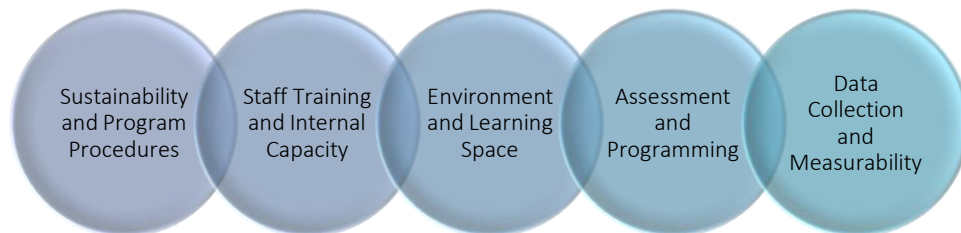




Danvers Public Schools- Learning Center
Program Review Report
September/October 2024

Executive Summary



Evaluators: Jessica B. Thompson, BCBA, M.Ed., LABA
School Strategy Manager

Kelsey Churchill, BCBA, MA, LABA
Educational and Behavioral Consultant

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Executive Summary

Evaluators:

Kelsey Churchill, MA, BCBA, LABA

Behavior Analyst/Educational and Behavioral Consultant

Kelsey Churchill, MA, BCBA, LABA is a dedicated behavior analyst and Educational and Behavioral Consultant, known for her expertise in implementing evidence-based ABA methodologies and her commitment to improving outcomes for children with diverse needs. With a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (CAGS) in Applied Behavior Analysis and Early Intervention from Northeastern University, an M.A. in School Counseling from Assumption College, and a B.A. in Psychology and Education from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Kelsey brings a comprehensive academic and practical background to her work.

Kelsey has served as the supervising BCBA for in-house ABA programs in New Hampshire, where she provided high-quality behavioral consultation across multiple school districts. She is skilled in delivering behavior analytic programming, conducting Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA), and leading district-wide training sessions to equip staff with practical ABA techniques. She employs strategies such as Behavior Skills Training and Competency-Based Learning to ensure effective and sustainable interventions.

Recognized for her compassion, creativity, and ability to collaborate with multidisciplinary teams, Kelsey is passionate about creating supportive, individualized learning environments that help children acquire meaningful skills. Her dedication to data-driven approaches and family-centered care has positioned her as a trusted resource for schools and families seeking to enhance student learning and well-being.

Jessica B. Thompson M.Ed., BCBA, LABA

Behavior Analyst/School Strategy Manager

Jessica B. Thompson, M.Ed., BCBA, LABA, is an experienced behavior analyst and strategic leader in education, known for her expertise in developing sustainable, in-house Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) programs and comprehensive staff training systems. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, with a concentration in criminal justice and social services, from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and a Masters in Special Education and Applied Behavior Analysis from Endicott College.

Jessica's career began at the Walker Home and School, supporting adolescents with emotional and behavioral challenges, and further evolved at Melmark New England, where she spent seven years building expertise in staff training, organizational behavior management (OBM), vocational programming, and severe behavior intervention. During this time, Jessica also developed a special interest in behavior systems analysis, which she has integrated into her program development efforts to optimize organizational and educational outcomes.

Since joining Constellations Behavioral Services (CBS) in 2015 and advancing to Director of School Services in 2021, Jessica has made substantial contributions to CBS's School-Based Staff Experience Program, developing and refining onboarding and training systems and bridging OBM and educational practices within her work. In her recent role as School Strategy Manager for CBS and The Stepping Stones Group, Jessica has focused on strengthening district partnerships across New England. Through this strategic role, she continues to drive impactful ABA programs and champion initiatives that support staff success, empowering districts to provide students with the highest quality educational and behavioral services within their communities.

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Overview:

Danvers Public Schools engaged Constellations Behavioral Services (CBS) to conduct a program review aimed at assessing, identifying, and defining key indicators necessary for refining and sustaining systems within the Learning Center. The goal of this review was to ensure alignment with evidence-based practices and proven outcomes. The findings outlined in this report will provide a foundation for identifying actionable steps to enhance programmatic systems and align with best practices for supporting students with more intensive behavioral and educational needs.

The review encompassed two preschool classrooms, six elementary classrooms, and two middle school classrooms, while high school programs were not included in the initial review. This evaluation took into account the diverse needs of students, ranging from moderate to severe, underscoring the importance of differentiated programming and the necessity for vertical alignment and continuity as students transition between grade levels.

A critical component of the review was a comprehensive district-wide analysis of BCBA caseloads and resource distribution. This analysis aimed to gain a better understanding of BCBA time allocation and how it pertains to the Learning Center, existing within the larger macrocosm of Danvers Public Schools. Insights from this review informed the allocation of time and support across the district, ensuring that resources are effectively tailored to the diverse needs of students.

Methods/Evaluation Tools:

CBS employed various evaluative tools, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the program's effectiveness and areas for growth. The following methods and evaluative tools were utilized to support this evaluation:

- ABA Program Evaluation Form, 2015 v.1.4 (Mark Sundberg)
- Staff Motivation and Climate Questionnaire
- Constellations Behavioral Services Foundational Skill Model Checklist
- Review of Relevant Program Documents
- Review of Past District or Program Evaluations
 - *Danvers Pre-K Evaluation 23/24*
 - *Danvers Public Schools Special Education Audit Report- September 2024*
- Review of Student Educational and Behavioral Data
- Interviews with Staff Members
- Classroom Observations
- BCBA District and LC Caseload Review

Goals for Assessment:

The evaluators commenced the review process by engaging in a series of initial meetings with key Special Education administrators from Danvers Public Schools. These included Christina Ryan, Director of Student Services; Derrick Munyon, Assistant Director of Student Services for the Elementary Level; Marla De La Cruz, Assistant Director of Student Services for the Secondary Level; and Bethany Stangas, Preschool Coordinator and School Psychologist. The Special Education team demonstrated exceptional support, cooperation, and enthusiasm throughout these discussions, which were instrumental in clearly defining the primary goals and intended outcomes of the evaluation. Their active participation ensured a collaborative environment that greatly enriched the review process.

These initial meetings yielded the following areas of focus and goals for the current Special Education administration:

1. Understanding of Mission and Vision
2. Understanding of Student Needs
3. Positive Student Outcomes
4. Understanding of Staff Roles and Responsibilities
5. Professional Development and Staff Training

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6. Systems for Consistency, Efficiency, and Sustainability
7. Vertical Alignment Across the District
8. Progress Monitoring Systems

Findings:

District Overview and BCBA Caseload Review Findings:

Danvers Public Schools serves 3,251 students from Pre-K through 12th grade across five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The district employs four Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) who provide behavioral consultation for 114 students. Currently, three BCBAs support the elementary level, while one BCBA covers the secondary level. The highest caseloads are at Smith School, which hosts most of the district's Learning Center Classrooms, along with HRMS and DHS. It's important to note that caseload numbers do not always reflect overall workload, as some students require more intensive services than others. Additionally, 27% of students on the caseload lacked clearly defined service minutes.

During meetings with BCBAs, many expressed concerns about their high caseloads, indicating they often struggled to provide effective support due to insufficient time, particularly with the growing number of high-needs students. Despite these challenges, BCBAs remain committed to supporting the Learning Center and district-wide behavior initiatives.

BCBAs reported their weekly time allocation as follows:

- 20% of their time is spent on training staff and providing coaching within classrooms, which they identified as a key responsibility for building staff capacity to manage and address student behavior.
 - 18% of their time is dedicated to behavioral assessment and programming, while 5% is spent on educational assessment and programming, emphasizing a primary focus on behavior-specific evaluations and interventions.
 - 20% of their time is devoted to meetings, including Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, team collaboration, and consultations with other professionals.
 - 3% of their time is used for data review and analysis, which they recognized as important for assessing the effectiveness of interventions and adjusting strategies as needed.
 - 35% on "Other" activities, such as responding to challenging student behaviors, covering lunches, working directly with students, traveling between buildings, and administrative duties.
- **BCBAs noted that a significant portion of their time is spent on tasks outside their primary roles, potentially limiting their effectiveness in training, assessment, and collaboration.*

Currently, 41 students access the Learning Center Classrooms, with about 46% identified as high-needs, requiring substantial support across various domains. All Learning Center students receive BCBA consultation, either through formal consultative minutes or additional documented program consultation.

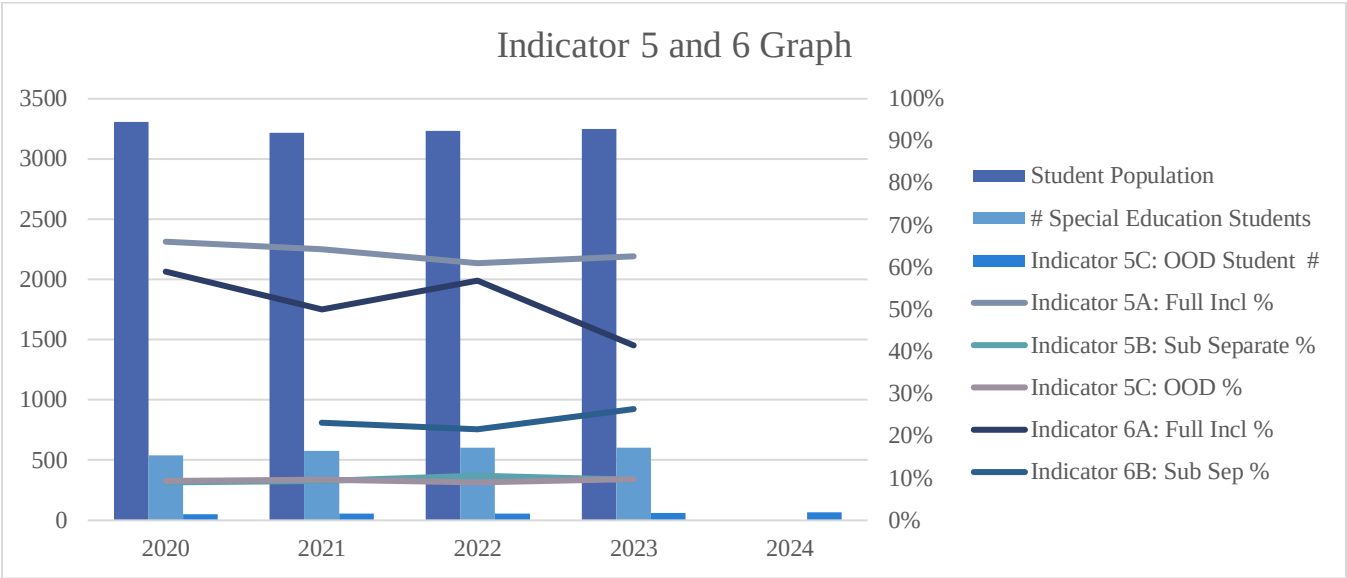
District Special Education Performance Findings:

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires states to provide a state performance plan/annual performance report (SPP/APR) to the federal government annually. This report provides information on key Performance and Compliance Indicators which demonstrate student outcomes as well as compliance with IDEA. For the purpose of this review, Indicator 5 (LRE K through 21) and Indicator 6 (LRE 3-5) is critical because it focuses on the *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*, measuring the percentage of students with disabilities who receive their education in general education settings. This indicator aims to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and are educated alongside their peers to the maximum extent appropriate (IDEA).

This issue has implications for out-of-district (OOD) placements, Indicator 5 and 6 performances can indicate a need for improvement with in-district programming that meets diverse student needs. While out-of-district

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placements can be valuable for students with very specific needs, they often come at a higher financial cost and may remove students from their community settings. The district currently has a total of 67 students in out of district placements.



Data was reviewed for Indicator 5: A,B and C and Indicator 6: A and B from 2020 to 2024. The data suggests that the district’s rising special education population, alongside a stable yet slightly increasing number of out-of-district (OOD) placements, points to a growing demand for specialized support. The slight decline in full inclusion percentages and increase in substantially separate placements indicate that more students may require specialized settings due to complex needs. Over the long term, the district may need to allocate more resources to support these students in-district. This could involve expanding specialized programs, adjusting instructional models, and investing in staff training to ensure teachers are equipped to support diverse needs within inclusive settings. Addressing these trends proactively through strategic planning and sustainable resource allocation will help the district meet the needs of its special education population while balancing budgetary considerations.

Program Overview and Historical Information:

The Learning Center classrooms evaluated in this program review are located within the Danvers Public School District at Riverside Elementary School, Smith Elementary School, Thorpe Elementary School, and Holton Richmond Middle School, with a total of 10 classrooms serving 41 students with diverse educational and behavioral needs. These classrooms aim to provide individualized support through specially designed instruction tailored to meet unique requirements, often necessitating one-to-one direct support grounded in ABA methodologies. Additional support services include speech and language therapy, alternative augmentative communication (AAC) consultation, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and behavioral consultation. The Learning Centers are led by Special Education teachers and supported by Instructional Assistants, ABA Assistants, and Behavior Technicians, with regular consultation from Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) to ensure expert guidance tailored to each student's needs.

Initially part of a New England Center for Children (NECC) Partner Program, the Intensive Learning Center (ILC) has since transitioned to an independent district program. Prior to the 2024-2025 school year, the district operated separate elementary-level Learning Centers and Intensive Learning Centers, but these models were merged into a single program at Smith Elementary School, with similar integration occurring at Riverside Elementary School for preschool students. At the middle school level, the Learning Center serves as a continuation for students transitioning from elementary Learning Centers.

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Classroom Overview:

At Riverside Elementary, two preschool Learning Center classrooms each serve four students and are staffed by a Special Education teacher and Instructional Assistants, with additional support from a Behavior Technician for staff training and implementation of behavioral strategies. The first classroom features a teacher desk, a rug area, large windows, an alarmed exterior door, individual learning spaces, a smart board, and various tables, along with an adjacent bathroom. The second classroom also includes a teacher desk, a smart board, group learning desks, individual workspaces, and a rug area. Both classrooms are equipped with a range of developmentally appropriate toys, some accessible and others labeled and out of reach, along with student cubbies and visual supports for routines. While there are no designated areas for de-escalating unsafe behaviors, room dividers can provide privacy for students needing support. Each classroom has access to a fully contained play yard featuring a climbing structure and various play items.

At the elementary level, five classrooms at Smith Elementary, each led by a Special Education teacher and supported by Instructional Assistants and Behavior Technicians, accommodate approximately 5-6 students based on grade level. These large classrooms include windows, cubbies, sinks, smart boards, and varied educational zones, although optimization of space varies. Most classrooms have identified areas for behavioral and emotional de-escalation, with some using room dividers for privacy. Educational, leisure, and sensory items are present, and Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) devices are utilized across classrooms. The Therapeutic Learning Center at Thorpe Elementary features a main group learning space and two smaller rooms designated for sensory breaks and de-escalation, though challenges arose in managing behaviors due to some unsafe room features.

At Holten Richmond Middle School, two Learning Center classrooms serve seven students in grades 6-8, with each classroom led by a Special Education teacher and supported by Instructional Assistants and Behavior Technicians. One classroom is equipped for Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) with a sink, counterspace, and a large bathroom, while both classrooms offer developmentally appropriate leisure items and mixed inclusion opportunities in academic and exploratory classes.

Quantitative Data and Checklist Findings:

ABA Program Evaluation Form Results: The ABA Program Evaluation Form, 2015 v.1.4 (Mark Sundberg) tool is used to measure the extent to which the program is consistently applying evidence-based practices across program locations, classrooms, and individualized programming. The overall score for the Learning Center Classrooms was 47%. Outcomes of this tool indicated a strong need for driving educational and behavioral assessments, need for consistent curriculum and scope of programming, staff training to support implementation of ABA methodologies and consistency with ongoing progress monitoring.

Dimension	Description	Score
Applied	<i>There is a focus on socially significant and meaningful behaviors and educational targets.</i>	50%.
Behavioral	<i>Behaviors that are targeted are observable and measurable (targets and outcome goals are well defined and can be measured).</i>	65%.
Analytic	<i>A functional relationship is demonstrated (outcomes are directly related to the interventions in place).</i>	42%
Technological	<i>Interventions can be easily replicated and replicated in the exact same way</i>	56%
Effective	<i>Interventions are yielding intended outcomes for learners.</i>	50%.
Conceptually Systematic	<i>Interventions are based in science and are evidenced based.</i>	33%
Generality	<i>Skills are able to be demonstrated in varying settings, across a variety of materials and people.</i>	33%.

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CBS Program Checklist Results: This checklist is designed as an internal progress monitoring tool, aimed at helping districts, schools, clinicians, and staff within a target program to identify the areas in which they should focus their time and attention to promote the growth and development of the program and the students within the program. It is recommended that this checklist be completed on a bimonthly basis and serve to identify program goals, and to collect the data needed to measure progress toward those goals. The initial measure was collected by the evaluator in collaboration with classroom teachers and BCBA's. The overall resulting score for the Learning Center classrooms was 49%. Outcomes of this tool indicated a strong need for improved program systems, procedures and processes, staff training to support implementation of educational and behavioral programming and ABA methodologies and continuity across educational and behavioral program design and implementation.

Area	Description	Score
Sustainability and Program Procedures	<i>Identifies key foundational items necessary for effective and lasting programs (moving from a person specific to a system specific program).</i>	36%
Internal Capacity and Staff Training	<i>Identifies whether a program has the training, resources, skills and expertise internally to support program objectives.</i>	22%
Environment and Learning Space	<i>Identifies whether the environment and learning space will best support student success.</i>	65%
Assessment/ Programming	<i>Identifies whether a program utilizes most appropriate and meaningful assessment tools and programming to support best outcomes for students.</i>	56%
Measurability/ Data Collection	<i>Identifies whether a program has the tools and strategies necessary to monitor ongoing student progress.</i>	65%

Observation and Document Review Findings:

During September and October, all ten classrooms within the Learning Center Program were observed as part of a comprehensive evaluation process aimed at fostering improvement and growth. These observations took place at various times and locations, including general education settings, and involved collaborative sessions with Special Education Teachers and direct support staff. The evaluator also shadowed two of the four BCBA's providing behavior analytic consultation to the program. Additional documentation reviewed included the Danvers Public Schools website, draft program guidelines developed by district BCBA's, student file reviews, a preschool program review by Seaside Educational Consultants, and a Special Education Audit Report completed in September 2024. Throughout the evaluation, the Learning Center team displayed exceptional engagement and support, demonstrating a shared commitment to the program's success.

One key opportunity for improvement identified in the evaluation is the Learning Center Program's lack of a clear mission, vision, and program description that aligns with district goals. Inconsistencies in staff understanding of the program's objectives were also noted. While two documents reference the program, the Little Falcons Preschool flyer and the 2024-2025 District Wide Elementary Handbook, neither provides a comprehensive description of the Learning Centers. Additionally, the absence of documented procedures or protocols for supporting program sustainability presents an opportunity to enhance the integrity of student programming, intervention effectiveness, and staff engagement. The Learning Center team has already drafted key goals during their 23-24 LC Study Group to improve alignment and standardization, signaling a proactive approach to addressing these challenges.

The classrooms themselves were generally well-equipped with features typical of ABA programs, such as individual learning cubbies and designated break spaces. Classrooms without appropriate set up or design were in the process of being supported. While visual supports for students were prevalent, visual aids for staff were not yet present consistently; enhancing these resources could improve staff understanding and consistency in implementing skill acquisition programs. Furthermore, the evaluator observed gaps in staff knowledge of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) principles, which contributed to inconsistencies in service delivery and program implementation.

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Addressing these knowledge gaps can significantly enhance the allocation of time for both teachers and BCBA's, ultimately improving program outcomes.

Key areas for potential growth include establishing formalized entry and exit criteria for the Learning Center Program, which currently lacks a structured process. Staffing shortages, particularly in instructional assistant positions, also present challenges but can be addressed to enhance program effectiveness. The current reliance on special education teachers for 1:1 student support limits their ability to engage in essential responsibilities such as training and curriculum development. Additionally, the evaluation highlighted challenges in student files, IEPs, and Behavior Support Plans, noting inconsistencies in assessment and goal-setting practices.

Interview Findings:

Interviews conducted with team members across the Learning Center classrooms, which include preschool, elementary, and middle school levels, highlighted both strengths and barriers affecting the program's effectiveness. Notably, staff members praised their colleagues for their dedication and compassion, which fosters a strong belief in the importance of student inclusion in both school and community settings. The program benefits from small class sizes, averaging 5-6 students per classroom, allowing for individualized support and opportunities for classroom staff to generalize skills across various environments. Additionally, staff value the consultation time they receive with various professionals and service providers, viewing this as a significant asset to their work.

Despite these strengths, several opportunities for improvement were identified. Key challenges identified by staff include insufficient staffing in classrooms, inadequate training opportunities that do not align with program needs, lack of consistent assessments and curriculum and limited time for collaboration outside of student learning hours. While many teachers enjoy working with their colleagues and have established a positive culture within their classrooms, some feel disconnected from the broader school community and report difficulties in collaborating with other professionals.

The recent changes in administrative leadership have prompted a renewed focus on developing clear systems and procedures to support the program's growth. Many staff members are relatively new and are still familiarizing themselves with established practices. Clarity around roles and responsibilities has also emerged as a concern, indicating a need for improved collaboration and communication among team members.

Training opportunities were highlighted as a significant area for improvement, with many staff members noting that current professional development sessions do not always address the specific needs of special education or Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Furthermore, the reliance on informal, on-the-job training has resulted in inconsistent preparation for staff, which may affect student outcomes. A common request among educators is for a consistent curriculum across classrooms, as current materials can be improvised or vary widely, leading to confusion during important IEP meetings. Addressing these challenges presents an opportunity for meaningful growth and improvement within the Learning Center Program, ultimately benefiting both staff and the students they serve.

Survey Findings:

The Staff Motivation and Climate Questionnaire, inspired by Reid and Parsons' resource "Motivating Human Service Staff," aimed to gather staff opinions on strategies that enhance work performance and satisfaction. The survey focused on three key areas: Culture and Connection, Program Goals and Outcomes, and Staff Training and Recognition, with a separate section dedicated to direct service staff due to their specific role in implementing programming.

- **Culture and Connections:** Most staff members feel a strong connection to the school and acknowledge students for appropriate behavior, believing in high standards for achievement. However, there were some inconsistencies in reporting, indicating some disparities with inclusivity and fairness.
- **Program Goals and Outcomes:** Program Goals and Outcomes: While there is general confidence in understanding program goals and student outcomes, there is uncertainty about consistency across teams.

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Responses vary significantly among staff, revealing gaps in understanding and training. Additionally, there are differences in how outcomes are monitored and shared, with some staff feeling more informed than others. Access to resources and training remains a critical concern, indicating a need for improved support.

- **Training and Staff Recognition:** Some staff members report clearer procedures than others, while others express uncertainty about existing processes. Training challenges are apparent across all groups, with low confidence in available tools for skill execution, highlighting the need for systematic improvements. Recognition and feedback are prioritized by many, while others would benefit from more consistent feedback practices. Overall, there is a clear need for structured training systems, clearer processes for achieving student outcomes, and uniform feedback across all roles.
- **Direct Staff Insights:** Many staff feel supported and recognized within their teams, but there is a need for greater clarity in job expectations. Training remains a challenge, with many staff unsure or dissatisfied with their preparation for student-specific programming. Addressing these issues could enhance staff confidence and overall performance.

Evaluator Impressions and Program Recommendations:

The Learning Center Program demonstrates tremendous potential in supporting student success through the application of ABA principles and evidence-based interventions. Staff appear invested and committed to ongoing learning and improvement efforts to ensure the program is providing excellent services to all students. As the team looks to refine and elevate the quality and effectiveness of the Learning Center Program even further, the following recommendations will guide the team in enhancing their practices and ultimately achieving better outcomes for students and the teams supporting them.

- 1) **Program Mission and Vision:** Currently, the Learning Center Program does not yet have a unified mission or vision, and this inconsistency is reflected across different staff roles as well as across various locations, from Pre-K to Middle School. This observation is supported by document reviews, staff interviews, and survey responses. Establishing a clear, cohesive mission and vision is a critical step in building a strong, well-aligned program. It brings all stakeholders together under a common purpose, ensuring that decision-making is guided by shared goals and values.

Focus: The next focus should be on developing a clear and unified mission and vision for the Learning Center Program. This process should involve all key stakeholders, including staff across different roles and locations, to ensure that the final mission reflects a shared understanding and commitment to the program's goals. Once the mission and vision are established, they can serve as a foundation for decision-making, aligning practices and strategies across all levels of the program. Additionally, it will be important to ensure that the mission is effectively communicated and embraced by all team members, creating consistency and unity within the program.

- 2) **Least Restrictive Environment, "Learning Centers" and Sub Areas of "Learning Centers":** The term "Learning Center" appears to encompass a broad range of students who receive instruction in a separate setting. District-wide, students accessing the Learning Centers present with diverse needs, including educational, behavioral, and social-emotional challenges. In the classrooms reviewed, students' needs ranged from moderate to severe. It is important to recognize that students with more significant or complex needs may require more restrictive environments and specialized teaching methodologies, while those with more moderate needs may benefit from less restrictive settings, such as small group instruction or general education with appropriate modifications. Without a clear understanding of what the Learning Center program truly entails, it becomes challenging for teams to ensure that student placements align with their individual needs.

Focus: It is essential for the district to prioritize providing a continuum of care for learners in the Learning Centers, offering a range of flexible and adaptable services and supports from early intervention through high school. By enabling students to transition between different levels of support based on their progress and needs, the district can foster both academic and social-emotional growth while maintaining students in the least

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restrictive environment possible. A key aspect of this approach involves clearly defining the Learning Center program and its sub-areas to ensure it delivers appropriate, individualized support for students with diverse needs. This includes establishing clear guidelines regarding the types of students who will benefit from the program, tailored to their educational, behavioral, and social-emotional requirements.

As the team works through this, the following may be a consideration for learning center program design:

- a. Learning Centers: Restructure Learning Centers to best define and meet student needs:
 - High Need Program: For students requiring intensive support, focusing on individualized instruction and behavioral interventions in 1:1, 1:2, or small group formats, primarily outside the general education setting.
 - Moderate-Need Program: For students with low to moderate needs, providing more opportunities to engage in general education and benefit from small group learning environments.
***Both programs should apply ABA-based strategies for personalized, data-driven interventions, serving students from Pre-K to high school. Further subgrouping can be introduced as needed, focusing on functional life skills or academic pathways, especially in high school where transition activities may prioritize readiness for post-secondary education, employment, or independent living.*
- b. Therapeutic Learning Centers: The Therapeutic Learning Center should combine ABA methodologies with social-emotional learning (SEL) approaches, collaborating closely with mental health providers to address students' academic, behavioral, and emotional needs comprehensively. Clear program definitions, including target populations and support types, could ensure consistency and cohesion across the district's Learning Center offerings.

- 3) **Program Description/s:** The Learning Center Program does not yet have comprehensive descriptions that clearly outline its purpose and structure. At the Pre-K level there is some evidence of a description on the website as noted above, indicated that it is a sub separate program using ABA methodologies, is overseen by a Special Educator and receives BCBA consultation.

Focus: To enhance understanding and consistency across the district, it is imperative to develop detailed program descriptions that define the overarching goals of the Learning Center Program, including its mission to promote inclusive educational practices and support students with varying educational, behavioral, and social-emotional needs.

These descriptions should identify the specific student demographics served by the program, detailing the range of needs addressed. The program structure should describe the different components of the Learning Center Program, including any distinct sub-programs or specialized offerings designed to meet the diverse needs of students, such as separate pathways for those with severe needs versus those with moderate needs. Furthermore, it should highlight the evidence-based practices and instructional methodologies employed within the program, such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) strategies, to ensure effective teaching and support for all learners.

- 4) **Vertical Alignment and Clear Pathways for Students Across All Levels:** Currently, there is a lack of clarity regarding how each program transitions from one level to the next, with the clearest understanding observed between Pre-K and the elementary level. While there are various programs available across all levels, the absence of clear definitions may create barriers that hinder learners from accessing the appropriate level of support. This lack of clarity can also impede educators and families from understanding the pathways available to students, making it challenging to ensure that each learner receives a tailored educational experience.

Focus: Clearly defining and creating a visual representation of student pathways will help outline the progression from one educational level to the next, highlighting key transition points and available support at

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each stage. Fostering collaboration between staff at different educational levels ensures a cohesive approach to student development. Ongoing professional development focused on vertical alignment is necessary to help educators understand the developmental needs of students and how to support their transitions effectively. Involving families by providing resources and guidance on supporting their child's academic journey across different levels is crucial, which can include tailored informational sessions. Finally, establishing feedback loops for students, families, and educators will assess the effectiveness of pathways and allow for necessary adjustments, ensuring that programs and services continually meet the evolving needs of students.

- 5) **Program Systems and Procedures:** At present, the program lacks a well-defined outline and explanation of essential procedures, which could have various implications for its success, such as affecting student programming, intervention effectiveness, and staff engagement.

Focus: The development of a program manual as well as a staff manual will allow the program to have clear program procedures and protocols as well as clear staff expectations and understanding regarding their roles and responsibilities.

Program Manual Development: • Mission and Vision aligned with district goals • Program Overview • Core Program Elements • Team Structure • Environment Setup and Service Continuum • Entry Process • Entry Criteria by Level • Discharge Criteria • Assessment, Curriculum, and Program Planning • Safety Protocols • Templates and Program Resources (e.g., lesson plans, behavior support plans, data forms)	Staff Manual Development: • Communication Guidelines • Defined Roles and Responsibilities • Meeting Schedule • Annual Training Program • Competency Goals • Resource Guide
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- 6) **Program Entry and Exit Criteria:** While the LC Study Group documents include some draft materials related to entry and exit criteria, the program has not yet established an accepted and clearly defined set of criteria for entry and exit from the Learning Center Programs across all levels.

Focus: Entry and exit criteria are essential components of any program, as they serve distinct and crucial purposes throughout a student's educational career and for individuals overseeing and operating within the program. Specified criteria for a program ensure that resources are allocated efficiently (i.e., staff training aligned on key topics, curriculums in line with student needs, staff ratios according to student needs), participants are appropriately matched to the program (i.e., student access their just right educational fit), and the student's success can be objectively measured.

- 7) **Environmental Arrangement and Program Design:** Observations indicated that this was an overall strength for the program. Classrooms each had designed spaces, small student numbers and classroom spaces. Many of the classrooms had spaces set up appropriately to meet the needs of the learners, and only one was deemed needed for immediate intervention.

Focus: The arrangement of a classroom is essential in creating a positive and effective learning environment, benefiting both students and staff. Thoughtful antecedent environmental adjustments can help reduce challenging behaviors, increase student engagement, support instructional flow, and enable teachers to effectively oversee multiple students. Considering flexible groupings based on student needs and ages may further enhance classroom dynamics, and an annual review of student performance levels and eligibility will

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ensure that class groupings and classroom spaces remain appropriate. To meet the diverse needs of students, dedicated spaces should be incorporated within program areas, including small group learning areas, 1:1 instructional spaces with sanitization options, storage bins for individualized learning materials, a designated break area, and a “cool-down” space for behavior management.

- 8) Roles and Responsibilities of Staff:** Observations, interviews, and surveys conducted with staff reveal that many individuals feel the need for further clarification regarding their roles to engage more effectively in their jobs. Additionally, there are various titles for roles of direct service staff within the Learning Center, including Behavior Technician, Instructional Assistant and ABA Trained Assistant.

Focus: It is essential for team members to understand not only the specific roles and responsibilities associated with each position but also where these roles may overlap. By identifying the unique strengths and competencies of team members, the program can better support the diverse needs of students. Emphasizing an inter-collaborative approach will enhance the team's ability to work together effectively to achieve the goals established by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. Furthermore, clarifying which roles are truly necessary for the program, outlining the reporting structure, and defining titles and responsibilities will be vital in improving understanding of expectations. To enhance clarity and effectiveness within the program, it is recommended to identify key players who support the program, outline the key responsibilities of each role, and specify when and how roles may appropriately overlap, highlighting the benefits of collaboration. Additionally, defining reporting lines and supervision, as well as establishing how and when feedback (both corrective and reinforcing) will be delivered, will contribute to a well-structured environment. Conducting a R.A.C.I. (responsibility assignment matrix) activity may further support the team in comprehensively understanding roles and responsibilities.

- 9) Staffing Ratios and Classroom Teacher Time:** Staffing levels and student-to-staff ratios present significant challenges in the classroom, particularly affecting the classroom teacher's ability to fulfill essential responsibilities. Teachers overseeing ABA classrooms often need to step away from direct instruction to perform critical tasks such as writing individualized programs, training staff, and monitoring progress. When teachers are unable to focus on these key areas, it not only hinders their effectiveness but also limits the training and oversight that support staff receive.

Focus: To enhance the effectiveness of the program, it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the staffing needs and ongoing tracking of these positions. This includes accurately assessing the required staff-to-student ratios and reviewing the time teachers need to devote to tasks beyond direct student support, such as developing individualized plans and conducting staff training. By addressing these areas, the program can ensure that teachers have the necessary resources and time to deliver high-quality instruction and foster a supportive learning environment for all students.

- 10) Competency Based Training Program:** Staff training emerged as a consistent theme among all members working in the Learning Center regarding areas for improvement. Many individuals expressed that the trainings offered by the district did not always align with the specific skills required for their roles, limiting their ability to effectively support students. Both teachers and BCBAs identified that training was a key area of need to support both staff and student success. Additionally, it was noted that not all staff members entered their positions without the foundational skills necessary to work with high-needs learners. Finally, concerns were also raised about the necessity of Safety Care Training, with questions about whether all staff should receive this training to adequately support the unique profile of learners in the program.

Focus: The Learning Center Program would benefit from the development of a competency-based training sequence. In line with a Behavioral Skills Training Model, competency-based training involves assessing an individual's ability to execute a particular task or activity following training and the provision of ongoing

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training or monitoring of that task or activity until competency is met. The training should involve foundational trainings/lessons for each role as well as competency and application follow up to ensure skill mastery. Training can be conducted through a variety of ways to include attending in-class sessions, on-line/remote training programs, consultative training from outside agencies, training from in-district BCBA.

All Learning Center Support Staff Topics
- Learning Center Program Overview - Instructional Control and Rapport Building - Basic principles of Applied Behavior Analysis - Functions of Behavior
Instructional Assistants, Behavior Technician and ABA Trained Assistants:
All direct staff members working within the learning center classrooms would benefit from the 40-hour RBT Training or training which is commensurate that addresses all relevant methodologies being recommended and/or used within the program and may go above and beyond that of the RBT credential. Key topic areas include: - Instructional Control and Rapport Building - Principles of Behavior Analysis - Functions of Behavior - Antecedent Interventions - Consequence Interventions - Teaching New Behavior - Discrete Trial Instruction - Incidental and Natural Environment Teaching - Data Collection and Graphing - Student Rights
Classroom Teacher Topics:
- BCBA Coursework or above trainings - Group Contingencies - Behavior Skills Training - Supervision Training: <i>Greater satisfaction with supervisor support was found to be associated with lower levels of burnout (Gibson et al. 2009; Hurt et al. 2013), greater levels of job satisfaction (Hurt et al. 2013), and less intention to turnover (Kazemi et al. 2015).</i> - Pairing and rapport building with staff - Promoting staff engagement and morale - Fostering a coaching relationship using principles of ABA
BCBA Topics:
- Behavior Skills Training - Pairing and rapport building with staff - Fostering a coaching relationship using principles of ABA - Evidence based teaching methods - Treating severe problem behavior

11) Assessments, Curriculum and Scope of Student Programming: Consistency regarding assessments, curriculum and scope of programming for students came up as a high area of need across all classroom teachers indicating that this is a critical focus area to best support teachers and their practice, as well as to align student programming across the Learning Center.

Focus: The district is encouraged to invest in assessment tools and curriculum to support the learners within the Learning Centers. At the Pre-K and Elementary levels, the primary focus should be on fostering foundational

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learning skills, self-regulation, and adaptive skills. Emphasis should be placed on individualized programming that addresses academic, independence, behavioral, and social skills.

For Middle School learners, the focus should shift toward addressing academic and social skills gaps while introducing pre-vocational skills. This transitional phase is crucial for preparing students for more independent living and future work experiences. Programming should aim to promote self-advocacy, social skills, and responsibility, allowing students to engage meaningfully with their peers and community.

Assessments for Consideration:

- a. **Foundational Skills:** The VB-MAPP (Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program) is a comprehensive language and learning assessment designed for young children with autism or other developmental disabilities and language delays. Rooted in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) principles and the analysis of verbal behavior, this assessment offers a scope and sequence of developmental learning. Although it covers children up to 48 months, its framework can be effectively applied to support all young learners in identifying and filling skill gaps. The VB-MAPP also includes milestones, barriers, and transition assessments that are relevant to the school setting, ensuring that educators can tailor their approaches to individual needs.
- b. **Skills Assessments:** The ABLLS-R (Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills—Revised) should be implemented alongside the VB-MAPP. The ABLLS-R breaks down skills into smaller, achievable tasks, making it an excellent tool for tracking the progress of students with varying abilities. Additionally, the Activities of Functional Living Skills (AFLS) provides a range of foundational skills necessary for increasing student independence and facilitating access to education. For younger learners aged 4-6, incorporating the School Skills Assessment can support the development of meaningful classroom readiness skills, ensuring a smooth transition into formal education.
- c. **Social Skills:** To enhance social development, the team should consider integrating additional social skills assessments, such as the Social Skills Checklist or the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS). Research indicates that social impairment has a significant impact on quality-of-life indicators for individuals with autism, affecting employment quality and friendship quality into adulthood (Barnhill, 2007; Orsmond, Shattuck, Cooper, Sterzing, & Anderson, 2013). By utilizing targeted assessments in social skills, educators can better understand and support the social development of their students, paving the way for improved interpersonal interactions and relationships.

Considerations for Evidence-Based Social Skills Curriculum:

- a. **Social Skills Solutions:** A structured program focused on teaching specific social skills through explicit instruction and practical activities. Social Skills Solutions provides clear lesson plans and role-playing scenarios to enhance students' understanding and application of social skills. The curriculum is designed to be adaptable for various learners and includes resources for teacher training to support effective implementation.
- b. **PEERS (Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills):** An evidence-based social skills intervention program aimed at adolescents and young adults with autism. PEERS focuses on improving social relationships through group sessions that teach practical skills for initiating conversations, making friends, and navigating social situations. The program also involves parents to reinforce skills learned during sessions, promoting generalization in real-world contexts.
- c. **SSIS SEL Classwide Intervention Program:** A comprehensive curriculum that integrates social-emotional learning (SEL) with social skills training, designed for implementation in a class-wide setting. The SSIS program emphasizes positive classroom environments and inclusivity while providing structured lessons aligned with SEL competencies. It includes assessment tools to track students' social-emotional development and offers professional development resources for educators to enhance their teaching practices.

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Curriculums to Explore:

- a. **Unique Learning System:** A comprehensive online curriculum designed specifically for students with special needs. It offers differentiated instructional materials across various subjects, ensuring accessibility and engagement for diverse learners. The system includes individualized lesson plans, visual supports, and interactive activities tailored to students' unique learning profiles.
- b. **Headsprout Reading:** An interactive, web-based reading program that focuses on developing early literacy skills using a systematic phonics approach. It employs engaging animations and stories to capture students' interest and provides immediate feedback to reinforce learning. Headsprout is designed for students who may struggle with traditional reading methods, making it accessible for various learning abilities.
- c. **TeachTown:** A digital learning platform offering a comprehensive curriculum for students with autism and other developmental disabilities. TeachTown combines video modeling, interactive lessons, and assessments to teach essential academic, social, and daily living skills. The program emphasizes individualized instruction and includes behavior support strategies to facilitate learning and engagement.

12) Refine Educational and Behavioral Programming: Discussions with staff highlighted some inconsistencies in individualized student programming in alignment with IEPs. Variations were noted in the types of programming implemented, particularly in the application of ABA methodologies and evidence-based teaching strategies, such as Discrete Trial Instruction, Task Analysis, and Natural Environment Teaching. Furthermore, there was a lack of uniformity in program binders, both in terms of their presence and formatting across classrooms. Access to the ACE program varied, with some educators having access while others either lacked access or had not received the necessary training on it.

Focus: To refine educational and behavioral programming, it is essential to standardize formats by developing a consistent template for program binders across all classrooms, ensuring uniformity and ease of use. Additionally, a monitoring system should be established to regularly evaluate the implementation of individualized student programming in alignment with IEPs, which can include classroom observations and feedback sessions.

Access to essential resources, including the ACE program, must be guaranteed for all teachers, along with comprehensive training for those who are not yet familiar with it. Fostering a culture of collaboration among staff will enable them to share best practices and effective programming strategies, while regular team meetings will provide a platform for discussing successful implementations and identifying areas for improvement.

Moreover, implementing a robust data collection system will facilitate the tracking of student progress in relation to IEP goals and the effectiveness of various programming approaches, thereby informing future programming decisions. Gathering feedback from staff about the challenges they face while implementing programming strategies is crucial, as this input can guide adjustments and enhancements to training and resources. To further support instructional efforts, a centralized location of materials should be established, including a suite of templates and a lesson plan bank for shared use, alongside training resources and best practices related to ABA methodologies and evidence-based strategies. This will equip staff with the necessary tools to optimize their programming efforts and ultimately support student success.

13) Leadership Structure: The leadership structure supporting the Learning Community (LC) includes a Director of Student Services who oversees the overall student services, along with two Assistant Directors focusing on specific educational levels: one for elementary students and the other for secondary students. Additionally, there is a Preschool Coordinator who also serves as a School Psychologist, responsible for preschool programs and psychological services. This team collaborates to ensure comprehensive support across all educational levels.

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Focus: Given the size and complexity of the specialized program, and in line with the district audit and potential need to relook at Special Education Leadership Structure, consideration should be given to restructuring the leadership to include a dedicated role focused on overseeing these specialized programs. The program currently involves several people at the administrative level; however, many of these individuals also have additional responsibilities. Achieving cohesion across 10 different classrooms in 3-4 different schools is a substantial challenge, particularly regarding aligning curriculum, assessments, service models, administrative needs, staffing, program fidelity, and progress monitoring.

Creating a dedicated leadership position could ensure the continuity and consistency needed to align program elements effectively. This role could focus on maintaining program fidelity, uniformly supporting staff and administrative needs, and addressing the diverse approaches currently in use. Staff feedback has highlighted a pressing need for greater cohesion, emphasizing the importance of a centralized approach.

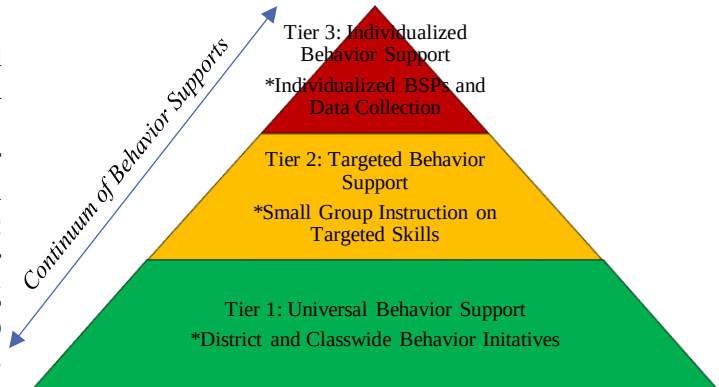
While Assistant Directors manage these responsibilities without additional support, the program's complexity makes effective oversight difficult without focused leadership. However, implementing other recommendations from the report, such as establishing consistent procedures and systems, and clarifying roles, could help support the program within the existing leadership structure.

- 14) BCBA Consultation, Time and Allocation:** The district has made significant strides in BCBA support by hiring two additional BCBAs over the past year in response to greater visibility into the overall district need for BCBA expertise. However, external factors such as staff training, caseload demands, behavioral challenges at the universal level, and issues affecting students outside their classrooms may still contribute to expanding caseloads that exceed manageable levels. Additionally, BCBAs are managing diverse caseloads across multiple student profiles and schools, requiring them to continuously adapt to meet the varying needs of their students.

Focus: To ensure that BCBA caseloads do not continue to grow at an unmanageable rate and to reduce the need for continuously adding positions, the district can implement several recommendations.

- a. **Three-Tiered Training Model in the Learning Centers:** A Three-Tiered Training Model would involve a team member supervised by a BCBA to support tasks such as staff training, data collection and graphing, implementation of behavior plans, and conducting fidelity checks. This approach would allow the BCBA to focus on program oversight, direct collaboration with classroom teachers, and monitoring student progress. Currently, the Learning Center employs individuals titled “Behavior Technicians” who work directly with students. These staff members have completed the 40-hour RBT training and have received previous supervision from BCBAs. Ideally, all staff would possess the same skills and training in the future. However, this role can be utilized as a training support and a resource for staff coverage during lunches and during staff absences, ensuring consistency for students when regular staff are unavailable, as substitutes may not have the same skill set. This model would also provide support to classroom teachers, allowing them the focused time needed for effective student programming oversight and implementation.

- b. **Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Behavior:** As the district works to create strategic initiatives, a strong focus should be placed on Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Positive Behavior Support (PBS) practices for behavior. This includes implementing universal strategies across all schools, as well as small group booster sessions for skill building targeted at at-risk students. A well-developed MTSS framework will support the reduction of Tier 3 behavior referrals and provide assistance in the least restrictive manner. Additionally, the district would benefit from considering BCBA support specifically for general education to enhance Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports in collaboration with social workers. This strategic approach aims to reduce overall Tier 3 BCBA caseloads, allowing BCBA within special education to concentrate on the highest-needs students and effectively address their individual requirements.



- c. **Focused BCBA Support in Specialized Programs:** Students accessing the Learning Centers require intensive educational and behavioral programming and are at time most often at risk of out of district placement. Council of Autism Service Providers (CASP) suggests that individuals with autism require one to two hours of case supervision for every 10 hours (1–2:10) of direct treatment (*CASP Guidelines 3.0, April 2024*). Suggesting that the Learning Center students would likely benefit from at least two full BCBA caseloads solely focused on that caseload. It should be noted that CASP guidelines state that *“these standards are provided for informational purposes only... many variables influence and direct the professional delivery of applied behavior analysis (ABA) services for persons with autism... guidelines may not address the specific needs of all patients in all circumstances...guidelines are not intended to be a substitute for the independent clinical judgment of the individual [provider].”* Learning Center caseloads should be reviewed at least annually to best determine BCBA support needed for the program.
- d. **Referral Process:** The district has begun developing a referral procedure for accessing individualized BCBA supports and services with the goal of finalizing this process and communicate it to school teams by the start of 2025. The rollout will be collaborative, with established timelines to ensure effective implementation. It is crucial that BCBA are actively involved in service delivery recommendations for students to ensure that consultative services align with individual needs.
- e. **Appropriate Student Discharge:** It is important for BCBA to titrate service delivery and discharge students when appropriate (e.g., Student is demonstrating independence with skills and learning from the natural environment, challenging behaviors are at zero rates). Continuous data and progress monitoring will allow the BCBA to make informed service delivery recommendations tailored to individual student needs, with the ultimate goal of discharging students from services to facilitate the use of the least restrictive behavior support procedures.
- f. **Functional Behavior Assessments and Behavior Support Plans (BSPs):** File reviews indicated inconsistent implementation of FBAs (Functional Behavioral Assessments). There was also some inconsistencies with regard to implementation of Behavior Support Plans (BSPs) versus behavior

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guidelines. Likely, the team should only consider “behavior guidelines” when they are working towards putting together a more formalized Behavior Support Plan, informed by ABC data or and FBA, or when they are using it a collaborative document to highlight antecedent and reinforcement strategies.

The district would benefit from adopting a formalized template including the name of the supervising BCBA, the date of implementation, and revision dates, along with the function of behavior and the data obtained to support that function. They must also provide operational definitions for behaviors targeted for increase and decrease, as well as reinforcement strategies and function-based responses to challenging behaviors. Additionally, each BSP should include a note regarding the type of safety management curriculum used and guidelines for its *implementation* (e.g., *When the student poses a risk to self or others, Safety Care strategies may be implemented by trained personnel*). BSPs are likely required for most students within the Learning Center, and all BSPs and function-based interventions should be informed by ABC data collection and/or formal functional behavior assessments (FBAs).

- g. **Defined Schedules of Support:** Many BCBA's reported being pulled from key tasks, such as training, when behavior challenges arose on-site in a building. To address this, clear communication regarding BCBA availability, their focus areas for the day, and plans for how teams should respond in their absence will help foster more consistent and effective support. Specifically for the Learning Center, it is recommended that BCBA's dedicate specific days to each classroom, reducing the need for frequent shifts between locations or teams. This approach will enhance the overall effectiveness of support and ensure that BCBA's can provide targeted assistance where it is most needed.

15) Family Involvement, and Communication: Family Involvement and Communication: Many staff members noted that family involvement, training, and carryover between providers were areas needing additional attention. This was also marked as “poor” on the ABA Evaluation Checklist, highlighting inconsistencies in whether parent consultations were offered across student IEPs.

Focus: The team may want to implement a 30-minute monthly parent consultation for all students accessing the Learning Center. These sessions could focus on reviewing progress toward IEP goals and offering strategies for extending behavior support into the home environment. This collaborative approach would enhance student programming and promote proactive strategies over reactive ones. However, it's important to acknowledge that adding these consultations would increase BCBA caseload time.

16) Culture and Connection to School Community: There are many positive aspects and reports highlighting the culture of inclusion across schools in the district. While there are instances of inconsistent reporting, this presents an opportunity for the district to strengthen its efforts. The recent relocation of all Learning Center programs to centralized locations may have created some gaps in understanding within the community regarding how to best support high-needs learners.

Focus: As the Learning Centers acclimate to their new environment, it is crucial to provide additional training and resources to the broader school community. Fostering learning amongst staff, families, and community members about what the Learning Center goals are, along with ABA principles, the methodologies used, and effective strategies for supporting their new teams and students, will foster a strong connection and promote a culture of inclusion.

It has been a genuine pleasure to collaborate with the Danvers Public School District and the Learning Center Program team throughout this evaluation process. The commitment of this team to the success of their students and

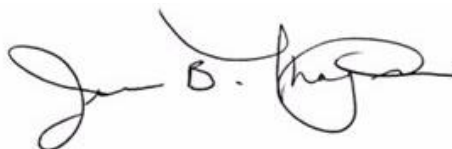
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program is evident in every step they took. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed their time, insights, and support, your humility, transparency, and willingness to engage have made this process incredibly impactful. Constellations Behavioral Services welcomes the opportunity for continued partnership with the district to establish priorities, develop a roadmap, and evaluate the resources necessary to implement the recommendations outlined here. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any additional questions or follow-up items.

Respectfully submitted,



Kelsey Churchill, MA, BCBA, LABA
Behavior Analyst/Educational and Behavioral Consultant



Jessica B. Thompson M.Ed., BCBA, LABA
Behavior Analyst/School Strategy Manager

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