



**BROOKFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**SPECIAL EDUCATION OUT-OF-DISTRICT**  
**PROGRAMMING REVIEW**

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*This report has been produced at the request of Brookfield Public Schools and contains information intended for use by Brookfield leaders for the purpose of program improvement. Information in this report should not be shared with other parties without consent from Brookfield Public Schools, in consultation with Capitol Region Education Council (CREC).*

## Introduction

In spring 2023, Brookfield Public Schools' (Brookfield) leaders requested a program review of the district's Enrichment Learning Center (ELC), Social Emotional Enrichment (SEE), and out-of-district placement programming. This review sought to evaluate in-district programs to meet the needs of students with disabilities in out-of-district placements and determine the patterns and trends in out-of-district placements initiated for Brookfield Public School students

This report presents data and analysis following the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) framework for program reviews. CREC team members conducted the data collection portion of the program review from July to September 2023. This report shares findings and provides recommendations for district consideration.

## Approach and Methodology

CREC has developed an approach to program reviews that has the continuous improvement of programs and services for students as its goal. The review process is intended to:

- Assess the quality of an educational institution's programs across key domains,
- Determine priority need areas; and
- Detail recommended goals and activities that will change practices and improve outcomes for students.

CREC began this program review by meeting with district leadership to review the evaluation domains, confirm the scope of data collection, and plan for collaboration with out-of-district placements. CREC team members then carried out activities to collect and analyze data including file reviews, interviews, district document reviews, and the previous special education program review report dated May 2023. CREC team members triangulated and synthesized the data according to the evaluation questions to determine findings and recommendations.

## Evaluation Domains

Two overarching domains frame this review.

1. **Domain 1: Resources**—Evaluate in-district programs to meet the needs of students with disabilities in out-of-district placements
2. **Domain 2: Student Placements** - Determine the patterns and trends in out-of-district placements initiated for Brookfield Public School students

Within and across the two evaluation domains, specific focus areas for review included:

- Evaluation and IEPs
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Progress Monitoring
- Family Involvement and Support
- Behavioral Supports
- Professional Development and Collaboration

## Data Sources

Data described below were collected and analyzed in order to answer the evaluation questions. Any data used from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) are only as accurate as the district's reporting at the time the state requires the data.

## Documents and Reports

CREC reviewed documents and reports from Brookfield Public Schools and the CSDE. These documents and reports include but are not limited to program descriptions and materials, communications with staff and families, staff rosters, student enrollment information, student demographics, district fiscal information and the previous special education program review report dated May 2023.

## Student Review

CREC selected a random sample of nine (9) out of 23 total students enrolled in special education out-of-district programs as a representative sample for this review. All of the students had individual education plans (IEPs) that were reviewed to determine patterns and trends, and comparisons of IEPs between in-district students and out-of-district students.

## Individual and Group Focused Interviews

Input from staff and parents was obtained through 21 interviews conducted July through September 2023. The interviews were designed to solicit feedback about the two domains for this review. CREC initiated contact with nine (9) families, eight (8) different out-of-district schools, and four (4) in-district program teams.

## Domain 1: Resources

**Evaluate in-district programs to meet the needs of students with disabilities in out-of-district placements.**

### Special Education Budget Expenditures

Brookfield Public Schools' prevalence rate of students with disabilities has ranged from 14.0% - 14.8% of the total student population over the last four (4) school years. Table 1 presents the difference in the proportion of total expenditures spent on special education with and without out-of-district placement costs of tuition and transportation over three (3) years. At the time of this report, 2022-23 data were not available publicly. However, for the 2021-22 school year, Brookfield's total special education expenditures were \$12,395,757. Including special education tuition and transportation, this is 24.4% of Brookfield's total education expenditures. Without special education tuition and transportation, it is 17% of the district's total expenditures.

**Table 1. Special Education and Total Expenditures, 2020-2022<sup>1</sup>**

	2021-22	2020-21
Special Education Expenditures	\$12,395,757	\$11,787,442
Total Expenditures	\$50,895,420	\$48,132,354
Percent Special Education	24.4%	24.5%
Percent Special Education Minus Out-of-District Tuition and Transportation Costs	17%	19.3%

Table 2 includes a breakdown of expenditures within the special education budget for the 2021-22 school year. The 2021-22 school year data are the most recent data available at the time of this report.

**Table 2. Total Special Education Expenditures, 2021-22<sup>2</sup>**

Expenditure Type	Total (\$)	Percent of Total (%)
Teacher Salaries	\$3,772,079	30%
Instruct.- Aide Salaries	\$1,715,101	14%
Other Salaries	\$908,854	7%
Employee Benefits	\$1,575,851	13%
Purchased Services Other Than Transport.	\$594,815	5%
Special Education Tuition	\$2,782,590	22%
Supplies	\$60,313	0%
Property Services	\$3,102	0%
Purchased Services for Transport.	\$950,996	8%

<sup>1</sup> From [Profile and Performance Reports, EdSight: Connecticut State Department of Education](#)

<sup>2</sup> From [Special Education Expenditures, EdSight: Connecticut State Department of Education](#)

Expenditure Type	Total (\$)	Percent of Total (%)
Equipment	\$29,534	0%
All Other Expenditures	\$2,523	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$12,395,757</b>	<b>100%</b>

## In-District Programs

### *Enrichment Learning Center (ELC)*

Brookfield Public Schools has a program with services in grades K - 8 titled the Enrichment Learning Center (ELC), which serves students with developmental disabilities and significant cognitive disabilities. At the high school, there is a similar program referred to as the Life Skills program serving students in grade 9 - age 22 as appropriate. There are no written categorical criteria or eligibility requirements, as each student's placement is determined by their PPT. Generally, these students have significant challenges in a variety of domains that can include cognitive functioning, communication, and daily living skills. Students may spend more time in a self-contained special education classroom to focus on academic skills, communication, social skills, functional daily living skills, and independence.

Each school can serve students in the appropriate age and grade level with a team comprised of a special education teacher and dedicated paraeducators. A board certified behavior analyst (BCBA) consults with the team and students may receive a more intensive and integrated plan for related services.

However, the related service providers are shared amongst the schoolwide student population and are not dedicated solely to the ELC. Additionally, most of the students access general education settings within the school and have opportunities to engage with students that do not have disabilities. This access varies depending on the student's needs, appropriateness of participation, and availability of these opportunities within the school.

### *Social Emotional Enrichment (SEE)*

The Social Emotional Enrichment (SEE) program is for students with significant social and emotional needs in grades K - 8. Students often have average to above average cognitive ability, may only be one to two years behind grade level, or require academic assistance due to significant social emotional challenges that prevent them from being successful without support. Students access the general education environment throughout the day as appropriate. This can fluctuate according to a student's needs in which students may remain in the program for longer periods of time.

The models at the elementary and middle school are similar in that they both have a school psychologist that works with the program, but is also shared with the rest of the school. The program at the

elementary school has a BCBA that regularly consults and works with the team, while the perceptions of the program at the middle school is that it does not have regular involvement from the BCBA.

## Staffing and Utilization

In most districts, staffing and utilization comprise a large portion of school and district resources. Table 3 shows Brookfield's full-time equivalent (FTE) staff using data from CSDE. Upon verifying these data with Brookfield, the district provided information via their internal database, MUNIS. The district shared that the human resources consultant reported inaccurate data to the CSDE at the time.

Brookfield increased its FTE staffing by 12.6 positions in the 2022-23 school year over the 2021-22 school year. The largest increase was in Other Staff/Non-instructional Services/Support, comprised of additional positions for health and student safety staff. The only category that decreased staffing was in general education teachers by 0.4 FTE position. Brookfield did not see a significant decline in overall student enrollment or increase in special education prevalence over these two school years.

**Table 3. Full-Time Equivalent Staff by Category, 2022-23 and 2021-22**

Category	Staff Type	2022-23 <sup>3</sup>	2021-22 <sup>4</sup>
General Education	Teachers and Instructors	177.0	177.4
	Paraeducators	12.5	10.0
Special Education	Teachers and Instructors	36.7	36.7
	Paraeducators	65.0	65.0
Admins, Coordinators and Dept. Chairs	District Central Office	5.0	5.0
	School Level	15.0	15.0
	Instr. Specialists Who Support Teachers	10.0	9.0
	Counselors, Social Work and School Psych	22.0	19.5
	Other Staff Non-Instructional Services/ Support	77.3	71.3

<sup>3</sup> From Brookfield Public Schools, MUNIS HR/Payroll Database and Position Control

<sup>4</sup> From [FTE Staffing, EdSight: Connecticut State Department of Education](#)



In the 2022-23 school year, special education teachers in the ELC and SEE were expected to provide adult support for individual students in these programs as well as carrying out the special education teacher expectations for all students on their caseload. While the related services staff provided much support to students and staff in the programs, it did not always allow sufficient time for collaboration. Table 4 demonstrates the ratio of students to adults by program. It is not appropriate to categorically assign every student to an adult or design programs with a 1:1 ratio for all students, therefore variability is expected.

**Table 4. Number of Students and Staff in Brookfield’s In-District Specialized Programs (October 2023)**

	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Program 4	Program5
Students	8	9	6	7	6
Certified teachers plus paraeducators	8	4	7	3	6

Staff at the elementary level felt supported by team members, administrators and the school. Upper grade levels were inconsistent in feeling supported and a few staff members shared feeling isolated.

Although at the time of this report it is early in the 2023-24 school year, staff report they are still needed to provide individual adult support to students, but it has decreased somewhat and there is an improvement in paraeducator supports in certain programs. A review of district data from the 2022-23 school year reveals caseload ranges for related services staff:

- Speech and Language Pathologists = 19-31 students
- School Psychologists = 8-21 students, with an additional 25-35 evaluations
- School Social Workers = 8-22 students
- Occupational Therapists and Physical Therapists = 24-28 students

## Evaluations and IEPs

All staff members reported having the necessary resources to conduct evaluations of students including related services, technology, sensory, and motor needs. Psychiatric and neuropsychological evaluations are contracted outside of the district. Some parents of students in out-of-district placements shared previous concerns with district evaluations in that they were not comprehensive enough or did not evaluate the area of need. In one case, parents expressed not trusting the district’s evaluation. In these cases, parents recalled advocating for additional evaluations by external resources to gain deeper information about their child’s disability such as a psychiatric or neuropsychological evaluation. In all cases, those evaluations led to a recommendation for an out-of-district placement.

In reviewing the sample of student IEPs, it was not clear whether the district initiated the recommendation or the parent initiated the request. Two (2) IEPs documented a parent’s request for an out-of-district placement with the district rejecting the recommendation. However, there was little

justification for the rejection. Inevitably, the students did get placed in an out-of-district placement.

## Curriculum, Instruction, and Progress Monitoring

Both teams reported using a variety of curricula, instructional tools, and materials for student learning and progress monitoring. While student's programs rely on individualized needs, programs did not reference a core curriculum or instructional program. Staff reported inconsistency in availability of materials. It appears the elementary school has more access to needed materials, however, the upper grades report limited materials. While the upper grades would typically expect to include community experiences into their curriculum to practice application of skills or as reinforcement, they report these have not been available due to perceptions of funding challenges. Upon following up with the Director of Special Education, there have been no requests for materials specific to the programs in the upper grades. The Director also reports that any requests for special education materials or expenses across the district have all been approved this fiscal year. All programs report frequent use of lunch bunches and social skills groups, as well as sensory breaks or break time for students.

There was inconsistency regarding how skills were integrated throughout a student's day. For some programs, although skills were taught explicitly and directly in the special education setting, there was communication across the team about other opportunities for students to practice the skills. This appeared more seamless at the elementary level where students have less transitions and teachers throughout the day. Whereas at the middle and high school level, some students are transitioning to a new class and teacher every class period, making the integration of skills more difficult. Staff shared that individual student data sheets and behavior plans helped in those situations, since they traveled with the student and paraeducator regardless of class setting.

Teams report progress monitoring done via individual student data sheets for targeted behaviors, goals and objectives mostly done by a paraeducator. Special education teachers then compile data charts and data binders for students. Special education teachers review the data, with team collaboration around the data limited at times. In some instances, the program calls for students to do self-ratings as a data collection to monitor progress. Individual teachers and related service staff utilize excel spreadsheets and forms individually designed and developed.

Programs shared data with parents in a range of frequencies from the universal timeline including report cards, PPTs, and parent-teacher conferences to every other week reporting.

## Family Involvement and Support

Levels of family involvement and support differed from program to program and was at the discretion of each staff member to determine. It appears that most support is provided via email and/or phone communication as needed. However, some programs share that they have offered home visits, individual meetings with parents after school, and ensuring a weekly phone call to every student's family.

There were no reports of specific training, support groups, or community events for the families of

students in the programs. Staff shared that if a parent wanted more information or a team member felt something was really important for home, they might email or call and also send home an article or some resources. Some program staff shared that they speak to students' therapists frequently.

## Behavioral Supports

There are differences between the elementary and middle/high school ELC and SEE programs for providing behavioral supports. One program uses a point system for students with focus on five (5) classroom expectations and on task data, in addition to a schoolwide behavioral program for all students. Most student incentives and reinforcers can be met with resources already available in the school. The middle school shares that there is no program-wide behavior system and behavioral programming is built off of individual student's Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), or paraeducators collecting data on verbalizations and on task behavior. Middle school reports that a program-wide behavior system was attempted but discontinued with a perception that there was no funding for incentives or reinforcers. Upon following up with the Director of Special Education, there have been no requests for funds related to the program's behavior systems and any requests for special education materials throughout the district have all been approved this school year.

Students in the ELC and high school Life Skills program have more explicitly taught behavioral supports through strategies used in applied behavior analysis.

## Professional Development

Teams reported having no specialized professional learning relative to their specific program or student population. Professional development for staff in these programs were the same professional development provided districtwide and often not meaningful enough to support their own growth and development. In some instances, staff were able to seek out their own professional development, with some being reimbursed while in other situations they were not. Collaboration is often considered a form of professional development when the people involved are attempting to solve a problem of practice either programmatically or student-specific (Leko & Brownell, 2009)<sup>5</sup>. While there has been continued training on the state's new IEP and data system this school year, there have been no content area-specific requests for professional development from staff.

The district did attempt to provide paraeducators with some online professional development in applied behavior analysis in the 2022-23 school year. However, paraeducators report that it was challenging to engage with the material and understand how it related to their particular situation. Special education teachers reported that many paraeducators are trained on-the-job in tasks such as data collection and implementing a behavior plan. However, there are times when they can coordinate time for specific training on a student's needs and program. Some teachers will take advantage of professional development days if they finish their obligations early, they will use the remaining time to train their paraeducators in a student's program or data collection. However, this was not available often.

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<sup>5</sup> Leko, M. M., & Brownell, M. T. (2009). Crafting Quality Professional Development for special educators. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 42(1), 64–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990904200106>

A survey was conducted for staff in the ELC and SEE programs with 21 responses. Below is a summary of responses related to collaboration and professional development.

**Table 5. ELC and SEE Staff Survey, Collaboration and Professional Development Results**

Survey Item	Daily		Weekly		Monthly		Never		When we can or need to (not regularly scheduled)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Do you meet with other team members from your program (e.g. BCBA, OT, SLP, Social Worker, etc.)?	8	35%	3	13%	4	17%	2	9%	6	26%
Do you ever do vertical teaming with colleagues from other schools that work the same program as you?	0	0%	1	4%	0	0%	14	61%	6	26%

The survey included an open-ended item for respondents to share: *Can you share the title/topic of the last three professional learning opportunities you accessed, their date(s) - month, year, and who delivered them?* A representative sample of open-ended responses, as written, included:

- Human trafficking- august 2023, pmt refresher - 10-9-23
- PMT, Child Trafficking, Bloodborne 2023
- PMT refresher, I don't remember any others
- 3/23-Cate Crowley-EL, 10/23-IT and IEP quality training
- Dbt intro, iep quality, pmt
- Biweekly CONNOTA (Connecticut Occupational Therapy Association) community of practice meetings (ongoing). 2. Active participant in the revision of the "Connecticut Occupational Therapy Practice in Schools" document with other professionals monthly (ongoing). 3. "Is it Behavior or Sensory Part 1 and 2" Therapro 12/2022 & 6/2023
- Para training program last school year during staff training times. I did not find it very helpful
- Unsure
- NA

## Domain 2: Student Placements

Determine the patterns and trends in out-of-district placements initiated for Brookfield Public School students.

### Out of District Placements

Brookfield's out of district placement data over four (4) years demonstrates a net increase of students receiving their education outside of the public schools as determined by the students' planning and placement teams (PPTs). Brookfield pays the cost of tuition and transportation for these students. Based upon a review of internal documents, Brookfield reports that a total of 29 students are currently placed in out-of-district settings. However, only 21 of those students are currently placed in out of district settings that are not for secondary transition purposes. Of these students, those identified with an emotional disturbance had the highest rate of outplacement followed by students with autism, with 63% of students being in grades 9-12.

**Table 6. Number and Percent of Total Student Population in Out-of-District Placement, (2019- 2022)<sup>6</sup>**

	2021-22 <sup>7</sup>	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
N	13	15	14	11
Tuition per pupil (\$)	unavailable	\$118,136	\$133,103	\$152,193
% of all SWD	3.4%	4%	3.66%	2.86%

At the time of this report, Brookfield Public Schools indicated that there are 23 students in 11 out-of-district placements that are not for secondary transition purposes or 18-22 year old programs. These placements were determined by student planning and placement teams (PPTs), including parental involvement. In some cases, the school team initiated a recommendation for an out-of-district placement while in other cases the recommendation was initiated by the parents. Although the names of schools are not provided in this report due to confidentiality, summaries of the schools are provided in Table 7 below. One school is comprised of three (3) separate programs, which provides for a total of 11 descriptions.

**Table 7. Descriptions of Out-of-District Placements**

School	Description provided on website
1	The school provides a therapeutic educational program for both residential and day students The school offers core academics and college preparatory courses, allowing students to meet their unique academic objectives while in their therapeutic programs.

<sup>6</sup> From [Per Pupil Expenditures for Outplaced Students, EdSight: Connecticut State Department of Education](#)

<sup>7</sup> From [Profile and Performance Report, EdSight: Connecticut State Department of Education](#)

School	Description provided on website
	The school has a long history of success in serving children with emotional, psychological and learning vulnerabilities and issues. School staff stays in close relationship with the local schools and partners with parents to facilitate each student's transfer back to their communities and local schools.
2	The school serves students with a variety of disabilities, including autism, emotional disturbance, ADHD, and intellectual disabilities. For many students, their stay with us is temporary but transformative — as they learn the skills they need to be successful back in their public school classrooms.
3	By using a functional academic and life-skills curriculum, the program's activities focus on supporting and encouraging meaningful student learning and independence across home, school, and community contexts. The development of personal management skills such as hygiene, grooming, and domestic living skills are fundamental to successful independence and are an integral part of the program. The program also focuses on the development of appropriate academic, social, communication, and behavioral skills needed to successfully participate in a variety of activities. With a foundation in Developmental Therapy and the SCERTS Model, the program incorporates a variety of visual supports, communication opportunities, and emotional regulation strategies to encourage learning, interaction, and generalization. The school day is highly structured, predictable, and focused on communication, independence, and community integration.
4	The program offers a comprehensive treatment approach rooted in the principles of humanistic and behavioral psychology. The program's goal is to improve a student's overall educational, emotional, and social functioning, and return the student to a school placement within his or her own school district as early as possible. The program enrolls students who present with a wide range of difficulties in the areas of emotional, behavioral, social, and academic functioning. Included in this population are students who exhibit internalizing symptom profiles as well as students who, at times, are prone to engage in more externalizing symptoms. Diagnostic indicators common for students enrolled in the program include mood instability, attention deficit/hyperactivity, anxiety, depression, school avoidance, behavioral dyscontrol, oppositional behavior, and the social impairment associated with PDD or Asperger's Syndrome. The students' academic abilities range from very superior to below average and the students are highly diversified with regard to socio-economic status and ethnicity.
5	We individualize our education program for each of our students, seamlessly incorporating instruction in reading, writing, math, listening, speaking, and social skills in an ungraded, non-competitive, goal-oriented setting. Our goal is to provide intensive, short-term, remedial instruction to children with learning differences.
6	We are a specialized educational day program where students receive continuous, team-based, behavioral and academic assessments, as well as weekly individual and group counseling. The program offers a variety of educational program options including Academic/Behavioral Outplacement Programs, Short-Term Diagnostic Placements, and Expelled Student Educational Programs.

School	Description provided on website
7	The school is a private therapeutic day school for college-bound students in upper grades. By integrating an individualized education with a health and wellness curriculum, the school helps students realize their academic potential and supports skill development to overcome social and emotional difficulties.
8	We are a 1:1 program that provides individual staff support to each child every minute of every day in order to keep our students safe and on-task—whether it’s special education instruction or therapy services, including speech therapy, occupational therapy or behavioral therapy (i.e., ABA). We service children with autism as well as other behavioral challenges, developmental delays and learning disabilities.
9	Our approach to learning blends highly customized instructional strategies with extensive expertise in educating people with autism and other developmental disabilities. Our use of Applied Behavior Analysis helps both children and adults gain success in small steps. We also offer Advanced Intervention for more intensive behavioral challenges and assessments for all ages and levels along the spectrum.
10	The school provides a speech and language-based academic program to students with a range of communication, sensory-motor, learning and social skill disabilities. When appropriate, students will be introduced to The Association Method, a highly successful phonics-based, multi-sensory, and multilevel curriculum designed to teach oral and written communication within a reading and language arts-based program.
11	The program provides specialized services for children and adults with multiple developmental disabilities and complex medical needs, such as cerebral palsy, acute brain injury, neuromuscular disorders and autism spectrum disorders.

## Focus Areas

The CREC review team used multiple tools to determine quality indicators and focus areas for investigation of programs that serve students with autism and students with social emotional disabilities. While programs may not categorically serve students only with these disabilities, the tools used for this review provided the most comprehensive and aligned indicators for the population of students in out of district placements and Brookfield’s Enrichment Learning Center (ELC), Social Emotional Enrichment (SEE).

These included the Autism Program Quality Indicators, Colorado State Department of Education (2019),<sup>8</sup> Serious Emotional Disability Quality Indicators, Colorado State Department of Education (2021),<sup>9</sup> and Quality Indicators of Emotional Support Services and Programs, Pennsylvania Training and Technical

<sup>8</sup> [Autism Spectrum Disorders Quality Program Indicators, Colorado Department of Education \(2019\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Serious Emotional Disability Quality Indicators, Colorado State Department of Education \(2021\)](#)

Assistance Network (2022).<sup>10</sup> The focus areas determined for the review included:

- Evaluation and IEPs
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Progress Monitoring
- Family Involvement and Support
- Behavioral Supports
- Professional Development and Collaboration

The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (2004) specifies, “Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.”<sup>11</sup> Connecticut state special education regulations remain consistent with IDEA requirements.<sup>12</sup> In addition to understanding a student’s unique learning needs and a district’s true ability to meet those needs, placement decisions are inherently often made by any PPT member’s perceptions and beliefs about those variables. Agran et al. (2020)<sup>13</sup> suggest these determinants include:

- Perceptions of Competency and Resulting Placement Policies
- Economic and Demographic Stratification
- Biases
- Teacher Preparation and Experience
- Lack of Resources and Capacity
- Absence of Knowledge of Current Research

This review did not investigate the extent to which these determinants were factors in placement decisions, but only sought to determine patterns and trends in out of district placements. Interviews and focus groups were held with seven (7) of the eight (8) out-of-district programs, as one program declined to participate.

Out-of-district schools are designed with intentionality and specificity regarding their student population and have criteria to ensure a match between their program and the student. Of the 11 programs and schools reviewed, three (3) did not serve students with behavioral or social-emotional challenges and therefore did not require behavioral support staff. Typically, programs fall into the category of a therapeutic or social emotional setting, programs for students with significant cognitive and functional life skills challenges, or highly intense and explicit instructional programming. In some cases, a program can serve students with multiple characteristics while in other cases, the school restricts enrollment to specific populations.

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<sup>10</sup> [Quality Indicators of Emotional Support Services and Programs, Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network \(2022\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [IDEA Federal Regulation Section 300.114 LRE Requirements](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, Department of Education, Section 10-76d](#)

<sup>13</sup> Agran, M., Jackson, L., Kurth, J. A., Ryndak, D., Burnette, K., Jameson, M., Zagona, A., Fitzpatrick, H., & Wehmeyer, M. (2019). Why aren’t students with severe disabilities being placed in general education classrooms: Examining the relations among classroom placement, learner outcomes, and other factors. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 45(1), 4–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796919878134>



## *Evaluations and IEPs*

All programs reported that the school district the student resides typically completes the psychological educational evaluation with a district provided school psychologist. While one program reported having a full time school psychologist with the ability to complete the testing, the district typically completes it instead. One school does not complete any educational evaluations and relies solely on the district to complete all tests. A second school shared that it is in the process of having the speech-language pathologist certified in assistive technology (AT) which would allow those evaluations to be completed by the school. The remaining schools all reported the ability to complete standard comprehensive evaluations within their staff and at the request and in cooperation with the district including communication, motor skills, and behavior if the school is designed for students with behavioral challenges. None of the schools were able to complete their own evaluations that required a neuropsychologist, psychiatrist, or other highly specialized area of expertise. These evaluations were the responsibility of the school district.

A review of a sample of student IEPs provided insight to student programming and needs. Of the 10 IEPs reviewed, four (4) students were initially placed while they were in grades K - 2. The remaining students were placed while they were in grades 6 - 11. Upon reviewing the IEP where a placement recommendation was made, the district's rationale was often general. This made it difficult to determine what specialized programming was needed in relation to the student's present levels of performance and areas of concern. A review of recommendations, impact of disability on participation, and reasons for removal should have articulated the specific challenges the student demonstrated that the school district could not provide an appropriate program. However, these were generic in that the student's disability requires a highly specialized program with individualized instruction and supports. In two (2) cases, the IEP did not list the recommendation for an out-of-district placement, and in one (1) case the IEP was blank where the reason for removal was required.

A review of the same student's current IEP demonstrates some improvement in the articulation of reasons for removal. While the recommendation is typically listed to continue placement, a closer look at statements about the impact of the student's disability reveals more specificity and clarity to support an out-of-district placement. This was evident in six (6) of the 10 current IEPs.

## *Curriculum and Instruction*

Similar to Brookfield's in-district programs, none of the out-of-district schools interviewed stated a singular curriculum or instructional approach, but customization for each student. Programs were able to reference the curriculum and instructional approaches they use most frequently such as Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support (SCERTS), Circles, Michelle Garcia-Winner, Unique Learning System, the Pyramid Model, and restorative practices. In two (2) programs that were highly individualized for students with medical needs and very complex adaptive needs, programs were individually designed with a routines based approach and integrated these routines with multiple repetitions throughout the day. Related services and therapy programming were also closely integrated throughout a student's day for a majority of their day in school.

Most programs shared group sizes of one student up to four (4) students. In many cases, students had a full time paraeducator with them. The exception was in programs that did not address behavioral challenges or significant cognitive disabilities but served students with intensive learning needs. These programs had slightly larger group sizes up to six (6) students, but often with another adult assistant in the group.

Only one (1) program described efforts for its students to access opportunities with peers that did not have disabilities through a partnership with a local private parochial school. Both schools planned activities for students to interact and participate in social activities together a few times a year.

### **Progress Monitoring**

Different schools serve students with different disabilities and thus, outcomes for students are varied. Some programs place a heavier emphasis on academics and traditional school curriculums while others strive for outcomes around independence and functional daily living skills. However, all schools were able to share data collection methods about student progress. The below list demonstrates the variety of data collection and progress monitoring across some out-of-district schools:

- We have very data driven IEPs and are collecting data all day long on every goal and objective. It gets compiled for a weekly team meeting and in some cases we are able to put it into a spreadsheet and make graphs.
- We progress monitor each student's IEP goals and objectives. We gather data on a monthly basis and report it quarterly through CT SEDs. We assign different data points to different staff using Google sheets. Students in the upper grades are part of their goal setting and data collection.
- Two (2) times a year we have very long reports that break down the skills for every class into very discrete skills like a scope and sequence chart. We have a section for comments and a social emotional section that has things like self-advocacy and executive function.
- For academics, we benchmark three (3) times a year, with weekly progress monitoring. For students with functional or adaptive goals and objectives, we monitor them more frequently. We do have DTI with multiple students as well as incidental data collection. We have a binder system. For some students we do use excel to track their data.

### ***Family Involvement and Support***

Out-of-district programs shared a range of opportunities for family involvement and support. Some shared larger events like Father's Day Breakfast and Mother's Day Lunch, field trips with parents joining, and monthly guest speakers or training for parents and caretakers. Three (3) programs have a family center that centralizes things like home visits, procurement of equipment for homes, locating therapy services for families, or requesting advice and support. One (1) program assigns a case worker to a student and family for the duration of that student's time in the program. This is the point person for the family and provides strong relationships, trust, and a sense of community. In some cases, the case manager is also a service provider for the student within their program.

Nine (9) families with students in out-of-district placements were interviewed. Eight (8) of these families

shared that their school is very communicative and available for them via email, phone, and sometimes text messaging. They believe they have a good relationship with their child's team and that the adults in the program make them feel like part of the team. Parents believed they knew what was happening in their child's program, how their child was doing, and received data or information about their child's progress with the right amount of frequency. Some families recognized the efforts that their school made to make events and opportunities accessible in the evenings or weekends, given that the students come from a large geographic area, it was difficult to attend certain events.

Families were asked about communication from the Brookfield Public Schools since their child started attending an out of district program. Responses were consistent that Brookfield staff attend PPTs regularly, but communication outside of those meetings was very limited or nonexistent with the exception of three (3) families that reported since new special education leadership is in place, they have been in communication with the Director of Special Education. Some families reported a desire to continue being part of the Brookfield Public Schools community and continuing to receive information about events at their local district school, despite their child attending school outside of the district.

### *Behavioral Supports*

For programs that had students in need of behavioral supports, five (5) of the seven (7) programs interviewed shared that there is a schoolwide behavioral system. Additionally, these five (5) schools articulated individualized behavior plans and supports for each student and supported most frequently by a paraeducator or ABA technician. Individual support plans were often designed and monitored by a school psychologist, social worker, or BCBA and implemented across all team members. Due to the nature and amount of collaboration time provided to teams, all five (5) programs collaborated daily on individual students and reviewing behavioral supports. Some programs designated a weekly early release day solely for student collaboration and planning. Two (2) programs shared a routine of student self-reflection as a universal part of their behavior plans, further enhancing the work done in individual or small group counseling.

### *Professional Development*

Every program allowed three (days) up to a week for staff to return to school in the fall prior to students, solely for professional development and planning. In addition, programs frequently cited a half day every week where students were released early and the remainder of the day was set aside for collaboration and professional development, sometimes as an extended day for staff. All staff interviewed shared that in addition to what their school provides, they are able to access individual professional development as needed. Two (2) programs shared that they encourage attendance and speaking at conferences as another way to access professional development.

In the 2022-23 school year, programs appear to use a lot of their professional development for the state's new IEP and data system, much like public school districts. Aside from that, out-of-district programs appeared to access highly relevant and meaningful professional development such as consultations and training with Ross Greene, targeted training in structured literacy programs used with

students, workshops and consultations with local agencies that provide expertise in mental and behavioral health, and use of technology not just for students but as a way to enhance services.

# Findings and Recommendations

## Domain 1—Resources--Summary Findings

### Evaluate in-district programs to meet the needs of students with disabilities in out-of-district placements

Most students successfully access the general education setting or socialization with peers without disabilities on a regular basis. However, current in-district programs do not appear to have the intensity or capacity of supports that out-of-district programs inherently have. Most notable in out-of-district programs are large amounts of protected and scheduled collaboration time, appropriateness and availability of targeted professional development, variety of family supports, and dedicated related services staff. The district's programs have potential to improve in the areas of professional development, collaboration and teaming, and staffing levels to the extent that staffing levels can improve professional development, collaboration and teaming. It is not likely that in-district programs could replicate out-of-district programs in all areas and thus, students with the highest levels of need will naturally require a significantly more comprehensive and intensive program. However, with some adjustments to the district's programs, there is a higher likelihood of preventing the need for out-of-district placements and the possibility to meet the needs of students that do not require the most significant levels of support and may be appropriate to transition back to the district.

### Recommendations

1. Establish core values and a standard set of practices for each program in vertical alignment with each other, with clarity around a common vision of services that support inclusive education and the roles of adults (Agran et al, 2020 p.8). Develop core values and practices with input from program staff and school administrators<sup>14</sup> and provide predictability across schools for staff, students, and families.
2. Continue analyzing the use of special education teachers as adult support for students and analyze appropriate staffing levels for each program. Monitor the level of impact on student programming and outcomes to determine flexibility or need in staffing. Determine the relationship with staffing levels in relationship to protected collaboration and teaming, along with the opportunity to provide targeted professional development.
3. Use program teams to develop an annual professional learning plan targeted for their position and student population. It is likely the district would seek this professional learning with an external partner that specialize in students with significant needs<sup>15</sup>. This professional learning should seamlessly integrate with professional learning goals, thus improving two systems simultaneously.

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<sup>14</sup> Roberts, C. A., Ruppert, A. L., & Olson, A. J. (2017). Perceptions matter: Administrators' vision of instruction for students with severe disabilities. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 43(1), 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796917743931>

<sup>15</sup> Leko, M. M., & Brownell, M. T. (2009). Crafting Quality Professional Development for special educators. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 42(1), 64–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990904200106>

4. Consider opportunities for teams to collaborate vertically across the district at least three (3) times a year. This garners a sense of community but also leverages internal experts as students advance through the grade levels. This also allows for broader sharing of practices and addressing concerns. Include building administrators in vertical collaborations.
5. Address the needs of programs that report meeting never or only when needed.
6. Consider continued opportunities for family involvement and support that does not rely on typical communication methods and that create sustainability. This may include an open house just for families with students in these programs, or partnering with the district's Special Education PTO (SEPTO) or other external partners to provide training, speaking events, or simply a sense of community. There also has to be consideration for a family's desire to engage or preferred levels of privacy. Opportunities aligned to school-based activities should be specific to parents of students with disabilities as well.

## Domain 2—Student Placements--Summary Findings

### **Determine the patterns and trends in out-of-district placements initiated for Brookfield Public School students.**

Patterns and trends in out-of-district placements varied greatly. However, some universal characteristics were very small student to teacher ratios, deep integration of skills across a student's day and across service providers, and regular protected collaboration and professional development time. These three (3) characteristics stood out in most contrast to Brookfield's in-district programs. Naturally, out-of-district programs have very little or no access to appropriate peers for students with disabilities. It is important to note that out-of-district programs are purposefully uniquely different from public school programs by design. It is not common for public school programs to replicate out-of-district programs holistically.

### *Recommendations*

1. Train ELC teams in the Autism Quality Indicators and conduct a self assessment to set the stage for next steps of program development. Use this tool as a continuous improvement tool for areas of growth, and celebrate areas of strength.
2. Involve the general education teachers of students in Brookfield's programs in the self assessment and as a standing member of the team to provide input for program growth and improvement. Place particular emphasis on building partnerships at the middle school level.
3. Schedule staff in Brookfield's programs to observe Brookfield students in out-of-district placements. While not all aspects can or should be replicated, there are practices, tools, and structures in out-of-district placements that might be appropriate for Brookfield to adopt at the classroom/service provider level.
4. Articulate how Brookfield's Portrait of Graduate and the district's "4Cs" is related to students with the most complex needs. Include parents, general education teachers, and building leaders to ensure alignment across the team and to leverage supports in light of each student's Portrait. Triangulate this work with the district's Strategic Plan 2023-2028 ensure that supports, systems, and practices stay aligned and focused on long-term success.

Brookfield Public Schools has a strong foundation to build upon for its intensive special education programs. As with many initiatives, it will require a long-term commitment over multiple years, with flexibility to adjust as students' needs change.