

In TO: School Committee

FROM: Tim Piwowar, Superintendent
Caitlin Ahern, Assistant Superintendent
Lori Cimeno, Interim Director of Student Services

DATE: May 29, 2026

RE: Special Education Update

This winter, we received our [Westwood Special Education Review Report](#) that highlighted a number of recommendations across the district. While not an exhaustive list, this memo is designed to highlight areas where we have made progress towards those recommendations during the 2025-2026 school year and/or in preparation for the upcoming 2026-2027 school year.

The report was organized into eight (8) different sections of commendations, findings, and recommendations. The update below is organized into these eight areas, with recognition that in some cases, action steps have impact across multiple areas.

Area 1: Organizational Structure and Leadership

- Consistent with the recommendation that there is an examination of the administrative needs of each elementary school, an addition 0.5 FTE for elementary student services department head was added to the FY2027 budget, resulting in the following departmental structure for next year:
 - One (1) full time position serving Pine Hill
 - One (1) full time position serving Downey, Martha Jones, and Sheehan
 - One (1) full time position for Preschool and Out-of-District
- A 0.6 FTE psychologist was also approved in the FY2027 budget to increase the level of support available at Pine Hill. This serves the dual purpose of better meeting caseload ratios, while also ensuring that the role of adjustment counselor at Pine Hill is consistent with other elementary schools in the district.
- Consistent with both the recommendations in the report and recently negotiated language in the WTA contract, meetings are being held with related services providers to examine caseloads to ensure a more equitable distribution of assignments.
- Training with the district's legal counsel has been scheduled for the district's administrative team in late June in support of the recommendation that all principals are provided with training and clear expectations regarding their responsibilities in special education and 504 planning.

Area 2: Special Education Rates

- District IAs received professional development regarding executive functioning and how to support students with executive functioning skill deficits in the classroom environment.
- In planning for districtwide professional development in SY26-27, a recurring theme will be the connection between executive functioning skills and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) - building on the work that has happened this year with UDL, and making more explicit how this approach can build executive functioning skills for students.

Area 3: Continuum of IEP Services and Specialized Programs

- In collaboration with special education staff, there is an initial internal draft of program descriptions with exit and entry criteria that promote greater vertical alignment across programs. This draft will then go through internal review, with the goal of being operationalized next year.

Area 4: Westwood Applied Behavioral Analysis (WABA) Programs

- Consistent with the recommendation that there be a comprehensive program review of the WABA program with an outside expert specialized in public school programming for students on the autism spectrum, we have contracted with CASE Collaborative to conduct this review. The review is scheduled to take place in January 2027, with CASE initiating records reviews in December. The methodology includes onsite visits of the programs, record reviews, and focus groups with all stakeholders. The final report, with recommendations, is scheduled to be issued by April 2027.

Area 5: Instructional Assistants and ABA Tutors

- A new collective bargaining agreement has been settled with our Instructional Assistants and ABA Tutors that ensures that both groups have more competitive wage scales, and that creates incentives that encourage retention and discourage mid-year resignations. The new agreement also creates additional opportunities for professional development for IAs and ABAs as part of our overall district approach to professional growth.

Area 6: Resource Allocation

- The comprehensive caseload and workload analysis is currently being conducted by district administration. This process includes consultations with Special Education Teachers, Related Service Providers, Psychologists, and BCBAs. A final report analysis will be completed by June 30, 2026.
- Math specialists and Literacy specialists and paraprofessionals have been reallocated across elementary schools for next year to be greater responsive to levels of student

need. This reallocation will provide greater support for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions so that students can successfully access grade-level standards in the general education setting.

Area 7: Preschool Program

- To fulfill recommendations for expanding preschool capacity and providing age-appropriate inclusion for WABA students, the approved FY27 budget includes the following changes at Downey this fall:
 - Opening a fourth integrated preschool classroom
 - Relocating the preschool WABA program to the Downey site

Area 8: Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

- The administrative team remains actively engaged in a comprehensive review of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, Tiered Intervention strategies, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. We are establishing shared definitions and understandings, mapping our current Tiered Strategies, and identifying next steps, roles, and responsibilities to further build out our framework. This work will continue through the Admin Council meetings next year.
- A critical action currently underway is the creation and implementation of an enhanced District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP). The revision of the DCAP is designed to establish a consistent, district-wide approach to interventions and accommodations, with full implementation targeted for the end of the 2026-2027 school year.
- At the elementary level, all principals and math and literacy specialists implemented data team meetings after the winter benchmark window, to examine grade-level trends in data and inform interventions and instruction. We will continue to revise the process, in service of establishing consistency and alignment across schools in how we examine and interpret student data.

We look forward to discussing this with the Committee at our meeting on June 4.