

Special Education Program Review  
Executive Summary  
And  
Final Recommendations

Submitted by:

West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District Special Services Department

July 30, 2012

## Introduction

The West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District Special Services Department began a review of its Special Education Programs and Services in the Fall of 2009. At that time, consultant Dr. Stanley Vitello was hired to conduct a needs assessment to prepare the request for proposal to study the Special Education Program.

The district began its Program Review by selecting the expert services of Dr. Michele Kamens from a pool of four qualified consultants. Dr. Kamens is a Rider University Professor with extensive Special Education knowledge and experiences. Dr. Kamens was charged with an external review of our Special Education programs and services. Dr. Kamens worked with district officials in the Spring of 2011 and Fall of 2011 to review our programs and services and make recommendations. Her work included conducting focus groups with parents and staff, conducting an electronic survey to the parents of students in our special needs programs, reviewing our programs, curricula, observations of classrooms, and conducting personal interviews.

In addition, the district convened an internal committee to continue the review of programs and services. Committee members representing special education teachers, general education teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, related services providers, and the child study team convened on multiple occasions throughout the Spring of 2011, Fall of 2011, and Spring of 2012. The internal committee identified the following areas as focal points for sub-committee work: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment and Performance, Resources, Professional Development, and the Special Education Code. Surveys were created by several subcommittees to assess current and projected needs in the area of special education resources and curriculum. Surveys were electronically distributed to all district teaching staff members. In addition, special and general education teachers as well as child study team members were solicited to participate in focus groups. These focus groups sought to gain a

better understanding of current practices and procedures in our special education department and solicited suggestions for how to improve upon our practices.

### **Commendations**

The West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District Special Services Department has been recognized for having numerous strengths in its servicing of students with special needs. Some of these strengths have been highlighted by the internal and external program reviewers to include the following:

- The district has been monitored by the NJ DOE for compliance with regards to federal and state special education code requirements. The last completed monitoring took place in December 2008 with results of that monitoring submitted to the district in September of 2010. The monitoring results indicated that the district meets its obligation to provide FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education) in the LRE (least restrictive environment) to all special education students. A complete review of this monitoring was made to the school board at a public meeting on September 30, 2010 and placed on the district website.
- The district was selected by the NJ Office of Special Education Programs to serve as a model of excellence in its delivery of Special Education Programs and Services for review by the NJ State Legislature Office of Legislative Services Office of the State Auditor in June 2012.
- The district has a history of expanding the number and types of programs offered in-district in an effort to meet the needs of district students. The development of these new programs allows students to receive their schooling with in-district peers. The district will be opening programs in the Fall of 2012 and will include an additional K-1 MD/Autism class, and well as a class for students with behavioral disabilities at the middle school level. These additional programs will help the district strive to meet the needs of individual students in the least restrictive setting.
- The district offers a full continuum of placement options as required by New Jersey Code.
- Eighty-six percent of students in special education programs pursue post-secondary schooling after the completion of high school as noted in a survey of students with disabilities who exited during the 2009-2010 school year.

- The district offers instruction at all levels and within all programs that are aligned with CCCS and IEP goals/objectives.
- Instruction is differentiated as appropriate for student with special needs in various settings. Best practices in special education are implemented.
- Replacement programs (MD, BD, LLD, and RC) are available in various subjects and instruction is modified according to IEP goals and objectives.
- The district was commended for its impressive communication between all stakeholders and tireless efforts to implement high quality programs and services to the diverse student population.
- Child Study Teams consistently provided thorough assessments of students' abilities as related to the needs determined by the Evaluation Planning Committee.
- As appropriate, classroom teachers use a combination of high quality formative and summative assessments, standardized tests, norm referenced tools, and/or informal inventories to gather data for use in monitoring current program and in developing future goals and objectives.
- Ample resources are shared between necessary staff members to aid in the instruction of individual students and their needs
- Special Education teachers and administrators are committed to enhancing all students' instructional and educational achievement by attendance in professional development opportunities presented in and out of district.

### **Areas of Growth**

Educational frameworks that support reflective practices encourage growth toward the goal of Excellence. This program review has encouraged those serving the students of our Special Services Department to engage in these reflective practices and work with both the Internal Program Review Committee and the external consultant , Dr. Michele Kamens, to yield multiple recommendations to assist in the districts' striving belief: we are constantly moving from '*good to great.*' Recommendations were made by both the Internal Program Review Committee and Dr. Kamens and are organized into

eleven areas. Overarching themes in each of the eleven areas are summarized below. A chart detailing all the recommendations is attached.

*Suggested Areas of Growth:*

- **Parent Relations:** The overarching themes under this area of growth include examining ways in which enhanced and increased communication can happen with families through the working relationship with CST members and parents. The establishment of a Special Education PTA (SEPTSA) and Special Services newsletters are encouraged.
- **The Referral/Placement Process:** The district is encouraged to continue to explore interventions and options in general education settings and in the Intervention & Referral Services (I & RS) process to help struggling learners outside of special education programming.
- **Program Offerings/Continuum of Services/Curriculum:** The district is encouraged to expand in-district programs to meet the needs of various student disabilities, some of which will be implemented for the Fall of 2012. In addition, suggestions related to more clearly defining program criteria as well as suggestions related to enhancing experiences in existing programs were made.
- **Staff Roles and Relationships:** The district is encouraged to enhance the development, facilitation, and utilization of Instructional Assistants. Professional Development directly related to the various Child Study Team disciplines was also suggested.
- **Consistency and Articulation between Schools:** An overarching theme encouraging vertical and horizontal articulation about programming and implementation of varied special education services was suggested.
- **Curriculum:** The regular revision of curriculums for all self-contained programs is encouraged. In addition, the availability of technology resources should be inventoried by building. Social Skills curriculums should continue to be developed.
- **Instruction:** The district is encouraged to continue to explore differentiation, the writing of measureable goals and objectives, and expand electives at the secondary level to meet the needs of students with varied abilities.
- **Assessment and Performance:** Continued professional development to explore topics related to assessment practices for both CST and teachers is encouraged. In addition, dedicating time to review of data to enhance instructional practices is encouraged.

- Resources: While teaching resources were reported to be abundant in most cases, suggestions related to additional literature and math materials for students performing far below grade level were made. In addition, the resource of time for continued articulation was encouraged.
- Professional Development: Specific themes for professional development were suggested, including training for Instructional Assistants and General Education personnel in areas related to student disabilities.
- Special Education Code NJAC 6A:14 (New/Expanded Programs): Program expansion to encourage more programming for students within the district was encouraged. In addition, a review of ethnic disproportionality in special education is underway.

Several of the recommended themes and topics listed above have already begun to be implemented. Other areas of growth will continue to be developed over the next three years. The recommendations, in their entirety, have been organized into the attached chart which delineates the anticipated timeline for their completion and who is responsible for ensuring the implementation of the recommendations.

**Helen Keller On Unity:**

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.