Lake Oswego School District
Evaluation of Special Education Services:
Final Report

Submitted by the
Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative
Education Development Center
October, 2018
Section A: Introduction

In spring 2018, Lake Oswego School District (LOSD) contracted with the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative (the Collaborative) at Education Development Center (EDC) to conduct a comprehensive review of programs and services offered by the school district to students with disabilities. The district asked for the review because they want to have information and recommendations to improve special education services. It is our hope that these observations and recommendations will enable the district to strategically move to the highest level of service when supporting their students with disabilities.¹

Lake Oswego School District
Lake Oswego is a small city located in the state of Oregon, primarily in Clackamas County and approximately 8 miles south of Portland. Lake Oswego School District enrolls approximately 7,084 students. Of those, 9.6% receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The racial makeup of the student population in Lake Oswego School District is 75% White, 6% Latino/Latina, 7% Multiracial, 10% Asian, 2% Other (Black/African American, Pacific Islander, American Indian). Students receiving free or reduced lunch comprise 8.3% of the population.

Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative
The Collaborative, which is housed at EDC, is a national network of 100 school districts committed to improving outcomes for students with disabilities and other culturally and linguistically diverse learners. In addition to over 20 years of experience in providing leadership development and networking opportunities to its membership of special and general education administrators, the Collaborative has organized and delivered technical assistance to more than 50 local education agencies and state departments of education. The Collaborative approaches its work as a “critical friend” by asking probing questions, examining data through multiple lenses, and offering concrete recommendations with a full appreciation of what is already in place and working well. The goal of this technical assistance work is to assist education agencies in their efforts to improve outcomes and opportunities for students with disabilities and other culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

The Collaborative’s understanding of special education stems from the IDEA, which states that special education services are to provide children with disabilities a “free and appropriate public education” in the “least restrictive environment” to prepare them for “further education, employment and independent living.” In addition, the IDEA “ensure(s) that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected.” Dr. Thomas Hehir, responsible for the most sweeping updates of IDEA in 1997 has stated, and we affirm, that special education is meant to minimize the impact of disability and maximize the opportunities for children with disabilities to participate in general education in their local community (Hehir, 2005). Further, as the law is clear that students should remain in the educational environment they would be in if they did not have a disability, and removal from this environment must be justified, we work with the assumption that “special education is a service, not a place.” In response to the school

¹ For a list and description of Collaborative team members, see Appendix A.
district’s request for a program and service delivery review, the Collaborative organized a team of experienced educational leaders to identify organizational, programmatic, policy, procedural, resource allocation, and service delivery improvements that the district might implement to enhance student outcomes, address gaps in achievement for students with disabilities, and conform to standards of contemporary best practice.

**Methodology**
To conduct this study, we collected district, state, and national data; examined district documentation; interviewed approximately 75 Central Office and school level staff and families; and visited all 10 schools. We also communicated with staff and families via email. We collected and analyzed our data during the summer of 2018. While our interviews and focus groups occurred during the spring of 2018, the quantitative data we collected represented the 2016-2017 school year. As such, the data represented a snapshot of special education at that time.

**Organization of Report**
We have organized this report to move from general education to special education as it is our belief that because special education is a service, the stronger the district’s general education practices, the stronger the district’s special education practices. We want those reading this report to focus first on general education. Further, districts are required to support all students in meeting their academic standards and in building systems of tiered support. The first tier lays the foundation for the second and third tiers and, therefore, must not only be strong but purposeful in including students with disabilities.

**Acknowledgements**
The Collaborative Team recognizes the contributions of Michael Musick, Superintendent; Heather Beck, former Superintendent; Joe Morelock, former Assistant Superintendent for Academics and Student Programs; Patrick Tomblin, Executive Director of Special Services, and all of the staff and families in LOSD. All of the LOSD families and staff we spoke with were open to this study. They were engaged and provided much of the information on which this report is based. Many seemed encouraged that this review could improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The families we spoke to were extremely passionate and concerned and cared not only about their own children, but about the LOSD.

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2 For a list of interviewee roles, see Appendix B.
Section B: Strengths of the System

Equity is a named focus by district level leadership and is outlined in the district’s strategic plan.

It was clear from the moment we entered Central Office and the LOSD schools that equity was a focus for the district. There were posters and student work on the walls supporting equity for all students and staff. The district’s strategic plan was also heavily focused on equitable practices. The district included a plan for professional development to continue this work and to build a culture that is rooted in “all means all.” The current mission of the district also states that the LOSD strives to be “an inclusive and safe learning community with challenging opportunities that develop lifelong learners and contributing world citizens.” We commend the LOSD for their hard work and commitment for creating a culture that includes all.

Lake Oswego School District is focused on increasing graduation rates with a plan that targets and addresses students’ attendance, behavior, and course performance (ABCs).

LOSD has an articulated plan to increase graduation rates by addressing the areas of attendance, behavior, and course performance with both disaggregated data and targeted strategic actions. This focus supports their “all means all” commitment in that a true improvement in graduation rates will mean paying attention to typically marginalized subgroups, including students with disabilities.

Lake Oswego teachers are retained by the district making the process of systematizing and deepening work easier to attain.

Interviews with all professional groups reflected high teacher commitment to the school district as evidenced by the very low rate of turnover. When an instructional team is stable, leadership can spend time making steady forward progress in identified initiative areas without having to spend valuable resources of time, money, and effort annually bringing staff new to the district up to speed. Time is not lost in systematization efforts.

Lake Oswego building level administrative teams appear committed to ALL students in their schools.

Interviews with building level administrators indicated strong support for this review and an eagerness to dig into resulting recommendations. All leaders communicated the belief that ALL did, in fact, mean ALL.

Lake Oswego has a districtwide focus on Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Response to Intervention (RTI) supports at all levels.

The Central Office team is extremely knowledgeable about PLCs and RTI and how it impacts student achievement and reduces inappropriate referrals to special education. There has been considerable effort in developing both PLCs and RTI models at all schools in the district and supporting this process through quality professional development. Per their last Strategic Plan
Updates and Evidence from 2016-17, over the last two years more than 200 staff have attended a PLC or RTI conference. Furthermore, the district collects data on both of these initiatives.
Section C: Observations and Recommendations

Observation 1. Vision: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Vision, diversity, equity, and inclusion are a fundamental focus for the district and a major component of the district’s strategic plan; however, it is unclear where the Special Education Department falls in this critical work.

Based on our conversations with staff and visits to schools, it was clear the district places a strong emphasis on equity and diversity. This was evidenced in the language staff used when discussing the inclusion of all students and “all means all” posters in every building we visited, including the Central Office. This work supported the LOSD’s vision for equitable practices and a diverse student population that felt safe and welcome. This was further evidenced in the district’s strategic plan, which included board metrics that stated:

1. The board will adopt a diversity, equity, and inclusion policy that supports the work of and aligns with the Leadership Project, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee, and district and school-based cultural and equity initiatives by March 2018.
2. The board will regularly engage the community in diversity, equity and inclusion discussions in order to receive guidance and feedback in order to support the superintendent and any staff’s initiatives.3

We also discovered the district had created a new position, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. This position was created to develop and support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion teams in the schools, and conduct curriculum reviews to uncover any bias that may be apparent in the materials the staff are using.

The strategic plan specifically highlighted two focus areas and seven priority areas, as follows:

Focus areas:

1. Every family, student and staff member feels welcomed and safe at our schools.
2. Diversity is celebrated, all are included, and decisions are only made using an equity lens.

Priority areas:

1. Community understanding and articulation of standards, goals, and outcomes for all students.
2. Develop/foster community involvement with a welcoming, diversity-aware focus for all students.
3. Attract and retain the best teachers and staff by providing teacher mentoring, coaching, training, and opportunities for professional growth.
4. Student leaders are empowered to affect positive school culture.
5. Schools and district develop a systemic culture of empathy using an equity lens and diversity-aware posture.
6. All students develop meaningful and identifiable adult and peer connections.
7. Ensure that all families have access to district communications.

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We commend the LOSD in making such strong efforts to shift the culture of the district to one that honors and encourages diversity and inclusion. It was clear from our work this was a fundamental area of focus for the entire district. However, when we looked at this through the lens of special education, we did not find evidence the Special Education Department’s work was aligned with the district’s current initiatives. This first became apparent in our conversations with staff. Many staff working in special education felt they worked in isolation, and that there was a clear divide between special education and general education. We were also informed that there was no strategic plan for special education or the development of inclusive practices that was aligned to the overall district plan. Additionally, the Special Education Department had developed a mission, but it was not one that was regularly discussed or used to drive the work of the department.

One area of concern that may have led to this division was that the Director of Special Education no longer sat on the Cabinet-level team. This creates a further disconnect from the Central Office team given the lack of voice the Special Education Department has in the Director’s absence from the team. It seemed there were specific initiatives discussed and decided at the Cabinet level that the Special Education Department was informed of after the fact. This created challenges in communication channels coming from Central Office. It is important the Special Education Department collaborates as an integral part of the Central Office leadership team to ensure all departments are working together to make decisions that serve the best interest of all student populations. Collaborative structures and practices are key for all departments to ensure alignment with the LOSD’s strategic plan. Finally, the fact that the offices for the Special Education Department are currently housed in a separate part of town from where the other Central Office staff reside symbolically represents that the Special Education Department operates in a silo. This division was noted at both the Central Office and building levels, with some special education teachers also believing they worked separately from the general education staff, as opposed to collaboratively.

Recommendation 1: Special Education must go through a process to create a strategic plan focused on the educational outcomes of students with disabilities that is aligned to the district’s overarching focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

We recommend the Special Education Department develop a strategic plan aligned to the district vision that supports the district’s strategic planning. Such a plan should be developed with both short- and long-term goals as well as action steps to meet the goals.

This work should not be done in isolation. It should be undertaken in collaboration with stakeholders throughout the district, particularly those focused on teaching and learning. This work will support all stakeholders in developing a common understanding of what special education should look like in LOSD and how everyone plans to achieve a common purpose and priority areas. A strategic plan lays the road map and informs the community about the direction the Special Education Department is taking, as well as, when and what data will be collected as evidence that the department is meeting its priority areas. Developing a mission and strategic plan aligned to the current strategic plan can be a healthy experience for an educational system as a whole. The process of developing a mission aligned to a strategic plan allows individuals and
groups to discover and build upon their strengths while correcting their areas of challenge (Calder, 2002).

As part of this work, the district must consider what it means to teach ALL students and what beliefs educators bring to the table when doing this critical work. This will help frame a discussion and a plan to put “all means all” into actionable priority steps for the Special Education Department.

To further expand on this work, the district might consider looking into Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity concepts, which support districts in tackling this work from a systems approach. This model is based on four areas, called cornerstones, and supports districts in eliminating inequities in school systems. The four cornerstones are as follows:

1. Focus on Equity
2. Align Staff and Students
3. Transform Teaching and Learning
4. Leverage Funding and Policy

We discuss this framework in detail in Observation 5.

If interested, the district might have schools conduct their own self-assessments to better know their individual areas for improvement. Examples of such assessments include the ASCD School Improvement Tool, the North Dakota Special Education Improvement Planning Guide and the North Carolina Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

Observation 2. Response to Intervention: Systems

Lake Oswego School District has implemented Response to Intervention (RTI) as a framework to reach their vision; however, not all systems are aligned, and special education is not part of the RTI model. In addition, the RTI framework is focused on academics and does not include social-emotional learning.

Based on document reviews and discussions with staff, it was clear the district places a strong emphasis on Response to Intervention (RTI). District level staff have an understanding of how to create strong RTI systems that are tiered to meet the individual needs of students; however, they are not sure how to incorporate special education services. Additionally, when we broke this down further to the building-level, there was a noticeable difference in each school’s approach to RTI, the systems used, and the language used by staff in each individual building. There also appeared to be a disconnect and a lack of understanding for the staff roles created to support this work. Finally, the RTI model addresses academics, which is one half of the framework; it does not address social-emotional learning, which completes the RTI framework.

LOSD is messaging RTI appropriately as a set of systems and supports for all students, and any student can receive interventions found in all three tiers of the RTI framework, whether or not they are receiving special education services. In LOSD, no level of intervention is synonymous with special education. Still, while the district has operationalized RTI as a model for all students, special education services do not appear to be incorporated in the RTI model. Supports
and services provided to staff and to students are different for special education and for RTI; they are not working in concert with each other. In fact, we found no evidence that the Supported Education Specialists on the special education team worked collaboratively with any of the staff responsible for RTI interventions. We did look at who was responsible for supporting the district’s RTI process.

Over the last few years, the district created the position of RTI Coordinator to support RTI systems at each level: elementary school, middle school, and high school. The RTI Coordinators were split among buildings, and therefore supported multiple schools. The goal of the RTI Coordinator is to reduce the number of students who lack the grade-level skills to be on-track and career and college ready, exhibit low academic growth, demonstrate poor academic performance, and have not hit the benchmarks that ultimately lead to high school graduation. The role of the RTI Coordinator is to partner with staff at the building level (e.g., counselors, Literacy Specialist, Title I Coordinator, and Principal) to support programming for students in tiers 1, 2, and 3. Additionally, RTI Coordinators are tasked with supporting teachers in the PLC process and modeling lessons for teachers.

In addition to RTI Coordinators, the district also created a Literacy Specialist position to support grades K–5. The Literacy Specialist is responsible for providing targeted direct instruction to enable students to develop grade-level literacy skills. This includes implementing a comprehensive literacy program through coaching, supporting, and guiding teachers in best practices for literacy instruction. The Literacy Specialist was also tasked to work with building administration and teachers to collect, analyze, interpret, and use data to guide instructional decisions. It was unclear how often the RTI Coordinators and Literacy Specialist collaborated to determine best practices and support at the building level. We also noted from the LOSD Strategic Plan Updates and Evidence 2016-17, that the district created a literacy cohort of 25 teachers from the elementary school, middle school, and high school. These teachers participated in a literacy program sponsored by Portland State University that was designed to help teachers understand the complexities of literacy development and lead into work with the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to implement dyslexia supports for students. At this time, it was unclear if this group—RTI Coordinators, Literacy Specialist, and teachers—had the chance to work together to share best practices in literacy to support all staff in the district. Furthermore, when we consider the lack of integration of the Learning Support Specialists, we see room for a more collaborative approach of providing intervention supports and services to students, teachers, and schools.

As referenced earlier and in our discussions with staff, it also became evident that the RTI systems looked different in each building. It appeared the RTI Coordinators acted in different capacities depending on which building they were working in. In some schools, RTI Coordinators were providing direct instruction to students and pulling small groups, while in other buildings, they were supporting discipline or testing accommodations for students. This created inconsistencies in the roles and responsibilities of the RTI coordinators and appeared to pull them away from completing all of their job responsibilities. It was also our understanding that part of the role of the RTI Coordinators was to support PLCs. The PLC model was functioning appropriately in some schools, while in others, it was hard to tell if the PLC model was producing any meaningful benefit for students and staff. This was evident as the district did
not appear to have universal screeners or progress monitoring tools that were used across buildings with fidelity. These were responsibilities that could be given to the RTI Coordinators if their time was used appropriately in the buildings they supported. It did not seem there was a consistent use of RTI Coordinators across all schools.

One of the major challenges academic support staff faced was the level of academic freedom teachers were given, which meant curricula and lesson plans could vary widely from building to building. This would cause further issues for RTI Coordinators that are tasked with supporting the articulation of standards, goals, and outcomes for all. While academic freedom is something to be valued, we were told the district was in the process of identifying priority standards to create stronger curricular alignment, both horizontally and vertically, that would allow these priority standards to be the focus. This would still honor academic freedom for teachers, but they would all teach within priority standards and track student mastery in these areas. As this work evolves the district will be able to create universal screeners and progress monitoring tools that will support interventions at all three tiers. It would also ensure data are collected in a manner that would guide adjustments to instructional practice, which in one of the fundamental tasks of a PLC. Without these systems in place, it is challenging for the RTI Coordinators to support the work at the building level and support progress in student achievement. If data are not collected around core instruction and interventions, students may be referred for special education supports and services at higher rates than necessary.

Lastly, it was clear from our discussions with staff that the RTI model was heavily focused on academics and increasing student achievement. However, the RTI lacked any focus on social-emotional learning, which is a critical component to a strong RTI system. Students may struggle academically if they are struggling socially and emotionally. Many staff felt this was an underlying issue for students, and one that was either untouched or ignored. There were several staff that felt students would benefit from having additional social-emotional supports and that this would naturally lead to greater student achievement for some. It was also noted that Oregon, as a state, lacked strong mental health supports, which left schools struggling to find resources and provide the needed interventions students would benefit from. This is further evidence of the benefit to including social-emotional learning in the district’s RTI model.

**Recommendation 2: The LOSD should closely examine the alignment between RTI and special education services and staff and collaboratively develop protocols and disseminate best practices aligned with all three tiers, both for academics and social-emotional learning.**

While the district is focused on the term *Response to Intervention*, current research and literature is more focused on the term *Multi-tiered System of Supports* (MTSS). The beneficial use of an MTSS framework is that it draws from the strong research base that highlights both RTI and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS). An MTSS framework implemented with fidelity integrates assessment and intervention in a schoolwide, multi-tiered prevention system to

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4 Commonly, the term *multi-tiered system of supports* (MTSS) is used to refer to a framework that supports academic achievement and positive behavior. The term is used in the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
“maximize student achievement and reduce problem behaviors.” That said, MTSS is a relatively new term that when defined accurately can be described as the next generation of RTI. Therefore, when we refer to RTI and MTSS in this report, we are referring to a similar framework.

The MTSS framework suggests that the more complex the learner is, the more intensive support they need, both in academics and in the social-emotional realm, and that the supports should be thought of in tiers. MTSS says all students must have high-quality core instruction (Tier 1). There will be a small group of students who need more support, and they might receive skill building in a small group to meet grade-level standards (Tier 2). After high-quality instructional and supplemental supports have been tried, there will be a smaller group of students who need even more intensive supplemental supports (Tier 3). These multi-tiered supports should be offered to all students for all academic subjects and social-emotional supports.

The MTSS framework relies on high-quality general education instruction, which is aligned to the standards, whether they are Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or other state learning standards, and it is differentiated to provide all students with a meaningful opportunity to learn. MTSS builds on the standards to provide a framework, a set of critical interventions, and additional time to support teaching and learning at differing levels of intensity, depending on the needs of the student. In this way, the standards articulate the “what” in teaching, and MTSS provides a framework for “how and when” to provide it. As described by the Council of the Great City Schools:

In short, MTSS employs a problem-solving process that helps match instructional resources and focus to educational needs; makes the instructional adjustments necessary for continued improvement in both student academic performance and students’ rate of progress; and assesses the effectiveness of instruction/interventions on student outcomes. MTSS is also designed to be preventive in nature because it uses a variety of early warning signs to ensure educators can work to accelerate student progress before it is too late. Furthermore, MTSS provides an earlier and more appropriate identification of students who are not on track academically and allows differentiated instruction and intervention as soon as a need is identified. So, students do not have to exhibit significant academic failure or behavioral difficulties before they receive support.

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Districts use the MTSS framework to ensure (1) the development of core curriculum and tiered supports for all students; (2) that students identified as needing special education services have ample opportunities to receive evidence-based instruction and interventions in reading, math, and social-emotional supports; and (3) their disability identification (as needing special education services) is not based on a lack of such opportunities. In this way, districts are also better able to mitigate any disproportionality in racial/ethnic disability identifications due to a lack of instruction.

We recommend LOSD examine the current RTI/MTSS model at each school to ensure it is implemented with fidelity. We encourage the district to examine and support alignment across all areas. This includes alignment of staff (e.g., RTI Coordinators, Literacy Specialists, Instructional Specialists, and Supported Education Specialists); alignment of curriculum and intervention materials (e.g., core, intervention, special education supports); and alignment in language (e.g., RTI system with common definition and protocols). LOSD already has a strong foundation for this work; however, the district leadership team must closely examine these areas to ensure alignment, as research shows the use of RTI/MTSS to support intensive interventions for all students leads to higher achievement for students with IEPs.  

In addition to ensuring alignment across all areas with RTI/MTSS, we encourage the district to start designing instruction based on the principles of universal design for learning (UDL). When we asked staff if they knew about UDL, only a handful of staff were aware of this evidence-based framework. UDL is a framework for all teachers, not only special education teachers, to reach all students and develop inclusive best practices. As shown in Exhibit 1, UDL is a framework that can be used to develop high-quality, flexible learning environments that address the needs of all students and help all students achieve high standards. UDL helps educators by suggesting flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that empower them to address student variability while maintaining high-achievement standards for all students through multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement.

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8 See, for example, research published by the RTI Action Network, retrieved at http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/research, and by the Center on Response to Intervention at American Institutes for Research, retrieved at http://www.rti4success.org/search?keywords=research

9 The district might look to the Center on Response to Intervention, Response to Intervention – Guide for New York State School Districts, as well as other states and districts leading this effort.

We want to be clear that UDL is not a special education initiative—it is an instructional framework. We strongly recommend that general and special education teachers base their instructional practices on the UDL framework so that instruction is designed to meet the needs of ALL learners. We recommend that UDL be an integral part of the districtwide RTI/MTSS plan.

In summary, we recommend that the district continues to build their RTI/MTSS model with a focus on establishing capacity to support all learners both academically and with social emotional learning. This should include a consistent written structure and protocols to guide implementation. The RTI/MTSS plan that includes both academic and social-emotional instruction should be (1) inclusive of all grade levels and students of all abilities, including students with disabilities, and (2) address culturally appropriate instruction. We also suggest that the district develop a task force of Central Office leaders, building administration, general education teachers, special education teachers, school psychologist, and counselors to collaborate across departments to develop a consistent MTSS process. This will allow for valuable feedback and discussion around the current process and how all stakeholders can adapt the RTI/MTSS model to support their work at the building level. The reason we recommend a task force approach is because of the current belief that special education and MTSS need to be completely separate. Without having building leaders and staff at the table to develop this process, we believe the mindset of what is special education will continue and building-based staff will not fully understand how to provide tiered interventions for students with and without disabilities.
We discuss the skills of accessing the general education curriculum and specially designed instruction that special education must bring to this work in Observation 5.

Observation 3. Students with Disabilities: Demographics

*While overarching classification rates are appropriate, there are considerations when rates are disaggregated by socioeconomic status, disability classification, race/ethnicity, and gender.*

In this observation, we provide demographic information pertaining to percentages of students with disabilities who receive special education services under IDEA. Data are summarized and compared to the state and nation as they relate to overall percentages and disaggregated by grade span, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), and disability categories. We disaggregate data to look at smaller units of analysis in order to reveal patterns that may be masked by the larger aggregate data.

**Percentage of Students with Disabilities**

According to state data from the Oregon Department of Education, as shown in Exhibit 2, students with disabilities comprise approximately 11% of all students in LOSD. This is a lower percentage than the national percentage of 13% students with disabilities. While there is no definitive percentage of students with disabilities that would be considered accurate, in our opinion, a percentage slightly below the national average is acceptable.

![Exhibit 2: Percentage of Students with Disabilities - LOSD, State, and Federal](image)

Similarly, when comparing LOSD’s percentage of students with disabilities with those of the three districts LOSD uses as comparison districts, Exhibit 3 shows that LOSD has higher percentages of students with disabilities (11%) than Mercer Island, WA (9.2%), Bellevue, WA (8.7%) and Palo Alto, CA (8.6%), again confirming that LOSD’s percentage is acceptable.
Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Grade Span
We start disaggregating our data by examining data by grade span in order to see if there are any patterns that might need to be addressed in elementary, middle, or high school. As shown in Exhibit 4, proportionally, there are more students with disabilities at the elementary school level (12%) than at the middle school level (10%) and at the high school level (9%). This general trend is appropriate. Early interventions produce substantial gains so there should be more services provided in the elementary grades, and when a student no longer requires special education supports, they should exit from their special education services, especially in the later grades. In a later section, when we examine disability category, these grade span data are further disaggregated.

Exhibit 4: Students with Disabilities by Grade Span

11% 9% 9% 9%
Lake Oswego Mercer Island, WA Bellvue, WA Palo Alto, CA

Percentage of Students with Disabilities – LOSD and Comparable Districts

Exhibit 3: Percentage of Students with Disabilities – LOSD and Comparable Districts

Comparison district research found at the following sites:
Bellevue, WA: http://www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/Data/Childcount-Placement.aspx
Mercer Island, WA: http://www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/Data/Childcount-Placement.aspx

12 Grade levels are defined as: Elementary – kindergarten through 5th grade; middle – 6th grade through 8th grade; high – 9th grade through 12th grade.
Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Gender
Exhibit 5 shows the percentage of students with disabilities disaggregated by gender. As is common across the nation, there are more boys classified with a disability than there are girls. No matter that this is a common occurrence, and putting aside questions related to the gender of students classified with autism, research does not confirm that there should be more boys than girls classified with a disability.

Exhibit 5: Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Gender

Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Race and Ethnicity
We next disaggregated the percentage of students with disabilities by race and ethnicity. Here, we are looking for any disproportionate representation of a group of students by race or ethnicity. First, we examine the race and ethnicity breakdown of all students with disabilities. As shown in Exhibit 6, students with disabilities make up 11% of the district overall. We see a higher percent of students that identify as Black or Hispanic of students with disabilities than the district average, while the percent of Asian students with disabilities is lower than average. Among students with disabilities, roughly 1 in 5 Black students have a disability, and 1 in 20 Asian students have a disability.

Exhibit 6: Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Race and Ethnicity

Note: Pacific Islander and American Indian values suppressed due to low numbers.

Next, we examine if the differences among students with disabilities in each race/ethnicity category is significant. If the difference is statistically significant this means that the difference can’t be attributed to chance. In other words, when the difference is statistically significant it means that the difference is great enough that we can say a student is more (or less) likely to
have a disability based on the race/ethnicity category with which he/she identifies. As shown in Exhibit 7, the differences among Asian and Hispanic students is statically significant, meaning Hispanic students are more likely to have a disability, and Asian students are less likely to have a disability.\textsuperscript{13} While the total number of Hispanic students in the district is low (475), representing 7\% of all students, they represent 10\% of students with disabilities in the district. As research and the law have made clear,\textsuperscript{14} there is no reason to assume that any one racial or ethnic group is more disabled than another group. However, this difference can be attributed to the fact that students who receive free and reduced price lunch in Lake Oswego are more likely to be classified as having a disability, and among Hispanic students in LOSD, 1 in 5 students receives free and reduced price lunch (compared to 1 out of 13 students receiving free and reduced priced lunch districtwide).\textsuperscript{15}

Interestingly, LOSD has conducted research on their own data related to disproportionality and have found that in one year, half of the students of color who were classified with a disability came to LOSD from another district and were not evaluated through LOSD and if they included only the number of students identified within the district, the state would not have identified them as disproportionate.

Exhibit 7: Comparison of Students with Disabilities by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>SWD</th>
<th>Without</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian*</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic*</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant difference

Note: Black, Pacific Islander, and American Indian values suppressed due to low numbers (<5%).

\textsuperscript{13} Black students are not included here because they represent less than 5\% of the total student population, and there is suppressed.

\textsuperscript{14} In fact, to address the issue of disproportionate representation, IDEA requires districts to: (ii) Must identify and address the factors contributing to the significant disproportionality, which may include, among other identified factors, a lack of access to scientifically based instruction; economic, cultural, or linguistic barriers to appropriate identification or placement in particular educational settings; inappropriate use of disciplinary removals; lack of access to appropriate diagnostic screenings; differences in academic achievement levels; and policies, practices, or procedures that contribute to the significant disproportionality. (IDEA, 34 CFR 300.646, Disproportionality).

Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Socioeconomic Status

We looked next at disability classification rates by students’ economic status. As shown in Exhibit 8, students with disabilities disproportionately qualify for free or reduced price lunch as compared to their peers. This suggests that students in LOSD whose socioeconomic status is lower are more likely to be classified with a disability than those whose socioeconomic status is higher. While poverty is known to have a small effect on disability, the differences are minimal and should be found across the spectrum of disability classifications. Poverty does not, for example, have a significant effect on whether a student has a learning disability rather than autism.\(^\text{16}\)

Exhibit 8: Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Socioeconomic Status

\(^{16}\) In fact, if poverty were a significant cause of disproportionate representation, than we should see disproportionate representation in all disability categories, whereas disproportion exists in the subjective categories of disability classification, such as an emotional disturbance or intellectual disability, where there is a great deal of room for interpretation, rather than in those disability categories that are more objective, such as blindness or deafness, where we do not see significant disproportionality.
Percentage of Students by Disability Category

We next examined students with disabilities in LOSD by disability classifications. As shown in Exhibits 9a and 9b, the largest category of exceptionality among students with disabilities is other health impairments (27%), followed by communication disorders (23%), specific learning disabilities (21%), autism spectrum disorder (16%), emotional disturbance (9%), intellectual disability (2%), hearing impairment (1%), orthopedic impairment (1%), and traumatic brain injury (0%).

Exhibit 9a: Percentage of Students by Disability Category - Chart

Exhibit 9b: Percentage of Students by Disability Category - Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Impairments</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Disorder</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Disturbance</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Disability</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedic Impairment</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic Brain Injury</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing these data with the state of Oregon and the nation, Exhibits 10a and 10b shows that LOSD has a higher occurrence of students classified with other health impairments (OHI) than the state and nation (respectively 27%, 17%, 15%). Why are a larger percentage of students in LOSD classified with OHI? As a student diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) would be included in OHI, it would be important to examine the number of students classified with ADHD, and specifically when they were diagnosed (which will be seen below). Also what are the special education services required for a student with ADHD and could that student’s needs be met with the accommodations of a 504 Plan? Also, LOSD has a higher percentage of students classified with autism spectrum disorder (respectively 16%, 12%, 9%).
and a lower percentages of students classified with specific learning disabilities (respectively 21%, 35%, 39%). Why is there a higher percentage of students classified with ASD and a smaller percentage classified with a specific learning disability? While there is no one reason, an explanation for the difference in students classified with specific learning disabilities and those classified with other health impairments is that specific learning disabilities and ADHD often coexist, so the district might be preferencing OHI when listing first disability category.\textsuperscript{17} Another explanation may be a lack of clarity in definitions and criteria. While this data does not provide explanations for such differences, it does lead to questions.

\textbf{Exhibit 10a: Exceptionality Comparison: District,\textsuperscript{18} State,\textsuperscript{19} and National\textsuperscript{20} - Chart}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & LOSD & State & National \\
\hline
Other Health Impairments & 27% & 17% & 15% \\
Communication Disorder & 23% & 22% & 17% \\
Specific Learning Disability & 35% & 39% & \\
Autism Spectrum Disorder & 16% & 12% & 9% \\
Emotional Disturbance & 9% & 6% & 6% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

Note: Intellectual disability, hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, and traumatic brain injury were suppressed from this chart due to low numbers (<5%).

\textsuperscript{18} Using data file submitted from district for 2016-2017
Exhibit 10b: Exceptionality Comparison: District, State, and National - Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>LOSD</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Impairments</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Disorder</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Disturbance</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Disability</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedic Impairment</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic Brain Injury</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of Students by Disability Category and Grade Span
We further disaggregated the percent of students with disabilities by disability category and grade span. Starting with those classified as OHI, as shown in Exhibits 11a and 11b, we see an increase from elementary school (18%) to middle school (35%) to high school (40%). While the categories within OHI include a range of conditions, ADHD is one of the more common categories. There is a growing awareness that in upper middle class school districts, there is an overrepresentation of students classified with ADHD for various reasons, including the availability of testing accommodations. Identifying students with ADHD often leads to these students being provided special accommodations throughout the school day, and on state standardized tests, students with ADHD are covered under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. These accommodations can be provided with or without an IEP.

Examining the category of communication disorders, we see a notable decrease from elementary school (42%) to middle school (11%) to high school (5%). Since many speech/language

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21 Using data file submitted from district for 2016-2017
24 According to IDEA, an umbrella term, “other health impairment” (OHI) encompasses a range of conditions. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) names several such disorders in OHI’s official definition: “having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that— (a) is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis [a kidney disorder], rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and (b) adversely affects a child's educational performance.”
impairments are tackled in younger students, and speech and language services are not an effective service for many older students, this decrease is very appropriate.

Looking at students classified with a specific learning disability, we see a higher percentage of students in the middle grades (27%) than in the elementary (19%) or high school (25%) grades. When examining data on specific learning disabilities, it is important to understand that research suggests that approximately half of all students classified with a learning disability have reading as their greatest area of deficit, so these data for LOSD raise questions about literacy instruction and the classification process at LOSD.

Looking in depth at the process for determining a special learning disability, in 2001, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs convened a summit to bring together key researchers and representatives from professional groups to find common ground around identification of specific learning disabilities. The consensus was that the traditional ability-achievement discrepancy was neither necessary nor sufficient. Recommendations for an alternative model of identification included provisions for considering: 1) low achievement; 2) insufficient response to effective, research-based interventions; and 3) exclusionary factors such as other impairments, limited English proficiency, and lack of opportunity to learn.

This evolution of research resulted in changes in the evaluation requirements for specific learning disabilities found in the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and 2006 federal regulations (34 CFR § 300) for implementing IDEA 2004. The most significant change was that states could no longer require districts to use the significant discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement as the model of to classify a student with a specific learning disability and concurrently, states must permit the use of a process based on the student’s response to scientific-research or evidence-based intervention, or response to intervention.

Many states are moving towards the response to intervention approach. To get a better sense of this work, we refer the district to a 2016 survey evaluating the use of RTI in state policies, as well as state policies from the Iowa Department of Education (supporting RTI), the

28 Here are several resources supporting this work:
30 State of Iowa Criteria for determination of Specific Learning Disabilities
Kentucky Department of Education (supporting RTI and discrepancy),\textsuperscript{31} and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction\textsuperscript{32} (supporting RTI).

Looking at students classified with autism spectrum disorder, we see higher classification rates in high school (20\%) than in the elementary school (14\%) or middle school (14\%). Since, autism does not start when a child enters high school, the fact that there is a higher percentage of students classified with autism in high school raises questions. The answer might be that the group is larger there because students with more significant disabilities might stay in school until they are 21 years old.

Finally, we examine students classified with emotional disturbance, and we find that there is a higher percentage of students in middle school (14\%) than in high school (10\%) or elementary school (7\%). There is no research to suggest that an emotional disturbance occurs more for middle schoolers than others, so this data raises questions.

\textbf{Exhibit 11a: Exceptionality by Grade Span - Chart}

\textit{Note: Intellectual disability, hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, and traumatic brain injury were suppressed from this chart due to low numbers (<5\%).}

\textsuperscript{31} Kentucky Department of Education’s (See the Specific Learning Disabilities Eligibility Guidance Document)
\textsuperscript{32} Wisconsin’s Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) Rule: A Technical Guide for Determining the Eligibility of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities
Exhibit 11b: Exceptionality by Grade Span - Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disabler Category</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Impairments</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Disorder</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Disturbance</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Disability</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedic Impairment</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic Brain Injury</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentage of Students by Disability Category and Race and Ethnicity**

Exhibits 12a and 12b shows the percent of students with disabilities disaggregated by disability category and race/ethnicity. All things being equal, there should be no difference in percentages, as disability does not affect one racial or ethnic group more than another.

Examining these data by disability classification looking for outliers, we begin with OHI(s), where we see a lower percentage of Asian students (11%) and fairly consistent percentages across all other groups (Hispanic, 26%; White, 28%; multiracial and Black, 30%). When looking at communication disorders, we see higher percentages of Asian (34%) and Black (30%) students and consistently lower percentages of White (23%), Hispanic (22%), and multiracial students (20%). Looking at specific learning disabilities, we see much lower percentages of multiracial (11%) and Asian (11%) students classified than students who are White (23%), Hispanic (26%), or Black (30%). Looking at autism spectrum disorder, we see much higher percentages of Asian students classified (37%) than all other subgroups: multiracial (22%), White (15%), Hispanic (11%), and Black (0%). Finally, examining students classified with an emotional disturbance, we see higher percentages of multiracial students (17%) than all other subgroups: Hispanic (11%), Black (10%), White (9%), and Asian (6%).
Exhibit 12. Percentage of Students by Disability Category and Race/Ethnicity

**Note:** Categories of intellectual disability, hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, and traumatic brain injury, and race/ethnicity series for Pacific Islander and American Indian, were suppressed from this chart due to low numbers (<5%).

Exhibit 12b. Percentage of Students by Disability Category and Race/Ethnicity - Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Multi</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Impairments</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Disorder</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Disturbance</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exceptionalities by Socioeconomic Status**

As shown in Exhibit 13, students with a specific learning disability and OHI are more likely to be recipients of free and reduced price lunch. While poverty can affect children's health, there is no research suggesting that poverty creates more ADHD, one of the largest disabilities covered in OHI, and alternately, that poverty creates lower percentages of students with Autism, as we see in LOSD.

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33 American Indian and Pacific Islander have been excluded from race categories, and hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury have been excluded from exceptionality categories due to low numbers (less than 5 students in each case)

34 American Indian and Pacific Islander have been excluded from race categories, and hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury have been excluded from exceptionality categories due to low numbers (less than 5 students in each case)
Exhibit 13. Percent of Students with Disabilities who Receive Subsidized Lunch

Note: Categories of intellectual disability, hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, and traumatic brain injury were suppressed from this chart due to low numbers.

When examining disability classification data, if evaluation procedures are based on the most current research and up-to-date processes and are followed with fidelity, there should be minimal discrepancies between the percentages of students when disaggregated by gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Yet, as shown in this observation, there are discrepancies; specifically, a higher percentages of boys, Hispanics, and students who receive free or subsidized lunch are identified as students with a disability. In addition, LOSD has higher percentages of students classified with OHI than the state and nation.

Recommendation 3: Examine current, and update where appropriate, evaluation and classification policies and practices to assure fidelity, and track data disaggregated by socioeconomic status, disability classification, race/ethnicity, and gender.

The findings described above indicate a need for LOSD to evaluate its criteria for classifying students with disabilities, ensuring that classification criteria are up-to-date and there is fidelity of using those criteria to ensure that students who are classified as having a disability are done so appropriately and paying specific attention to classifying students who identify as Hispanic, students eligible for free or reduced lunch, and the special education classification of OHI, all with higher than expected percentages. One suggestion is that the district explore the possibility of using the RTI process for identifying students with a learning disability, which is best practice. We suggest tracking these data and taking action where appropriate.

Observation 4. Students with Disabilities: Academic Outcomes

Academic outcomes for students with disabilities are lower than for students without disabilities; however, there is a notable increase in achievement for students with disabilities, especially in ELA for girls.

In this section, we examine the academic outcomes of students with disabilities in LOSD. To do this, we examine English language arts (ELA) and Mathematics Smarter Balanced data, enrollment in higher level mathematics classes, as well as students who received failing grades in the junior high and high schools.
Smarter Balanced
Smarter Balanced is a large-scale assessment currently used by 14 states for federal accountability. As shown in Exhibit 14, districtwide ELA and math scores have stayed relatively constant for the last three years, with ELA at 84%–85% and math at 75%–76%.

Exhibit 14: Districtwide Three-Year Assessment Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015-2016</th>
<th>2016-2017</th>
<th>2017-2018</th>
<th>3-year Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA Proficiency</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Proficiency</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taking a deeper look into the ELA assessment, we see that the achievement gap between students with disabilities and those without disabilities has closed over the last three years. As Exhibit 15 shows, the difference, or gap, between students with disabilities and students without disabilities in the 2015-2016 school year was 40% (i.e., 80% proficiency for students without disabilities and 40% proficiency for students with disabilities.) The gap decreased in the 2016-2017 school year to 36%, with scores rising for both students without disabilities (from 80% to 88% proficiency) and those with disabilities (from 40% to 52% proficiency). The gap decreased again in the 2017-2018 school year to 33%, with scores staying the same for students without disabilities (88% proficiency) and rising for students with disabilities (from 52% to 55% proficiency).

Exhibit 15. ELA Proficiencies: Students with Disabilities

Disaggregating these data by gender, we see that the academic achievement with the ELA Smarter Balanced increased and the achievement gap decreased steadily for girls, but not so for boys. As shown in Exhibit 16, ELA achievement increased for girls with disabilities from 32% in 2015-2016 to 55% in 2016-2017 to 61% in 2017-2018, while the achievement gap decreased by 17% (47% to 30%) during that same time period.
Exhibit 16. Female Students ELA Proficiencies

Exhibit 17 shows that for boys with disabilities, the ELA Smarter Balanced increased and the achievement gap decreased, but not at a steady rate. ELA achievement increased for boys with disabilities from 45% in 2015-2016 to 51% in both 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, and the achievement gap decreased from 5% (39% to 34%) during that time period.

Exhibit 17. Male Students ELA Proficiencies

As shown in Exhibit 18, when disaggregating ELA data by grade span, we can see that in the elementary grades, there was an overall 5% decrease in the achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities between 2015-2016 (33%) and 2017-2018 (28%); however, there was a greater decrease of 10% between 2015-2016 (33%) and 2016-2017 (23%).
As shown in Exhibit 19, when disaggregating ELA data in the middle grades, there was a steady and greater overall decrease in the achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities: 16% between 2015-2016 (53%) and 2017-2018 (37%).

And as shown in Exhibit 20, when disaggregating ELA data for high school, there was an overall 4% decrease in the achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities between 2015-2016 (43%) and 2017-2018 (39%). However, there was a greater decrease of 7% between 2015-2015 (43%) and 2016-2017 (36%).
In summary, for the Smarter Balanced ELA assessment, there was a decrease in the achievement gap for students with disabilities between 2015-2016 and 2017-2018, with the greatest gains shown for girls with disabilities and students in the middle grades.

Moving to examine Smarter Balanced data on the Math assessment, we see similar, yet not as notable, progress as with the ELA assessment. As Exhibit 21 shows, the difference, or gap, between students with disabilities and students without disabilities in the 2015-2016 school year was 40% (80% proficiency for students without disabilities and 40% proficiency for students with disabilities.) The gap decreased in the 2016-2017 school year to 39%, with scores staying the same for students with disabilities (at 40% proficiency) and decreasing for students without disabilities (from 80% to 79% proficiency). The gap decreased again in the 2017-2018 school year to 32%, with scores again increasing for students with disabilities (from 40% to 46% proficiency) and decreasing for students without disabilities (from 79% to 78% proficiency).

One of the explanations brought forward for the low proficiency rates for students with disabilities was that many parents are opting out of these assessments for their children with disabilities. An analysis of the district opt-out data does not support this conclusion. We found that among students with disabilities, 5% were opting out of ELA assessments and 4% were opting out of Math.
Disaggregating these data by gender, we see that the academic achievement with the Math Smarter Balanced increased, and the achievement gap steadily decreased for girls and boys. As shown in Exhibit 22, ELA achievement increased for girls with disabilities from 32% in 2015-2016 to 35% in 2016-2017 to 41% in 2017-2018 and the achievement gap decreased from 10% (47% to 37%) during that same time period.

Exhibit 22. Math Proficient: SWD and Without

Exhibit 23 shows that for boys with disabilities, the Math Smarter Balanced increased from 43% in 2015-2016 to 48% in 2017-2018 and the achievement gap decreased by 8% (38% to 30%) during that time period.

Exhibit 23. Math Proficient: Boys SWD vs. Without

When disaggregating math data by grade span, as shown in Exhibit 24, in the elementary grades, there was a significant decrease of 15% in the achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities between 2015-2016 (33%) and 2017-2018 (18%).
As shown in Exhibit 25, when disaggregating math data in the middle grades, there was an overall decrease in the achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities of 5% between 2015-2016 (29%) and 2017-2018 (33%). However, in 2016-2017, there was actually an increase in achievement gap of 6% (from 50% to 56%).

And as shown in Exhibit 26, when disaggregating ELA data for high school, there was an overall 2% decrease in the achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities between 2015-2016 (47%) and 2017-2018 (45%).
In summary, for the Smarter Balanced Math assessment, there was a decrease in the achievement gap for students with disabilities between 2015-2016 and 2017-2018, with the greatest gains shown for girls with disabilities and students in the elementary grades.

In addition to delving into the Smarter Balanced large-scale assessment, we examined the district’s focus on student success as measured by attendance, behavior, and course performance, what the Everyone Graduates Center at John's Hopkins called the early warning ABC’s. In effect, by keeping track and working to improve students who are off-track in any of these three academic behaviors – [A]ttendance (missing 10 or more days of school), [B]ehavior (two or more behavior infractions in a year of sustained mild misbehavior), and [C]ourse performance (failing a math or English class in middle grades, failing two of more credit bearing courses in high school) – the district can improve students' chances for success.

Starting with attendance, we looked to see if students with disabilities were chronically absent (defined by the district as missing 10 or more days of school) at similar or different percentages than those without disabilities. As shown in Exhibit 27, while 11% of students at LOSD are chronically absent, students with disabilities are twice as likely (or 21% more likely) to chronically absent than students without disabilities.

36 The Department of Education defines chronic absenteeism as more than 15 absences during the school year.
Exhibit 27. Chronic Absenteeism Among Students with Disabilities

Disaggregating these data by race and ethnicity, Exhibits 28a and 28b shows that Hispanic students with disabilities are more likely to be chronically absent that the rest of the students with disabilities (26%), followed by White (21%), multiracial (20%), and then Black (9%) and Asian (8%).

Exhibit 28a: Chronic Absenteeism of Students with Disabilities by Race and Ethnicity - Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>SWD</th>
<th>Without</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exhibit 28b: Chronic Absenteeism of Students with Disabilities by Race and Ethnicity - Table
Further disaggregating these data by disability classification, we see in Exhibit 29 that students diagnosed with an emotional disturbance are more likely to be chronically absent from school (38%) than their peers classified with OHI (26%), specific learning disability (21%), intellectual disability (17%), communication disorder (14%) and autism spectrum disorder (14%).

Exhibit 29. Chronic Absence by Exceptionality

To summarize, students with disabilities are chronically absent at higher rates than students without disabilities, and further, students with disabilities who are Hispanic and who are classified with an emotional disturbance are chronically absent at higher rates than their peers.

Examining how behavior affects student achievement, as measured by two or more behavior infractions in a year or sustained mild misbehavior. From the data we gathered, there were a total of 8 suspensions in the year and 3 incidents of restraint and seclusion. In terms of disciplinary responses, the district is doing a great job.

We examine course performance next. Exhibit 30 shows the percent of F’s that students with disabilities received in each school with comparisons between the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years. As shown, in each school, the percent of students with disabilities receiving a grade of F increased in Lake Oswego Junior High (23%–35%), Lakeridge Junior High (9%–11%), and Lakeridge High School (12%–13%) and stayed the same at Lake Oswego High School (16%).

Exhibit 30. Percentage of Students with Disabilities Receiving F’s
Finally, we received data on the enrollment of students with disabilities in higher level math courses in the 9th grade and found that they were rarely enrolled. Specifically, in the 2016-17 school year, there were 2% or less students with disabilities enrolled in Advanced Algebra, Geometry, or higher level course and not more than 10% enrolled in Algebra. Why is this important? According to the National College and Career Readiness Standards:

Algebra is the “gateway” course not just because it as a prerequisite for many high school and post-secondary math, science, engineering, and technology courses, but because it is an intellectual gateway to abstract reasoning. Students who study math at least through Algebra II in high school are more than twice as likely as those who do not to earn a four-year degree, and the level of math a student reaches is the most accurate predictor of whether that student will earn a Bachelor’s degree.  

Recommendation 4: Continue to address the achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities by focusing on the RTI model, UDL, and the district focus on attendance, behavior, and course performance and focus special education supports and services on student outcomes.

The academic outcomes of students with disabilities is lower than the academic outcomes of students without disabilities, creating an achievement gap. Encouragingly, LOSD has chosen to address this gap and our recommendations can serve to support rather than create this work and also reiterate some of our earlier recommendations. We suggest that LOSD:

- Stay on course with the focus on RTI, making sure that the resources deployed for RTI and for special education are working collaboratively.
- Develop instructional practices using the framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) within all of the RTI tiered structure the district has developed.
- Continue to drill down on attendance, behavior, and course performance, with a message to have a focus on students with disabilities as a subgroup.
- Provide special education services that focus on access to age-appropriate curriculum and specially designed instruction to close skill gaps. (More on this in Observation 5.)

We want to be clear that the majority of students’ disabilities do not impact their cognitive functioning, so the majority of students with disabilities, provided with the appropriate supports, should be able to achieve these high academic standards. To illustrate, students classified with a specific learning disability, the largest group of students classified with a disability nationally, do not by definition have a cognitive impairment; the definition states clearly that you a students with a specific learning disability dose snot have what was termed mental retardation, now called an intellectual disability. Looking at the data from LOSD, students classified with other health impairments, communication disorder, specific learning

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37 “Higher” math = pre-calculus, calculus 3, or AP calculus.
38 National College and Career Readiness Indicators. Retrieved from https://www.redefiningready.org/research-college-ready/
disability, and emotional disturbance do not, by definition, have a cognitive disability and those groups comprises approximately 80% of all student classified with a disability in LOSD. There are also 16% of students in LOSD classified with Autism, and some of those students are very high functioning academically.

In addition, even if there is some evidence of a cognitive disability, we suggest that LOSD embrace a concept called "presumed competence," sometimes called the "least dangerous assumption." According to Donnellan, “we should assume that poor performance is due to instructional inadequacy rather than to student deficits” and “in the absence of conclusive data, educational decisions ought to be based on assumptions which, if incorrect, will have the least dangerous effect on the likelihood that students will be able to function independently as adults.”

She goes on to include a number of principles to accept when assuming competence:

1. People’s expectations matter. When teachers expect students to do well, they do even better than expected.
2. I.Q. and other tests that purport to measure human capacity are terribly flawed. They usually tell us what students can’t do rather than what they might do if they had good instruction and high quality supports. Basing a student’s whole educational career and future on a test score just seems fraught with potential harm.
3. A growing body of research shows “unexpected” abilities in people who had been identified as intellectually disabled until they were provided with a means to communicate. Think Hellen Keller or Larry Bissonnette.
4. To presume incompetence could cause irreparable harm to our students if we are wrong.
5. Even if we are wrong about presuming a student’s ability to learn and to communicate in ways that are on par with his classmates without disabilities, being wrong about that isn’t as dangerous as the alternative.

Observation 5. Special Education Supports and Services

In this section, we examine LOSD’s special education supports and services. Specifically, we focus our observations on an equity mindset, staffing to support student outcomes, educational planning, educational environment, and the continuum of effective supports and services.

We frame several of our recommendations using the Integrated Comprehensive Systems (ICS) for Equity, a model used to help conceptualize the overarching vision of equity mentioned in Recommendation 1. The Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity is based on four areas, called cornerstones, and support districts in eliminating inequities in school systems. The ICS four cornerstones are quoted below:

1. **Focus on Equity** - A focus on equity guides all team decisions. To develop a focus on equity requires a thorough understanding of the educational history of marginalization, a shift from deficit vs. assets thinking and practice, advance our own identity development across differences, apply the equity research, complete an equity audit, and develop Equity Non-Negotiables.

2. **Align Staff and Students** - Staff and students are aligned guided by the Equity Non-Negotiable of proportional representation. All staff share expertise through co-planning and co-serving teams in support of all learners.

3. **Transform Teaching and Learning** - These teacher-based teams co-plan and co-serve through identity relevant teaching and learning practices that are grounded in the most current research.

4. **Leverage Funding and Policy** - All district policies, procedures, and funding are aligned with the Equity Non-Negotiables and federal and state legislation is leveraged to eliminate inequities.

Before moving to these next observations and recommendations, we want to frame and remind readers of the goal of special education as described in IDEA:

Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible, in order to meet developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, the challenging expectations that have been established for all children; and be prepared to lead productive and independent adult lives, to the maximum extent possible (IDEA, cite42).

According to Dr. Thomas Hehir, former Director of the Office of Special Education Programs for the Clinton administration, “The role of special education should be to minimize the impact of the disability and maximize the opportunities for children with disabilities to participate in general education in their natural community.”43

Simply put, special education services should level the playing field between students with disabilities and students without disabilities and provide access to students with disabilities to achieve high academic standards and, further, remove any barriers to success.

*Observation 5a. Mindset: All Means All*

In LOSD, while there is a clear focus on equity and diversity, students with disabilities are not defined as a part of the district’s diversity. Students with disabilities are not clearly discussed in the district’s message of “all means all.” Students with disabilities were not disregarded, but the special education services and equity messaging were not clearly connected to the district’s vision. If the outcomes of student with disabilities is to be improved, this must shift. In order to

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43 Thomas Hehir, *New Directions in Special Education* (2005), p. 49
raise the academic outcomes of students with disabilities, it is important to shift the mindset of what these students are capable of and how special education services might be provided.

*Recommendation 5a: Include students with disabilities into the overarching message of “All Means All” and provide information to staff that offers a historical perspective and evidence that the promise of special education is that students with disabilities can and should succeed as do their peers without disabilities.*

To implement this recommendation, we focus on equity, the first cornerstone of the Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity. As described above, such a focus must be a part of all team decisions. LOSD already has the structures in place to examine diversity, equity, and inclusion. This recommendation would guide the district to further their focus by attending to disability status. Further, providing staff and the community with the historical perspective of special education as civil rights legislation protecting those with disabilities from being segregated in institutions would help clarify the purpose of special education as a service meant to level the playing field. Also, educating the staff and community on the potential and assets of students with disabilities could help move special education from a focus on deficit to one on assets.

*Observation 5b. Staffing: Focus on Student Outcomes*

Current structures and staffing models result in students with disabilities receiving most of their specialized instruction, supplementary aides, and supports from assistants as opposed to highly qualified learning specialists or classroom teachers.

Through interviews, staffing policies, and analyses of student-to-educational assistant and teacher ratios, we find that educational assistants provide a great deal of the special education support and services for students with disabilities in LOSD. This is due in part because (1) Learning Specialists are in elementary schools half of the time and (2) LOSD’s practice is to provide educational assistants for supports in self-contained special education classes, learning centers, and in general education classes. Before delving further into this subject, we want to state clearly that the educational assistants we interviewed were dedicated, professional, and passionate, and they obviously worked extremely hard to meet the needs of the students in their charge. One stated clearly that “our job is to make it work.” We recognize that the use of educational assistants is done with positive intentions. We also recognize that this dedicated workforce is often underappreciated. However, we believe and research has indicated, that an overreliance on educational assistants is often indicative of underlying systemic issues (Giangreco, Smith, & Pickney, 2006).

Systemically, the district incentivizes the practice of an overuse of educational assistants. To begin, each elementary school has a .5 learning specialist, and educational assistants are placed in schools full-time. So an educational assistant would provide special education supports and services when the learning specialists were at their other placements. If a student received a majority of their education through the learning center, with the learning specialist there half time, the educational assistant was responsible for the majority of the student’s education. Referring to this issue, a number of interviewees discussed educational assistants teaching all subject areas.
Educational assistants are also used to provide direct services in general education classes when a student is supposed to receive services there. We were also told that in practice, when a student with a disability is supposed to receive their supports and services in a general education class, the educational assistant would often be responsible for that student within the class, teaching them by themselves or in a small group both within the classroom and, when asked by the general education teacher, outside of the general education environment. In general, we were told on many occasions that for some reason or another, the educational assistant was responsible, though unofficially so, for the education of students with disabilities. This even led to some interviewees explaining that learning specialists could not share accurate information in IEP meetings, as the educational assistants held the most knowledge about the student in question.

Exhibit x shows the number of learning specialists and educational assistants by school for the 2017-2018 school year. As shown at the bottom row, there were a total of 32 learning specialists and a total of 122 special education assistants across the district. This means that there are close to four times the number of special education assistants (3.8) than there are learning specialists. The table also shows a staff-to-student ratio for both learning specialists and educational assistants. As shown, there is a 1:24 ratio of learning specialist to student with a disability and a 1:6 ratio of special education assistants to students with a disability. Disaggregating the special education assistants by role, we see 4 are placed 1:1 with a student, 24 are placed in the DELTA program, 25 in ACCESS, 44 in Pathways, and 29 are placed in what is termed “building.”

Why is this data concerning? Most importantly, the practice requires the least qualified professional (educational assistant) to work with the most complex students (students who require special education supports and services). Educational assistants, no matter how amazing individually, are not required to have a teaching certificate. They are required to have an associate’s degree or two years of higher education. Students whose educational needs are significant enough to require special education supports or services in order to succeed with the general education curriculum are receiving these services because there is a need for added expertise, which by definition, is not the educational assistant.

Another issue with the use of educational assistants is the fact that they are supposed to be an extension of the special education teacher. However, this relationship requires planning and collaboration, and we were told in interviews that there was very little time for this. One interviewee said, “There is not time for collaboration. Assistants don’t know what they are working on. Here’s your student—go.”

In addition to working with the special educator, those educational assistants who supported students in the general education class were often not provided with guidance on their role from the general educator. One interviewee stated, “Nothing is coordinated. Hit or miss based upon the teacher.” Another issue here is that when an educational assistant is responsible for supporting a student in the general education class, the general education teacher might feel less responsible for teaching that student and/or have to focus less on providing access.

Another issue is that educational assistants are receiving little professional development. We were told that educational assistants received little training to do their role or on the academic or behavioral supports they were providing to students. One interviewee stated, “It’s like getting
thrown into the deep end of the pool.” A notable exception to this was the training provided to educational assistants working in the ACCESS program, and the district would be well served to replicate the training and collaborative model that exists in ACCESS in all schools and all professional partnerships. Here, educational assistants met regularly with their teachers to review interventions and strategies for the students they were supporting in the general education classroom. In addition to the supports educational assistants are supposed to provide, there was a concern that there might be the unintended consequence of providing too much support. One interviewee stated that there was, “No training on how to help without over helping the students. How to just be an assistant with the goal being release of dependence. Not over-cuing kids, providing processing time, no hugs all the time, take the mom hat off and go to an empowerment help. What is the fade process?”

We examined the district’s decision-making guidance related to the appropriate use of an educational assistant. The Request for Classified Support for Classroom Teacher document provides information for where support might be required, but not where support was not necessary.

*Recommendation 5b: Develop structures and staffing models that assure the appropriate deployment and use of Learning Specialists and educational assistants to provide special education supports and services.*

We suggest that the district consider shifting from a reliance on special education assistants to adding more learning specialists. Growing the number of learning specialists would increase the likelihood that students with disabilities and general education teachers are receiving special education supports and services from the most qualified staff member. Such a shift could support more collaborative practices between general and special educators, which could benefit students with and without disabilities. Relying more on qualified special education staff could also support the development of special education supports and services in all schools.

To illustrate how this shift might be made, we examined current and potential staff-to-student ratios. As shown in Exhibit 31, currently, there are 122 special education assistants and 32 learning specialists. With these staff, and 773 students with disabilities, there is a ratio of 1:6 students to special education assistants and a ratio of 1:24 students to learning specialists. If we wanted to decrease the students to learning specialists ratio to 1:15, as shown in Scenario #1, we would need 50 learning specialists. This could be accomplished if 54 educational assistant positions were converted into 18 learning specialist positions (assuming that the cost of 3 educational assistant positions = 1 learning specialist). Scenario #2 shows that the extreme example that if there were no educational assistants, there could be a student to learning specialist ratio of 1:11. While we are not suggesting that the district move to this scenario, we do want to highlight the capacity of the district to increase its teaching force.
We also suggest strengthening the guidance used to determine when and how special education assistants are placed.

**Observation 5c. Educational Planning: Co-Planning to Co-Serve All Students**

Our interviews, observations, and document review saw no evidence of systemic co-planning and/or co-teaching. To be sure, there were staff who did co-plan and co-teach, but this was not a districtwide practice or expectation. There was evidence in interviews and observations of a distinction between who was responsible for students with and without disabilities. Students with disabilities were the responsibility of learning specialists and educational assistants, and those without disabilities were the responsibility of general educators. Another indicator that “All” does not really mean “All” throughout the district.

**Recommendation 5c. Develop systems that bring together the expertise of general and special educators to collaboratively plan and serve all students.**

To implement this recommendation, we focus on the third cornerstone of the Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity, transforming teaching and learning by co-planning and co-serving.

There are benefits for both students and staff when expertise and responsibilities are shared. For staff, research has found that collaboration increases beliefs that teachers are responsible for all students (Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009)\(^44\) and that teachers’ confidence in their abilities to teach in inclusive settings increases with experience, professional development, and other supports such as time and resources (Fisher, Sax, Rodifer, & Pumpian, 1999; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993).\(^45\)

Further, according to Marilyn Friend, national expert on collaborative practices, co-planning and co-teaching (1) makes available to all students a wider range of instructional alternatives

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than would be possible in a classroom with just one teacher, (2) helps reduce the fragmentation that has characterized past instructional services, (3) enhances the participation of students with disabilities as full classroom members, and (4) provides a powerful support system for the professionals who teach.46

Observation 5d. Educational Environment: From Program to Services

In this section we discuss educational environment, or where a student receives their special education supports and services. We start with descriptions of LOSD’s current programs and then examine amounts of time students with disabilities in LOSD spend in the general education classroom.

Current District Programs and Services

When discussing LOSD’s special education services in our interviews and focus groups, it was clear that special education was considered a program, rather than a continuum of specialized supports or services created individually to support students’ unique strengths and needs. LOSD special education is described through six programs:

• Learning Center
• Developing Educational and Life Tools for Achievement (DELTA)
• Advancing Curriculum & Communication to Enhance Student Success (ACCESS)
• Pathways (Formerly Essential Life Skills Classroom)
• Pathways Community Transition Program (CTP)
• Life Enrichment Education Program (ESD LEEP)

Conversations with staff included little mention of specific supports and services provided to students, but rather special education supports and services were mentioned in the above buckets. This overarching mindset of what constitutes special education indicates a limited understanding of how special education is meant as a support and service to help students with disabilities meet high expectations and to ensure their access to the general education curriculum.

The actual descriptions of these special education programs at LOSD highlight other issues. For example, while special education is meant to focus on supports and services, the ACCESS program focuses on a disability type. The ACCESS program is designed for students classified with an autism spectrum disorder. In reality, each student with autism likely has different strengths and needs, and students with autism may have strengths and needs more similar to that of a student with a specific learning disability. In other words, while a disability classification can provide general insights into how to begin thinking about supports and services for a student, such a classification should not be turned into a particular program. Programs tend to also be associated with “places.” Services and supports are intended to be provided across all environments, schools, classrooms, and courses. Aside from the potential of not meeting a student’s needs, building special education services around explicit programs can unnecessarily narrow educational placement opportunities for students based upon disability label.

Next, while not directly against the regulation that “Unless the IEP of a child with a disability requires some other arrangement, the child is educated in the school that he or she would attend if nondisabled” and the child’s placement “Is as close as possible to the child’s home,” when students are relegated to programs that exist in specific schools, their access to all schools becomes limited. For LOSD, students in the DELTA, ACCESS, and Pathways programs must attend certain schools, which does not always afford them the opportunity to attend the school in their geographic boundary. For example, students enrolled in the DELTA program in junior high and high school must attend Lakeridge Junior High and High School and students in ACCESS and Pathways in junior high and high school must attend Lake Oswego Junior High and High School, while their peers living close to them attend the school closest to their home. These students do not have the same opportunity to build their local community. Further, when a program such as DELTA is offered in specific elementary schools in different grade spans (K–3 in Westridge and grades 3–5 in Hallihan or Forest Hills), students must transfer to a different school.

No matter the structure and the description of these six programs, we see next when examining educational environment, specifically, the data on the amount of time a student spends in a general education class, that LOSD does educate the large majority of their students for 80% or more of the day in the general education class. However, there are issues to address when we disaggregate these data and look closer at grade span, race and ethnicity, and disability classifications.

Educational Environment
As stated above, special education supports and services must be provided in a student’s least restrictive environment (LRE). Research has consistently shown a positive relationship between effective and inclusive instruction and better outcomes for students with disabilities, including the following:

- Higher academic performance
- Higher likelihood of employment
- Higher participation rates in postsecondary education
- Greater integration into the community

The 10-year National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS 2) described the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of a nationally representative sample of more than 11,000 youth, ages 13–16, who were receiving special education services in grade 7 or above when the study began in 2001. The study found that while more time spent in general education classrooms was associated with lower grades for students with disabilities compared to their nondisabled peers, students who spent more time in general education settings scored closer to grade level on standardized math and language tests than did students with disabilities who spent more time in separate settings. Research also shows that including students with a range of disabilities in general education classes does not affect the achievement of their nondisabled peers. We refer

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Keeping inclusive practices in mind, IDEA requires local school districts to provide a continuum of special education services to their students, ranging from special education supports and services provided directly or indirectly to students in the general education classroom, where most students should be placed, to special education services provided outside of the general education class and even outside of the general education school. If a student’s need is so great that the district cannot provide supports, the district is to provide this small population of students with an educational placement outside of the district that meets their needs. Exhibit 32 provides a visual representation of a comprehensive continuum of special education services.

Exhibit 32. Continuum of Special Education Services

**Educational Environment – Comparisons**
When examining educational environment across the nation, as shown in Exhibit 33, we see that the majority of students with disabilities are educated 80% or more in the general education classroom (63%), the next largest group are educated 40%–79% in the general education classroom (19%), followed by a smaller group educated less than 40% in the general education classroom (13%), and the smallest group educated in a separate school (4%).

Examining the state of Oregon, we see a similar trend, however, a larger percentage of students with disabilities educated 80% or more in the general education classroom (73%) and smaller percentages of students educated 40%–79% in the general education classroom (15%), less than 40% in the general education classroom (10%), and the smallest group educated in a separate school (1%).
LOSĐ goes further than the state with an even larger percentage of students with disabilities educated 80% or more in the general education classroom (86%) and still smaller percentages of students educated 40%–79% in the general education classroom (10%), less than 40% in the general education classroom (3%), with the smallest group educated in a separate school (1%).

Exhibit 33. Percent of Time Spent in A General Education Classroom (ages 6–21)

Comparing LOSĐ’s data with their comparison districts, Exhibit 34 shows that LOSĐ has a higher concentration of students with disabilities educated in the general education class for 80% or more of their day (86%) than the comparison districts of Palo Alto, CA (73%), Mercer Island, WA (58%), and Bellevue, WA (55%).

Exhibit 34: 80% or more in the regular classroom - Comparison Districts

This overarching data are very promising for students with disabilities in LOSĐ, providing the district with a strong foundation for special education to be operationalized as a service, rather
than a place. No matter the strong overall percentages, it is still important to disaggregate the data to assess whether there are areas in need of targeted focus.

**Educational Environment by Grade Span**

We start by disaggregating according to grade span. As shown in Exhibit 35, students in the middle school have smaller percentages for spending 80% or more of their day in the general education environment (79%) than their peers in elementary school (89%) and high school (88%). Alternately, students in the middle school have higher percentages of students with disabilities spending less than 40% of their day in the general education environment (16%) than their peers in high school (10%) and elementary school (6%). Oftentimes, when students enter middle school, gaps in learning become more apparent, and general education teachers are not always in position to provide the necessary supports. This is where it becomes critical to have literacy supports for students with disabilities who need to continue skill-building in both reading and math.

**Exhibit 35: Educational Environment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>80+</th>
<th>40 - 79%</th>
<th>&lt;40%</th>
<th>Separate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Educational Environment by Race and Ethnicity**

When disaggregating educational environment by race and ethnicity, as shown in Exhibit 36, these data show that students who are White, Asian, Hispanic, and Black spend 80% or more of their day in the general education environment (respectively 87%, 83%, 87%, 91%) at rates commensurate or even higher than the average of all LOSD students (86%). Students who report two or more races (multiracial) are under the district percentage (74%) for spending 80% or more of their day in the general education environment.

**Exhibit 36: Time Spent Inside the Classroom by Race and Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>80+</th>
<th>40 - 79%</th>
<th>&lt;40%</th>
<th>Separate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Educational Environment by Disability Classification

We then disaggregated educational environment by disability classification, as shown in Exhibit 37. The majority of students classified with OHIs, communication disorders, specific learning disabilities, and intellectual disabilities spend 80%–100% of their time in the general education classroom at similar or higher rates (respectively 85%, 96%, 98%, 83%) to the district overall (86%). Students classified with autism spectrum disorder and emotional disturbance spend 80%–100% of their time in the general education classroom at lower rates (respectively 72%, 63%) to the district overall (86%).

To summarize, while the special education programs are not designed to be inclusive or to keep students in their neighborhood schools, there are relatively few students enrolled in these programs, as evidenced by the data in educational environment. The vast majority of students receive their special education services in the general education setting at least 80% of their day. This leads us to believe that district has the capacity to increase their inclusive placements to an even greater degree.

**Recommendation 5d.** LOSD needs to shift special education towards a system focused on supports and services provided in general education in the student’s home school.

Given the mostly positive data on educational environment, we believe that LOSD has the potential to become a district that is fully inclusive. While there are significant issues with the academic achievement of students with disabilities in the district, the overarching structure is there for the majority of students to receive the bulk of their education in the general education class. This lays the foundation for special education to be operationalized as a service rather than a place. We want to be clear here that we are not suggesting an inflexible model, but rather, one in which students receive supports and services that they need. While the presumed educational environment will be the general education class, there are justifiable reasons for services to be provided outside of the general education class when it benefits the student.

We do not recommend abruptly or unilaterally disbanding programs, but rather believe that they will disappear over time with implementation of our other recommendations. To
dismantle programs without making changes at the school and classroom levels would be irresponsible. Rather, we suggest that the district start by focusing on natural transition points, such as shifting from a self-contained program to more inclusive services when students move from elementary to middle school and to high school. As enrollment is slowly decreased, the programs are in effect disbanded. Another natural transition point is the initial placement decision. We suggest focusing on developing and growing services at the student’s home school before looking to place them in a program in a different school. In order to do this, each school would need to begin to build a continuum of flexible service and placement options based upon student needs. The district could map out how long it would take to move away from program placements through attrition.

The work of moving towards a fully inclusive and flexible provision of special education services requires a combination of adaptive and technical work. There is a need to disrupt the beliefs that exist for both staff and families that students do better when they are in separate spaces and programs. As described by John Hattie, Director of the Melbourne Education Research Institute at the University of Melbourne, the following beliefs and assumptions must be challenged when dissolving programs.48

1. We can better serve students who struggle if they are separated from their peers
2. We can only provide individual attention and support in a setting or situation separate from the student’s peers
3. Staff are incapable of teaching to a range of students.
4. Schools are incapable of changing to meet student needs;
5. The locus of student problems lies within the student; thus, we have no need to examine how the school’s response to the child over the child’s educational history has contributed to student struggle or how we might educate students in ways to avoid student struggles.
6. Students are more different than alike.

Technically, there is a need to build the skills of the general and special education teaching staff. As described in previous recommendations, the district work on RTI and the suggested focus of UDL, the skill level of the teacher will rise and as teachers’ instructional skill increases, student outcomes will improve and teachers increase their beliefs in themselves to reach and teach all students through the power of the PLC and collaboration. An aligned central office team can model this collaboration on behalf of all students and might also shift some of the decisions that may have perpetuated program thinking at the school level.

Operationalizing an inclusive special education service delivery model that (1) shifts self-contained programs to providing supports in students’ home schools and (2) shifts reliance on educational assistants to teachers with collaborative practices between general and special educators, could include, for example:

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○ Shift self-contained programs for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) to receiving educational services in their home school with the support (for students and teachers) of an ASD support team.
○ Shift self-contained programs for students with emotional disturbance to receiving educational services in their home school with support of an SEL support team for students and teachers.
○ To support both of the above populations, and likely many other students work on making all schools sensory supportive environments.49

To close, we offer several resources that discuss the positive outcomes of inclusive practices for students with disabilities and students without disabilities and how to build a system of inclusive supports and services:

- Inclusive Education: Positive Outcomes
  - A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education
  - SWIFT Research Brief on Inclusive Education’s Benefits
  - National Center on Inclusive Education: Research on Inclusive Education

- Building Systems of Inclusive Supports and Services
  - Precarious or Purposeful? Proactively Building Inclusive Special Education Service Delivery on Solid Ground50
  - Segregated Programs Versus Integrated Comprehensive Service Delivery for All Learners: Assessing the Differences51

**Observation 5e. Continuum of Supports and Services: Meeting Student Needs**

Special education supports and services lack focus on access to and success in the core curriculum and clarity as to what is specially designed instruction.

As stated throughout this report, LOSD has made great efforts to focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion and to close achievement gaps. We have also noted that for much of this work, there has not been a focus on how special education services should be involved. There are the makings of a strong RTI system, however special education is separate. There are notable efforts to address students’ attendance, behavior, and course performance—all factors that affect academic success—and still, the gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities exists.

When asked what services were provided to students with disabilities to close these gaps, the answers were typically to name the special education program (Learning Center, DELTA,

ACCESS, etc.) that the student was in or the fact that they were working with an educational assistant. It appeared that some staff thought of special education as a “place” students went to receive services, as opposed to an array of services provided to students to support learning in their current setting. This sends a message that students with specific disabilities (e.g. emotional impairments, intellectual impairments, autism spectrum disorders) are automatically attached to a program, as opposed to individualized services. The recommendations provided in this report, work to shift that mindset to thinking of special education as a flexible continuum of services. This will allow teams to consider the services that students need, before thinking of the “place” where they can receive required services. Staff were not able to describe what services were provided. Some staff described special education as delivered at a slower pace and lower level than what was delivered in the general education setting. Other staff felt there was nothing “special about special education,” and when students were eligible for special education services, it typically resulted in an elective being dropped in place of a learning center class or intervention block. We found no focus on accessing the general education curriculum or on developing students’ skills. In general, we find that LOSD does not have a unified understanding of what constitutes special education services and supports. 

Math appeared to be a significant struggle as we were told many students with disabilities reached the high school level and were not exposed to algebra given the lagging skills they still had in math. For English language arts there was some use of System 44 in the elementary grades and at the secondary level, the main intervention for students that were struggling with literacy was Read 180 or the core curriculum with some strategies to support students that needed additional help. However, there were no tools or interventions the district used to support students with disabilities that require highly specialized reading interventions, specifically at the secondary level. If there were interventions available, many of the staff were not trained to use them or did not know they were available to them. The Reading Specialist employed by the district was only available to support the elementary levels. Many believed the lack of specialized instruction resulted in limited growth for students with disabilities across all grades. Furthermore, once students were identified as requiring specialized instruction, they rarely exited special education. It also became clear that students were often dependent on adult support throughout the day, which leads to decreased independence accessing the curriculum at all levels. This resulted in the district staff not fully understanding how to provide access to the curriculum or specially design instruction for students given the current options available to staff. 

Recommendation 5e: Develop a continuum of supports and services focused on access to and success in the core curriculum and clarity as to what is specially designed instruction.

For this recommendation we focus on two of the most important services provided by special educators, accessing the general education curriculum and providing specially designed instruction, where access allows for multiple entry points to the general education curriculum and specially designed instruction focuses on developing skills.

Accessing the General Education Curriculum

Providing access to the general education curriculum should be addressed with the implementation of the district's response to intervention work and created within the framework
of UDL, as has been discussed. To add, we suggest that the district start by defining what constitutes best practice instruction in the CORE for all students, then articulate the continuum of services and supports that will be available to support all tiers and all students. The Oregon Department of Education provides resources on Universal Design for Learning and accommodations in their [CCSS and Students with Disabilities](https://www.ode.state.or.us) website.

Once defined, there will be a need to develop teachers’ skills in each school relaying on the ability to design universally accessible instruction to be able to meet the needs of all students and a need to create systems for special and general educators to collaborate and problem-solve. The district will need to examine what they are holding tight, or what is fixed in terms of instruction, and where there is leeway in the materials used.

Technology can play a significant role in providing access to the curriculum. Oregon has resources that can be found in [Education Tech Points: A Framework for Assistive Technology Planning](https://www.ode.state.or.us) and [Assistive Technology for Students with Disabilities](https://www.ode.state.or.us).

**Specially Designed Instruction**

In this section, we discuss the need for intensive literacy supports and provide an overarching description of specially designed instruction. We start with literacy, as this is the skill that affects the majority of students with disabilities and is also the skill that when not addressed, leads to school failure. Students classified as having a learning disability typically have issues with decoding. Without a districtwide systemic approach to teaching literacy that includes tiered supports, as is required by response to intervention, students who struggle with reading early on will fall further behind as they move through the grades. Therefore it is important to develop a districtwide tiered system for teaching literacy that includes a strong core foundation and tiered supports for those students who are older and for whom teaching reading is outside of grade-level instruction. Students with typical cognitive functioning who struggle with reading often have as their issue decoding and what research has suggested works for students with reading disabilities or even those who struggle to read is a multi-sensory approach to teach students how to "break the code." Such an approach is often based on the Orton Gillingham method, which can be found in many curricula. We suggest that the district consider developing instruction that is specially designed for those older students struggling with decoding.

Research shows that improving the effectiveness of teachers is the most direct approach to improving outcomes for low-achieving students; however, many effective practices that can substantially improve student achievement are not routinely used by teachers (McLeskey; et al., 2017). Specially designed instruction (SDI) is a term often used in special education. It is a broad term that specifies the type of instruction students with disabilities should receive. SDI is created by changing instructional content, methods, or delivery to meet the student’s unique needs as a result of a disability (Riccomini, Morano, & Hughes, 2017). It is important to note that SDI should support students’ access to the general curriculum while meeting the goals and objectives outlined within the student’s IEP (Riccomini et al., 2017). However, there are many terms that fall under SDI (e.g., high leverage practices, explicit instruction, and intensive instruction) when thinking about developing effective instruction for students with disabilities. We recommend the district develop a plan to work with staff to understand how SDI is used to develop effective practices for students with disabilities. Exhibit 38 shows a conceptual understanding of SDI, how
the elements of SDI overlap and converge, and how to meaningfully put all four practices into place in the classroom (Riccomini et al., 2017).

Exhibit 38: Specially Designed Instruction

One of the terms commonly used is high-leverage practices (HLP). HLPs are “a set of practices that are fundamental to support K–12 student learning, and that can be taught, learned, and implemented by those entering the profession” (Riccomini et al., 2017). Recently, the Council for Exceptional Children and the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) teamed up to create a collection of 22 HLPs based on current research and practice, titled *High-Leverage Practices in Special Education*. We

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recommend this guide as one option for LOSD to consider in discussing SDI with teachers and administrators. HLPs address many aspects related to the delivery of special education, including collaboration, assessment, social-emotional behavior supports, and instruction (Riccomini et al., 2017). The HLPs that have been identified are listed in Exhibit 39.
The guide, published online, goes into greater detail regarding each of these HLPs. We recommend the district consider this guide as a starting point in bridging the gap between general and special education teachers. Based on our conversations, it was evident there was a disconnect between special educators, general educators, and paraprofessionals. It is important that all teachers work collaboratively to ensure student needs are met, regardless of disability status. HLPs provide a common language and common practice across all classrooms.

The last two components of SDI are explicit instruction (EI) and intensive instruction (II). Evidence suggests that EI promotes learning more effectively and efficiently than other instructional approaches, specifically when working with students with academic challenges.

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EI has been shown to be an effective practice in both literacy and mathematics instruction for students with and without disabilities (Riccomini et al., 2017). Based on our observations and discussions with staff, EI should be part of an intensive supplemental literacy support program for students that require foundational reading skills. We were told Read 180 was the program most frequently used; however, this program is not effective for teaching students foundational reading skills (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), which are the building blocks to becoming a successful reader at any grade level. We further recommend the district examine all specialized reading instruction and interventions for low-incidence programs (e.g., students with the most severe needs), as well as math instruction and specialized programs to support students struggling in math.

In reviewing the available programs, the LOSD should think about intensive instruction as part of SDI. This will be critical in supporting students. Based on our observations and discussions with staff, SDI is seen as an additional block where students receive interventions, or attend a class where they receive some additional supports. It was unclear if intensive interventions were in place for students that were struggling beyond the same classes offered to all students that needed remediation, which was typically Read 180. Intensive instruction is a process by which the intensity of an intervention is increased to match the severity of the student’s need or lack of expected or adequate academic or behavioral progress (Riccomini et al., 2017). The concept of intensive instruction becomes especially important when a student has not shown progress after interventions have been tried (Riccomini et al., 2017).

Therefore, we recommend the district creates a process where student data area regularly reviewed by teaching teams and determinations are made to support more intensive instruction, which is a key aspect of SDI. For further information, we recommend the district review the article “The Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity” (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Malone, 2017), which discusses the taxonomy of intervention intensity and identifies a number of evidence-based dimensions for evaluating and building intensity.

It is critical that all teachers understand how to support students with disabilities as data show many students with disabilities fail to make sufficient progress in school. Effective instruction requires a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of students that facilitates the development of highly responsive, explicit, systematic interventions that support the success of all students (McLeskey, et al., 2017). To ensure quality outcomes for students with disabilities, teachers must provide instruction that is evidence-based and highly responsive to these students’ complex and varied needs (McLeskey, et al., 2017). The routine analysis of practices used in the district and its effect on student outcomes is foundational for creating an effective teacher workforce that collaborates together to support student growth and achievement (McLeskey, et al., 2017). We recommend the LOSD work collaboratively to determine high leverage practices that align with their strategic plan and support implementation by all staff, both general and special education.
Observation 5f: Professional Development

Professional development is needed for special education and general education staff to implement and realize the district vision of equity, diversity and inclusion for students with disabilities.

In reviewing the LOSD Strategic Plan Updates and Evidence document and speaking to staff, it is clear that LOSD has a focus and has spent a considerable amount of time training staff. Two of the main focus areas for professional development have been PLCs and RTI. Over the last year, 120 staff from across all schools attended a PLC or RTI conference, and in the past two years more than 200 staff have attended one of these conferences. As part of this work, LOSD has teamed with Solution Tree, a consulting group that supports PLC and RTI implementation. Recently, LOSD had an expert from Solution Tree come to the district and present to more than 40 elementary staff on RTI. Also, during the 2017-2018 school year, LOSD brought speakers to the district to build on the foundational understandings of collaborative learning structures and RTI.

Through these trainings, LOSD has placed a strong emphasis on the importance and implementation of student support systems. In the LOSD Strategic Plan Updates and Evidence, it was noted that each school developed action plans within their PLC goals. Some examples included:

- Both high schools opened highly effective academic support centers as an extension of their study halls.
- From the work on schools' new start time and the subsequent development of new schedules in the elementary and secondary schools, all LOSD schools offer dedicated time to support students.
- Four of the elementary schools, including two Title schools, piloted assessment programs that provided additional data about at-risk readers.

This work was in addition to the literacy cohort of 25 teachers who received training from Portland University, which was discussed earlier in this report. LOSD also holds an annual two-day professional development conference where teachers and staff plan working sessions to learn together and from each other. We were also told the district’s clinical psychologist has held several training sessions throughout the school year, including de-escalation training and best practices for supporting students with social-emotional disabilities. This was not referenced in the LOSD Strategic Plan Updates and Evidence document, but we feel it is important to note.

We commend the LOSD on the professional development they have offered to staff and continue to offer. We understand it takes time to train staff and develop a strong RTI model in any school district. However, it is clear LOSD is working hard to ensure all staff receive appropriate training to build a strong RTI model and collaborative practices to support student achievement. The following recommendations should be considered an extension of this work and a way to develop teachers further in the classroom as they support all students. We specifically make recommendations for further professional development for special education
teachers and paraprofessionals, and highly recommend and encourage all staff to participate in this professional development to build a culture where “all means all.” This is particularly relevant when thinking about UDL, which, we noted earlier, is not a special education initiative.

Recommendation 5f: Provide training to ensure that staff are adept at providing accommodations and modifications for students to access the general education curriculum and specially designed instruction to work on developing students’ skills, regardless of student’s skill level.

We recommend that LOSD creates a professional development plan to support the district’s vision for how special education supports and services can provide students with disabilities with what is needed for them to be as successful as their peers without disabilities. The plan should be designed with both professional learning experiences and job-embedded support for special and general education teachers as well as educational assistants and can include trainings as well as online and physical resources and toolkits.

The development of educators’ instructional skills must include a focus on professional learning activities and resources to implement core instructional programs. There is a need to ensure that all staff know the Common Core Standards and have the capacity to develop universally designed instruction. All staff should have the skills to collaborate with each other, sharing and combining their areas of expertise. We also suggest that all staff have some level of training on what is disability and what are special education services. We also suggest that special educators are trained to provide access to the general education curriculum and more individualized accommodations, as well as specially designed instruction, such as intensive literacy instruction.

Observation 6. Response to Intervention: Social-Emotional Learning

This district currently lacks a Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) model as part of RTI and does not have a social-emotional learning (SEL) framework that is used consistently throughout the district.

As reported on in Observation 2, based on discussions with staff and a review of documents, it was evident the district has not fully implemented PBIS or SEL into their RTI model. There were some references to PBIS in some schools, but it was not consistent, and staff did not feel it was a priority or focus area. While the district emphasized “all means all,” there was not a system in place to support this work at the building level. Staff reported to us that there are few disciplinary referrals in the LOSD; however, PBIS and SEL are not only intended for districts that have high-trauma or high-discipline referrals. A focus on SEL has been shown to improve academic outcomes for all students. Therefore, it makes sense for the district to include PBIS and SEL into their current RTI model to meet the goals in the LOSD strategic plan.

When students in LOSD did experience behavioral issues and were classified as having an emotional disturbance, the standard practice was placement in the DELTA program, where students were supposed to receive emotional and behavioral supports. One issue with this practice was the lack of clarity as to what interventions were in place prior to a special education placement or what supports were in place in the general education setting to support students in need of social-emotional and/or behavioral supports. We were told that prior to the DELTA program’s implementation, many students with behavioral challenges were sent out of the district. We commend the LOSD for building a program in-district to meet student needs. That said, since DELTA supports are not available in all buildings, students deemed appropriate to receive this support are sent to various schools around the district. Implementing social-emotional standards and building positive behavioral supports throughout the district in all schools, and in more inclusive educational environments, would be beneficial for all students and would help move the district closer to a culture where “all means all.”

Another benefit to implementing PBIS and SEL is to bridge the divide between general and special education. Many staff in the district felt there was a divide between general education and special education, with some teachers wanting students with behavioral challenges to be removed from their class for minor infractions. To address this, we were told staff looked to the Special Education Department to provide necessary supports. As part of this work, there has been an emphasis on keeping students in their community schools and finding ways to support them in their buildings. This was still a work in progress as we were also told that many staff did not see the benefit of implementing PBIS. This raises concerns, as unnecessary special education referrals can increase when there are no behavioral supports in place, or students with social-emotional disabilities are more often referred to placements outside of the general education classroom. PBIS and SEL are preventative and work to build a culture and climate that supports all students.

An additional challenge the LOSD faces is limited mental and behavioral health supports. This is a statewide issue, but one that creates barriers for the LOSD in providing wraparound services that extend beyond the school day. However, the district currently only hires part-time counselors and often relies on the school psychologists to support students behavioral and mental health needs. Based on discussions with staff, regardless of discipline referrals, the majority of staff felt it was critical to address the social and emotional needs of the students in LOSD as this is part of preparing students for college and career readiness. This becomes increasingly important as some staff reported the numbers of students in the district being diagnosed with anxiety and depression have been steadily increasing, while supports both in-district and in the community have not. LOSD currently has a clinical psychologist on staff, but it did not appear he was used in a way that could drive SEL across the system.

**Recommendation 6:** Include SEL in the current RTI model and ensure consistent implementation across the district, as well as, identify key stakeholders to support this work at the building level.

Students need more than just academic knowledge to succeed in college, careers and personal life (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). It is critical for students to understand their own skills and abilities, manage their emotions and behavior, communicate effectively, negotiate conflict, care
about others and make responsible decisions (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). When such skills are intentionally taught, practiced and reinforced in schools, students have better behavioral, social and academic outcomes (Kendzroia & Yoder, 2016). Social and emotional learning is increasing accepted by educators and researchers as a process to cultivate life skills that foster personal development, academic achievement, and a more empathic school climate (Kendzroia & Yoder, 2016). Research on students that have participated in some form of SEL of short and long-term benefits in student outcomes (Kendzroia & Yoder, 2016). For example, a systematic review of 213 school-based SEL programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students showed that, compared to control groups, SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Furthermore, these effects have been consistent across all grade levels and school demographics and have been replicated in other studies on SEL (Kendzroia & Yoder, 2016). Therefore, we recommend the LOSD include SEL in their current RTI model to support students from both an academic and social-emotional lens.

Instruction rooted in SEL is designed to (1) promote resiliency; (2) teach specific skills designed to improve coping skills; (3) provide supports to students navigating challenging experiences (e.g., trauma, abuse); (4) develop healthy perceptions of self and build self-esteem; and (5) include character education (CASEL). These five areas can create school climates and cultures that are welcoming to all students and help students develop skills that will benefit them in postsecondary settings. CASEL specifically references five core competencies that make up their framework, which includes:

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-management
3. Social awareness
4. Relationship skills
5. Responsible decision-making

One part to support the SEL framework would be including PBIS in the current RTI model. The broad purpose of PBIS is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of schools. PBIS was designed to improve the social, emotional, and academic outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities and underrepresented students (PBIS.org). As noted previously, more students in LOSD are being diagnosed with anxiety and depression, but there is not enough staff available to provide the supports needed. It was also evident that teachers struggled with student behaviors and often felt the only solution was special education or moving the student to DELTA. Moving students to more restrictive settings on the continuum should be a last resort after all other efforts have been tried. PBIS is an evidence-based process that allows districts to support student behavior in a positive manner and increase those supports for students who are unresponsive.

Given the district’s strategic plan and its focus on “all means all,” PBIS and the SEL would fit into the goals the district is trying to accomplish. Social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2018). The benefits of SEL for all staff and students are clear, especially in
relationship to the work the district is currently doing. SEL is an evidence-based framework to support these students in developing the skills they need to feel safe and successful both in and outside of school.

We feel it is important to note that LOSD created two task forces to research and recommend programs related to mental health issues. The first was the Student Support Task Force, and it included three parents, one teacher, four counselors, one mental health professional, two Central Office administrators, and three building administrators. The second group was the secondary counselors that met during the summer of 2016 to develop an implementation plan for the Naviance student career modeling software, as well as, recommendations for possible changes to the LOSD counseling delivery model. It was noted the second group would continue to attend RTI and ASCA conferences. We recommend the LOSD continue the work of these task forces, but shift the focus to look at PBIS and SEL. We also believe the district’s clinical psychologist should be included on this task force. It seemed the psychology team had a wealth of knowledge on how to best support students, and we believe their expertise could be used to support this work at a deeper level.
Section D: Conclusion

LOSD requested this review to gain information and recommendations in order to improve their special education services. In our time working on this review we have had the honor to work with staff who are not only thoughtful and insightful, but not afraid to make changes to improve the educational outcomes for all students. It is our hope that these observations and recommendations will provide support for the district as they to move to raise the bar for educating all students. It is our belief that Lake Oswego has the ability to be an exemplar in general, and in particular, as it relates to the education of students with disabilities.
Section E: Appendices

Appendix A. Urban Collaborative Team Members
Appendix B. Interviewee Roles
Appendix C. Summary of Observations and Recommendations
Appendix A. Urban Collaborative Team Members

Lauren Katzman, EdD. is the Executive Director of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative and adjunct professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Prior to this work, she served as the Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Education Services for the Newark Public Schools and the Executive director of special education in the New York City Department of Education. In both of these positions, she developed and led significant reform efforts, increasing academic achievement, inclusive educational and experiential options, reliable data management, and statutory/regulatory compliance. She worked to develop strong interdisciplinary partnerships between districts, states, universities, advocacy groups, and communities to build the foundation for deep and sustaining systemic reforms. Prior to these two high-level and demanding school district leadership positions, Dr. Katzman served as Associate Professor of Special Education at Boston University and co-authored the book Effective Inclusive Schools: Designing Successful Schoolwide Programs with Dr. Thomas Hehir, former Director of the Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education. She was also a special education teacher for 14 years in St. Louis, New Jersey, and New York City and has conducted program evaluations of the special education services for the District of Columbia Public Schools, the state of Massachusetts, Ithaca Public Schools, and the New York City Department of Education.

Jennifer Apodaca is Director of Student Services for the Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, Area School District and member of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative’s Advisory Board. In her current role, she is responsible for the oversight and development of teaching, learning, and equity in special education as well as student services including student health services, psychological services, social work services, guidance services, homebound services, Section 504, school safety, and McKinney Vento (support for students who are homeless) coordination. With 14 years of school and district level leadership experience, Ms. Apodaca has consulted with schools on best practices in inclusive education specifically focusing on authentic educational involvement of students with intellectual disabilities and autism. Operating from a social justice and equity perspective, she and district leadership have worked to restructure the district’s organization to eliminate historical silos of instructional services and student services that existed. Specific areas of expertise lie in universal design for learning and multi-tiered systems of support.

Jennifer Baribeau, Ph.D., currently serves as the Special Education Supervisor for Springfield Public Schools, the second largest urban district in New England. Prior to this work, Dr. Baribeau was the Interim Director of Special Education for Holyoke Public Schools and previously Director of Student Support Services for a start-up charter school. In these various leadership roles, Dr. Baribeau led program management and reform and developed policies and practices to support special education students at the district level. She has a B.S. in Business Management and received her M.Ed. and Ph.D. in Special Education from the University of Massachusetts. She previously served on a task force working towards developing best practices for assessing and identifying English Language Learners with disabilities and served on the board for the Massachusetts Council for Exceptional Children. Prior to her leadership roles in special education, Dr. Baribeau managed several grant-funded projects for gang-involved and emotionally disturbed youth in Massachusetts and co-taught graduate courses in Special...
Education at the University of Massachusetts, Harvard Graduate School of Education, and Springfield College. Her current research is focused on issues with enrollment, placement and compliance in special education for both traditional public schools and charter schools.

**Brianna Roche** is a Research Associate at EDC. She has spent the last 8 years working in research and evaluation on a wide range of projects; from large federally funded evaluations to small developmental evaluations at non-profits. She is passionate about data and discovery and has dedicated her career to improving program services through thoughtful analysis.
Appendix B. Interviewee Roles

- Superintendent
- Assistant Superintendents
- Executive Director of Special Services
- Principals
- Supported Education Specialists
- Teachers - Special Education
- Teachers - Elementary Education
- Teachers - Secondary Education
- Psychologists
- RTI Specialists
- Motor Team
- Special Education Program Assistants
- Special Services Parent Advisory Committee
Appendix C. Summary of Observations and Recommendations

Observation 1. Vision: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Vision, diversity, equity, and inclusion are a fundamental focus for the district and a major component of the district’s strategic plan; however, it is unclear where the Special Education Department falls in this critical work.

Recommendation 1: Special Education must go through a process to create a strategic plan focused on the educational outcomes of students with disabilities that is aligned to the district’s overarching focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Observation 2. Response to Intervention: Systems
Lake Oswego School District has implemented Response to Intervention (RTI) as a framework to reach their vision; however, not all systems are aligned, and special education is not part of the RTI model. In addition, the RTI framework is focused on academics and does not include social-emotional learning.

Recommendation 2: The LOSD should closely examine the alignment between RTI and special education services and staff and collaboratively develop protocols and disseminate best practices aligned with all three tiers, both for academics and social-emotional learning.

Observation 3. Students with Disabilities: Demographics
While overarching classification rates are appropriate, there are considerations when rates are disaggregated by socioeconomic status, disability classification, race/ethnicity, and gender.

Recommendation 3: Examine current, and update where appropriate, evaluation and classification policies and practices to assure fidelity, and track data disaggregated by socioeconomic status, disability classification, race/ethnicity, and gender.

Observation 4. Students with Disabilities: Academic Outcomes
Academic outcomes for students with disabilities are lower than for students without disabilities; however, there is a notable increase in achievement for students with disabilities, especially in ELA for girls.

Recommendation 4: Continue to address the achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities by focusing on the RTI model, UDL, and the district focus on attendance, behavior, and course performance and focus special education supports and services on student outcomes.
Observation 5. Special Education Supports and Services

Observation 5a. Mindset: All Means All

Recommendation 5a: Include students with disabilities into the overarching message of “All Means All” and provide information to staff that offers a historical perspective and evidence that the promise of special education is that students with disabilities can and should succeed as do their peers without disabilities.

Observation 5b. Staffing: Focus on Student Outcomes

Recommendation 5b: Develop structures and staffing models that assure the appropriate deployment and use of Learning Specialists and educational assistants to provide special education supports and services.

Observation 5c. Educational Planning: Co-Planning to Co-Serve All Students

Recommendation 5c: Develop systems that bring together the expertise of general and special educators to collaboratively plan and serve all students.

Observation 5d. Educational Environment: From Program to Services

Recommendation 5d: LOSD needs to shift special education towards a system focused on supports and services provided in general education in the student’s home school.

Observation 5e. Continuum of Supports and Services: Meeting Student Needs

Recommendation 5e: Develop a continuum of supports and services focused on access to and success in the core curriculum and clarity as to what is specially designed instruction.

Observation 5f. Professional Development

Professional development is needed for special education and general education staff to implement and realize the district vision of equity, diversity and inclusion for students with disabilities.

Recommendation 5f: Provide training to ensure that staff are adept at providing accommodations and modifications for students to access the general education curriculum and specially designed instruction to work on developing students’ skills, regardless of student’s skill level.

Observation 6. Response to Intervention: Social-Emotional Learning

This district currently lacks a Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) model as part of RTI and does not have a social-emotional learning (SEL) framework that is used consistently throughout the district.
Recommendation 6: Include SEL in the current RTI model and ensure consistent implementation across the district, as well as, identify key stakeholders to support this work at the building level.