators: provide support and sometimes instruction to small groups of students with disabilities
- Student assistants: provide predominantly 1-to-1, non-academic support to students, although it is not uncommon for them to provide instruction as well
- Temporary employees: contracted through an outside agency, primarily help to ensure that students do not act out in class and often are staffed 1-to-1

The district also has a large number of general education paraprofessionals.

Benchmarking

A benchmarking analysis compared the district’s paraprofessional staffing levels, including special education paraeducators, student assistants, and temporary employees, to like districts across the nation.

Special Education Paraprofessional Staffing Levels

Paraeducators, Student Assistants, and Temporary Employees

Role	Current FTE	FTE per 1,000 students		Multiple	Scaled multiple
		District	Like communities		
Paraprofessional Staff*	760.5	14.3	8.0	1.8x	2.7x

*This includes special education paraeducators, student assistants, and temporary employees, but not general education paraprofessional staff.

The value in the “multiple” column indicates the ratio of Howard County Public Schools’ paraprofessional staffing level compared to the paraprofessional staffing rate of similar districts, adjusted for enrollment. The “scaled multiple” column shows the same ratio, except it controls for the district’s low identification rate.

Two factors could be contributing to paraprofessional staffing levels that are significantly higher than similar districts. First, the district relies on paraprofessional staff to provide a significant amount of instruction to struggling students.

Second, the artificial stratification of paraprofessional staff into three distinct roles could be contributing to the higher-than-average staffing levels. Interviews indicated that oftentimes the roles and responsibilities of the three different paraprofessional positions were ambiguous or overlapping, which could cause multiple staff to be assigned to similar activities.

This analysis does not include any of the roughly 500 FTE of general education paraprofessionals that Howard County Public Schools employs. However, as a comparison, many districts would have less than 200 FTE of general education paraprofessional staff, while some districts have close to 0 FTE.

Financial Impact

Rethinking the role of paraprofessional staff could focus limited resources on support models more aligned with best practices for raising student achievement. Shifting a portion of the nearly \$27.4 million, or 760.5 FTE, invested in paraprofessional staff to reading, ELA, or math interventionists could help more students achieve at higher levels.

- Adjusting paraprofessional staffing levels to those of like communities the district could free up \$12.2 million for other services.

5. Consider increasing the amount of time related service providers spend with students, while also closely managing group size through thoughtful scheduling.

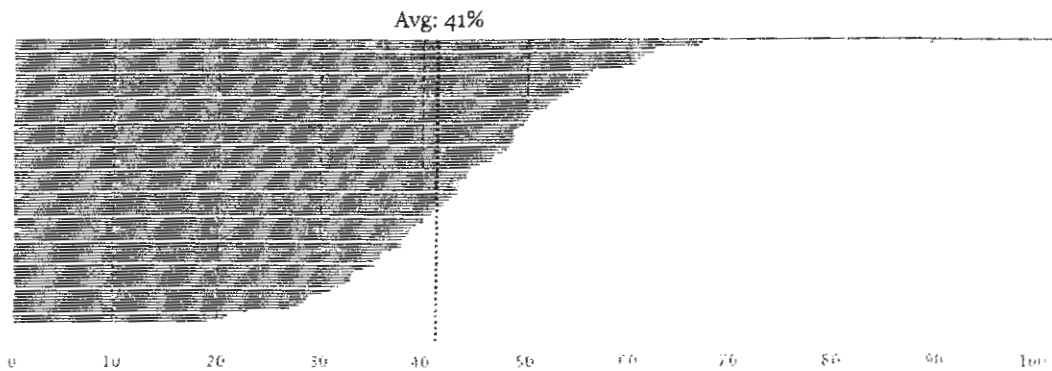
Taking a proactive role in managing related services could allow the district to free up funds to service more students without reducing a minute of service to students.

5a. Speech and Language Pathologists

Speech and language pathologists are an important component of many student’s IEPs. They spend time working directly with students, while also participating in evaluations, report writing, and data analysis.

Speech and Language Pathologist Direct Student Support (105.5 FTE)

Direct service is calculated based on the percent of time spent with students in the contracted work week.



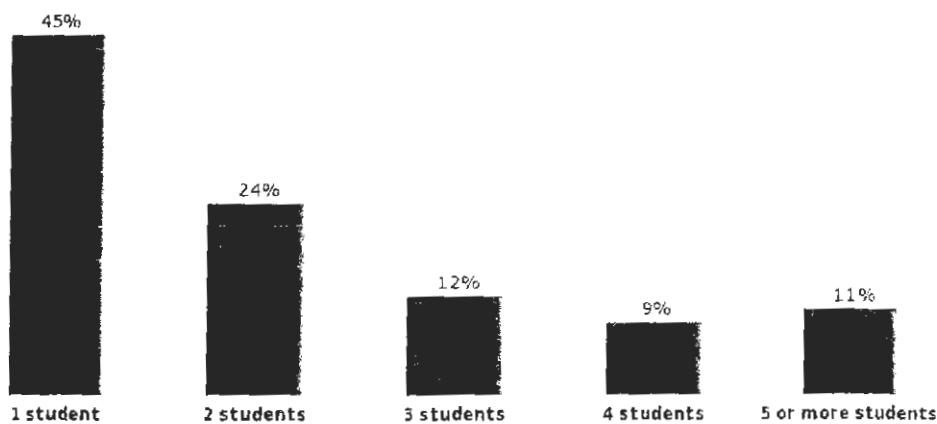
- On average, speech therapists spend 41% of the contracted work week serving students.

Speech and Language Pathologist Activities (105.5 FTE)

Activity	% time spent
Therapy with students	41%
Total direct service	41%
Paperwork/ IEP/ IFSP writing	10%
Planning/ materials preparation	9%
Collaboration with colleagues (email, phone, in-person)	7%
Attend meeting (IEP/IFSP)	5%
Personal lunch	5%
Attend meeting (other than IEP/IFSP)	5%
Professional development	5%
Assessing/ observing students	3%
Travel	3%
Medicaid billing/ service documentation	3%
Parent counseling/ training	2%
Assigned school duties (i.e. bus duty, lunch duty, etc.)	2%
IEP/ IFSP testing/ assessment	2%
Over reported	-2%
Total Indirect Service	59%

The average speech therapist in the district serves 28 students. Nationally the typical caseload is over 50 students. The low caseload is a consequence of much time in meetings and doing paperwork, coupled with providing much service 1:1. Speech therapists provide nearly half of their services 1:1.

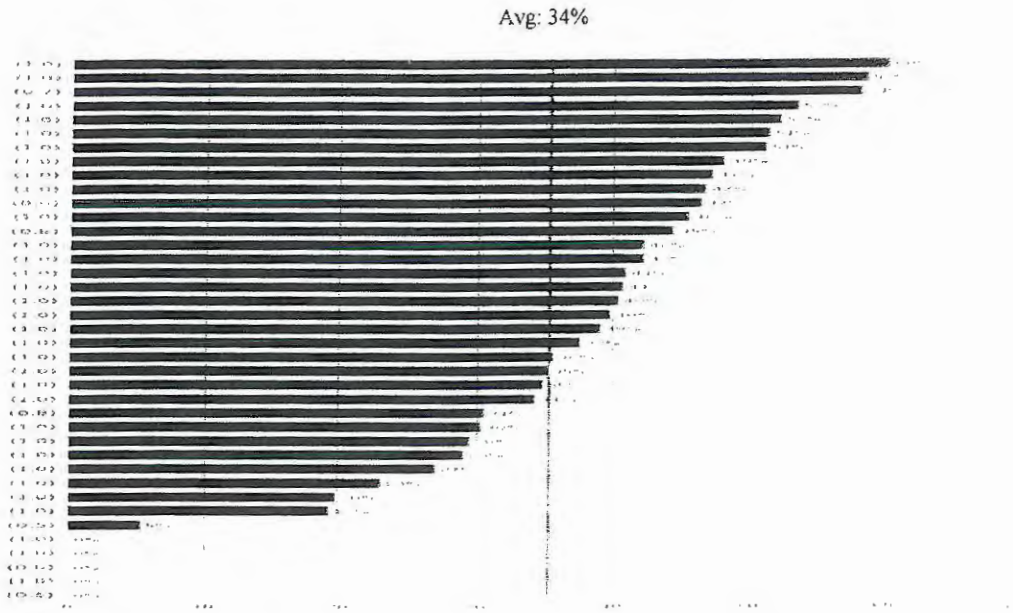
Speech and Language Pathologist Group Size (105.5 FTE)



5b. Occupational Therapists

Much like speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists provide very important services to students with disabilities, but also have other responsibilities.

Occupational Therapist Direct Student Support (40.2 FTE)



more than twice the FTE of related service providers than like districts, when scaled for identification rate.

A benchmarking analysis comparing the district's related services staffing levels to like districts across the nation indicated that Howard County Public Schools has significantly more than average number of related services staff.

Staffing Levels Compared to like Districts

Role	FTE per 1,000 students			Scaled multiple
	District	Like communities	Multiple	
Speech and language pathologists	2.0	1.4	1.5x	2.2x
Occupational therapists	0.8	0.4	1.9x	2.9x
Physical therapists	0.2	0.2	1.3x	1.9x

- The district has 1.5x and 1.9x the number of SLPs and OTs, respectively, as similar districts, even while similar districts typically serve about 40% more students with disabilities.
- When its identification rate is considered, Howard County Public Schools has between 2x and 3x the number of related service staff of like districts.

Potential Financial Impact

Managing the scheduling of related service providers could free up limited resources without reducing any support to students or changing any IEPs.

Increase average direct service to 75%

By increasing the average direct service to 75% for all related service providers, the district could free up \$6 million, to reinvest in other district priorities without decreasing services to students.

	Current				
	FTE	DS %	\$	DS %	\$
SLP	105.5	41%	\$8,334,500	75%	\$4,556,193
OT	40.2	34%	\$3,175,800	75%	\$1,439,696
PT	12.4	35%	\$979,600	75%	\$457,147
Total	158.1		\$12,489,900		\$6,453,036

6. Consider expanding the roles and responsibilities of school- and central office-based administrators to more closely manage how special education staff use their time.

As the district moves to best practice service delivery models, district leaders can set explicit expectations for how services are provided, how much time in a day staff provide instruction and how many students are helped at once by a teacher. These service delivery, workload and group size guidelines are very common in general education, but less so in special education.

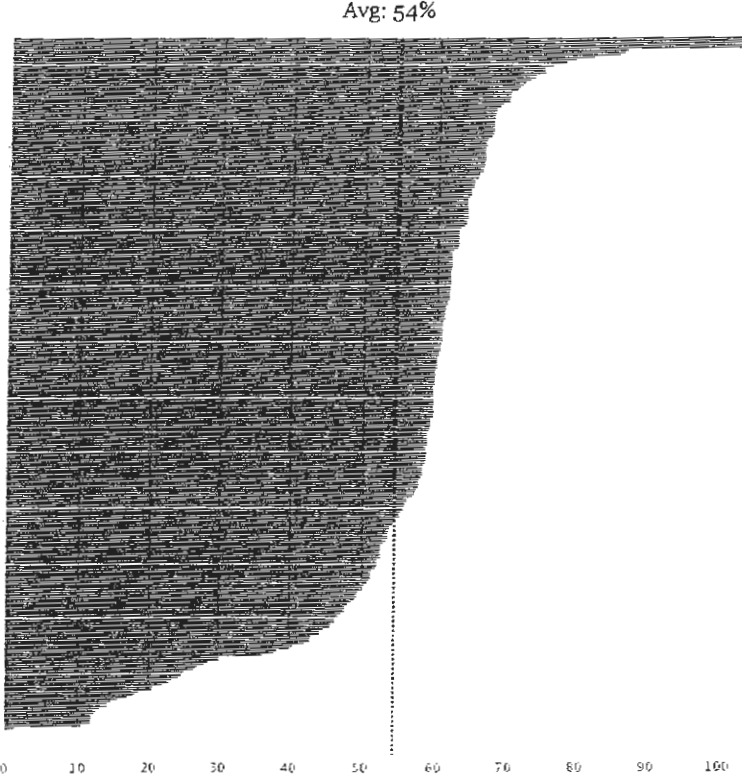
Howard County Public Schools has a variety of administrator roles at both the school and district level (e.g., instructional team leaders, resource teachers, and instructional facilitators) that could be utilized to help implement the shift in how special education staff use their time and serve students.

6a. Staff Time with Students

Special Education Teachers (Inclusion)

To the extent that special education teachers will be providing support in core academic subjects, there is an opportunity to have them spend more time doing so. In the current scheduling, special education teachers spend, on average, 54% of their time working directly with students. As a point of comparison, a general education teacher might typically spend 75%-85% of their week providing direct service and in some districts special education teachers also spend 75% of their time with students. Re-thinking the schedule and non-teaching demands of special educators in the district could allow the teachers to spend more of their week helping students.

Special Education Teacher (Inclusion) Direct Service (396 FTE)



- Special education teachers in Howard County Public Schools spend, on average, about 2.5 days per week with students.

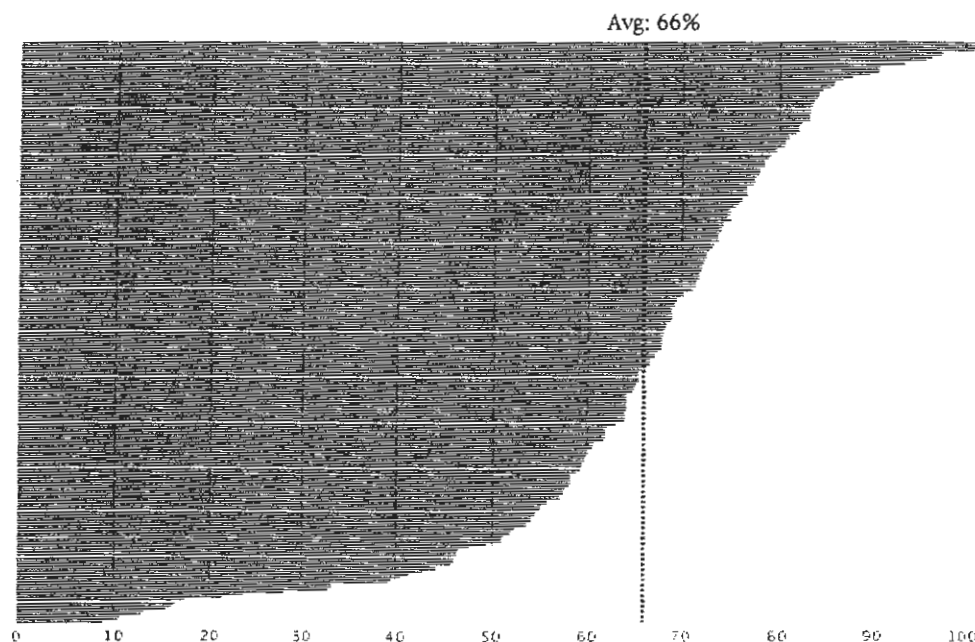
All activities are important, yet few districts actively manage the distribution of this time for special education staff. For comparison, in general education all trade-offs between student time and indirect time are set by the district leadership, such as the number of courses taught by a high school math teacher.

Special Education Teacher (Inclusion) Activities (396 FTE)

Activity	% time spent
Student instruction or support	54%
Total direct service	54%
Planning/ materials preparation	14%
Collaboration with colleagues (email, phone, in-person)	7%
Paperwork/ IEP writing	6%
Personal lunch	6%
Attend school based meeting (other than IEP)	4%
Assigned school duties (i.e. bus duty, lunch duty, etc.)	3%
Parent communication (email, phone, in-person)	2%
Student observation/ data collection	2%
Attend meeting (IEP)	2%
Professional development	<1%
Scheduling	<1%
Implementation of specialized methodologies	<1%
IEP testing/ assessment	<1%
Travel	<1%
Over reported	-3%
Total Indirect Service	46%

- Special education teachers spend about 2.5 days per week with students and about one day per week planning or collaborating with colleagues.

Special Education Paraeducator (Inclusion) Direct Service (212 FTE)



- Special education paraeducators in Howard County Public Schools provide slightly more than three days per week of direct service to students.

Special Education Paraeducator (Inclusion) Activities (212 FTE)

Activity	% time spent
Student instruction or support	66%
Total direct service	66%
Planning/ materials preparation	9%
Assigned school duties (i.e. bus duty, lunch duty, etc.)	7%
Personal lunch	7%
Student transition/ escort	2%
Attend meeting	1%
Data collection	1%
Behavior intervention plan	<1%
Parent communication (email, phone, in-person)	<1%
Implementation of specialized methodologies	<1%
Travel	<1%
Under reported	5%
Total Indirect Service	34%

Potential Financial Impact

Actively managing direct student support hours and the time staff spend on indirect tasks such as paperwork, IEP writing, meetings, and travel can have a significant impact on staffing decisions. By managing their indirect workload, special education teachers can either spend more time with students, or the district can meet the same direct service hours with less staff. By increasing the direct service time of special education teachers in an inclusion setting to 75% and the same for paraeducators while keeping group size constant, the district could free up \$9.8 million that could be shifted to other support services directly impacting students.

These calculations assume no changes to student IEPs and no reduction in services to students. It does assume that meetings and paperwork requirements are streamlined.

6b. Implementing the Shift

Implementing changes such as shifting staff schedules to spend more time with students will require focus and effort on the part of the district. To accomplish this, it can help to have some staff in the district have the explicit role of supporting the scheduling and managing the daily activities of special education staff.

In Howard County Public Schools there are a variety of special education administrators, both at the school and district level that could fill this role, including resource teachers, instructional facilitators, and secondary instructional team leaders. Interviews indicated that oftentimes the roles and responsibilities of each of these three roles are ambiguous or overlapping. This is an opportunity to more explicitly define the expectations for each position. While redefining these roles, the district could include a new expectation that some will manage the schedules and service delivery model.

Students with Disabilities by Subgroup (Grades K-12)

	# Students w/ IEP	Total Students in District	% of Subgroup with IEPs	Subgroup vs District ID Rate
Af. American	1,374	11,378	12.1%	1.35
Latino	512	4,781	10.7%	1.19
White	2,114	23,454	9.0%	1.00
Multiracial	269	3,306	8.1%	0.91
Nat. American	7	103	6.8%	0.76
Asian	454	9,713	4.7%	0.52
Low income	1,327	10,490	12.7%	1.41
ELL/LEP	169	1,680	10.1%	1.12
Male	3,333	27,306	12.2%	1.36
Female	1,405	25,500	5.5%	0.61
Total	4,738	52,806	9.0%	1.00

Student Outcomes by Race (Grades 3-10, Math MSAs)

	All Students	Asian	White	African Am.	Hispanic
Grade 3	84%	93%	92%	69%	71%
Grade 4	90%	95%	95%	77%	81%
Grade 5	83%	94%	90%	63%	71%
Grade 6	78%	92%	87%	58%	58%
Grade 7	75%	91%	84%	52%	59%
Grade 8	73%	91%	83%	44%	48%
Grade 10	95%	95%	95%	86%	93%

Student Outcomes by Race (Grades 3-10, Reading MSAs)

	All Students	Asian	White	African Am.	Hispanic
Grade 3	87%	94%	91%	74%	77%
Grade 4	94%	95%	95%	87%	89%
Grade 5	95%	95%	95%	91%	94%
Grade 6	91%	94%	95%	81%	82%
Grade 7	88%	95%	94%	77%	77%
Grade 8	87%	95%	93%	75%	72%
Grade 10	92%	94%	95%	83%	86%

Student Outcomes by Gender (Grades 3-10, Math MSAs)

	Male	Female
Grade 3	84%	85%
Grade 4	90%	91%
Grade 5	82%	84%
Grade 6	76%	80%
Grade 7	72%	77%
Grade 8	71%	74%
Grade 10	94%	95%

Student Outcomes by Gender (Grades 3-10, Reading MSAs)

	Male	Female
Grade 3	83%	90%
Grade 4	92%	95%
Grade 5	95%	95%
Grade 6	88%	93%
Grade 7	85%	92%
Grade 8	83%	92%
Grade 10	90%	94%

Student Outcomes by Subgroup (Grades 3-10, Math MSAs)

	All Students	Students w/ Disabilities	FARMS	ELL
Grade 3	84%	45%	63%	53%
Grade 4	90%	52%	74%	52%
Grade 5	83%	37%	57%	43%
Grade 6	78%	28%	53%	38%
Grade 7	75%	21%	45%	25%
Grade 8	73%	21%	37%	36%
Grade 10	95%	63%	89%	80%

Student Outcomes by Subgroup (Grades 3-10, Reading MSAs)

	All Students	Students w/ Disabilities	FARMS	ELL
Grade 3	87%	47%	68%	61%
Grade 4	94%	67%	84%	52%
Grade 5	95%	72%	89%	66%
Grade 6	91%	54%	75%	41%
Grade 7	88%	44%	71%	39%
Grade 8	87%	40%	67%	44%
Grade 10	92%	60%	78%	32%

2+	Amer. Indian
84%	*
92%	*
86%	*
82%	*
75%	*
76%	*
95%	95%

2+	Amer. Indian
88%	*
95%	*
95%	*
93%	*
91%	*
89%	*
91%	92%