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## **Regional School District 14**

## **Special Education Opportunities Review**

**February 6, 2014**

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## Introduction

The District Management Council (DMC) has conducted a Special Education Opportunities Review on behalf of Regional School District 14. The review focuses equally on the academic achievement of students and 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, and respecting children, parents and staff are all important. Addressing one, while ignoring the others, is not an option.

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

Although the list of opportunities is short, each opportunity will require significant amount of thought and planning were it to be implemented with success. Any of these opportunities would typically take 1-3 years of careful planning, research, communication, coordination, and roll-out, with a commitment from leadership to provide focus and stability during the implementation process.

The research includes extensive in-person interviews, online surveys, a deep look at hard data, classroom visits, benchmarking against best practices and like communities, and online research. Extensive financial analysis and a review of existing reports and district documents were also conducted.

The Special Education Opportunities Review highlights many of the strengths in the district and pinpoints a small number of interrelated opportunities to increase student achievement and reduce costs.

## Commendations

Regional School District 14 has many aspects worthy of commendation.

### **1. Staff care deeply about their students.**

Staff members are committed to ensuring that students with special needs succeed. Most staff members interviewed (both general education and special education) are excited about working in the district and want to do what is best for their students. Staff members in Regional School District 14 are committed to ensuring that all struggling students thrive. Through interviews with staff, it was consistently noted that they are committed to ensuring students with disabilities succeed academically, socially and emotionally. In addition, staff expressed that they are open to improving their current practices to improve student outcomes.

### **2. Staff appreciate the role of the special education team leaders.**

Interviews with staff praised the role of special education team leaders, who are responsible for providing support to special education and related service staff. Staff members pointed out the improved communications within special education in addition to the extra layer of support to address any problems that arise.

### **3. Inclusion is embraced both in theory and practice.**

At the elementary and middle school levels, both special education and general education staff strongly believed all students should be included in a general education classroom.

- In surveys, 100% of principals and assistant principals agreed with the statement, “Inclusion is beneficial for most students with mild to moderate special needs.”
- In online surveys, many parents mentioned an appreciation for the inclusion model. According to one representative parent, “We are very pleased with the inclusion model and the fact that students with special needs are educated alongside their peers.”
- Schools throughout the district offer inclusion classes across all grade-levels and nearly all classrooms visited included students with special needs.

### **4. Students are identified for special education services at a reasonable rate.**

Across the country, wide variation of identification of students with disabilities is common. The district’s identification rate of students with IEPs is very close to state and national averages.

## Comparison of Regional School District 14 to state and nation averages

Disability	Regional School District 14		State Multiples	Nationwide Multiples
	Students with IEPs	District		
Specific learning disability	65	3.4%	0.9	0.7
Speech or language impairment	38	2.0%	0.9	0.9
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>5.4%</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.7</b>
Autism	32	1.7%	2.1	2.7
Developmental delay	7	0.4%	N/A	1.8
Other health impairment	42	2.2%	1.1	1.6
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>2.0</b>

Intellectually disabled	9	0.5%	1.0	0.5
Emotional disturbance	7	0.4%	0.4	0.4
Multiple disabilities	5	0.3%	0.6	1.0
Orthopedic impairment	2	0.1%	6.0	0.8
Traumatic brain injury	0	0.0%	*	*
Visual impairments	0	0.0%	*	*
Hearing impairments	0	0.0%	*	*
Deaf-blindness	0	0.0%	*	*
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.5</b>

<b>Total</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.9</b>
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How to read this chart: The first two columns identify the number and percentage of students with certain disabilities in Regional School District 14. The next column compares the district's percentages with that of the state and nation. For example, if we look at the State Multiple for Autism, the number is 2.1 meaning the district has 2.1 times more students with autism than the state average.

### **5. District leadership has a commitment to both raising achievement and wisely spending limited resources.**

District leaders have shown a strong commitment to both improving outcomes for students with special needs while at the same time managing the district's resources prudently. They have avoided the "either or" approach and are actively pursuing strategies that are both good for children and the budget.

Special education costs have grown more slowly than the budget as a whole from 2010 to 2014, 1.1% vs. 8.3%, with reductions in both teaching staff and paraprofessional. This all occurred while the number of students with IEPs declined.

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## Opportunities

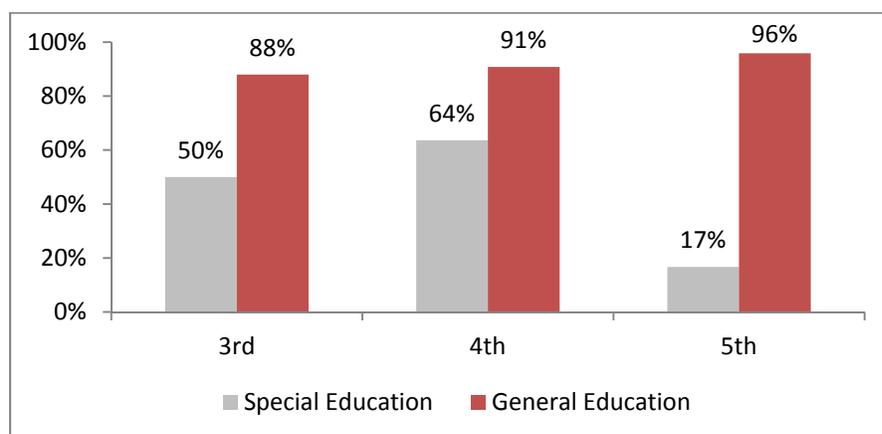
### 1. Implement a best practice based elementary reading program.

As most educators agree, reading is the gateway to all other learning. Writing, social studies, and science cannot be mastered without strong reading skills. Even modern math is full of word problems; reading and math success are highly correlated. Research has shown overwhelmingly that early intervention in reading can change the trajectory of a student's life.

School districts in the U.S. have grappled with the dilemma of how to deal effectively with students who are not performing successfully in classrooms, in particular with students having difficulty learning to read. A strong district-wide reading intervention program will provide the extra support needed for students who struggle, thereby reducing the referral rate to special education, the achievement gap, as well as providing early intervention to prevent students from falling farther behind.

An elementary reading program based on best practice can be one of the highest impact efforts to raise achievement of students with disabilities. In the long run, it will also help the budget by reducing special education, remediation, and intervention costs in the future.

#### **Proficiency rates of elementary students in reading on the 2013 CT Mastery Test**



- On average, only 43% of elementary students with disabilities scored proficient in reading on the Connecticut Mastery Test in 2013.
- There is a substantial gap between general education and special education proficiency in reading.

#### **1a. Implement a district-wide reading intervention program at each elementary school.**

Currently, the reading intervention curriculum is not consistent across the district. In recent years, the district has undertaken some initiatives to ensure struggling readers are identified and given support. These efforts have included identification of struggling readers through Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA), review of struggling student through the School

Consultation Team (SCT) and the utilization of literacy tutors to support students who struggle and don't have IEPs.

In interviews, when asked about a reading program, most interviewees shared that there is no common district-wide approach or curriculum to implementing elementary reading interventions. When principals and staff were asked what they would change to improve supports to struggling students and students with disabilities, almost all were focused specifically on reading. In addition, several staff shared a concern that considerable variation in reading instruction exists from school to school.

The new intervention efforts should include:

- General education staff should take primary responsibility for the delivery of core reading instruction to all students, including students with mild to moderate disabilities;
- All elementary struggling readers should get extra time on task to master reading; and
- Core and intervention instruction should come only from teachers skilled and trained in teaching reading.

Across the district, there are various types of reading programs (Fountas and Pinnell, Words Their Way), intervention supports (Literacy Tutors), and special education service delivery models (e.g., pull-out, co-teaching, inclusion, and resource rooms) – all with varying degrees of effectiveness. There is an opportunity to achieve greater consistency and effectiveness by ensuring that all practices in reading instruction are based on best practices and applied consistently across the district.

Based on the work of the National Reading Panel (NRP), the What Works Clearinghouse, and the experience of best-practice districts, a proven plan for teaching reading to struggling students includes:

1. Balanced instruction in the five areas of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) as part of a 90-minute/day literacy block.
2. Explicit instruction in phonics in the early grades and comprehension in the later grades.
3. Clear and rigorous grade-level expectations for reading proficiency (e.g., specific DRA scores expected of all students at the beginning, middle and end of each grade level).
4. Frequent measurement of student achievement and growth, influencing instruction and intervention (at minimum three times per year, preferably more).
5. Early identification of struggling readers, starting in kindergarten.
6. Immediate and intensive additional instruction for struggling readers, averaging 30 minutes a day and using more than one strategy.
7. Remediation and intervention that are seamlessly connected to each day's full class instruction.
8. A skilled teacher trained in reading instruction.

Though some of these practices are in place in classrooms, the district has an opportunity to increase the consistency within and between schools.

### **1b. Provide greater access to trained and skilled reading teachers.**

For students who struggle, research suggests that the expertise of the instructor has the greatest bearing on the student's likelihood of achieving grade level mastery.

In Regional School District 14, elementary students who struggle in reading are often assigned extra help from literacy tutors, paraprofessionals or even community members. Interviews with principals and teachers suggested that in many cases, current reading interventions are not consistently effective at bringing struggling students up to grade level. Special education teachers also provide support for struggling readers, but not all special education teachers are trained in teaching reading.

Interviews also suggested that, when provided, interventions were not always tightly tied to the core curriculum, which can be confusing and less impactful for students who are already struggling.

The district currently has 4.4 FTE literacy specialists that can play a significant role in developing, managing and perhaps providing intervention services to struggling readers.

### **1c. Increase time on task during the school day for students struggling to read.**

Students who struggle to stay on grade level need more time on task to master rigorous, grade-level content to catch up with their peers. Research has shown that this is true for both students with mild to moderate disabilities as well as students without IEPs who struggle to reach grade level proficiency. In particular, struggling readers with and without IEPs should receive regular literacy instruction *in addition* to core reading time in order to provide an opportunity to catch up with their peers.

The district provides support from literacy tutors to students struggling without IEPs, but interviews indicate that past practice of providing 3-4x/week for 30 minutes of additional support has recently been reduced to 2x a week.

Best practice shows that a robust reading intervention program should include at least an extra 30 minutes a day beyond the core instruction. The core reading program for all children would include daily phonics and explicit strategies for learning comprehension. This extra time would target student specific areas of need.

### **Financial Impact**

Implementing a district-wide elementary remediation and intervention reading program may sound expensive. In fact, it would require approximately four staff to provide supplemental support. These four teachers would cost the district roughly \$320,000. The district is already spending approximately \$950,000 on supporting struggling students at the elementary level. Some of these resources could be thoughtfully repurposed for supporting a robust, best-practice based reading intervention program.

**Cost of a district-wide elementary reading program**

	<b>Number</b>
Total elementary school enrollment	660
Struggling students (~20%)	132
Number of reading teachers required	4.0
Average salary w/ benefits	\$80,000
<b>Total cost of reading program</b>	<b>\$320,000</b>

**Current spending to support struggling elementary students**

	<b>Cost</b>
<i>Interventions</i>	
Literacy Tutors	\$106,000
Literacy Specialists	\$202,000
Paraprofessionals*	\$236,000
Special education teachers*	\$197,000
Speech and language staff	\$209,000
<b>Current resources invested</b>	<b>\$950,000</b>

\*These figures do not include special education teachers and paraprofessionals in the substantially separate settings (i.e. Learning Centers).

## **2. Redesign the system to support students who struggle in math at the secondary level.**

Catching students up who have fallen behind at the secondary level can feel daunting, especially when recent standardized testing scores in the district show that at least 57% of secondary level special education students are not scoring proficient or above in math.

Currently, the district does not have a structured math intervention program at the secondary level. At the secondary level, there are currently many different types of extra help efforts including a variety of service delivery models, intervention supports, co-teaching, and intervention curricula. While math is a required course over four years of high school, there are no formal supports for struggling students in math at the secondary level.

Best practice shows that the most effective method to support struggling students is to provide them with extra time on task, and to make sure that this time is spent with teachers with deep subject-specific knowledge. At the secondary level, the extra instructional time required increases significantly relative to the elementary level, up to one or two hours per day to make up for prior lost years.

### **2a. Reassess the practice of increasing intensity, rather than increasing time, to support students with mild to moderate disabilities.**

Special education teachers and paraprofessionals spend a large proportion of time providing support within the general education classroom in the form of co-teaching, shared or 1:1 paraprofessional support, or push-in support. The intention of these models is to allow a student to remain in the general education setting while providing additional adult support as needed. What often results, however, is that students with disabilities have less access to their general education teacher because they are unofficially “assigned” to either a paraprofessional or special education teacher who is in the room. None of these models provide extra time to pre-teach, re-teach or un-teach misconceptions.

The district has opted for an approach that provides much intensity of adults rather than extra time. For example the district has 1 adult “extra helper” (special education staff, paraprofessionals, instructional assistants and other remediation staff) for every 4.3 students with a mild to moderate disability. This data excludes students with severe disabilities and the staff that support them.

## Staffing ratios of in-district students with IEPs

	Mild to Moderate	Substantially Separate	Total
# of In-District Students	154	25	<b>179</b>
# of Special Education Teachers	12	5	<b>17</b>
# of Paraprofessionals/ Instructional Assistants	24	16	<b>40</b>
<b>Students to Special Education Teacher Ratio</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>5.0</b>	
<b>Students to Adult Ratio (special education teacher plus paraprofessional)</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>1.2</b>	

Many best practice districts support students with mild to moderate disabilities at a special education teacher caseload of 35 or 40 to 1. Regional School District 14's model of support has not yet led to the type achievement gains the district could achieve. In particular, the achievement gap for struggling students with and without disabilities has remained wide throughout the years.

Co-teaching, for example, is a common form of extra help in Regional School District 14. This model involves two or more teachers who share a classroom and teaching responsibilities for a heterogeneous group of students, typically in a math or English classroom. Co-teaching requires cooperation in planning, presenting the lessons, assessing student learning, and problem solving. Many teachers are asked to co-teach in inclusion classrooms, but are not provided with any guidelines or specific direction on how to go about the process. When done well, co-teaching can be very effective, but it is very hard to do well consistently. This is especially problematic because co-teaching is expensive, even when compared to other intensive interventions. During interviews, almost all teachers agreed that best practice co-teaching "did not exist" due to a lack of planning time or coordination between special education and general education teachers.

- National research indicates 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 learning than a class with a single teacher.
- Interviews with hundreds of staff across the country who co-teach often emphasize the limited content expertise of the special education teachers and the lack of respect for special educators from general educators ("they treat me like an overpaid paraprofessional"). In Regional School District 14, although special education teachers may have content expertise, they are not always fully utilized to teach content in the co-teaching setting.
- Teachers in the district expressed not having sufficient time to meet and plan lessons with their co-teaching partners. With limited to no common planning time, they are not able to effectively operate as a team in the classroom. Providing sufficient common planning time typically increases staffing requirements by 20% or more.

- In interviews, some special education teachers mentioned that, when in a co-teaching setting, they are utilized more as a support than as a true co-teacher.

**2b. Reconsider the role of the Academic Lab for increasing academic achievement of students with mild to moderate disabilities or no disability at all by providing opportunities for extra time on task to master math content and skills from content strong staff.**

Within a tight schedule where instructional time is at a premium, an academic lab period may not be the best use of students' time. Currently, at the secondary level there are very limited opportunities for struggling students to receive extra time on task with a teacher who has expert content knowledge. Students who struggle at the secondary level in math currently get extra support during Academic Labs. At the middle school, the academic labs are provided one period per day and cover a different subject each day. This does not provide daily extra support and instruction in math. Additionally during the academic labs, related service providers often pull out students to provide their services.

At the high school, the academic labs are staffed with a special education and general education teacher and is provided 1 period per day 5 times a week. While these programs are designed to provide supports for struggling students, they do not always provide targeted, additional time on task.

- Interviews suggested that many of these classes function like study periods. They are not focused on remediating a student's knowledge or skills in a specific content area, but are instead geared towards homework help and study skills. Academic labs often have ten or more students and are not grouped based on the content the students are struggling with, their grade level or ability level. This makes it nearly impossible to provide deep content instruction.
- Case managers are scheduled to be in the academic labs at the high school to see their students, but interviews indicate that the schedule does not permit the case managers to regularly be with their students during this period.
- The academic labs, which are intended to offer skills-based support, often are not linked to core content instruction.
- Interviews indicate that some general education teachers assigned to the academic labs consider this time a duty rather than an intervention class.

Besides additional time on task, research shows that the content expertise of the instructor has the greatest bearing on the student's likelihood of mastering the content. 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 explain the content to a struggling student.

- Special education teachers are often put in roles that, instead of demanding expertise in only one subject, require them to support students who are struggling with multiple subjects, such as in resource rooms.

## Financial Impact

Moving to a system that relies more heavily on extra time and content strong staff, rather than very staff intensive support could free up over \$700,000.

	<b>Staffing Ratio</b>	<b>Cost Per Student</b>
Current Practice - Special Education Teachers and Paraprofessionals/Instructional Assistants	4.3	\$ 11,377
Current Practice - Special Education Teachers Only	12.8	\$ 6,130
Best Practice - Special Education Teachers	75	\$ 1,049

### 3. Create clear criteria for when a student or classroom is assigned paraprofessional support

Paraprofessionals can play an important role in helping students. But while it seems like common sense that an aide can only benefit a student, the reality can be just the opposite. The presence of an aide can reduce the student’s contact with the certified teacher. Moreover, an aide is often not equipped with the content background to address the underlying academic issue a student may have, such as struggling to read or learn math. As young students age, an aide often remains through middle school and high school. This creates a dependency that harms the student after graduation. A carefully developed plan is required to thoughtfully evaluate the use of aides in the district.

The district currently relies heavily on noncertified staff to help students with special needs.

	<b>Region 14</b>	<b>Like Communities</b>	<b>Multiple</b>	<b>Percentile</b>
Special Education Paraprofessionals*	40.0	24.9	1.6x	87%

\*Includes both paraprofessionals and instructional assistants

- Regional School District 14 has 60% more paraprofessional’s than typical like communities nation-wide.
- A large portion of the paraprofessionals support students with severe disabilities. They move in and out of the general education setting and also support students with mild to moderate disabilities in the classroom.
- In addition to the paraprofessionals and instructional assistants listed above, the district has 7 literacy tutors supporting struggling students.

The district has recently seen a reduction in paraprofessional support in recent years, but still has high levels of staffing.

#### **Special education paraprofessional historical comparison**

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>Change</b>
In-District Students w/ IEPs	206	179	(27)
Paraprofessionals (FTE)	45	40	(5)
Paraprofessionals per students w/ IEPs	4.6	4.5	(0.1)

\*Paraprofessional FTE includes instructional assistants and is based on reported figures to the state.

- The district has 5 fewer paraprofessional FTE since 2010

The use of paraprofessionals for inclusion remains very popular with teachers, parents and principals. Research has shown, however, that the presence of a paraprofessional can reduce the

student’s contact with the certified teacher and prevents friendships from forming with classmates. Although well-intentioned, this level of support may undermine the positive benefits of inclusion to promote independence and develop greater peer-based support networks.

A paraprofessional hovering beside a student can create a social barrier, stifling peer interaction and defeating one of the primary benefits of inclusion. What’s more, a 1:1 paraprofessional can *decrease* the instruction a student gets from the classroom teacher who thinks a student with a paraprofessional already has 100% of an adult’s time, unlike classmates without paraprofessionals. The students with the greatest needs consequently get the least attention from the teacher certified in the subject matter. In the worst case, the paraprofessional actually does the work for the student under the guise of helping.

**Paraprofessionals by role**

	<b>FTE</b>	<b>% FTE of total</b>	<b>Total salary and benefits</b>
<b>Special education 1:1 support</b>			
Elementary	6	15%	\$143,457
Secondary	4	10%	\$176,914
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>\$320,371</b>
<b>Special education shared support</b>			
Elementary*	16	40%	\$513,043
Secondary	14	35%	\$513,382
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>\$1,026,425</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$1,346,796</b>

\*Includes Pre-School

- 25% of all paraprofessionals and instructional assistants are assigned 1:1 support which is very high compared to comparable districts.
- Additionally, 45% of paraprofessionals (18) are located at the secondary level, which is also high in comparison to like districts.
- In interviews with district administrators and educators noted the substantial number of paraprofessionals within the district.

The staffing patterns are very much at odds with best practices for raising achievement. Paraprofessionals, who are not teachers, provide a great deal of academic support. Often a paraprofessional cannot address the underlying academic issue such as struggling to read or learning math.

Surveys suggest, however, that many in the district along with parents believe that paraprofessionals play an important role in supporting student who struggle.

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- 95% of responding planning and placement team members agree or somewhat agree that 1:1 paraprofessionals play an important role in helping many struggling students learn at a higher level.
- 41% of responding planning and placement team members agree or somewhat agree that they would like to see more services provided by certified teachers, and less by 1:1 paraprofessionals.
- 87% of responding parents agree or somewhat agree that the district should have a few more paraprofessionals.
- 100% of responding principals agree or somewhat agree that 1:1 paraprofessionals play an important role in helping many struggling students learn at a higher level.

### **3a. Create a clear criteria for assigning paraprofessionals with an eye towards fostering independence**

Interviews indicate that there is a lack of clarity about how much paraprofessional support each student needs. Surveys also indicate lack of clarity on the criteria for assigning paraprofessionals to students, and when a student has achieved enough independence that the aide can be removed. This uncertainty around assignment of paraprofessional also extended to parents.

#### **Survey responses**

#### **Which of the following statements concerning paraprofessionals for students on IEPs do you generally agree with?**

- 41% of responding planning and placement team members agree that the district has clear guidelines for who gets a 1:1 paraprofessional vs. 67% of responding principals.
- 24% of responding planning and placement team members agree that the district has clear guidelines for when a 1:1 paraprofessional is no longer warranted vs. 33% of responding principals.
- 54% of responding parents agree that they understand how the school (IEP Team) determines how much paraprofessional support a child requires.

Across the country, many districts have found a partial day or partial week paraprofessional schedule to be a helpful way to balance providing needed support to students while also giving students a chance to practice independence. Some students, for example, may benefit from an aide early in the week as he or she re-acclimates to the school week. Other students may need support in some subjects, such as math, but can use other periods such as art to practice working independently. There is little partial day or partial week support in the district.

### **3b. Have clear and reasonable expectations for paraprofessionals.**

In some school districts a paraprofessional is expected to be a “cure all.” If a student acts out regularly and behavior analysis efforts have been tried and failed, then an aide is assigned. If a student struggles in math or reading, they are provided a paraprofessional to work with him or her. It is uncommon however, that an adult with relatively little training will have an appreciable impact on academic achievement in these situations.

In school visits, many students with a paraprofessional were interacting only with their aide. Research suggests that struggling students and those on an IEP learn most when they are taught by a content expert staff. Given that most paraprofessionals are not trained in content or pedagogy, many identified students might actually learn more without the presence of an aide.

The district has an opportunity to develop a process to clearly articulate the student’s needs and when an aide is most appropriate to address these needs. This will increase student learning and reduce costs.

#### **Financial Impact**

If the district shifts its use of paraprofessionals to levels similar to like communities, over \$500,000 would be available for redeployment towards more impactful supports or other uses.

#### 4. Consider the cost effectiveness and workload of the special education management team

Managing special education is a complex process and in all districts requires a considerable investment in people and time. Staff have praised the special education team leaders in each school. This is an important role, and can serve to help implement a number of the recommendations in this report such as micro scheduling paraprofessionals for partial day/partial week support, ensuring paraprofessionals aren't reducing student independence, and helping implement the shift towards extra time on task with content strong staff.

In the district, school psychologists play an important role in evaluating students for eligibility for special education. School psychologists also provide a great deal of counseling, and the district also has four social workers. While no national database exists, this is a reasonably high number of psychologists and social workers.

Like most systems across the country, the decision to find a student eligible or not for special education services is involved. The testing caseload per psychologist is low compared to districts nationwide. In Regional School District 14, the average number of evaluations and re-evaluations per psychologist per year is approximately 26, while more typical expectations are 80-120 students based on national studies.

#### Testing and evaluation analysis

##### Psychologists

FTE	4.0 FTE
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##### Evaluations

3 Year Evaluations	69
Initial Referrals	36
<b>Total number of evaluations per year</b>	<b>105</b>

<b>Evaluations per psychologist</b>	<b>26.2</b>
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If the district dedicates psychologists to performing evaluations and counseling, and the district staffed similar to comparable districts nationwide, the district could potentially reallocate resources to an in-house behaviorist. The need for this expertise was often mentioned by staff.

Additionally, even with building based team leaders, all special education staff and paraprofessionals report to the director of special services. Creating additional managerial positions to assist the director seems warranted. These managers would need very clear roles and responsibilities and explicit key performance indicators (KPIs) to ensure that they effectively carry out the vision of the department leader.

## 5. Consider expanding programing for students with autism in district

Most parents would prefer their child with significant special needs to be educated within the district in a high quality appropriate program. This provides stronger ties to the community, neighborhood friendships, opportunities for inclusion with typically developing peers, and a much shorter ride to school.

In most cases a district can run an identical, high quality program, rich with specialized support staff and expertise, for much less than an out of district placement, assuming at least three students in a class. While staffing costs tend to be the same, transportation costs are lower, and the district needn't cover additional facilities costs like an out of district school.

Currently, Regional School District 14 has 1.5% of its students placed out of district, which is 1.8x more students than comparable districts nationwide.

### Students out-of-district compared to like communities (per 1,000 students)

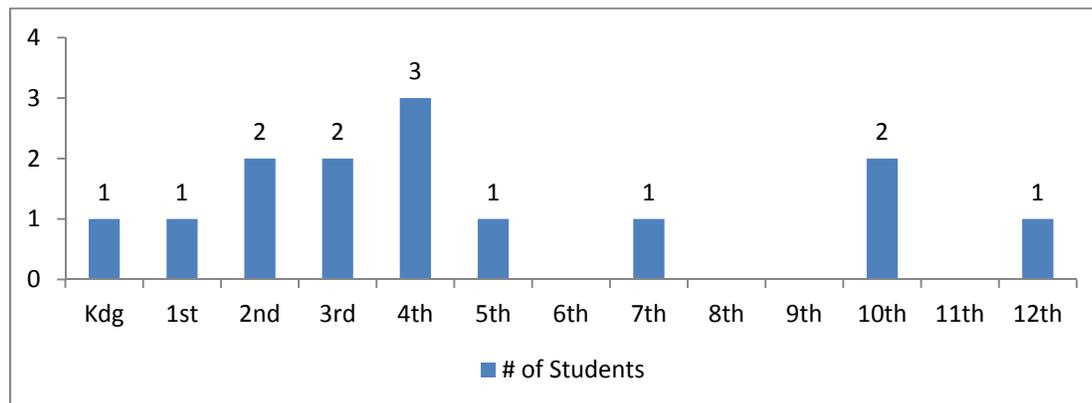
	District	Like Communities	Multiple
Number of students out of district (per 1,000 students)	14.6	8.3	1.8x

### Students out of district by disability

Type of Disability	Number of Students	Percent of Students
Autism & Autism related	14	50%
Emotional Disability	4	14%
Other Health Impairment	4	14%
Multiple Disabilities	3	11%
Specific Learning Disability	2	7%
Intellectual Disability	1	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100%</b>

Of the 28 students out of district, 50% of these children have autism.

### Grade when students with autism leave the district



Many districts have had great success serving students with autism in-district. Currently, Regional School District 14 serves twelve students in-district with autism ranging from PreK - 8<sup>th</sup> grade through its Learning Center program. The Learning Center is a cross categorical program designed to serve students with a variety of disabilities in-district. Students receive individual support from special education staff addressing a variety of needs.

A shift towards more specialized programing, rather than cross categorical support might be helpful and would allow the district to hire staff with specific expertise in autism.

The paradox of a commitment to full inclusion is that for students who need a smaller, more specialized environment, with partial inclusion not a readily available option, the student is moved to an out of district placement with zero inclusion.

While it is difficult to generalize, since IEPs should be individualized based on each student's needs, a few options could be considered when appropriate and with full parental involvement:

- A substantially separate alternative to the classroom setting with partial inclusion opportunities based on student needs.
- Provision of an autism consultant to work with classroom teachers.

### **Financial Impact**

Enhancing and expanding in-house programs for students with autism will allow these students more opportunities for inclusion, neighborhood friendships, shorter bus rides, the chance to attend school in their communities, and will increase their access to grade-level standards.

Additionally, most districts find they are able to provide equally high-quality programs as those provided out-of-district, with similar levels of staffing. If Regional School District 14 were to bring just half of the 14 students with autism back into the district, it could save approximately \$275,000 annually. The same is true if fewer students over time don't leave the district.

Currently, the district's support for students with serve needs is also very staff intensive.

Substantially separate programs average a 1:1 student to adult (teacher or para) ratio. These ratios indicate that present staffing caseloads would allow for the establishing of an autism specific program with only some additional staff and expertise required.

**Cost comparison**

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Average out of district tuition</b>	<b>Cost to serve in district (est.)</b>	<b>Tuition savings (est.)</b>
Autism	\$65,625	\$30,000	\$35,625

**Transportation savings per student**

Current average transportation for out-of-district (est.)	\$18,400
Cost to transport in-district (est.)	\$15,000
<b>Transportation savings per student</b>	<b>\$3,400</b>