



NORWALK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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MORE Commission on Special Education

Written Testimony

January 8, 2015

In response to your request for written testimony concerning, "What are the systematic challenges to special education and what are some possible solution?" the Norwalk Public Schools offers the following.

Systematic Challenges

1. There has been an increase in the number of ASD identified students which has subsequently been accompanied by an increased need for ABA services.
This challenge carries with it the need for additional staff and training to deliver ABA services. Currently, many districts have had to contract with independent agencies and service providers.

Suggested solution: To build capacity within district, to meet the increased number of identified ASD students, with requested ABA services, graduate schools of education need to build this into their training program, and district funding needs to recognize and support this need.

2. There has been an increase in the number of adolescents with significant social/emotional needs, necessitating placing more students in residential, therapeutic and hospital settings.

Suggested solution: School psychologist and social workers need dedicated time in their day to proactively meet the needs to these students exhibiting significant social-emotional challenges. This is a challenge given their already compliance-driven service delivery model. Perhaps, a more ecological, school-wide, PBIS model, with appropriate training, can meet this challenge.

There is also the need for more community based psychiatric services to support schools and families.

3. General education teachers need to be trained to instruct students with IEPs in their classrooms. Issues of differentiation and inclusiveness rise to the forefront with this challenge.

Suggested solution: University-based teacher preparation programs need to increase their focus on instructing all students who sit in general education classes, as with those with IEPs. In addition, any school/district wide professional learning on addressing the needs of students with IEPs must be attended by general education teachers.

4. There has been a limited number of available spaces in out-of-district settings, resulting in students not being appropriately served in the interim and remaining on homebound instruction longer than necessary.

Suggested solution: Building capacity, in-district, to meet the varied needs of students who might be out placed, should be a priority.

5. Transportation costs are rising given out-of-district placements.

Suggested solution: Decrease out placements by building capacity in district.

6. Psychologists main responsibility have been to evaluate, given "Child Find" mandates and referrals, leaving little time to adequately address students' social-emotional needs in a timely and proactive manner.

Suggested solution: Build a comprehensive PBIS model in schools to proactively address students' needs as they arise.

7. Unfunded federal and state mandates from SDE result in increased committed staff time with limited resources.

Suggested solution: SDE staff responsible for addressing unfunded mandates could meet regionally with districts to brain storm and offer efficient/effective responses to the mandates.

8. Staffing and training resources are lacking to address SRBI in schools. The lack of these resources has left special education to be, by default, the only service available. In addition, there is limited time during the school day for staff to collaborate on students' progress and the effectiveness of related interventions.

Suggested solution: General education needs to take the lead in providing dedicated and comprehensive training in SRBI. Districts need to hold schools accountable for the implementation of SRBI.

9. Undergraduate teacher preparation programs do not adequately train prospective special education teachers in research-based reading and math instruction. Consequently, new teachers entering school systems are ill prepared to deliver the needed instruction for students with IEPs.

Suggested solution: Develop a task force with local colleges/universities to address this issue.

10. The lack of available time during the school day, does not allow for adequate paraprofessional training to work with students with IEPs.

Suggested solution: Develop a staggered schedule for paraprofessional training during the school year with a focus on disability awareness, basic principles of behavior management, and IEP essentials.

Respectfully submitted,

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Norwalk Public Schools