



Westwood Public Schools

Special Education Review Report

FINAL REPORT: FEBRUARY 2, 2026

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Executive Summary

Consultants from Ribas Associates & Publications were contracted to provide the Westwood Public Schools with a study of the effectiveness of its current special education department and programs, as well as to consider what revision and reorganization could be implemented as a result of the audit findings. In addition, the District wanted to receive feedback on the current preschool program and structure, the integration of special education programs at each school, the criteria for special education student program placement, and the implementation of regular education interventions, including the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

As part of this work, the Consultants engaged in the following:

- A literature and budget review;
- Interviews with the Superintendent and other key members of the central administration;
- Interviews with building principals and special education leadership;
- Interviews with SEPAC leadership and other parents representing substantially separate programs in the District;
- Visits to Pine Hill School, Thurston Middle School, and the preschool program at Westwood High School;
- Interviews with regular education and special education teachers and service providers;
- A parent and staff survey; and
- Review of data and configurations of other Massachusetts school systems.

The Consultants have provided the District with eight (8) specific findings and recommendations that are based in the data and interviews and which, we believe, will assist the Superintendent and his team in improving the organization and conditions for Westwood students and families. These findings and recommendations are focused in the following areas:

- Organizational Structure and Leadership
- Special Education Rates
- Continuum of IEP Services and Specialized Programs
- Westwood Applied Behavioral Analysis (WABA)
- Instructional Assistants and ABA Tutors
- Resource Allocation
- Preschool Program
- Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

During the course of the review, all members of the Westwood Public Schools staff were thoughtful and helpful in providing information and insight into the current programming of special education services in the District. Everyone seemed eager to find solutions that would offer Westwood students a range of programming options that would, in turn, provide opportunities for students to receive the appropriate supports and interventions, regardless of setting and school. Moreover, the individuals who we talked with would like to see strong practices and protocols that enable both the general education and special education processes to work effectively and efficiently for students, staff and families.

Like most other Massachusetts school districts, Westwood is facing financial challenges that could impact the ability to operationalize some of the recommendations included in this report. However, it

is clear to the Consultants that at least some of the core guidance provided here does not require the expenditure of additional funds and/or should be implemented in a timely fashion to prevent the financial situation in special education from hamstringing future efforts in Westwood. We, therefore, recommend that the Administration engage in a three-pronged process to address the recommendations: (1) identify recommendations that can be implemented with little or no cost; (2) take a creative approach to identifying funding for immediate needs; and (3) begin long-term planning to implement recommendations with significant financial and contractual impacts.

1. Overview

The town of Westwood is a community of 16,266 residents located 13 miles southwest of Boston. It is considered an affluent community known for its top-rated schools.

As of the 2020 census, the racial and ethnic makeup of Westwood was primarily White, with growing diversity. Specifically, in the last population census the racial makeup of the town was 79.5% White, 2.9% African American, 0.0% Native American, 11.8% Asian, 0.0% from other races, and 4.5% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race represented 3.4% of the population.

The population was spread out with 25.6% under the age of 18, 56.0% between the ages of 18 and 65, and 18.4% age 65 and over. Females represent 51.6% of the population.

The median household income was \$171,071. The per capita income for the town was \$75,396. About 2.3% of the population were below the poverty line.

The Westwood Public Schools provide an outstanding PK-12 education for students in a preschool center located at Westwood High School (Westwood Integrated Preschool), four (4) K-5 elementary schools (Downey, Martha Jones, Pine Hill and Sheehan), one grade 6-8 middle school (Thurston MS), and one grade 9-12 High School (Westwood HS). It should be noted that the Pine Hill School opened on February 27, 2024 and houses a consolidation of the former Hanlon and Deerfield Schools.

District enrollment is approximately 2,842 students (DESE FY2025 figures). The makeup of the student body is as follows, according to these DESE figures: Asian (13.6%), Latino/Hispanic (7.1%), White (71.3%), and Multi-Racial (6.1%). In addition, 28.1% of students are considered High Need, 7.5% are designated as Low Income, 7.5% are considered First Language Not English, 1.1% are English Language Learners, and 21.3% are considered students with disabilities.

The number of students qualifying for special education services has increased in recent years, climbing from 544 in FY2022 to 579 in FY2023 and to 611 in FY2024. In FY2024, according to DESE data, 65.5% of these students were educated in full inclusion settings, while 13.3% were taught in substantially separate classrooms.

The School District requested this proposal for a study of the effectiveness of its current special education department and programs, as well as to consider what revision and reorganization could be implemented as a result of the audit findings. In addition, the District was interested in receiving feedback on the current preschool program and structure, the integration of special education programs at each school, the criteria for special education student program placement, and the implementation of regular education interventions, including the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

2. Work Plan

The Consultants studied the student services organizational structure and practices with the goal of developing recommendations regarding special education structures and regular education supports and interventions.

Steps included:

- Literature and budgetary review. The Consultants reviewed the FY2026 adopted budget, the current organizational structure of student services, the current staffing of regular education and special education personnel within the schools, the student services program guide, the current placements and profiles of students being educated out-of-district, elementary school learning center caseloads, special education program IEP service grids, the FY2026 SIMS special education data (district & school level), along with DESE District Analysis and Review Tools (DART), Resource Allocation and District Action Reports (RADAR) and district profile data.
- Interviews with the Superintendent and Senior Leadership within Central Administration. The Consultants interviewed the Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent, the outgoing Director of Student Services (August 2025), the Interim Director of Student Services, the Director of Finance and Operations and the Director of Equity, Integration and Community Partnerships individually for this study.

The Consultants also interviewed two (2) School Committee members individually regarding these issues, their impact on the schools and Westwood students, and the Committee's long term goal for special education services.

Finally, the Consultants interviewed SEPAC leadership, as well as two (2) separate small groups of parents who have students enrolled in substantially separate District programs at all levels (high school, middle school, and elementary school) regarding the focus areas for this study.

- Additional interviews with District and Special Education Leadership. In addition to the document review and interviews noted above, the Consultants conducted individual interviews with Principals, small group interviews with special education staff who work in schools, and small group interviews with regular education teachers at each level. In addition, the Consultants interviewed Special Education Department Heads in a small group setting.
- School Visits. The Consultants conducted on-site visits to Pine Hill Elementary School, Thurston Middle School, and the Preschool Center at Westwood High School.
- Surveys. The Consultants created a parent survey and staff survey for use in gathering additional perception data from staff and families beyond those who were interviewed as part of the study.

- Review of Similar School Districts. The Consultants reviewed data and configurations of similar Massachusetts school districts. This review was designed to highlight best practices and alternatives, as well as potential programming and practice options, where appropriate.
- Preparation of Preliminary Alternatives. The Consultants have identified a series of potential actions to be taken to address the stated findings. These preliminary recommendations were discussed with the Superintendent and Interim Director of Student Services before being finalized in the following pages of the report.
- Preparation of Final Recommendations. The Consultants have produced this final report summarizing the work of the project. The Consultants made a public presentation of the results of the study to the School Committee on Wednesday, January 21, 2026 and have since finalized the written report.

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

- What are the regular education instructional and behavioral supports (including DCAP, UDL, etc.) currently in place in Westwood by grade span?
- Where are Westwood's inflection points in regard to requests for additional supports or disability services?
- What shifts is the district experiencing with respect to the student population?
- What does staff turnover and retention patterns look like among special educators in Westwood? Do these patterns differ by school and/or level?
- What do 504 numbers currently look like in Westwood? How do 504 Plans impact scheduling for service providers?
- What does the special education administration structure currently look like?
- What does the MTSS system look like in Westwood as described by the administration? as described by teachers?
- What other instructional strategies/systems are used to provide responsive and remedial instruction? (ESL, Title I, special programs, etc.)
- What are the current out of district profiles and placements? How has this changed over the past 3-5 years?
- What systems does the District have for collecting and analyzing data? Is data used consistently and systematically to determine interventions and their success/failure?
- Do you have a multi-year budget projection that will impact the District's ability to service students with additional needs?
- Does the District have clearly defined program criteria for admission or exiting programs? Would administration and staff describe these criteria as "equitable?" Why or why not?
- What ramifications would building additional in-district programs have for staff and families (general, special education, related-services, other specialists)?
- What ramifications would relocating in-district special education programs have for staff and families?
- What ramifications would building and/or relocating in-district programs have on building space?

- What ramifications would building in-district programs have on the District's relationship with its educational collaborative?
- How has the early childhood program changed or grown over time?
- What is the early childhood administrative structure? Do staff view the current structure as effective for successful transition to Kindergarten?
- How and when are early childhood special education students identified?
- Is there progress monitoring to measure student growth? Is there an end of year assessment that is shared with the receiving Kindergartens?
- What other preschools feed into the Westwood Public Schools? Do they take students with disabilities? How competitive is the Westwood Early Childhood Program?
- Given the current program and curriculum, what challenges is the District facing in terms of programming, space, staffing, enrollment?

3. Schedule

The chart below shows the original time schedule for accomplishing the tasks included in the original contract and associated with the initial project work plan for the study. As noted, additional interviews and surveys were added to this original plan and created a need for additional time to complete the work.

The District did an exceptional job in scheduling the needed interviews in a timely manner. In particular, the Consultants wish to thank Alyssa Provazza, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, for her assistance in scheduling interviews.

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

4. Parent and Staff Survey

As part of this study, the Consultants conducted comprehensive surveys of staff and family caregivers. The surveys were intended to provide an opportunity for broader feedback beyond the focus groups and interviews. The surveys were sent in the second week of December, which is a busy time of the year for families and school personnel.

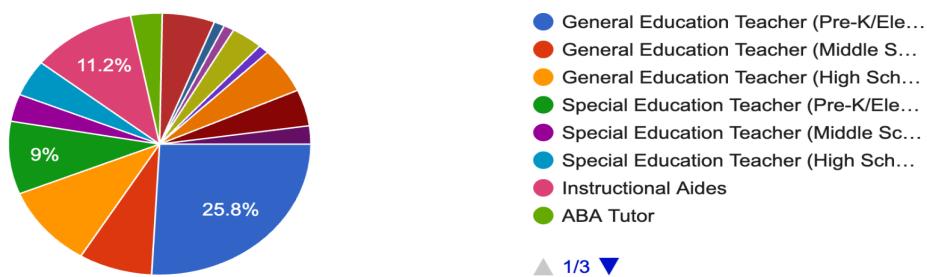
Despite this timing, the Consultants received 178 responses from caregivers and 91 responses from staff. Many families expressed their deep appreciation and respect for the Westwood Public Schools educators and leaders. It is clear from the survey results that there is great interest in these issues on the part of stakeholders, as well as tremendous respect and appreciation for the work done in the Westwood Public Schools.

An analysis of the faculty respondent revealed that:

- 6% are administrators;
- 5% are curriculum coordinators/specialists;
- 26% are K-5 general education teachers;
- 9% are K-5 special education teachers;
- 8% are general education middle school teachers;
- 3% are special education middle school teachers;
- 10% are high school general education teachers;
- 5% are high school special education teachers;
- 11% are instructional assistants;
- 3% are ABA tutors;
- 6% are psychologists;
- 3% are counselors/social workers; and
- 3% are related services personnel.

This demographic information indicates that the survey yielded insight from a broad cross section of Westwood faculty.

What is your primary role within the Westwood Public Schools? Type: Multiple choice
89 responses



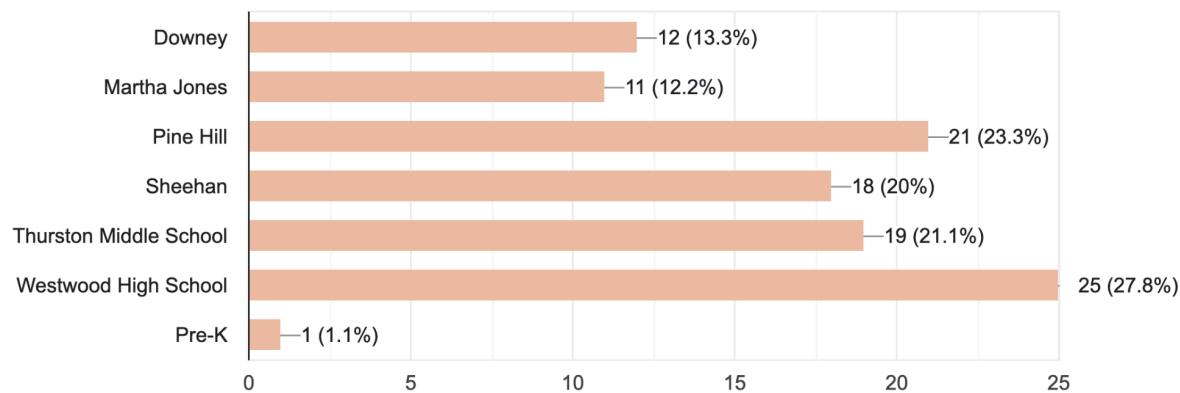
In addition, the survey gathered information regarding the longevity of staff employment. The responses indicated that:

- 11% of participating staff had been employed in Westwood for 0 to 2 years;
- 22% have been employed in Westwood for 3 to 5 years;
- 12% have worked in Westwood for 6 to 10 years;
- 11% have been employed in Westwood for 11-15 years; and
- 43% reported having worked in Westwood for 16 or more years.

District schools were represented in the following percentages:

At which school(s) do you primarily work? (Select all that apply)

90 responses



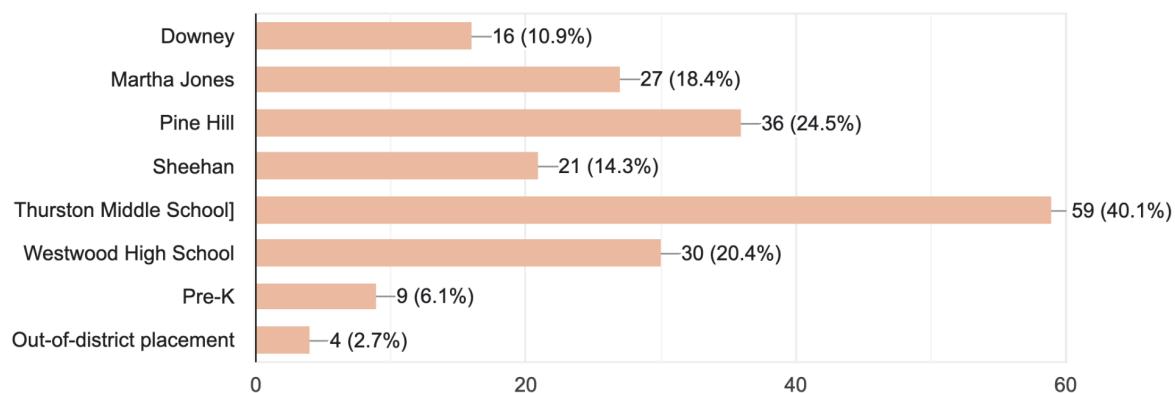
An analysis of the demographics of the caregivers indicates that:

- 16% are pre-K families;
- 43% are K-2 elementary families;
- 39% have students in grades 3-5;
- 37% are caregivers of students in grades 6-8;
- 20% have students in grades 9-12; and
- 5% have students who are ages 18-22.

Schools attended broke down as follows:

Which Westwood Public School does your child/ren attend?

147 responses



Families with a student with an IEP are 44% of respondents, families with a student with a 504 plan represent 35% of respondents, and 20% of respondents are families whose student receive all supports in general education.

A key focus of the questions in both the faculty and caregiver survey was the availability and effectiveness of services and supports in special and general education, as well as how effective the structures, processes and procedures for accessing support are working from caregivers and faculty's perspectives. On the family survey additional focus was on communication between home and school to address students' needs and then specific sections were dedicated to families with students on 504s and IEPs.

Family perspectives on the effectiveness of services and supports for students with disabilities and without disabilities revealed a wide range of experiences. Several key themes emerged, namely, many families whose students were served in general education:

- expressed a desire to know more about what is available to students who need support within general education;
- expressed a desire for there to be more opportunities for enrichment and engagement for students who need more academic challenge, particularly at the middle school level;
- reflected that there are strong supports for students in special education and limited resources for students who are struggling and do not have disabilities;
- systems, processes and implementation of 504 plans is an area of concern for families across the district with many noting that they do not always get invited to attend annual meetings and do not know whether their students 504 is being implemented.

For families whose students are served in special education, key themes are:

- the need for greater consistency in service delivery and program implementation across different schools within the district and across levels;
- the transition to middle school is an area of concern for families with concerns about which programs at middle school align best with the elementary school programs;
- staff turnover in general in special education and particularly in the WABA program is an area of significant concern for families; and
- Families indicate their appreciation and respect for teachers and related service providers. Families expressed great respect for the instructional assistants and ABA tutors with a perception that the district does not adequately value and support these roles resulting in high turnover which impacts their children.

For faculty a number of key themes emerged:

- the need for professional development and clear systems to address the increased behavioral needs of students in general education;
- a desire to provide more services in the general education classroom and less pull-out services. Many educators believe there would be stronger outcomes if this was to occur and this would require an overhaul of the current system, beliefs and practices; and
- Special educators noted the instability in special education leadership over the last 2-3 years. This was coupled with reflections that while the district had been stable prior to this, there has not been much in the way of innovation in the district. Many educators described an insularity with regards to professional learning and development, adopting DESE best practice guidelines

(e.g., MTSS, literacy, supervision and evaluation) and ensuring instructional practices were constantly improving and evolving.

5. Key Commendations, Findings and Recommendations

During the course of the review all the educators and parents who were interviewed were thoughtful and helpful in providing information and insight into the current programming of special education services in the District, as well as the regular education support available for students. Specifically, the interviewees were forthcoming regarding not only where the District was succeeding, but also where Westwood needs to improve.

Specifically, below are eight (8) specific sets of commendations, findings and recommendations regarding challenges that were raised during this review.

#1. Organizational Structure and Leadership

Commendations: The District appears to be well staffed in most areas with many long term and highly experienced educators. This is a considerable strength in the system that can be leveraged for instructional and systemic change efforts.

Findings: While the District is largely well staffed, recent history suggests that certain categories of employees, including Instructional Assistants and ABA Tutors, have been able to find higher wages, improved benefits, and the perception of better working conditions elsewhere. In addition, there appears to have also been a higher than usual turnover in special education teachers in recent years. Similarly, the District has experienced high turnover recently in student services and special education leadership positions, including the Director of Student Services and in the Department Head roles, where no one has been in their current roles for more than two (2) years.

In Westwood, the Special Education Department model through 2024-2025 was as follows:

- full time Special Education Department Heads at Westwood High School and Thurston Middle School;
- 1.5 FTE positions across the four (4) elementary schools, with the remaining .50 FTE elementary position working as the Early Education Director; and
- A part time individual working as the Out of District (OOD) Coordinator.

There is currently an open position for a 1.0 FTE Early Education Director/Out of District Coordinator, along with a 1.0 FTE that oversees Pine Hill and Sheehan and other individuals (specifically, a school psychologist and a retired educator) filling in at the remaining elementary schools.

These Department Heads are part of the Unit A Westwood Teachers Association (WTA) collective bargaining agreement, although they function very much as Unit B employees with respect to educator evaluation and certain leadership functions. Given that these Department Heads chair all evaluation meetings in their buildings, they are spread thin and, as a result, critical work around teacher development, instructional coaching, supervision and support is not as robust as it could be.

In addition there is a significant lack of consistency and oversight of special education processes and procedures across and within buildings with little horizontal or vertical alignment. This is a function of the current model in which the IEP annual meeting process is managed by multiple different case managers in the buildings and initial meetings and re-evaluations are managed by the Department Heads. Given the complexity of needs of many students on IEP's and particularly in district wide programs, the demands on special educator time around student and parent engagement, this model is not conducive to ensuring district wide consistency with best practices, IEP process and procedure and compliance, ensuring tight eligibility and calibrated criteria for service delivery provision, nor maximizing special educator time for work with students.

In addition, it was reported through our interviews that Principals have a varying understanding of inclusion and strategies for addressing the needs of students with IEPs and 504 plans and involvement in these processes.

Other areas of concern expressed during our investigation were as follows:

- The District does not currently have a lead nurse position, meaning that all school-based nurses report to their Principal and the Director of Student Services. Given the complexity of student's health, mental health and wellness needs as well as the multiple state mandates for school nursing, there is a need for a more tightly managed health services system.
- Coordination and management of Extended School Year (ESY) Services was also reported to be an issue over multiple school years. Specifically, it appears that the role of Department Heads in managing ESY services has been unclear and inconsistent.
- The intake and eligibility process at early childhood was also highlighted as an area that needs attention and improvement. This topic is addressed in another recommendation area of this report.
- Finally, many of those interviewed indicated that the roles of adjustment counselors and school psychologists, particularly with respect to providing direct services and managing 504 plans, is inconsistent across Westwood schools.

Recommendations: There is no “one size fits all” model for special education administration or building level coordination. Each district develops the model that best fits their situation organizationally, financially, and educationally. Given the above findings, we are recommending that Westwood take the following steps to address the current organizational structure and leadership issues.

- The District should consider moving to a Team Chair model (Unit A) with FTE's assigned per building based on IEP case loads and level of student need. While this requires an initial investment of financial resources, it is considered advantageous when the goal is to improve: eligibility practices, allocation of special education services provision, consistency, compliance and vertical and horizontal alignment of best practice within schools and across the District.

In districts where this model has been successfully implemented, Team Chairs not only serve to ensure special education compliance, consistency and best practice; these roles also provide a bridge and support to general education teachers and leaders around differentiation and inclusion. In addition, these roles also enable an on-the-ground tightening up of the referral and eligibility process and differentiating when students' lack of progress is a result of a disability and when it is not.

Moreover, this structure will also address many of the findings and challenges described in this report, when working closely with the special education Department Heads. Specifically, this will enable the special education Department Heads to focus their time on improvement of instructional practices, robust supervision and evaluation practices, to partner with school leaders, consult with general education partners in effective ways to serve all students who struggle, and to provide staff training and professional development.

There may be some cost offsets with potential FTE reductions in the removal of IEP management tasks from special educators roles and responsibilities that would assist in implementing this structure. Over time, this system will reap long term benefits in compliance, establishing best practice, consistency, alignment across the District, eligibility and IEP service design and delivery practices aligned with providing a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). This should yield a reduction in special education rates, which have climbed precipitously in the last few years.

At the smaller schools, the Team Chair role should be coupled, if possible, with another special educator role within the building with FTEs assigned based on case load and students level of need so the person in the team chair role is a full time FTE in the building. The Team Chair plays a vital role in supporting building leadership to ensure that special education processes and procedures are implemented with fidelity and in compliance with state and federal regulations. They also serve an important role in advocacy, consultation to colleagues and support of students and families.

This model requires, particularly in its first years of inception, regular prek-22 meetings and professional learning time with all Team Chairs, Department Heads and the Director of Student Services. We believe that the Team Chair model would require an addition of 4.3 FTEs (1.0 FTE at Pine Hill, TMS & WHS, 1.3 FTEs allocated to the other 3 elementary schools, the prek-director position should chair all pre-K IEPs based on the low caseload).

- The District should review the current Elementary Department Head positions and align these FTEs based on the needs in the various buildings. The current structure has a potential new 1.0 FTE for preschool and out of district (41 IEPs), and 1.5 FTE's split between the Downey (38 IEPs), Martha Jones (46 IEPs), Sheehan (58 IEPs) and Pine Hill (116 FTEs) (See Appendix: Table I District Enrollment DESE SIMS Data October 2025).
- In addition, we recommend that the District take a fresh look at the administrative needs of each elementary school, particularly Pine Hill, the needs of pre-K and out of district and restructure the elementary department heads FTEs accordingly based on student and building needs. In addition, if there are any programs that are under consideration for movement to different

schools this should also be factored into the restructuring so there is equity and parity amongst the Department Head roles. If there is no Team Chair model, the District should consider a restructured department as follows:

- one (1) full time position serving Pine Hill School (116 students on IEPs);
- one (1) full time position serving the other three (3) elementary schools (142 students on IEPs); and
- one (1) full time position for preschool and out of district (41 students on IEPs) and management of pre-K-5 Extended School year Services. Due to the low numbers of students on IEPs (factoring in the out of district component of this role and that pre-K is currently in 2 different buildings), we recommend that this role be responsible in full for the pre-K intake process and should chair all pre-K IEP's (17).

Typically these positions would be part of a Unit B (administrative) unit. However, given that Westwood does not have a Unit B, we recommend that these roles should be individually contracted instead of the current Unit A structure.

The District needs to delineate clear job descriptions, including responsibilities for educator evaluation and Extended School Year (ESY) programming, for each Department Head position. As noted above, the District may want to consider assigning oversight of Extended School Year for pre-K-5 to the pre-school/out of district role to “even out” the job responsibilities and demands based on the three director positions and create equity and parity across these positions. At the middle and high school, the District should consider a stipended ESY coordinator role with oversight from the Department Heads.

- Provide all Principals with training and clear expectations regarding their responsibilities in special education and 504 planning, particularly at the elementary level. As noted later in this report, Principals should be provided with a framework that they operate within (a “defined autonomy”) with respect to these important issues.
- The District should conduct a thorough examination of the schedules of related service providers in order to reduce the amount of travel between buildings, wherever possible.
- As part of the process for developing or revising job descriptions, the District should clarify the reporting responsibilities for Department Heads. In a best case scenario, these individuals should report to the Director of Student Services with a dotted line to principals and should be evaluated in a collaborative structure by both the Director of Student Services (primary evaluator) and building principals (secondary evaluator).
- The District should establish the position of lead nurse, either as a separate role or as a stipend for a current practitioner. A job description should be developed to ensure that this individual is providing support for school nurses, arranging professional learning opportunities for these nurses, and (in a best case scenario) providing meaningful evaluation and supervision designed to enhance the practice of all school nurses.

- The District needs to better define, through job descriptions and case and work load analysis the roles and expectations of adjustment counselors and psychologists in supporting students on IEPs and 504s and students who are not. Both the role and the allocation of FTEs are highly variable across schools. It is recommended that the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) guidelines for a student-to-counselor ratios of 250:1 and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) ratio of 1 psychologist per 500 students be used in this analysis coupled with the level of student need and number of IEP's in each school.

#2. Special Education Rates

Recommendations: Westwood has a well deserved reputation for providing robust and high quality special education services. In addition the District has built a significant number of programs and services designed to address the needs of students with IEPs within Westwood Schools.

Findings: As noted in the overview, Westwood's special education rates have increased from 18.3% in 2021 to 21.3% in 2025 (Appendix: Table #II). This exceeds the state rate of 20.6%. In 2021, Westwood was slightly lower than the state rate of 18.7% at 18.3%. Westwood's rates of students designated as low income is 7.9% and students with English Language Learning (ELL) needs is 1.00%. While some districts saw an increase in referrals and rates of students on IEPs related to COVID, many of Westwood's demographically comparative districts largely remained stable. Westwood's overall rate of students on IEPs is higher than many of these districts (Appendix: Table #II). Given the demographics and resources in Westwood, one would expect rates more aligned with its demographically comparative districts. IEP rates have also increased in the context of a slight decrease in enrollment since 2021 (104 students). While special education is deservedly a point of pride in the Westwood community, based on the interviews and survey data, it is apparent that students with and without disabilities are being served in special education. This will need ongoing focus and attention at a systems level as it has deep impacts instructionally, culturally and fiscally.

Recommendations: When rates in special education are higher than expected based on demographic and comparative data, it requires an analysis of both the general education and special education system. As will be discussed later on in this report, the lack of tight and cohesive systems for instruction, assessment, progress monitoring and intervention in general education often results in students being moved into special education too rapidly and/or unnecessarily. This particularly occurs in the early elementary and middle school grades. In early childhood the fidelity of the general education literacy instruction system has significant impact on the rate and volume of referrals for students in the category of specific learning disabilities (SLD) (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2020; Hingstman, M., Neitzel, A. J., & Slavin, R. E. (2023). In the middle school years students with organizational and executive functioning needs are often referred in anticipation of middle school or early on in middle school as executive functioning demands increase due to the complexity of the middle school curriculum and structure. Without robust general education structures and supports, special education becomes the default. Both parent and educator reports highlighted these areas in Westwood. A thorough analysis of the general education structures and systems in general is recommended with specific attention to the areas highlighted above.

On the special education side, it is important to examine assessment and eligibility determination practices and calibrate best practices pre-K-12. This will require reviewing assessments across disability categories and collecting and analyzing the data; professional learning with all psychologists to ensure comprehensive, standardized and culturally responsive assessment batteries and professional learning with all psychologists and personnel chairing initials and re-evaluations to ensure consistent understanding and expertise in educational disability determinations.

#3. Continuum of IEP Services and Specialized Programs

Recommendations: Westwood has a well deserved reputation for providing robust and high quality special education services. In addition, the District has built a significant number of programs and services designed to address the needs of students with IEPs within Westwood Schools. The overall perception in Westwood among employees and parents is that the District is fully committed to serve and keep students with disabilities in the Westwood Schools. Westwood's array of special education programming indeed enables the District to educate the majority of students with disabilities in the District. Westwood has the lowest rates of out of district students amongst its comparative districts and one of the lowest rates in the state at 3.5%. This is a point of pride for educators and parents alike and is well justified (Source: DESE RADAR).

Findings: As noted in the overview, Westwood's special education rates have increased from 18.3% in 2021 to 21.3% in 2025. This exceeds the current state rate of 20.6%. While some districts saw an increase in referrals and rates of students on IEPs related to COVID, Westwood's rate of students on IEPs is higher than many of its comparative districts (Appendix: Table # II). Given the demographics and resources in Westwood, one would expect rates more aligned with its comparative districts. While special education is deservedly a point of pride in the Westwood community, based on the interviews and survey data, it is apparent that students with and without disabilities are being served in special education. This will need ongoing focus and attention at a systems level as it has deep impacts instructionally, culturally and fiscally.

The continuum of special education services across grade spans in Westwood is somewhat inconsistent and not vertically aligned. Staff and families across buildings reported a number of concerns in this regard. It is not clear to both groups what the entrance and exit criteria are for programs and what data is used to make determinations. Moreover, without a clear vertical through line for programs and services, transitions between grade spans result in IEPs that are a mismatch between the sending and receiving buildings. Additionally, without an explicit vertical alignment of programs and services, it is difficult for families to understand and trust that the level of services for their students will continue through the different grade levels.

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

are available to parents so that they can see the multiple opportunities available for their students as they progress through the system.

Following are additional findings within this area uncovered through our data review, surveys and interviews:

- Teachers and Principals alike noted a concern that students are pulled out of general education instruction beyond what some may deem necessary. This was raised specifically with regards to early literacy where, in many cases, pull out services are provided during the general education literacy block.
- In addition, within special education, students on IEPs receive services in partial inclusion 25.1% of the time and in substantially separate settings 7.3% of the time, with 69.6% receiving services in full inclusion. While this is higher than the state average of 67.4%, it is lower than many of its comparable districts where full inclusion percentages range from the mid 70-80%.
- Many educators noted that the level of A grid (consultation) and C grid services (outside of the general education classroom) written into student's IEPs in many cases exceeds the needs of individual students.
- Within specific programs, there are programmatic services that are part and parcel of the running of the program as a best practice including, for example, outside consultation or community outings. While many of these programmatic services are not required to provide a FAPE for individual students, they are encoded in all student's IEPs.
- Service delivery grids for in District IEPs often have more services listed in the grids than those of students who are placed out of district.
- Staff report the randomness with which co-teaching is implemented within and across buildings. Specifically, there does not seem to be a District plan for utilizing co-teaching and the implementation of such arrangements seems to be, in many cases, personality dependent.
- Educators noted that for many students in learning centers, the special education pull-out time focuses on study skills and getting homework done versus specialized instruction. Noted in these concerns is that students with this level of need should be served in general education and that there is work to be done on educating the community on the difference between students who need support in general education with accommodations and students who require specialized instruction in order to receive FAPE.
- Educators shared that while students have always been 'over-referred' to special education this has exacerbated since COVID; "everyone with needs qualifies regardless of whether there is a disability." In addition educators at the middle and high schools level expressed concerns that the need to provide accommodations is often conflated with the need to guarantee good grades.
- The need for organizational and executive functioning instruction at the general education level is seen as an area for growth by educators and parents alike. The largest disability category in

Westwood is health (27.4%) followed by emotional disability (15.9%) and autism (14.1%). The health category includes students with ADHD. This percentage exceeds the state percentage of 15.4% by 12 percentage points. The percentage of students on IEPs and 504s at the middle school level is over 30%, some of which, per report, is driven by the executive and organizational demands of the middle school years.

Recommendations: As the special education leadership team sets short and long term priorities, it would be helpful to articulate in writing the continuum of services from pre-K-22 in the Westwood Public Schools. Wherever possible, the District should align program names between the levels. While it is not uncommon for there to be expansions and/or contraction of programming as well as different service delivery models at middle and high school based on student need and development, it is important for both families and staff that the pathways are clear as well as the criteria for each program so decision-making is more transparent. In addition, it is important for families to be fully engaged in this process and aware that students with the same diagnoses and educational disability categories may best be served by different programs. Mapping out services from least restrictive to most restrictive with program description would create common understanding between grade levels and among families. Program descriptions should also include clear criteria for entrance and exit into each program. While it is important for program design to build in some flexibility in order to be responsive to changes in student needs, in general, the continuum of services descriptions and criteria would be helpful when making placement determinations.

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

Furthermore, special educators should be provided with access to and professional development in the curriculum materials utilized in regular education. Regular educators should receive professional development in utilizing Tier 1 strategies. Finally, the District educator evaluation process should be focused on providing feedback to educators regarding their use of high leverage and Tier 1 strategies.

The special education leadership team should undertake an analysis of IEP service delivery and programmatic service and ensure that student's IEPs are written in an individualized way to reflect the individual students needs.

Leadership of both general education and special education should explore the instructional models currently in place, particularly in literacy and work to individualize so that students requiring specialized instruction in reading are also benefiting from the reading instruction that is occurring in the classroom and are not routinely pulled out of literacy instruction to receive services.

In addition, IEPs should focus on disability-related needs; that is, additional services and supports should not be added to students IEPs who do not require them solely because they are already on an IEP. This will require professional development for general and special educators as well as

monitoring and oversight of IEP service design and delivery. The current model of multiple case managers in buildings handling the IEP process exacerbates this pattern.

Executive functioning and organizational and study skills instruction within general education is an area for further inquiry. When there is limited support in this area in general education, students end up being put on IEPs to address executive functioning issues that could be addressed in general education through systematic instructional processes. While many students do indeed need specialized instruction in this area, many students with milder needs can be well served with strong and consistent instructional practices in general education with a strong District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP). This is particularly an issue in the middle school years as curriculum increases in volume, demand and complexity and students are required to adapt to multiple teachers' instructional styles.

#4. Westwood Applied Behavioral Analysis (WABA) Programs

Commendations: Most parents of students in the WABA program at all levels indicated a deep appreciation for the program and, in particular, for the ABA tutors. Parents are passionate about the needs of their students and committed to having their children remain in the Westwood Public Schools.

Findings: The WABA programs at all levels are well-staffed and offer a wide array of school, home and community based services and opportunities. At the pre-K, elementary and middle school levels, the programs are housed in spacious classrooms with ample equipment, materials and evidence-based instructional materials. (Note: The consultants did not visit the high school program and, therefore, cannot comment directly on that program.)

As noted in a prior section, many of the WABA IEPs contain programmatic elements in the grids that are not individualized based on student needs. Providers reflected that in certain cases, there is so much service delivery on the grid, that there is often no time for students to work and develop independence. Providers reflected concern that the desire to provide so much in the way of services is inadvertently encouraging “learned helplessness.”

In addition, the grids that were made available evidenced a high degree of consultation services provided by all team members and direct services provided by the ABA tutors and related services providers (speech, OT, PT, BCBA etc).

Recommendations: There has not been a comprehensive program review of the WABA program in recent years. Given the staffing and budget levels committed to this very important program, we recommend that the school district engage in a pre-K-22 program review of the WABA program with an outside expert specialized in public school programming for students on the autism spectrum. This should be inclusive and, at a minimum, should include:

- looking at all programmatic elements;
- examining the transitions between elementary and middle school and middle school and high school;

- assessing the purpose and provision of home-based services, which typically should be around parent training and the generalization of a student's skills from school to home. Home services provided by public school districts under the auspices of an IEP are not designed to be respite.
- impact of the current model and structure of the program on staff quality of work experience and retention; and
- examining the curriculum and instructional model(s) being utilized.

#5. Instructional Assistants and ABA Tutors

Commendations: It is clear from our interviews and school visits that Instructional Assistants and ABA Tutors play a key role in providing quality experiences for students in Westwood. This work is valued highly by parents who, in many cases, rely on these individuals for information regarding how their students are progressing. Likewise, in many buildings, their contributions are recognized and valued by staff and administration.

Findings: Our primary finding in this area deals with the significant level of turnover among ABA tutors that Westwood has experienced, particularly at the beginning of the 2025-2026 school year. Individuals who we interviewed attributed these departures to the salaries being paid in neighboring communities, particularly Newton, as well as working conditions in Westwood dealing with the amount of home based services, case loads, and scheduling concerns (preparation time, lunch, etc.) during the day that don't occur because of staffing and IEP requirements. Our examination of nearby school districts indicates that both the instructional assistants and ABA tutors are compensated well below that of Westwood's comparison districts. The District has been somewhat successful at securing replacements for those who departed in August, although it was well into the fall before all hiring took place. In addition, in some cases, the District was forced to secure ABA tutors through contract agencies, where many of those hired came without school experience. These contracted services are billed at higher rates creating further issues of inequity and concerns amongst ABA tutors.

In addition, our interviews point toward a perception that, at least in some schools, instructional assistants and ABA tutors are not treated "as professionals" by teachers, although it is important to say that this was not the case at all schools. Moreover, we were told that Westwood historically has not necessarily sought to actively retain IAs; rather, the assumption was that these individuals would move into teaching positions, primarily with other school systems.

Recommendations: The Consultants understand that the Westwood Public Schools are currently engaged in collective bargaining with the Union representing IAs and ABA tutors (Local 272). We believe that this represents an opportunity to closely examine these positions, the contractually mandated working conditions, and wage comparisons with neighboring and comparison communities in order to create contractual conditions designed to retain these individuals in Westwood.

Moreover, steps should be taken to enhance the view and support the professionalism of IAs and ABA tutors in the District and its schools, including:

- The development of an ongoing professional development plan, designed to enhance the skills of individuals in these roles; and
- The creation of an educator licensure program pathway for IAs and ABA tutors in partnership with local colleges, and/or other school districts and/or a collaborative, created to incent those who are interested in securing professional licensure and remaining in Westwood.

#6. Resource Allocation

Recommendations: Westwood has robust resources and services and provides a deep and broad array of services and supports to students, particularly those in special education.

Findings: A consistent theme from administrators, teachers and parents who were interviewed and/or participated in the survey is resource allocation and whether resources are being utilized equitably, efficiently and most effectively. Specifically, it is clear that the distribution of students on IEPs across schools has wide variation (See Table: District Enrollment DESE SIMS Data, October 2025) and that the level and complexity of overall student need varies from school to school. Staffing allocations, resources and patterns do not necessarily align with the variability in numbers and needs. We found that educator caseloads are also imbalanced with variation not only between schools, but within schools for job-alike roles.

This is most pronounced at the Pine Hill School, with educators and families alike noting the inequitable allocation of resources, which is borne out by the staffing data that was shared.

Table I: District Enrollment: DESE SIMS Data October 2025

	Enrollment	IEP's	%
DISTRICT	2873	651	22.7%
Preschool	45	17	38%
Downey	280	38	14%
Martha Jones	281	46	16%
Pine Hill	491	116	24%
Sheehan	283	58	20%
TMS	633	165	26%
WHS	834	156	19%
OOD	24	24	100%
	2871	620	

Recommendations: The District should undertake a case-load and work-load analysis of special education teachers, psychologists, related services personnel, instructional assistants, counselors,

interventionists to ensure cohesive and equitable support allocation district-wide. In addition the differing levels of complexity and student need in each building needs to be factored into this analysis. This is particularly critical at the Pine Hill School where the allocation of resources is not aligned with the needs of the school and the complexities of the merging of the schools and programs. There is also a need for targeted professional development to address the needs of the Pine Hill community.

#7. Preschool Program

Commendations: The Preschool Program currently operates three (3) integrated classrooms at Westwood High School and one specialized WABA preschool classroom at Pine Hill School. The integrated classrooms are staffed by dedicated professionals who have been serving Westwood students for a significant number of years.

Findings: Based on our interviews, school visits, and the data provided by Westwood Public Schools, the Consultants believe the following to be true regarding the Preschool Program:

- The location of the WABA preschool program as a single preschool offering, separate from all other preschool programs, is a disadvantage to both the staff and students of this program. For example, students who would benefit from inclusion opportunities need to be transported to Westwood High School in order to participate in these classes. In addition, staff are separated from their colleagues in a way that makes sharing of practice and collaboration very difficult.
- There is no space for additional preschool classes at Westwood High School. Furthermore, the WABA preschool program is currently being held in a classroom which was originally designated as a kindergarten space. It appears that the space may be needed for this original purpose in the near future, possibly as early as the 2026-2027 school year.
- Data show that there is a need for additional preschool classes due to enrollment and demand factors. In addition, the District has a history of requesting waivers from the Massachusetts Department of Education in order to serve students with IEPs in the integrated classes at a rate that exceeds state and federal law.
- Westwood operates a program which has full day and half day students attending the same integrated classes at Westwood High School.
- The District utilizes classroom educators as part of the intake team, which necessitates having no students attend on Wednesday so that this group can engage in their intake work.

Recommendations: We believe that the District should strive to implement the following recommendations, based on our findings, regarding the preschool program:

- Relocate the WABA preschool program to be located with the other preschool programs. While we know, as indicated above, that this cannot be accomplished at Westwood High School, we believe that the District should examine space at other elementary schools in order to identify classroom(s) for preschool programs. Moreover, the WABA preschool classroom and/or other

preschool classes should not be located as a singleton at any location, given the issues identified above.

- The District should establish a full day preschool model, which would require an additional two (2) classrooms. This may mean locating the preschool across two (2) buildings, including the current high school location.
- The preschool should establish a dedicated intake team, which would relieve classroom teachers of these responsibilities. This would promote consistency in the intake process, as well as increasing the amount of time that students would have access to quality preschool programming during the week.

#8. Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

Commendations: The District has committed to working with Katie Novak on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), beginning with the 2025-2026 school year. We were told that the goal of this work is to “have a universal set of practices around having goals in every classroom for students” and to lead to better implementation of Tier 1 strategies to benefit all students in every classroom. While this is an ambitious goal that will not be accomplished in a short period of time, District leadership should be commended for the beginnings of a commitment to this work.

In addition, the District appears to be committed to an accelerated curriculum review process, designed primarily (at this point) to address the needs of educators and students in literacy. This is particularly important as there is evidence that high quality literacy curriculum coupled with strong assessment and data practices leads to effective instructional practices that meet the needs of all learners.

Finally, while special education and curriculum leadership in the District is largely new to Westwood, it is clear that they represent a “deep bench” with both general education and special education staff trained in multiple areas of intervention, remediation, and instruction. This should enable the District to facilitate the roll out of MTSS once the District finalizes the logistics for delivering services as well as the means and schedule for progress monitoring and analyzing student data. This group is a great resource to help other educators master the best instructional practices for proving Tier I interventions and supports within the classroom.

Findings: The level of understanding and implementation of MTSS frameworks and the current District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) is very uneven across schools and the District as a whole. In fact, both in our interviews and the survey we found evidence that a significant number of educators within the system did not know what MTSS and/or the DCAP are.

A widely expressed sentiment is that the District “does not do MTSS/RTI. We give every child what they need so we don't need it.”

As referenced in other sections of this report, the lack of familiarity with and ability to use the DCAP and the lack of understanding of tiered supports is problematic. Having a clearly articulated plan for general education and skilled educators capable of identifying and applying targeted instruction,

interventions and supports is critical to student success and to prevent the overidentification of students and use of special education services as the means to help students.

Similarly, our interviews revealed that, while staffing levels for regular education interventions are healthy, the implementation of various regular education intervention strategies (Universal Design for Learning, WIN blocks, etc.) vary from school to school. Staff reported inconsistencies across buildings in both the commitment to and delivery of Tier I instruction and interventions.

Educators and leaders alike will benefit from understanding the conceptual framework of MTSS. Tier 3 support is widely considered to be a special education service by educators and leaders when in actuality all of MTSS lives within the general education framework. Another often expressed sentiment is of special educators as saviors who “swoop in” and take care of all students’ needs. This theme emerged across buildings and is deeply steeped in the culture of the district. This mindset and action set impacts both professional identity as well as teacher efficacy and expertise as teachers have not had to flex certain instructional muscles in order to meet the growing diversity and complexity of students’ needs in Westwood.

One unintended consequence of both the resources available in Westwood and the above cited mindset is that it impacts educators’ beliefs in what students are capable of and how much scaffolding and support they need. Many special educators described concerns about creating “learned helplessness” in students by the over provision of services and supports.

Broadly speaking, it is clear from our interviews and data review that the implementation of District initiatives has historically been inconsistent and varied among schools. Numerous individuals interviewed for this report noted that the elementary schools in Westwood “are not a team working together.” As noted throughout this report, examples would include MTSS, DCAP, fidelity in the use of high quality curriculum materials, and the implementation of a “what I need” model to support students. Moreover, a number of individuals interviewed suggested that the District “finds it acceptable that there are different models for chairing 504 meetings, operating child study, and other functions” across elementary buildings. This issue is discussed in another section of this report.

Our interviews also revealed a resistance in this District to systems or programs that come from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, including MTSS and educator evaluation.

Additionally, while it is clear that the District has adequate professional development time in order to implement professional learning in tiered supports and differentiation to meet student needs, the District does not appear to have a multi-year professional development plan delineating the work to be done, how that work will be carried out and the indicators of success to be utilized in measuring the success of the professional learning endeavors.

It should also be noted that, even if these plans were already fully developed and in the process of being implemented across the District, it will take time and focused training for general education teachers to master the skills needed to implement interventions within the classroom successfully. The roll out of MTSS as well as the fidelity with which interventions are delivered will be uneven

and challenging. It is important that leadership and curriculum leads provide support to staff as they undertake changes in practice.

Recommendations: As noted above, the development of clear, transparent, long-term implementation plans, including the professional development needed to implement these plans across all schools with fidelity will be crucial. Aspects of such a plan should include, but are not limited to:

- Providing targeted opportunities for staff to observe well-structured Tier I interventions. This could include focused instructional rounds, peer observation, peer coaching, and professional development that is grade/subject specific during meeting times. The District has begun implementation of these routines.
- Identification and communication of appropriate Tier II supports for implementation, ensuring that there are equitable and high quality resources and well trained staff available across all buildings to deliver the services.
- Identification and communication of resources that are available in each school for intervention, including the creation of an online repository of resources and materials for intervention by tier and domain.
- Development of a system wide method for progress monitoring and data analysis.
- Expectations that all administrators support staff through the trial and error that is necessary to implement instructional strategies that are part of the DCAP and MTSS.
- Inclusion of job-embedded options for professional development, including coaching, peer modeling, and cross class grouping to assist staff during implementation. While developing a professional development plan for MTSS will take time, the District can also implement some low cost professional development options immediately. These include the use of faculty meeting time to share and model successful practices, book study groups, in class coaching, and videos from DESE and other resources.

It is critically important that all school leaders and central administrators have a clear understanding of the non-negotiables in the implementation of these important initiatives, as well as where there might be differences between buildings because of levels, the population being served, etc. While there could certainly be differences across schools in these approaches, the key non-negotiables must be defined and supported, with accountability measures in place and monitored.

One way to address these concerns would be to adopt “Tight Coupling and Defined Autonomy” as a districtwide approach. At least a few of those individuals interviewed expressed the sentiment that Westwood is a “loose federation of schools,” and not a school system. Specifically, this perspective indicates that many things are done differently from school to school. Our recommendation is that the District identify the practices and programs that need to be implemented with fidelity across all schools and that, therefore, are not negotiable, as well as those where school leadership has some

degree of autonomy regarding the practices in that building. Beyond MTSS and DCAP, this should include, but is not limited to, providing all schools with a framework for intervention blocks, child study team (CST), and creating 504 teams. Only by doing so will the District reach its goal of providing consistent and high quality services for all students, no matter which school they attend.

Implementing and sustaining MTSS is a multi-year effort. Whatever plan the District develops, it needs to be scaffolded to allow staff to develop the skills and resources needed and it needs to include a means to continually assess the effectiveness of supports and interventions and, subsequently, make periodic revisions/updates in response to findings.

Furthermore, it is important that the District find ways to utilize their professional development time available for system leaders and principals to provide meaningful professional learning for teachers and paraprofessionals focused on reinforcing and modeling the expectations of the MTSS plan.

Concurrently, the District should begin the process of creating a multi-year professional development plan as soon as possible. This multi-year plan will outline a scaffolded professional development framework that builds capacity for general education teachers and specialists in MTSS that can help students be successful **before** reaching a point where parents believe special education is the only option for help. Additionally, all staff need targeted training in best instructional practices for providing a high quality, standards based curriculum to all students with and without disabilities. Planning this work should involve key stakeholders and should include indicators of success and a process for regularly updating the Plan. It would be best if this work were linked to the strategic planning effort and/or the establishment of indicators of success. As noted, the work on UDL this year is a positive step in this direction; however, it should be integrated into the MTSS work and not seen as a stand-alone initiative.

Building MTSS is a district initiative and will need to be led at the District level. The Consultants recommend that a District MTSS team structure is created that includes Student Services, Curriculum & Instruction, Equity leadership, ELL, curriculum coordinators, and general and special education teachers. This is a multi-year process and the work would need to be mapped out over the next 3 years strategically. This work will require systems change efforts, mindset work, and ongoing professional development and learning. It will be essential for those leading the work to have expertise in both content and group facilitation.

6. Conclusion

Westwood Public Schools has a strong foundation of experienced and committed leaders and educators, robust resources, and a community that clearly values high quality education for all students. This study affirms many areas of strength while also identifying critical opportunities to improve coherence, equity, and effectiveness across special education and general education systems.

The findings and recommendations outlined in this report are intended to support the District in addressing rising special education rates, strengthening leadership structures, ensuring consistency and fidelity of practice across schools, and building sustainable systems, particularly in Multi-Tiered

Systems of Support (MTSS), program design, staffing, and early childhood services, that better meet the needs of all learners.

Meaningful progress will require clear districtwide expectations, strategic investment, thoughtful change management, and sustained professional learning over multiple years. With focused leadership, transparent communication, and continued engagement of staff and families, Westwood is well positioned to evolve its systems in ways that preserve its many strengths, address current challenges, and ensure that every student receives appropriate, equitable, and effective support in the least restrictive environment.

7. Consultants

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

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

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

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

Karen Shmukler. Dr. Karen Shmukler has a diverse and multi-layered career with experience and expertise spanning pre-K-college in the educational and human services domain in highly diverse communities. She consults at the state and national level bringing her deep expertise in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and building Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) that provide and integrate culturally responsive social emotional and academic development. She has deep expertise in innovative special education program design and development, special education reviews, and building in-district programming to reduce unnecessary out of district placements.

Karen has worked across districts and presented nationally on sustainable, systemic approaches to disrupt disproportionality in special and general education at the systems, school and individual educator level. She is passionate in supporting schools and districts to provide a continuum of research-based literacy instruction in general and special education that transforms literacy instructional systems and structures and prevents unnecessary referrals to special education. Karen was at the forefront of introducing wraparound and system of care principles in the areas of public education, mental health and child welfare in Massachusetts. She provides professional development in this area to IEP teams, special education administrators, school-based mental health personnel in developing and facilitating inter-disciplinary systems and coordinated care approaches with families and outside providers that wrap services and support around students with complex needs in special education, supporting students to remain in the most inclusive, least restrictive environments.

Karen was the Deputy Superintendent of Student Services in the Public Schools of Brookline where she worked for over a decade, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services in the Newton Public Schools, the Associate Head of School at Prospect Hill Academy. Most recently Karen was brought into the Public Schools of Brookline to support the district in addressing and stabilizing financial and operational issues in special education. Karen currently lectures at Tufts University on child mental health in the educational context. She has taught English as a Second Language and literacy to children and adults from marginalized communities in South Africa and the USA. Regardless of context, her work centers and braids issues of equity, inclusion, race, belonging and culture as she strives to support and build inclusive organizations that are culturally sustaining and healing-centered.

Karen received her Clinical Psychologist degree from the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, and her Doctorate in Education from Nova Southeastern University, Florida.

8. Appendix

	Enrollment	IEP's	%
DISTRICT	2873	651	22.7%
Preschool	45	17	38%
Downey	280	38	14%
Martha Jones	281	46	16%
Pine Hill	491	116	24%
Sheehan	283	58	20%
TMS	633	165	26%
WHS	834	156	19%
OOD	24	24	100%
	2871	620	

Table II: Students with Disabilities Rates

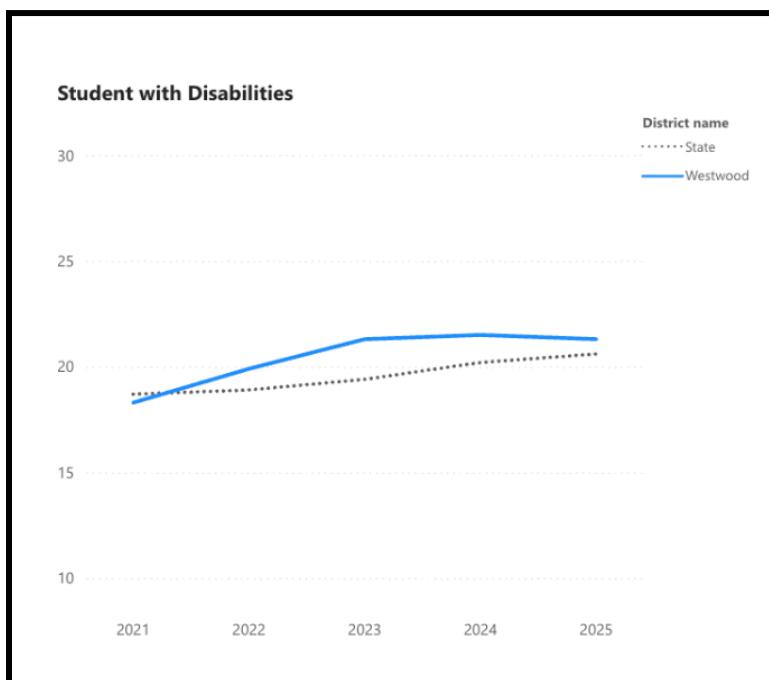
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Total in-and-out of district	2,968	2,910	2,914	2,905	2,864
# of students	544	579	621	624	609
% of students	18.3	19.9	21.3	21.5	21.4

Source: DESE School & District Profile Data.

Table III: District Comparisons Special Education & Demographic Rates

District	Student Enrollment	Student Enrollment	Student Demographics	Student Enrollment	Student Demographics	Student Demogra
	In-District FTE Pupils	Out-of-District FTE Pupils	Students with disabilities % Headcount	Total FTE Pupils	Low-Income % Headcount	English learner %
Arlington	6,065.0	97.2	17.1%	6,162.2	10.6%	5.1%
Belmont	4,420.1	154.7	15.1%	4,574.8	11.9%	10.0%
Brookline	7,034.0	86.0	18.7%	7,120.0	14.6%	11.3%
Burlington	3,544.2	105.9	16.1%	3,650.1	20.0%	8.7%
Canton	3,264.7	87.7	16.9%	3,352.4	20.9%	4.1%
Dedham	2,674.0	131.0	22.2%	2,805.0	29.8%	8.2%
Lexington	6,828.4	113.4	14.2%	6,941.8	8.5%	8.8%
Natick	5,314.7	127.5	18.4%	5,442.2	14.1%	4.7%
Needham	5,570.5	96.0	18.6%	5,666.6	7.8%	2.8%
Newton	11,764.7	153.3	18.6%	11,918.0	13.4%	7.2%
Norwood	3,596.0	168.0	25.0%	3,764.0	40.7%	16.2%
Wayland	2,665.2	57.0	19.2%	2,722.2	4.1%	2.1%
Watertown	2,735.4	119.6	19.5%	2,855.0	35.7%	16.5%
Wellesley	4,086.5	71.3	17.2%	4,157.9	8.3%	2.8%
Weston	2,058.8	22.5	17.9%	2,081.3	7.3%	3.0%
Westwood	2,871.6	32.4	21.5%	2,904.0	7.9%	1.0%

Source: DESE Resource Allocation and District Action Reports (RADAR) Data.



References:

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