



Danvers Public Schools

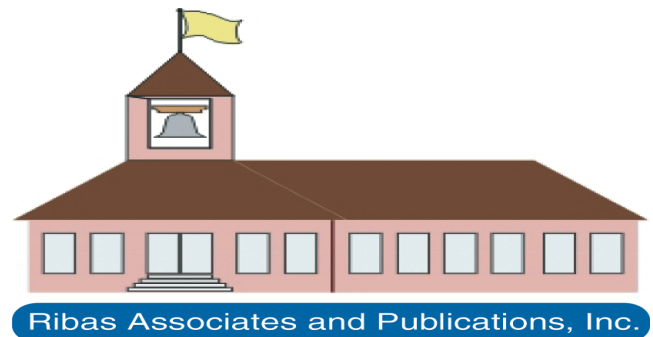
Special Education Audit Report

FINAL DRAFT: SEPTEMBER 20, 2024

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Ribas Associates and Publications



Executive Summary

Consultants from Ribas Associates & Publications were contracted to provide the Danvers Public Schools with a study of specific elements of the special education program and structure in order to provide the incoming Director of Special Education, Christina Ryan, with baseline data with which to plan and propose student and family services, efficiencies, and other improvements in operations.

As part of this work, the Consultants conducted a literature and budget review, conducted interviews with the Superintendent and other key members of the central administration, conducted interviews with building principals, special education leadership, and SEPAC leadership, and reviewed data and configurations of other Massachusetts school systems.

The Consultants have provided the District with seven (7) specific findings and recommendations that are based in the data and interviews and which, we believe, will assist the Director of Special Education and Superintendent in improving the structures and conditions for Danvers students and families. These findings and recommendations are focused in the following areas:

- Students with Disabilities Profile
- Regular Education Interventions and Supports
- Team Chairperson and Leadership Structure
- Special Education Programs and Continuum of Services
- Instructional Assistants
- Short and Long Term Planning for Special Education
- Professional Development

During the course of the audit, all members of the Danvers Public Schools staff were thoughtful and helpful in providing information and insight into the current programming of special education services in the District. Specifically, the staff were forthcoming regarding concerns for better programming PreK through age 22. They would like to see the development of strong programs that enable as many students with disabilities as possible to be successful within district schools. Similarly, they would like to see strong practices and protocols that enable the special education process to work more effectively and efficiently for students, staff, and families. All seemed eager to find solutions that would offer Danvers students a wider range of programming options that would, in turn, provide more opportunities for students to remain directly supported by and actively involved in the Danvers Public Schools.

It is clear that these recommendations will require additional initial funding for appropriate implementation. It is clear that administrators and staff recognize that Town and Schools are facing financial challenges that will impact the ability to operationalize any recommendations. However, it is clear to the Consultants that at least some of the recommendations cited here must be implemented in a timely fashion or the financial situation in special education will continue to hamstring efforts in Danvers. We, therefore, recommend that the School Committee and Administration engage in a two-prong process to address the recommendations: (1) take a creative approach to identifying funding for immediate needs; and (2) begin long term planning to implement recommendations with significant financial and contractual impacts.

1. Overview

The Danvers Public Schools provide an outstanding PK-12 education for students in five (5) elementary schools (Great Oak, Highlands, Riverside, Smith and Thorpe), Holten Richmond Middle School and Danvers High School. The elementary schools are currently configured as K-5, the middle school is grades 6-8, and Danvers High School serves grades 9-12. The district preschool center is located at Riverside School.

District enrollment is approximately 3,251 (DESE FY2024 figures). District enrollment has declined slightly from FY2021, when the schools enrolled 3,417 students, but the District saw a slight increase of 14 students from FY2023 to FY2024 (according to DESE figures).

In FY2024, the makeup of the student body was as follows, according to DESE figures: Asian (2.4%), Hispanic (12.7%), White (79.1%), Black (3.7%), and Multi-Racial (2.0%).

The number of students qualifying for special education services has increased in recent years, climbing to 623 in FY2022 from 581 in FY2019. According to Mary Wermers, Assistant Superintendent, there are currently approximately 67 students in out of district placements, including collaboratives. Danvers does operate a number of district-wide special education programs and is also a member of the Northshore Education Consortium.

The School District requested this proposal for a study of specific elements of the special education program and structure in order to provide the incoming Director of Special Education, Christina Ryan, with baseline data with which to plan and propose student and family services, efficiencies, and other improvements in operations.

2. Work Plan

The consultants studied the student services organizational structure and practices with the goal of developing recommendations regarding special education structures, regular education supports and interventions, and alternative approaches to current programming for out-of-district student placements. Specific findings and recommendations are included in this final report to the Superintendent and School Committee.

Steps in this study included the following:

- Literature and budgetary review. The consultants reviewed the FY2024 adopted budget and proposed FY2025 budget, the current placements and profiles of students being educated out-of-district, the current organizational structure of student services, the current staffing of regular education and special education personnel within the schools, and other recent reports related to the regular and special education supports and services in the district.
- Interviews with the Superintendent and senior leadership within Central Administration. The consultants interviewed the Superintendent and senior staff to explore the issues raised through the document review outlined above, as well as the more specific questions detailed below. Specifically, individual interviews include the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent,

Business Manager, Director of Student Services (incoming), and current key special education leaders, including the Out of District Coordinator (who moved to a new position for the 2024-2025 school year) and the prior Special Education Coordinators (who both left the district on June 30, 2024). These interviews were all conducted in-person in the Danvers Public Schools central offices.

- Additional interviews with District and Special Education Leadership. In addition to the document review and interviews with senior staff, the consultants interviewed building principals and School Psychologists/Team Facilitators from each school. The Principal interviews were conducted individually and the School Psychologist/Team Facilitator interviews were held in small groups. In addition, the consultants interviewed representatives of SEPAC as part of this project. All of these interviews were conducted in-person.
- Review of Similar School Districts. The consultants reviewed data and configurations of similar Massachusetts school districts. This review highlighted best practices and alternatives, as well as potential programming options, where appropriate.
- Preparation of Preliminary Alternatives. The consultants identified a series of potential actions to be taken to address the stated issues. These alternatives, which are shown below, were reviewed with the District leadership to gather feedback.
- Preparation of Final Recommendations. After reviewing the preliminary alternatives with the District, the consultants produced a final report summarizing the work of the project. The consultants will be available for a public presentation of the results of the study.

Prior to commencing this study, the District administration approved a list of questions, designed by the consultants, to be asked and answered. These questions included, but are not limited to:

- What are the regular education interventions currently in place in Danvers by grade span? Specifically, what does the MTSS system look like in Danvers?
- Where are your inflection points in regard to requests for additional support or disability services?
- What shifts is the district experiencing with respect to the student population?
- What trends are the district seeing with respect to disability categories and numbers of students within the IDEA disability categories?
- What do 504 numbers currently look like in Danvers and how do 504 plans impact scheduling for service providers?
- What does the special education administration structure currently look like?
- What other instructional strategies /systems are used to provide responsive and remedial instruction?
- What are the current out of district profiles and placements? How has this changed over the past 3-5 years?
- Do you have a multi year budget projection that will impact the district's ability to service students with additional needs?

- Does the District make effective use of data for planning and delivering regular education interventions and supports, including the DCAP, MTSS, ESL as well in providing targeted modifications, accommodations, and compensatory skills for students with disabilities?

3. Schedule

The chart below shows the rough time schedule for accomplishing each of the tasks associated with the project work plan for the study. The District did an exceptional job in scheduling the needed interviews in a timely manner. The timeline for this study, which is shown below, was agreed to prior to the start of the project.

Task	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Introductions & Scope of Study	X							
Literature and Budget Review		X	X					
Interviews		X	X	X				
Review of Similar School Districts		X	X	X				
Review of Preliminary Recommendations with District for Feedback					X	X		
Preparation of Final Report						X	X	
Presentation of Report								X

4. Key Findings and Recommendations

During the course of the audit, all members of the Danvers Public Schools staff were thoughtful and helpful in providing information and insight into the current programming of special education services in the District. Specifically, the staff were forthcoming regarding concerns for better programming PreK through age 22. They would like to see the development of strong programs that enable as many students with disabilities as possible to be successful within district schools. Similarly, they would like to see strong practices and protocols that enable the special education process to work more effectively and efficiently for students, staff, and families. All seemed eager to find solutions that would offer Danvers students a wider range of programming options that would, in turn, provide more opportunities for students to remain directly supported by and actively involved in the Danvers Public Schools. At the same time, administrators and staff recognize that Town and Schools are facing financial challenges that will impact the ability to operationalize any recommendations.

Below are seven (7) specific findings and recommendations regarding a number of issues that were raised during this audit.

Finding/Recommendation #1: Students with Disabilities Profile

- *Finding:* Similar to many districts, Danvers has seen an increase in students exhibiting post-Covid deficits. These deficits are primarily in the areas of reading and social-emotional/behavior impairments. Additionally, Danvers has more recently enrolled a

number of new students who are multi language learners and/or homeless students who may or may not need special education services. Finally, there appears to be a subgroup of students with disabilities with more extensive needs, but whose families would like them to remain in the Danvers Public Schools as long as possible.

- *Recommendation:* In planning for special education services across the district, the administration should analyze how many students continue to be impacted by the lack of literacy instruction during the pandemic and which students are progressing through the grades while still struggling with the literacy skills needed for more complex texts. At all grade spans, the current level of need for reading remediation may be short lived, but requires triage for a period of time while the district continues to implement a strong reading program at the primary levels.

Similarly, the increase in social emotional challenges is familiar to most districts. Addressing these challenges should not be solely a special education responsibility, but requires a deep rethinking of guidance/counseling and intervention services across all grades as more of our students exhibit behavioral health challenges.

Lastly, the implementation of a robust ESL and MTSS system should be a priority in order to address academic and behavioral challenges before the deficit rises to the level of a disability. In determining if multi language learners have a disability, the special education department should develop resources for assessing students in their native language as well as train staff in the cultural differences that may be impacting a student's performance.

Finding/Recommendation #2: Regular Education Interventions and Supports

- *Finding:* Staff report that the district has a District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) and a Multi Tiered System of Support (MTSS). However, they also indicate that, for a variety of reasons, staff are reluctant to use the accommodations and supports in the DCAP and that MTSS is underused. The MTSS is further compromised by burdensome paperwork, limited focus (mainly on literacy), scheduling challenges, and an overdependence on the special education staff to plan and provide interventions. As a result, there is a lack of consistency in the process and in the delivery of services across buildings and grade spans.

More troubling is the district's practice of transitioning immediately from a special education eligibility meeting immediately to a 504 accommodation meeting when a student is found not eligible for an IEP. There are currently 301 individual 504 Accommodation Plans in the district. It is unclear how many of the 504 Plans were developed sequentially to an IEP eligibility meeting. Regardless, this practice is a clear violation of both the Special Education regulations and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Lastly, it has been shared with the auditors that there is a District practice that enables independent tutors to be contracted for individual students. It is imperative that all interventions and supports provided to student meet state regulations regarding the use of scientifically based, research driven resources and instructional strategies and that all interventions be periodically assessed for impact on the individual students' knowledge and skill. It is not clear if the current practice of contracted tutors meets the requirements and if the

impact on student outcomes is being measured. More importantly, it is not clear if the hiring of contracted tutors is either bypassing any of the required processes and protocols for providing support and interventions such as MTSS, Special Education, 504 Accommodations, or English as a Second Language or is being provided when a student is found not eligible for such services. This lack of accountability for hiring these independent contractors can be detrimental in both a programmatic and fiscal manner.

- *Recommendation:* The District needs to take a number of steps to address the weaknesses reported in regular education interventions and supports. First, the District should plan to provide a review of MTSS protocols and procedures with all staff prior to the beginning of the FY2025 school year. Additionally, if the district has not yet created a resource directory by grade level and intervention, it should consider doing so, thus providing ready access to the resources and instructional strategies available for both the DCAP and through Tier I interventions. Similarly, explicit information identifying Tier II and Tier III resources and staff responsible for more frequent and intense interventions should be shared with all staff. Finally, the district should conduct an analysis of which specialized instructional methodologies individual staff have received training in. Depending on the results, the district may want to offer additional training by building and/or explore balancing available resources between buildings in order to increase capacity and consistency in the delivery of services.

Secondly, the district needs to develop a completely separate system for holding 504 meetings and finding/not finding eligibility under the appropriate legal guidelines for 504 plans. Since 504 plans are a regular education responsibility, special education staff should not chair these meetings. However, the regulations do allow students on 504 plans to receive services from special educators, primarily related service providers. The District will need to ensure that the use of special education staff assigned to 504 plans does not compromise their ability to provide services to students on IEPs.

Lastly, similar to the recommendation regarding instructional assistants, the district should conduct an analysis of the number of contracted tutors, whom they are tutoring, how it is decided to provide tutoring, and how student success is being measured. It may be more effective to reallocate the funding for contracted services to district positions so that the staff can be appropriately supervised and evaluated or, in some cases, to discontinue these services altogether.

Finding/Recommendation #3: Team Chairperson and Leadership Structure

- *Finding:* There is no “best practice” model for special education administration or building level coordination. Each district develops the model that fits their district organizationally, financially, and educationally. In Danvers, the school psychologists double as team chairs. One school psychologist/team chair is also the Early Childhood Director. While there have been some modifications recently and more changes are certain to be proposed for FY2025, the intent at present is to continue with the psychologists in these dual roles.

As part of our interviews, the school psychologists shared that they found this dual role to be difficult and, at times, a conflict of interest. We agree. This model compromises their objectivity in finding eligibility and occasionally puts them in conflict with the team when there is a lack of

consensus. Moreover, the fact that these positions are Unit A and, therefore, do not have supervisory and evaluation responsibilities, restricts the ability of the school psychologists to hold staff accountable for compliance with the process or with the delivery of services.

In addition to the school psychologists, our understanding is that elementary and secondary coordinators have historically chaired meetings if lawyers and/or advocates are present. Both of these Coordinators left the District at the end of the 2023-2024 school year. These departing coordinators also shared their concerns with the current structure, as well as the decision not to replace the middle school coordinator. With the FY2025 changes in special education leadership, there may need to be some shifting of roles and responsibilities.

- *Recommendation:* The roles and responsibilities within special education leadership need to be revisited. Although the budget has been set and there is new leadership for FY2025, the new Director of Student Services may need to consider some short term adjustments to the leadership structure.

One important consideration is to create a team chair structure as an administrative position separate from educators and other service providers. The current structure is concerning on a number of levels, including:

1. Without a team chair with supervisory and evaluation responsibilities, the chair cannot address conflicts of interest, concerning professional behavior, fidelity to service delivery, or provide professional training to improve the skills of team members.
2. Since the school psychologist may also provide services, he/she is in a position where the assignment of counseling services can appear to be self-serving.
3. Lastly, without extensive training in facilitating team meetings and the regulatory requirements of special education for all the chairs, the opportunity for inconsistency across the district regarding eligibility findings and service plans is a distinct probability.

It should also be noted here that the role created at the Riverside School, where the Early Educator Coordinator is expected to chair team meetings and act as the school psychologist for both the k-5 school population and preschool, is untenable. The Early Education Coordinator should act as program leader and team chair for the early education population exclusively.

The District will need to decide if this or other needs are the priority and if the FY2025 budget can support additional staffing any of these solutions would require.

Finding/Recommendation #4: Special Education Programs and Continuum of Services.

- *Finding:* The continuum of services across grade spans is inconsistent and not vertically aligned. It appears to be strongest at the elementary schools with a number of programs to address the disparate needs of moderate to severe students. The programming seems to fade at the middle school and then return to some degree at the high school. Without a clear through line of programs, it is difficult for families to understand and trust that the level of services for their students will continue through the different grade levels.

Having said that, it is common to have additional programs at the elementary and middle level or at the high school level as student profiles and achievement change. For example, students in behavior programs will often exit an elementary or middle school program as they acquire the compensatory skills needed to participate more fully in learning centers or inclusion classes. Similarly, students at the high school level may need programs that are a combination of academics and work experience as they prepare to age out of special education and/or high school. However, even where these differences exist between levels, it is critically important that materials and descriptions are available to parents so that they can see the multiple opportunities available for their students as they progress through the system.

An additional concern is that the term “learning center” is used to describe any service taking place in a separate setting regardless of the level of restriction in that location/program. More specifically, a learning center service that is scheduled for 2 x 30 minutes differs substantially from a learning center that is scheduled for 5 x 45 minutes. This is where program names and clear descriptions can help students, staff, and families understand the level of services and placement of the student.

In addition, based on our interviews and data provided by the District, we are particularly concerned about models being implemented at both the Smith and Riverside schools. Specifically, beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, Smith will house all of the intensive learning center programs, meaning that 27 students in district-wide programs will be relocating to the school. We have been told that 20 of these students have some degree of inclusion in their plans. Similarly, all of the preschool classes will be housed at Riverside as of September 2024.

Finally, as noted earlier in this report, the early education coordinator doubles as the team chairperson/school psychologist for the k-5 population at Riverside School. We do not believe that the model being put in place at this school is sustainable. A thorough analysis as well as projection of future trends needs to take place. Centering all programs at one school will impact the building and district’s ability to provide services across the district without additional staff. Additionally, if the district’s goal is to provide as much inclusion as possible based on a student’s IEP, having all programs at one school could tip the balance of general education to special education students within a general education classroom, thus compromising the model.

- *Recommendation:* As the new special education leadership team sets short and long term priorities, it would be helpful to articulate in writing the continuum of services in the Danvers Public Schools. Mapping out services from least restrictive to most restrictive with program description would create common understanding between grade levels and among families. Program descriptions should also include clear criteria for entrance and exit into each program. While it is important for program design to build in some flexibility in order to be responsive to changes in student needs, in general, the continuum of services descriptions would be helpful when making placement determinations.

To help staff in designing appropriate service plans and subsequently in determining placement, the District should provide professional development regarding disability categories and the wide range of options for providing services tailored to the individual student. This is critical because the existence of a program designed for a specific disability category does not

mean all students with that disability should be placed in that specific program. It is important to individualize student services so that they match the student's specific needs and provides those services in the least restrictive environment possible.

Further, in order to best support the Smith School staff, administration and families, the District should consider any or all of the following:

1. the creation of an inclusion specialist position to support educators in meeting the inclusion needs of students in district wide programs at the school and to support teachers in the implementation of best practices for inclusion and equity;
2. the increased responsibilities of the team chairperson/psychologist at the school; and
3. the possible need for a true Assistant Principal model to deal with the increased needs of the community as a result of the addition of these programs at the school.

With respect to Riverside, as noted elsewhere in this report, the position of Early Education Coordinator should be separated from the school psychologist and team chairperson roles at the school.

Finding/Recommendation #5: Instructional Assistants

- *Finding:* The District employs (as of July 19, 2024) a total of 94 student support positions in special education in a variety of categories. The majority of these positions (79, only 69 which are currently filled) are special education instructional assistants. The others include 4 ABA aides, and 10 behavior techs. In the current budget, instructional assistant salaries are expected to cost \$1.6m if all positions are filled.

We have not received any information regarding the decision making process for adding and/or assigning aides. Furthermore, it is clear that, at present, the District does not have a clear understanding of assignments for instructional assistants and if the assistant is 1:1, shared, program based or an extra adult in a classroom.

- *Recommendation:* The District needs to conduct a thorough analysis of how and when instructional assistants are assigned to a school/classroom/student and ensure that a process/protocol is put in place to manage the proposed creation of any instructional assistant position(s). It is important for decision makers to have clear data regarding the number of instructional assistants at each school, their specific responsibility and assignment, and how they are actually being utilized.

Understanding the roles and responsibilities of instructional assistants across grade spans and within special education programs is a necessary step in the overall examination of staffing within special education. A common question in planning for special education staffing is whether students are benefitting from the instructional assistant's support vs a special education teacher's direct instruction. In assessing the data and the outcomes for special education services, the district may want to consider reallocating funds for instructional assistant positions to teacher or related service positions.

Finding/Recommendation #6: Short and Long Term Planning for Special Education

- *Finding:* Like many districts, Danvers accommodates changes in student needs and staffing on a yearly basis as needed. Unfortunately, while adjustments have been made within the special education department, including to the administrative organization and the location of programs, there is no coherent planning for program development or flexible models for service delivery. In discussion with staff, the impression is that planning is often reactive and not proactive for either the short or long term. The lack of in-depth data analysis of case loads, trends in disability categories, or consistency in service delivery between schools and over grade spans is concerning. Given that special education expenditures represent approximately 30% of the school system budget (FY2023 figures) and given that the district has recently had to turn to the town for additional funding, it is important to develop both short and long term plans that project as best possible future district needs. This is said with a caveat. Because of the legal requirements for special education, any projected budget will be subject to unexpected expenses with move-ins of new students with IEPs and/or additional out-of-district placement of severely disabled students.

Beyond planning for staff, services, and placements within the special education budget, special education incurs additional expenses with transportation, legal fees, professional development, specialized resources, and technology, including hardware and software. Currently, these line items are dispersed under other categories. In calculating the total special education budget within a district, it is helpful to place these line items within the special education department category in order to calculate the true total cost of special education.

Specifically, with respect to transportation, the consultants learned that responsibility for the coordination of transportation services is dispersed among a number of individuals with very little coordination or overlap, despite the fact that Danvers utilizes a number of vendors to serve families whose students required transportation to access their specialized programs. This lack of structure is inefficient and creates many situations where no one appears to be actually responsible for the transportation of these students.

- *Recommendation:* The new Special Education leadership team should begin an in-depth analysis of special services, programs, and demographic trends. Given that it has recently come to light that 90 evaluations for eligibility were not captured in PowerSchool during the 2023-2024 school year, any current data is skewed and may not accurately portray student and district needs. Both the Assistant Superintendent and Business Manager need to be included in these discussions to help understand the current number of students on IEPs, projected trends for services and placements, and the impact of regular education interventions and supports on referrals, all of which have a role in shaping planning and the budget.

Additionally, the Superintendent and Town Administrator should collaborate with the appropriate town boards to develop guidelines for when and why the town's special education stabilization fund is used to supplement the annual school budget as well, as the possibility of returning Medicaid funds claimed against student services to the district as a funding source.

Lastly, the district should consult with their auditors to review formats for reporting and tracking of ALL special education costs. It is difficult to identify “budget busters” if they are being attributed to other categories or spread over a number of categories within the chart of accounts. Moreover, a clear understanding of the cost centers will allow for the better identification of underlying causes and, therefore, allow the District to better problem solve potential solutions. An obvious example is transportation costs, which have skyrocketed for all districts since the pandemic. This may be an area where the district could do a quick reallocation of responsibility with the goal of centralizing contracts for more oversight, which could alleviate many of the issues with transportation situations that occur under the current inefficient and uncoordinated structure..

Finding/Recommendation #7: Professional Development

- *Finding:* Numerous individuals interviewed for this study reported that the District does not have adequate professional development time in order to implement professional learning in tiered supports and differentiation to meet student needs. Specifically, we understand that the District has two (2) professional development days that are scheduled prior to the beginning of the student school year, one (1) that is to be scheduled during the school year, one (1) early release day per month and a “Danvers University” model that provides educators with optional professional development opportunities for PDPs and movement on the Danvers salary schedule. Principals and others indicated that this schedule does not permit time to do the necessary work with educators so that teachers and paraprofessionals can better support the needs of all students in the regular education classroom.

In addition, those interviewed reported that the District does not have a multi-year professional development plan delineating the work to be done, how that work will be carried out and the indicators of success to be utilized in measuring the success of the professional learning endeavors.

As referenced above, the lack of familiarity with and ability to use the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) and the district’s Multi Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is problematic. Having a clearly articulated plan for general education and skilled educators capable of identifying and applying targeted interventions and supports is critical to student success and to prevent the use of special education services as the only means to help students.

Additionally, Principals raised concerns that there is an uptick in autism spectrum disorder and reading disabilities across the grade spans that requires staff to be trained in a number of strategies and interventions to successfully assist students and provide options for services and inclusion opportunities.

- *Recommendation:* It is important that the District find ways to increase the amount of mandated professional development time available for system leaders and principals to provide professional learning for teachers and instructional assistants. While increasing the number of days in the professional calendar and modifying the choice-based Danvers University model currently in place would require collective bargaining and may, therefore, need to be more of a long-term goal, there are other strategies, including use of faculty meeting time, targeted professional learning during the school day, and the implementation of instructional rounds, all

of which could be implemented more immediately, although they are probably not budget neutral.

Likewise, the District should begin the process of creating a multi-year professional development plan as soon as possible. As discussed below, the district is in need of a multi-year and scaffolded professional development plan that builds capacity for general education teachers in Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) that can help students be successful **before** reaching a point where parents believe special education is the only option for help. Additionally, all staff need targeted training in best instructional practices for providing a high quality, standards based curriculum to all students with and without disabilities. Such training should include the provision of accommodations, modifications, and remediation for students with emotional and specific learning disabilities so they can succeed in the regular education curriculum and in the life of the school. Planning this work should involve key stakeholders and should include indicators of success and a process for regularly updating the Plan. It would be best if this work were linked to a strategic planning effort and/or the establishment of indicators of success.

5. Summary

This report details seven (7) significant findings and recommendations that impact the education of many students and families who attend the Danvers Public Schools, in addition to having a serious impact on the District budget and programming.

As noted earlier in this report, administrators and staff recognize that Town and Schools are facing financial challenges that will impact the ability to operationalize any recommendations. However, it is clear to the consultants that at least some of the recommendations cited here must be implemented in a timely fashion or the financial situation in special education will continue to hamstring efforts in Danvers.

We, therefore, recommend that the School Committee and Administration engage in a two-prong process to address the recommendations: (1) take a creative approach to identifying funding for immediate needs; and (2) begin long term planning to implement recommendations with significant financial and contractual impacts. Before undertaking any “brainstorming” for solutions, the district should gather and analyze all pertinent data that will influence any possible solutions. This includes breaking down students on IEPs by grade, disability category, placement, targeted services; identifying trends in eligibility; gathering information on the licensing and specialized training of both general education and special education staff; and analyzing the outcomes for students on IEPs by placement. Sequentially, the district should consider programmatic and organizational changes/revisions such as, but are not limited to, a reorganization of the special education department in order to identify opportunities to create positions recommended (e.g., team chairperson, inclusion specialist, transition coordinator, assistant principal), establishing protocols for better balancing caseloads within and across buildings, including traveling positions, identifying opportunities for consolidation and/or staffing reallocation, and developing/aligning programs across grade spans.

6. Consultants

William H. Lupini. Dr. Lupini has worked as a school superintendent for over 25 years, having held the position in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania, with the majority of that time spent with the Public Schools of Brookline and the Beverly Public Schools. These experiences have taken place in cities, towns, and regional school districts, as well as career and technical schools and educational collaboratives. He has also served as a Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Assistant High School Principal, Program Specialist with the New Jersey Department of Education, and a Marketing Education Teacher.

Bill served as President of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) and the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) Governing Board. He was the 2015 Massachusetts “Superintendent of the Year” nominee. He has also served on several statewide working groups in Massachusetts, including the Special Commission on Education Collaboratives, the Commission on Achievement Gaps, and the Next Generation MCAS Procurement Review Team.

Dr. Lupini has had diverse experiences in negotiating and designing educator evaluation systems, having done so in four (4) different school systems. He has a passion for leadership development, including coaching leaders in multiple school systems. He has extensive experience utilizing facilitative leadership, tight coupling, and defined autonomy to improve the performance of leadership teams and relationships between central office and building principals. In addition, he has led efforts to revamp special education services, including implementing cost saving measures while increasing services for students.

Bill teaches school law and other educational administration courses in several programs for aspiring administrators. Bill holds a Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership and Administration from Lehigh University, a Master of Education degree in Leadership, Administration, and Supervision from Rider University, and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Marketing and Business Education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Cyndy Taymore. Cyndy Taymore has worked in the field of education in multiple teaching and administrative roles. Her background in education includes administrative positions K-12 in general education, special education, and alternative education as well as teaching at the middle school and high school levels (science and English). Ms. Taymore recently retired as Superintendent of Schools in Melrose, Massachusetts. Previously, she was the Assistant Superintendent/Director of Special Education in Bedford, Massachusetts. Her experience in education includes leading systemic change, developing responsive general education and special education programs, and creating professional cultures rooted in continuous improvement.

Recently, Ms. Taymore has served in interim positions. She was the Interim Executive Director of the EDCO Collaborative for two years. During that time, she facilitated the dissolution of the collaborative following 50 years of service to 16 communities in Massachusetts. More recently, she was the Interim Special Education Director in Billerica, Massachusetts. Additionally, Ms. Taymore provides professional development to districts in Personalized Learning, Universal Design for Learning, Tiered Systems of Support, Staff Supervision and Evaluation, and high leverage

research-based teaching strategies. Ms. Taymore has degrees from American University, Emerson College, and University of Massachusetts-Boston.