

WESTPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION

AGENDA *

(Agenda Subject to Modification in Accordance with Law)

PUBLIC SESSION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

7:30 p.m., Staples High School, Cafeteria B (Room 301)

ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM BOARD AND ADMINISTRATION

PUBLIC QUESTIONS/COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS (15 MINUTES)

MINUTES: November 28, 2017, and December 18, 2017

DISCUSSION:

- | | | | |
|----|--|---------|---|
| 1. | FY 2018 and FY 2019 with Board of Education Insurance Consultant, <i>Lockton Companies LLC</i> | | Mr. Elio Longo
Mr. Tim Hasselman |
| 2. | CES Overview of Administrative Structure for Special Education Services, <i>pages 1-33</i> | (Encl.) | Dr. Colleen Palmer
Mr. Mike Rizzo
Dr. Michael Regan |
| 3. | FY 2018 Proposed Budget of the Superintendent of Schools | | Dr. Colleen Palmer
Mr. Elio Longo |

DISCUSSION/ACTION:

- | | | | |
|----|------------------------------------|---------|--------------------|
| 1. | Seal of Biliteracy, <i>page 35</i> | (Encl.) | Dr. Colleen Palmer |
|----|------------------------------------|---------|--------------------|

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- | | | | |
|----|------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| 1. | Policy Committee | | Ms. Karen Kleine
Mr. Mike Rizzo |
|----|------------------|--|------------------------------------|

ADJOURNMENT

*A 2/3 vote is required to go to executive session, to add a topic to the agenda of a regular meeting, or to start a new topic after 10:30 p.m. The meeting can also be viewed on cable TV on channel 78; AT&T channel 99 and by video stream @www.westportps.org

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION WELCOME USING THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES:

- Comment on non-agenda topics will occur during the first 15 minutes *except* when staff or guest presentations are scheduled.
- Board will not engage in dialogue on non-agenda items.
- Public may speak as agenda topics come up for discussion or information.
- Speakers on non-agenda items are limited to 2 minutes each, except by prior arrangement with chair.
- Speakers on agenda items are limited to 3 minutes each, except by prior arrangement with chair.
- Speakers must give name and use microphone.
- Responses to questions may be deferred if answers not immediately available.
- Public comment is normally not invited for topics listed for action after having been publicly discussed at one or more meetings.

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**A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATIVE
STRUCTURE FOR WESTPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Final Report



**40 Lindeman Drive
Trumbull, Connecticut 06611**

Submitted to:
Superintendent of Schools
Westport Public Schools
110 Myrtle Avenue
Westport, Connecticut 06880

December 22, 2017

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Westport Public Schools engaged Cooperative Educational Services (C.E.S.) to conduct a comprehensive review of the special education administrative structure in the district. C.E.S. consultants experienced in all aspects of special education administration and programming conducted the review addressing the following areas:

1. Is the current structure of the school based special education administration an effective model for coordination and oversight of special education services in each district school?
2. Does the school based special education administrative model constitute best practices for the district?
3. What metrics exist for demonstrating effectiveness of this model?
4. Is the model cost effective?
5. Is the current management structure sufficient to manage all aspects of a cost effective, integrated special education programs?

Upon completion of the review, the consulting team met with district leadership to discuss the team's initial findings and to assist in establishing district goals. A final written report was respectfully submitted to the Superintendent of Schools on December 22, 2017 by the C.E.S consulting team.

Michael Regan, Ph.D.
Eric Colon-Rodriguez, Ph.D.
Cynthia Rutledge, Ed.D.

COMMENDATIONS

Westport is commended for:

- The consistency of special education services delivery demonstrated by the school based special education administration model. This model affords the building level staff to focus on instructional issues, demonstrate administrative support for special education and provide high quality supervision for teachers that produces enhanced outcomes for students with disabilities. This model is also cost effective as it provides immediate customer service, thus decreasing litigation and out of district tuition in comparison to the District Reference Group. This model allows the district to provide an unparalleled and personalized academic experience for students with needs.

- Full compliance with federal and state requirements for Individual Education Program (IEP) development as evidenced by the 2016/2017 Connecticut State Department of Education SEDAC Desk Audit and File Review.
- Inclusion teams at the elementary school level that consist of the assistant principal-special education, teachers, and related services that monitors inclusive practices. The teams' focus is to develop and maintain a comprehensive plan that promotes best practice for supporting students in inclusive settings and to provide access to the general education curriculum through differentiation.
- Fiscal mindedness in budget development and managing special education costs.
- Well-trained special education teachers and related services specialists who provide a continuum of high quality, specialized instruction to students with varying degrees of disability in the regular, resource, and separate classroom as well as alternative and community settings.
- Providing a continuum of special education services including specialized in-district programming for students with significant learning challenges.
- Strong sense of teamwork and collaboration among building-level teams.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Westport:

1. Maintain the current building-level special education administrative structure as a viable model for providing special education services at each individual school within the district. This is an effective long-standing model that has strong community support.
2. Expand the role of Director of Pupil Services to assume greater responsibility for coordinating curriculum and monitoring academic progress district-wide, particularly as it relates to special education students.
3. Relocate the Office of Pupil Services from the high school to Central Office as space permits. It is also recommended that a central repository for all student-specific special education files be created to allow for maintenance and control of the "official" record under the direct supervision of the district's Custodian of Records.
4. Provide additional special education coordination services at the high school, as the present model of one coordinator is not sufficient. It is recommended that the psychological services coordinator share the coordination responsibilities at the high school with the special education coordinator in lieu of having the assistant principals acting as chair of the PPT meeting when the special education coordinator is unable to attend. Given that the current caseload for the coordinator is 225 students, a minimum of two days per week of additional support from the psychological services coordinator

appears warranted with flexible scheduling of up to three days per week for attending annual review PPT meetings.

5. Expand opportunities for collaboration between building staff when transitioning students from one school to the next, especially between elementary school to the middle school. This is critical to provide a continuum of special education services in the least restrictive environment.
6. The tracking of students for instruction in the middle school particularly for mathematics, needs to cease as those students are not afforded the same curriculum teachings as the other students, and therefore, fall behind with academics. This practice is also prevalent within the high school where classes are “leveled” and in which there is a propensity to place special education students in lower level classrooms. As such, it is recommended that the current level system be restructured to eliminate Level B and lower classes.
7. Update the Parent Satisfaction Survey for students with a disability, as the last survey was completed in 2009 by Diagnostics Plus.
8. Develop department goals for Pupil Services aligned with the district’s strategic plan. The department needs to identify specific learning objectives aligned with accompanying outcomes measures for all professional development activities related to special education and in alignment with the strategic plan. In keeping with best practice, it is recommended that baseline data and goal targets be included in order to evaluate growth as a result of these activities.
9. Update the “*Model Special Education Policies and Procedure Manual*” consistent with the latest revision provided by the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, and that the district ensure that the updated manual is available to all staff.

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND DISTRICT OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Westport Public Schools engaged Cooperative Educational Services (C.E.S.) to conduct a comprehensive review of the district's PK-12 special education programs. C.E.S. consultants experienced in all aspects of special education administration and programming conducted the review. At the request of the school district, the program review addressed the following:

1. Is the current structure of the school based special education administration an effective model for coordination and oversight of special education services in each district school?
2. Does the school based special education administrative model constitute best practices for the district?
3. What metrics exist for demonstrating effectiveness of this model?
4. Is the model cost effective?
5. Is the current management structure sufficient to manage all aspects of a cost effective, integrated special education programs?

Data for this review was collected over multiple days using a variety of methods:

- Review of Planning and Placement Team membership by school and initial eligibility decisions.
- Review of district special education financial records.
- Review of district special education policies and procedures.
- Review of CT State Department of Education file review/desk audit and current SEDAC error report.
- Review of Professional Development activities for special education and related services staff.
- Review of Pupil Services Administrative Team meeting agendas.
- Interview with administrators, special and regular education teachers, and related services personnel.
- Interview with PTA Council Special Education Committee Representatives.

1.2 DISTRICT OVERVIEW

Westport is in the southwestern region of Fairfield County, Connecticut. Ranked #4 on the 2016-2017 Adjusted Equalized Net Grand List per Capita¹, Westport Public Schools is classified as a District Reference Group A (DRG A) school district (see Appendix A). Westport has eight schools: Coleytown Elementary; Kings Highway School; Saugatuck School; Greens Farms School;

¹ <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/dgm/grantreports1/ReimbPercViewRpt.aspx>

Long Lots School; Bedford Middle School; Coleytown Middle School, and Staples High School. The total district enrollment as noted in the 2016-2017 state reporting is 5623 students, which ranked Westport as the largest DRG A school district (see Figure 1).

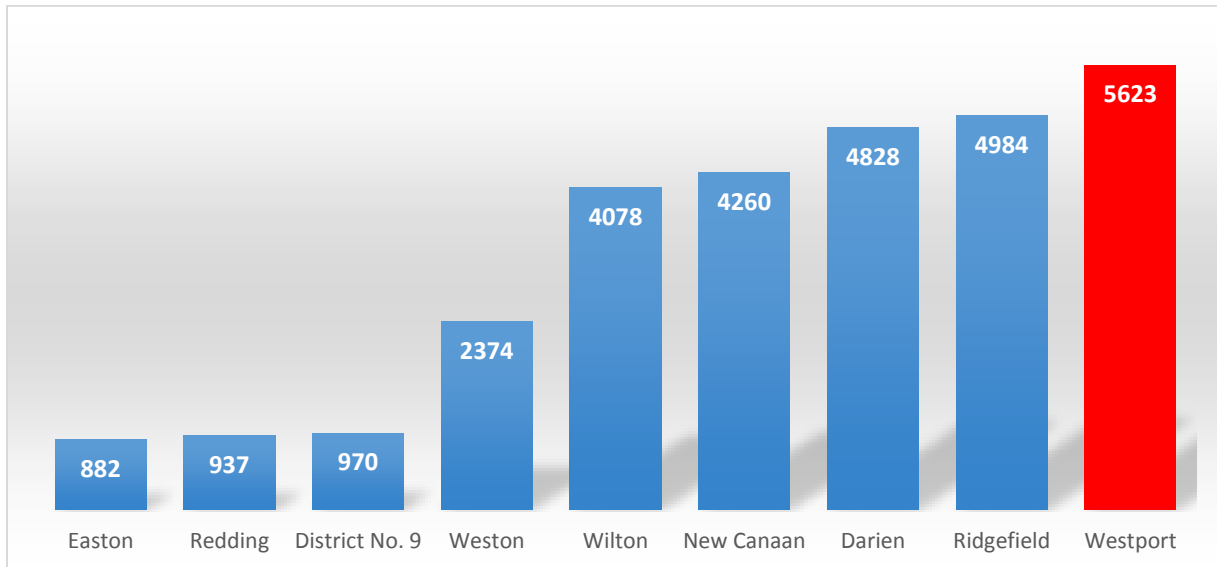


Figure 1. DRG D District Enrollment (2016-2017).

Westport has long prided itself on the quality of education provided by the school district. Bedford Middle School was designated as a National Blue Ribbon School in 2009 and Staples High School was designated a National Blue Ribbon School in 2013. In 2017, US News and World Report ranked Westport #391 in National Rankings, #5 in Connecticut High Schools, and #60 in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). The town’s commitment to its students and their families is well reflected in the district’s vision statement:

- *Our mission is to prepare all students to reach their full potential as life-long learners and socially responsible contributors to our global community.*

1.3 PREVALANCE RATE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Prevalence rate refers to the percentage of identified children with disabilities found eligible for special education and related services within the district. Prevalence rates in Westport have been consistently lower than the statewide average from school year 2012-2013 to 2016-2017. With exception to school year 2012-2013, Westport’s prevalence rate has also been lower than the DRG A average for the same time (see Figure 2). In addition, Westport has the third lowest DRG A prevalence rate for school year 2016-2017 (see Figure 3).

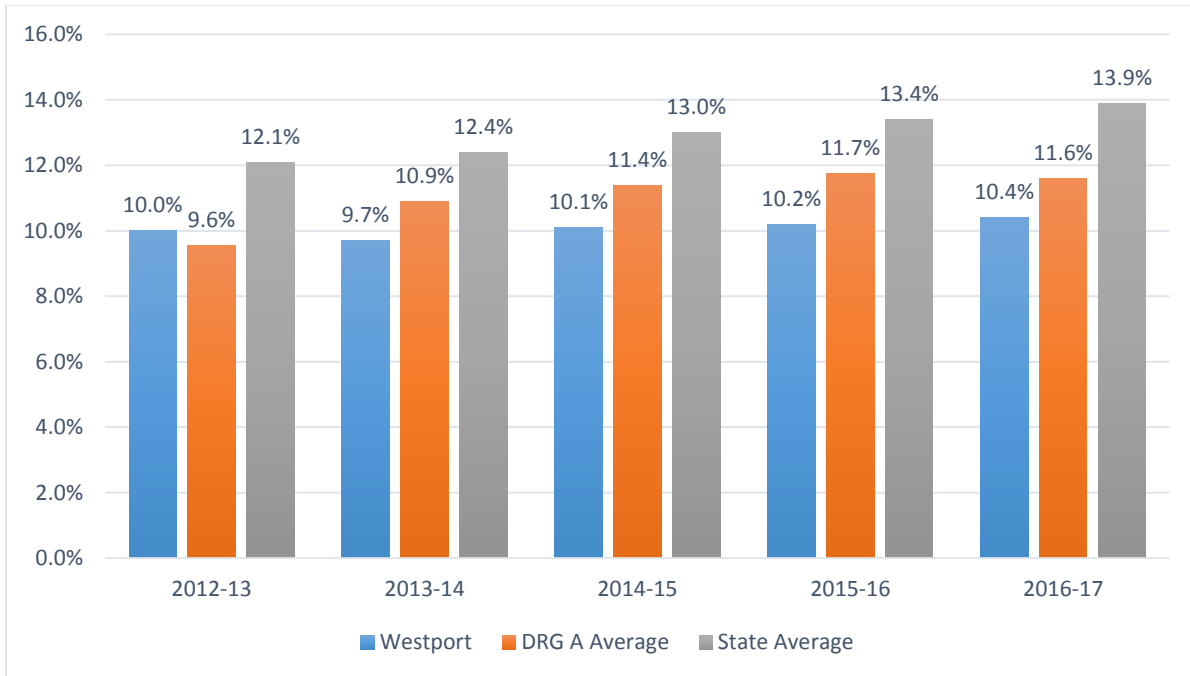


Figure 2. Kindergarten through Grade 12 Special Education Prevalence Rates: Westport, DRG A Average, and Statewide Average

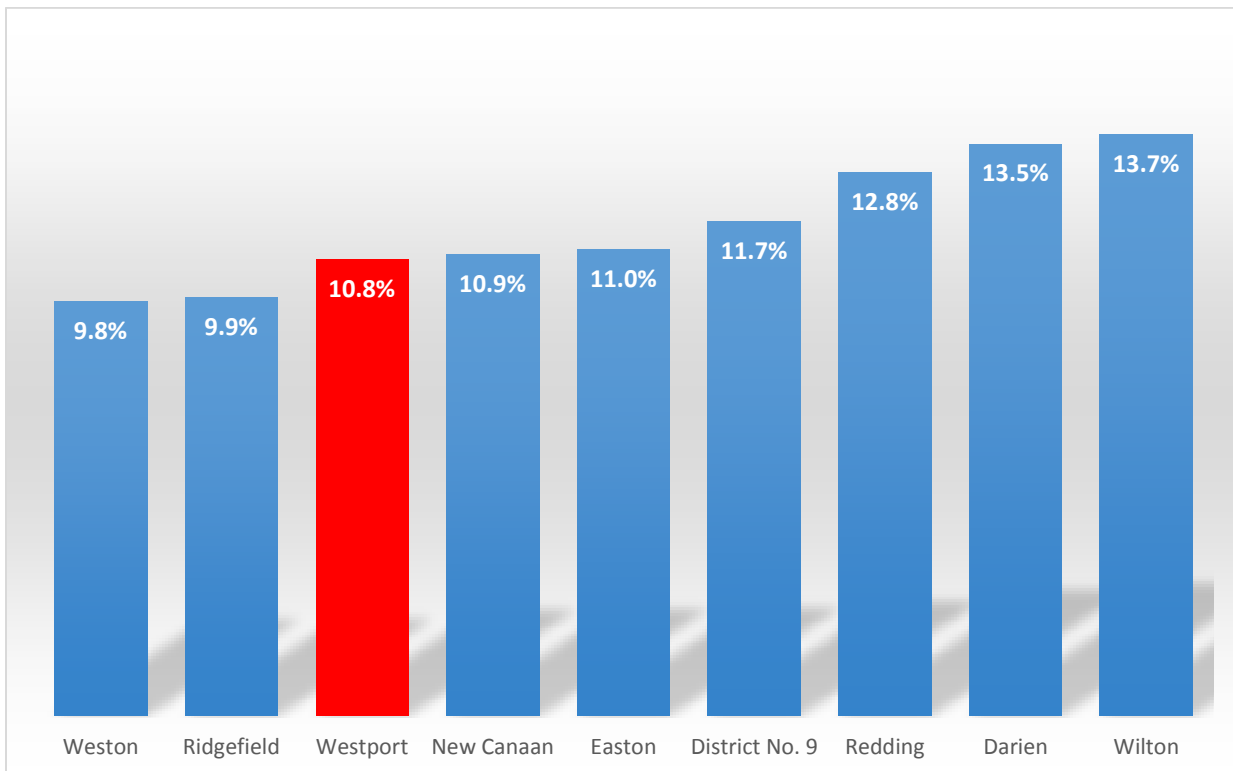


Figure 3. DRG A Pre-K through Grade 12 Special Education Prevalence Rate (2016-2017).

During school year 2016-2017, 148 students that had been provided the most intensive interventions (Tier III) under the district’s RTI program were referred to special education and

of those 148 students 74.3% were identified as having a disability requiring specialized instruction.

2.0 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES AND STAFFING NECESSARY TO SUPPORT THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

2.1 Administration

DISTRICT

The responsibilities of special education leaders have been described as complex and diverse as the needs of the students they serve. Their work is founded on the belief that all children be included in the educational experience regardless of their level of disability and they must continually adapt to new legislative initiatives, budgetary constraints, changes in best practices, and differing systems of accountability that govern their ability to serve the students under their charge.

According to the Council for Exceptional Children² the system of organization and administration developed for special education should be inextricably linked with regular education to increase the capability of the system to make more flexible responses to change in the behavior of individual students, to change conditions in schools, and to permit all elements of the system to influence the policies and programs of the others. The major purpose of the special education administrative organization is to provide and maintain those environmental conditions in schools that are most conducive to the growth and learning of children with special needs.

The Westport Public Schools Department of Pupil Services is led by the Director of Pupil Services as the central office administrator responsible for all aspects of special education. This administrative structure is dissimilar to the four next largest DRG A school districts (Darien, Wilton, Ridgefield, and New Canaan) which employ an assistant superintendent but similar to the four smallest DRG A school districts (Weston, Redding, Easton, and District No. 9) which employ a director.³

Westport's Director of Pupil Services is responsible for all aspects of special education and related services including budget development and management, supervision of all special education programs districtwide, and as the district's Custodian of Records, maintenance of all

² "Special education must provide an administrative organization to facilitate achievement for children with exceptionalities of the same educational goals as those pursued by other children. This purpose can be achieved through structures that are sufficiently compatible with those employed by regular education to ensure easy, unbroken passage of children across regular-special education administrative lines for whatever periods of time may be necessary, as well as by structures that are sufficiently flexible to adjust quickly to changing task demands and child growth needs". <https://www.cec.sped.org/Policy-and-Advocacy/CEC-Professional-Policies/Special-Education-in-the-Schools>

³ As part of Regional School District #9, Redding and Easton have a shared director's position.

confidential student records. Interestingly, the consultants found that Westport does not maintain a central repository of original special education documents, the “official” record, typical of most school districts. Instead, students’ original special education records are maintained at the school they currently attend.

Under the supervision of the director, Westport employs one full-time psychological services coordinator; one full-time supervisor of health; and one full-time pre-K and special programming coordinator. This component of the Central Office Special Education Administration follows the traditional model for school districts; however, it must be noted that there are no district-wide special education coordinators/supervisors, which is also a component of a traditional administrative model.

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

Prior to the 1999-2000 school year and before the number of elementary schools increased from three to five, the traditional principal/assistant principal/special education coordinator model existed at each elementary and middle school. During the period from 2000 to 2004, an administrative reorganization occurred at both the elementary and middle school level. To increase efficiency and accountability, the district-wide special education coordinators were eliminated, and was replaced by an additional assistant principal at each of the schools to act as the primary building administrator for special education matters. The number of special elementary resource room teachers was also reduced, as many of their responsibilities were subsumed by the elementary principals. The various curriculum coordinators were consolidated into positions with curricular, supervisory and evaluative functions in the areas of mathematics and language arts, and at Bedford Middle School, an additional assistant principal was added to compensate for the larger student population and square footage of the building (see Tables 1 and 2). This model increased administration and created distinctive lines of accountability for instructional leadership, special education, and supervision and evaluation of staff, and aimed to provide a more effective solution to Westport’s needs.^{4,5}

⁴ Superintendent’s memo to the Members of the Board of Education, January 23, 2008.

⁵ <http://www.westportps.org/district/board-of-education/budget-faqs>

Table 1. Comparison of 1999-2000 to the current staffing model at the Elementary School level.

1999-2000	Current Model
5.0 Principals	5.0 Principals
5.0 Assistant Principals	10.0 Assistant Principals
6.0 Curriculum Resource Teachers	1.0 Math/Literacy Curriculum Resource Teacher
2.6 Special Education Coordinators (district-wide) ⁶	

Table 2. Comparison of 1999-2000 to the current staffing model at the Middle School level.

1999-2000	Current Model
2.0 Principals	2.0 Principals
2.0 Assistant Principals	5.0 Assistant Principals
2.0 Curriculum Coordination: Science (.50); Social Studies (.50); Mathematics (.20); Language Arts (.25)	4.0 Department Coordination: Mathematics; Language Arts Science , Social Studies (grades 6-12) 3.0 Department Coordinators; World Language, Physical Ed and Health, Music and Visual Art (Prek-12)
2.0 Special Education Coordinators (district-wide)	

Candidates for the position of assistant principal-regular education must have a successful record of teaching and leadership in an elementary/middle school, must be knowledgeable of elementary/middle school age student academics, social and emotional development, must be well versed in education practice, and are required to have a Connecticut Intermediate Administrator Certificate (092). In addition to the above, candidates for the position of assistant principal-special education must have special education experience including knowledge of students’ disabilities, knowledge of specialized instructional strategies, knowledge of special education laws and regulations, and evidence in supervising the

⁶ The special education coordinators (2.6 FTE) employed by the district were assigned responsibilities district-wide during school year 1999-2000.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) and facilitating Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings. Although not required, certification in special education is preferred.⁷

The consultants found that the assistant principals work beside the school principal as an administrative team to manage the administrative and educational aspect of the school. They interact with teachers, students, parents, and members of the community daily. Their job is fast paced and requires multitasking in their leadership position, as they ensure the safety of the students and ensure that the school meets federal and state student/teacher performance guidelines. The administrative team is highly cohesive and collaborative, and they are available to all members of the staff, to all students, and to all parents, as they tend not to delineate their roles as “I am special education and only deal with those issues”, and “I am regular education, so I only deal with those students and their issues.” Parents, students, and staff are aware of these dynamics as this provides the most immediate and “best customer service” to the school community.

The administrative team meets with parents to discuss student behavioral or learning problems, respond to disciplinary issues, coordinate the use of school facilities for day to day activities, works with teachers and the curriculum coordinator/specialist to develop and maintain curriculum standards and instructional methods, observes teachers and evaluates learning materials to determine areas where improvement is needed, coordinates transportation for students on a daily basis, orders equipment and supplies, maintains the new PowerSchool system for attendance, grades, and report cards, walks the hallways to check on teachers and classrooms, and responds to emails from teachers, parents, and community members. They meet with teachers on a weekly basis to discuss curriculum issues, individual student issues, and regulatory and procedural updates in all areas of education. The administrative team also provides for staff development aligned with many district initiatives including workshops, conferences, and demonstration lessons and sessions in which the staff shares successful practices and strategies.

In addition to the above job duties, the assistant principal-regular education develops the school master schedule and oversees the Response to Intervention (RTI) process, including the universal screening of all students. They organize and facilitate the RTI team and ensure that pertinent data, both academic and behavioral, is gathered on struggling students by observation, teacher and parent interviews, student history, and bench-mark and progress monitoring assessments. The assistant principal oversees districtwide testing, and is responsible for school climate and ensuring that school culture is a results-oriented, collaborative learning community. The assistant principal-regular education is the 504 coordinator for the school, and

⁷ Westport job posting: Assistant Principal-Regular Education and Assistant Principal-Special Education.

is knowledgeable about the requirements under state and federal disability discrimination laws and regulations for Section 504. This assistant principal is also responsible for oversight of two grade levels and the supervision and evaluation of those staff.

The assistant principal-special education maintains oversight of the special education process in the school and follows each special education student throughout their tenure in that school. This structure provides an established relationship with the staff, students and parents; a thorough understanding of the student's strengths and weaknesses and progress made each year and what goals need to be established for each individual student. They also participate in the school-based Special Education PTA meetings, provide parents with district updates, and provide for school-based events and community activities. They develop the schools' special education budget for the school year, administer, schedule and evaluate the special education service delivery process for the development of IEP's, annual reviews and reevaluation of IEP's as required by state and federal mandates and guidelines. They chair every Planning and Placement Team meeting including those for students placed out-of-district, finalize all IEPs, ensure participation in the procedures and access to records, follow notification of timelines, and ensure that process requirements are met. They coordinate the curriculum for special education/preschool students that are aligned with the district's core curriculum and meet with the special education team weekly to ensure that differentiation of instruction is consistent and appropriate. They work collaboratively with all staff members to ensure alignment of programs, services, and operations with the entire school so that district goals can be met. The assistant principal-special education is responsible for maintaining a high level of knowledge regarding special education issues including regulatory changes and case law, evolving educational methods and technologies necessary for educating students with disabilities and for managing an excellent special education program. The assistant principal-special education is also responsible for oversight of two grade levels and the supervision and evaluation of those staff as well as the supervision and evaluation of the special education staff and related services staff in their school. The consultants found that this school-based administrative position provides an unparalleled and personalized academic experience.

HIGH SCHOOL

During the 1998-1999 school year, Staples High School had one assistant principal and one dean for 1,015 students, as well as department chairs, an athletic director, coordinators, and administrative support staff in the areas of guidance and special education. That administrative structure changed at the beginning of the 2004-2005 school year to include a principal, four assistant principals, directors of guidance and special education, 2.5 full-time department chairs, and one full-time athletic director. Since that time, the administrative structure has not

changed, but the student enrollment increased to 1,853 and the square footage of the building expanded by 115,000 square feet.

Table 3. Comparison of administration staff levels for school 1998-1999, 2004-2005, and 2016-2017.

Year	Enrollment	Administrators	Ratio Admin/Student
1998-1999	1015	1.0 Principal 1.0 Asst. Principal 1.0 Dean	1:338
2004-2005	1441	1.0 Principal 4.0 Asst. Principals	1:288
2016-2017	1853	1.0 Principal 4.0 Asst. Principals	1:371

The current administrative structure was designed to increase accountability; provide greater consistency in curriculum, instruction, and the use of assessment to enhance learning; provide coordination of all special education programs; to allow administration to be involved in the development of 504 plans and Student Study Teams; and supervision and evaluation of teaching and support staff.

Like their elementary/middle school colleagues, the assistant principals at the high school must have a successful record of teaching and leadership at a high school level, must be knowledgeable of high school age student academics, social and emotional development, must be well versed in education practice, and are required to have a Connecticut Intermediate Administrator Certificate (092). They are responsible for the management of a variety of school administrative functions such as: student discipline, including oversight of the Code of Conduct enforcement; development and maintenance of the school schedule; safety and efficiency of school operations. The assistant principals represent the school within the community for maintaining ongoing community support for educational goals and with issues related to the school environment. They are also the primary point of contact between families and the high school.

Each assistant principal is responsible for a grade level. However, the structure of the model is one where the assistant principal begins with the incoming freshman class, and stays with them until they graduate from high school. This model provides an established relationship with the

staff, students and parents; a thorough understanding of the student's strengths and weaknesses and progress made each year, coordination of resources for students in need, and what goals need to be established for each individual student to ensure that the student has a successful high school career and that they are prepared to reach their full potential as a life-long learner and a responsible citizen within the community. Additionally, each assistant principal is responsible for coordinating the RTI process and for overseeing and chairing all the Section 504 plan meetings for their assigned grade level. Each assistant principal is also assigned additional duties as well, such as overseeing a specific department (Library Media; Media; Child Development, Culinary Arts, Technology Education; Academic Support) as well as overseeing clubs and activities, and more specific duties that are assigned to individual administrators (safety and security plans; Title IX coordination; attendance appeals; master schedule; data management; Advanced Placement testing; parking; statewide testing; duty roster; locker assignments; personalized learning). Additionally, each assistant principal is responsible for oversight of the entire grade level to which they are assigned, including supervision and evaluation of the teaching staff. Further, they must attend all initial Planning and Placement Team meetings for their students.

The coordinator of special education services at the high school ensures that all special education students are receiving a high-quality education that meets their learning needs and goals. The coordinator provides direct support, guidance, and oversight on key elements related to the special education process, chairs PPT meetings, finalizes all IEPs and oversees special education compliance, state reporting, data collection, review, and day to day challenges that arise and ensures participation in the procedures and access to records. The coordinator collaborates with the academic teams throughout the school as well as external partners and service providers, and with the students and their parents to provide an unparalleled and personalized academic experience. The coordinator regularly reviews the special education and intervention data to inform programmatic changes and supports to improve the academic program and ensure that each student has a personalized learning plan that is data informed and aligned with the Common Core standards. The coordinator oversees the professional growth of the special education and related services staff, provides coaching to ensure progress towards professional goals, and provides direct supervision and evaluation of the special education and related services staff. The coordinator is also responsible for oversight of the Special Education PTA and new initiatives at the high school such as the Ruler Program and Dialectic Behavior Therapy (DBT).

2.2 Teaching personnel

CERTIFIED STAFF

Unlike the regular education program in which staffing needs are predicated on projected student enrollment, class size limits, and/or budgetary constraints, staffing the special education program is based not only on the number of children identified as needing special education and related services, but more importantly on the intensity and duration of the individual services prescribed for those students. The intensity and duration of services directly impacts the size of a special education teacher's caseload (see Section 3.1). Federal law does not specify requirements for caseload or class size regarding students requiring special education and related services. Likewise, state statute does not prescribe staffing ratios but specifies only that "the number and age range of children requiring special education and related services assigned to a class shall be such that the specifications of each child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) can be met".⁸

Westport's capacity to meet the individualized needs of its special education students is illustrated by the extensive special education and related services available within the district. Westport special education teachers provide a continuum of high quality specialized instruction to students with varying degrees of disability in the regular, resource, and separate classroom as well as alternative and community settings. Westport currently employs a total of 50.5 certified special education teachers district-wide. Comparison with the number of special education students to teachers reveals an average of 8:1 staffing ratio district-wide.⁹ In terms of related services specialists, Westport currently employs 18.8 school psychologists, 3.1 social workers, and 13.7 speech and language pathologists. The district also employs one transition specialist at the high school and 16.5 school counselors for grades 6 through 12.

NONCERTIFIED STAFF

Westport employs 6.7 occupational therapists and 2 physical therapists who provide services district-wide. The district employs 82.28 paraprofessional educators who provide direct instructional support to special education students. The district contracts with an outside

⁸ <http://www.nasdse.org/Portals/0/Documents/Download%20Publications/DFR-0392.pdf>

⁹ The ability to predict special education staffing needs is tentative at best given that school budgets are developed nearly one year in advance of knowing actual service needs. Although decreasing special education staffing as a means of decreasing budget expenditures may be fiscally alluring, it is important to note that resulting increases in caseloads not only decrease student contact time but simultaneously place greater demands on staff time to attend required meetings and complete required paperwork both of which are known to negatively impact individualized instruction and are correlated with high teacher attrition.

agency to provide Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) to primarily address the needs of students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

3.0 PROCEDURES AND PROTOCOLS FOR DELIVERY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

3.1 ARE THE POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND GOALS OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT CLEARLY ARTICULATED?

Written policies and procedures that comply with federal and state requirements along with a clearly articulated vision and goal-setting are considered foundational to continuous special education program improvement. To respond to the question, the consultants first reviewed Westport's current special education policies and procedures manual for compliance with state and federal requirements. Next, the consultants examined Office of Pupil Personnel annual goals for alignment with their stated purpose of refining special education policies, procedures, and programs.

3.1A SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

Special education policies and procedures are governing principles that mandate or constrain the actions of the school district to insure compliance with federal and state regulations. As implementation standards, they also establish a common set of expectations for stakeholders. Westport adopted the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education "*Model Special Education Policies and Procedure Manual*" for education staff and also developed their own parent handbook for special education in 2011 which is still provided as a parent resource. The director indicated to the consultants that this manual will be updated this school year to provide parents the latest information to give them a better understanding of the special education process. It should be noted that the Connecticut State Department of Education is updating the "*Model Special Education Policies and Procedure Manual*" and the district needs to ensure that the updated manual is availed to all staff.

3.1B GOALS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Vision is arguably the most important core value guiding the behavior and ultimately, the success of an organization. The Council for Exceptional Children defines vision as "forward-thinking and courageous decision-making dedicated to excellence and influence in an evolving environment".¹⁰ Goal-setting serves to scaffold efforts along a continuum and in congruence to the vision.

The consultants were unable to identify department specific goals and/or action plans. The consultants found however that the Office of Student Services provided staff with professional

¹⁰ <http://www.cec.sped.org/About-Us/Mission-and-Vision>

development opportunities encompassing topics including IEP development and data collection; understanding and working with children with complex learning and mental health needs; transition services for secondary education teachers and building administrators, physical management training for a crisis team; evaluation techniques for special education teachers and ecological assessments for building level teams; curriculum development; and assistive technology.

3.1C LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

34 C.F.R. Section 300.114 LRE of the IDEA requires each public agency to ensure that—

- To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and
- 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.

Westport records indicate that the placement of each student with a disability was determined annually and was based upon the child's IEP. Parents consistently attended PPT meetings and were involved in the decision-making process.

Three data points are monitored to inform districts about their compliance with 34 C.F.R. Section 300.114 LRE:

1. Percentage of students with disabilities who spend 80% or more their time with non-disabled peers.
2. Percentage of students with disabilities who spend less than 40% of their time with non-disabled peers.
3. Percentage of students with disabilities in separate placements.

REGULAR CLASS PLACEMENT

It is expected that a district's data for the percentage of students with disabilities who spend 79.1% or more their time with non-disabled peers meet or exceed state-established targets. , Westport has consistently performed above the state-established target in the percentage of students with disabilities who spend 79.1% or more of their time with non-disabled peers in the time period 2011-2012 to 2015-2016.¹¹ Westport was then compared to the DRG A average for

¹¹ The most recent data published by the Connecticut State Department of Education.
<http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>

the same time period.¹² Westport performed consistently above the state-established target and the DRG A average in the time period 2011-2012 to 2015-2016 (see Figure 4).

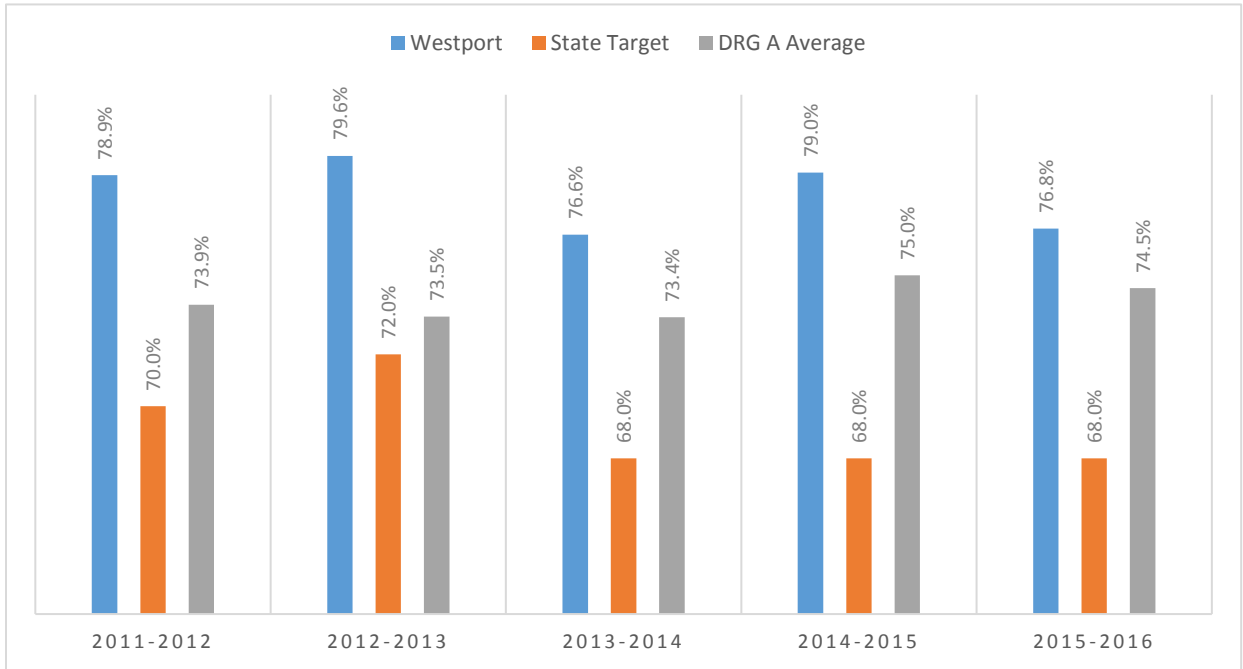


Figure 4. . Increase regular class placement.

¹² East Lyme Berlin, Rocky Hill, and Branford.

SEPARATE CLASS PLACEMENT

The expectation for the percentage of students spending less than 40% of their time in the regular class is that district data fall below state-established targets. Westport performed consistently below the state-established target and the DRG A average in the time period 2011-2012 to 2015-2016 (see Figure 5).

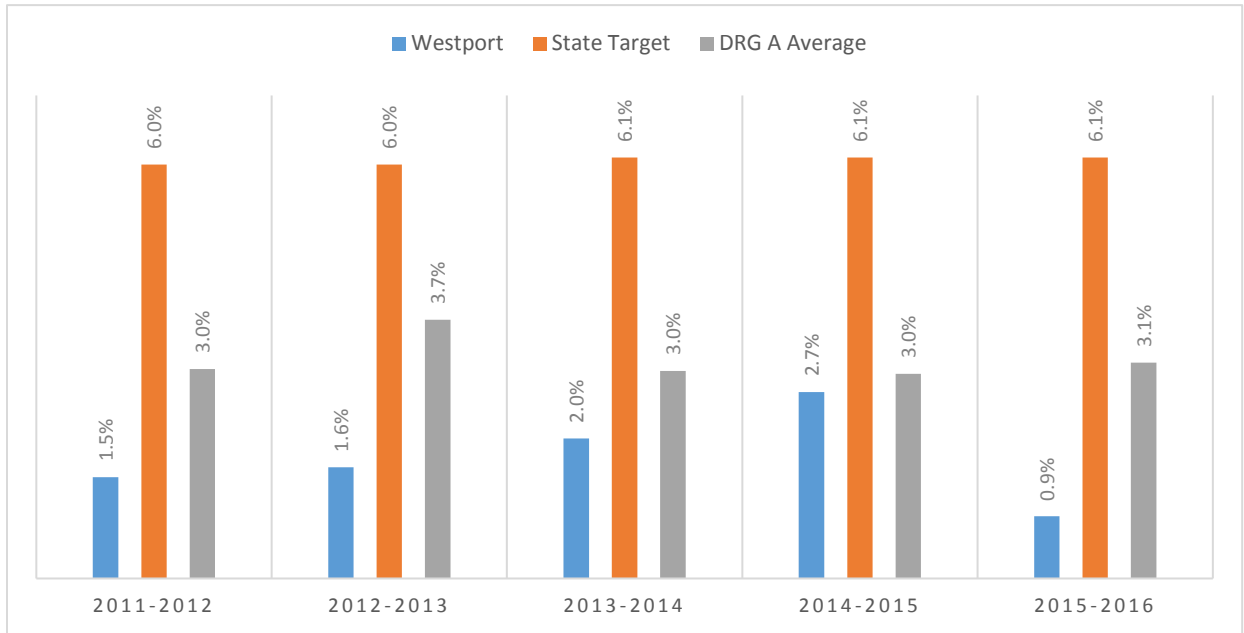


Figure 5. Decrease Separate Class Placement.

OUT-OF-DISTRICT PLACEMENT

It is expected that district data for the percentage of students placed in out-of-district placements (separate schools) also fall below state-established targets. Westport has consistently fallen below the state-established target in the percentage of students placed out-of-district from 2011-2012 to 2015-2016 and had a lower percentage of students placed out-of-district than the DRG A average for the same time period (see Figure 6). According to the Office of Pupil Personnel Services, there are twenty-seven students in out-of-district placements at the time of this review.

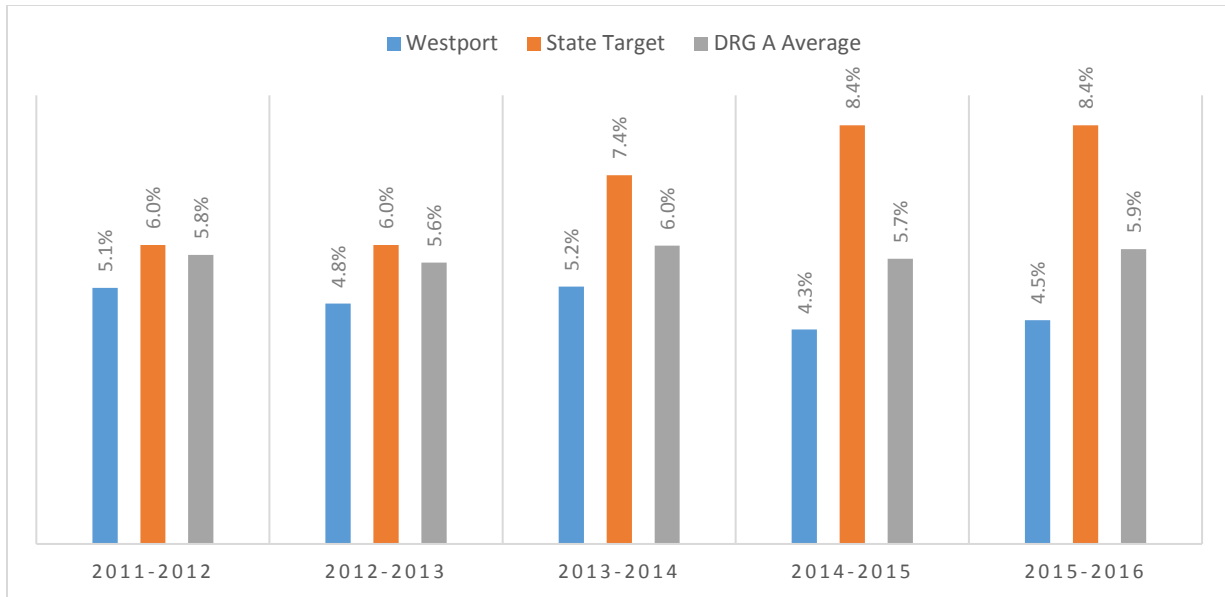


Figure 6. Decrease Placements in Separate School, Residential or Other Settings

Given the increased prevalence of developmental disorders and the nature and severity of mental health issues at all grade levels, the district is commended for its commitment to providing a variety of in-district programs, the impact of which is well-reflected in the above-referenced data.^{13, 14}

The consultants recognize additional practices relative to educating students in the least restrictive environment:

- Access to the general classroom for students with disabilities is the model emphasized districtwide, as there is frequent collaboration among administration, regular education staff and special education staff so that the team can meet student needs. Special education teachers typically attend all the grade level and curriculum meetings as well as regular education trainings to expand their capacity with the differentiation of instruction.
- Related services staff meet regularly and work in tandem with the special education teachers to ensure students have access to the general education curriculum.
- Administrators attend nearly all PPT meetings and are highly involved in the PPT process. These administrators have advanced knowledge in IDEA laws, policies and procedures and because of this knowledge base, the Director of Pupil Services only

¹³ <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr087.pdf>

¹⁴ <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/su6202a1.htm>

needs to provide consultative services, and is not required to attend these contentious PPT meetings.

- There is a strong sense of teamwork and collaboration among building-level teams. The special education teachers and related-service providers work together with their regular education peers, are knowledgeable of their students' needs, and in collaboration with the regular education teacher provide high quality specialized instruction at each of the schools.

RELATED SERVICES

Related services refer to transportation, and developmental, corrective, or supportive services as may be required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education, and includes the early identification and assessment of disabling conditions in children. It does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device.

Westport currently provides a wide-range of related services required to provide benefit from special education including speech-language pathology and audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, social work services, school nurse services designed to enable a child with a disability to receive a free appropriate public education as described in the individualized education program of the child, music therapy, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, and medical services, except for those that are for diagnostic and evaluation purposes only. The consultants identified a tendency to over-prescribe related services, particularly school-related counseling, with no rationale provided substantiating an identified need.

Westport currently employs 18.80 school psychologists, 3.10 social workers, and 13.70 speech and language pathologists. The district also employs one transition specialist at the high school, 16.50 school counselors who provide services grades 6 through 12. Westport employs 6.70 occupational therapists, and 2.0 physical therapists to provide services district-wide. The district contracts with an outside agency to provide Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) to primarily address the needs of students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

3.2 Do metrics exist for evaluating educational benefit?

Educational benefit is defined as the extent to which students with disabilities are afforded access, meaningful participation, and progress in general education over time. The following data points were reviewed for evidence of student progress:

- 1) The performance of students with disabilities on statewide assessment in English Language Arts and Math.
- 2) The State Identified Measurable Result for Children with Disabilities (SIMR).

PERFORMANCE ON STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

Investigation of proficiency data reveals that 39.4% of Westport students with disabilities grades 3-8 reached proficiency on statewide assessment in English Language Arts which surpassed the state target and DRG A average by 21.9% and 13%, respectively. Likewise, 24% of Westport students with disabilities reached proficiency in Math surpassing the state target by 12% but below the DRG A average by 9.5% (see Figure 7).

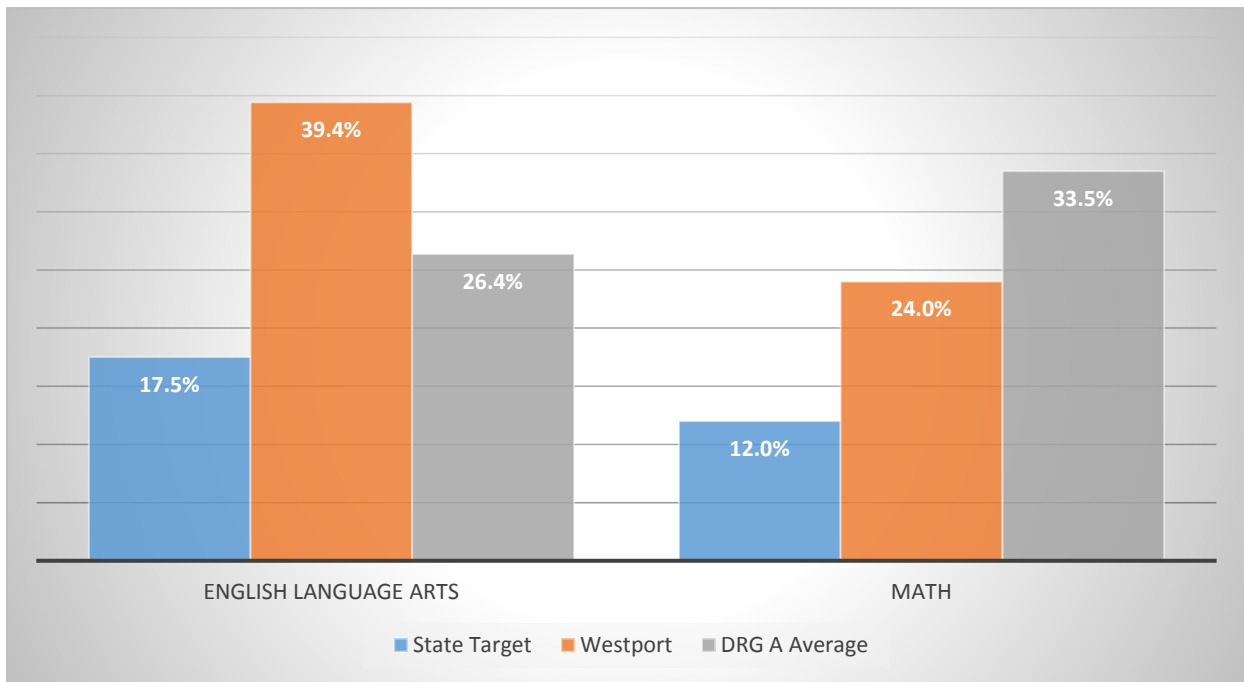


Figure 7. Percentage of students with disabilities reaching proficiency on statewide assessments in English Language Arts and Math grades 3-8 (2015-2016).

In comparison to all DRG A school districts, Westport ranked 3rd out of 9 for English Language Arts proficiency (see Figure 8) and 6th out of 9 for Math proficiency (see Figure 9).

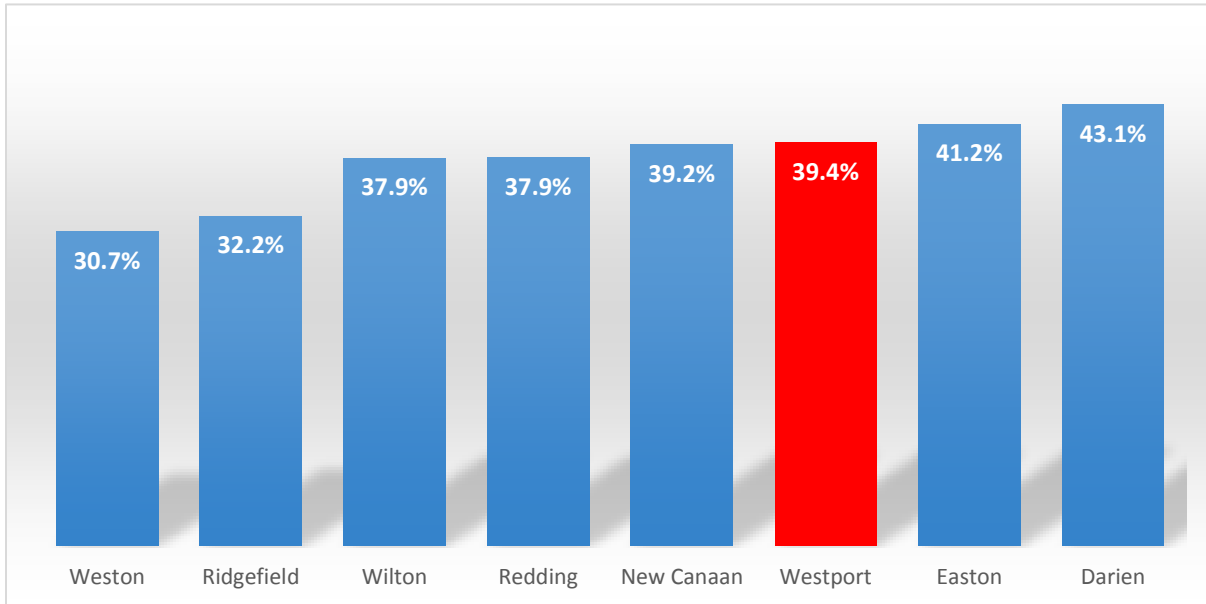


Figure 8. Students with disabilities English Language Arts Proficiency Rate (2015-2016).

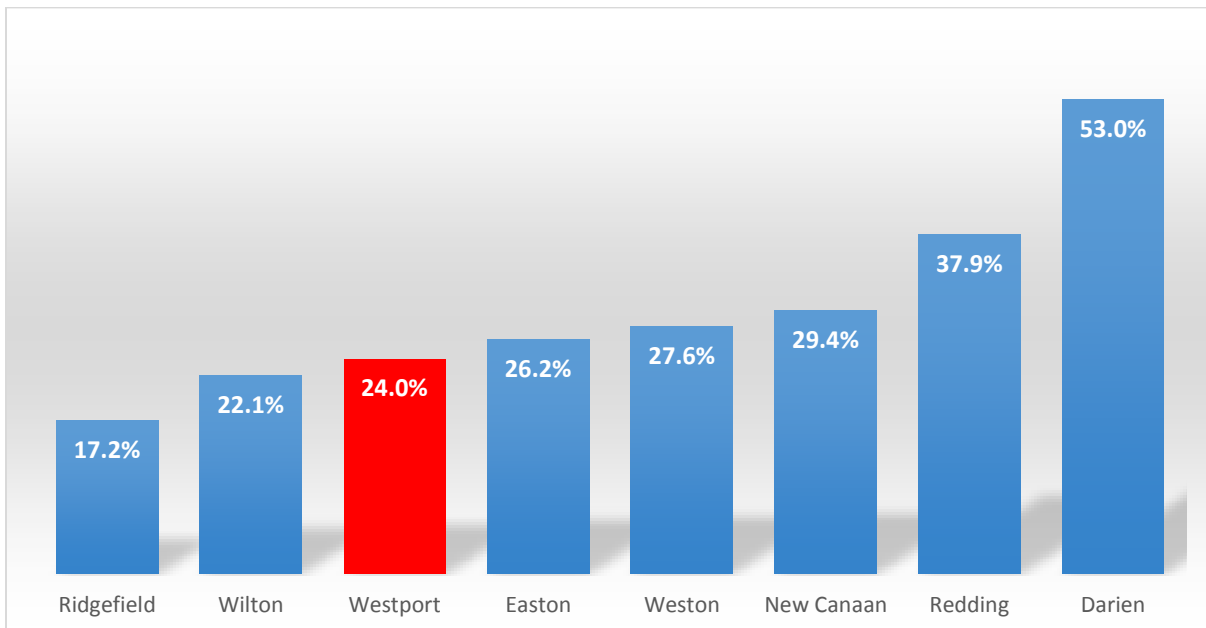


Figure 9. . Students with disabilities Math Proficiency Rate (2015-2016).

The consultants identified a system of academic tracking by ability beginning at the middle school, particularly for math instruction, and continuing through high school where “level courses differ in pacing, topics covered, and depth of study”.¹⁵ The consultants found a high prevalence of special education students at the high school to be enrolled in lower level courses and of those courses, most exceeded the necessary ratio of disabled to nondisabled students for consideration as inclusive settings.

STATE IDENTIFIED MEASURABLE GOAL FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES (SIMR)

The State Identified Measurable Goal for Children with Disabilities (SIMR) was first included in the June 2016 Annual Performance Report (APR) for each school district. As a relatively new indicator, the SIMR measures the reading performance of all 3rd grade students with disabilities statewide, as measured by Connecticut’s English Language Arts (ELA) Performance Index. Westport’s SIMR score of 68.1 surpassed the state average of 51.4 by 4.3 points (see Figure 10) and exceeds the DRG A average of 63.1 by 5 points. Westport ranks 2nd out of 8 DRG A districts (see Figure 11).¹⁶

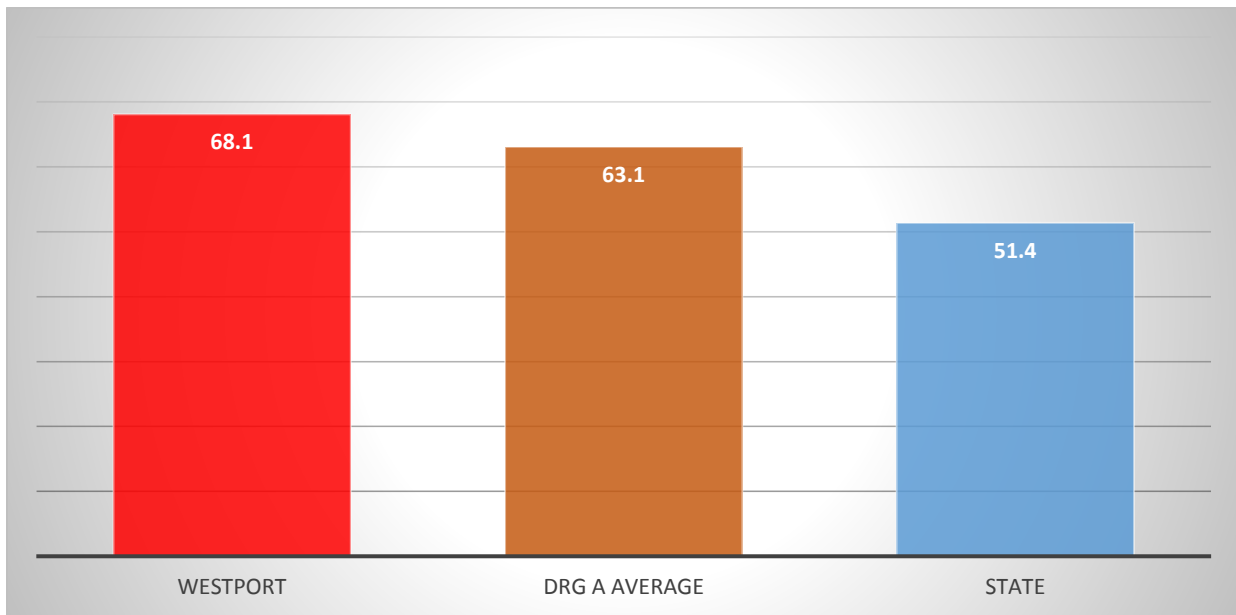


Figure 10. Connecticut’s State Identified Measurable Goal for Children with Disabilities (SIMR).

¹⁵ Staples High School Course Catalog (2017-2018).

¹⁶ District No. 9 is a high school, grades 9-12.

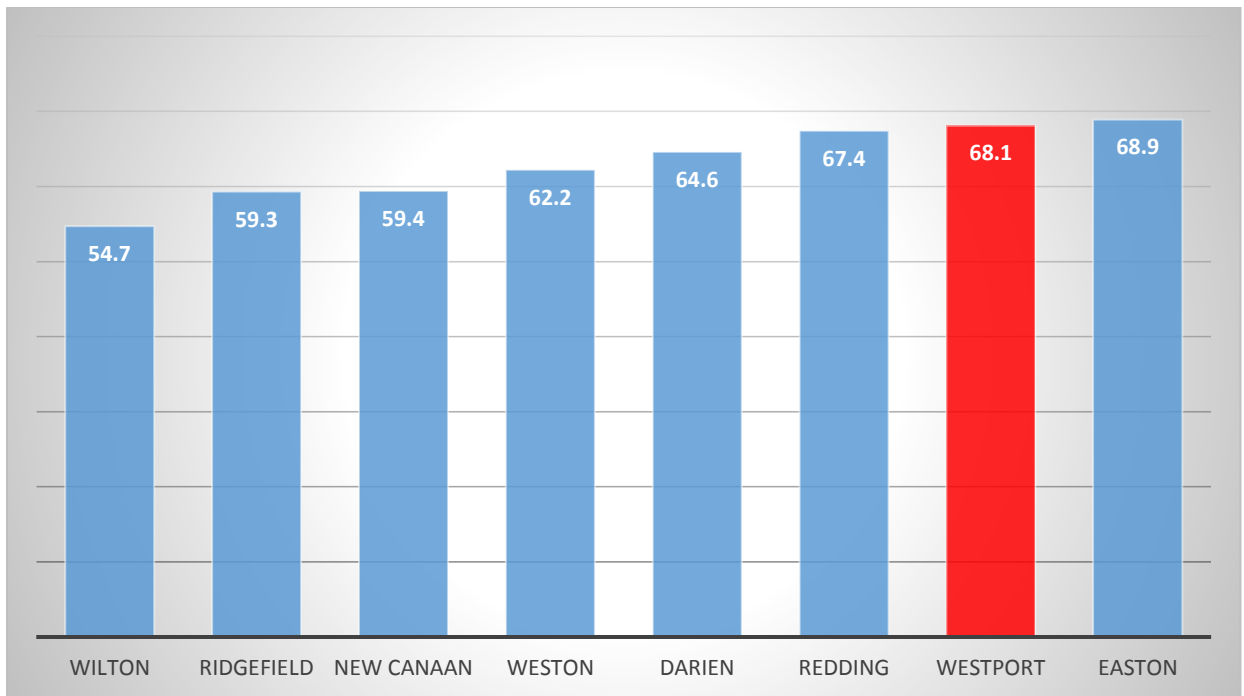


Figure 11. DRG A State Identified Measurable Goal for Children with Disabilities (SIMR).

3.3 Is there sufficient capacity to meet the educational goals and to project future special education expenditures?

The IDEA mandates that each school district provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all children with a disability, regardless of the severity, who need special education and related services. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Westport to provide funding sufficient to maintain its capacity to meet the needs of these diverse learners. To address the question of capacity to meet the educational goals and to project future special education expenditures, the consultants reviewed state financial records to analyze local special education funding trends as a percentage of total current expenditures. The consultants compared Westport's funding levels to those of all DRG A school districts. The consultants further reviewed state and federal grant allocations as additional revenue streams.

Analysis of state financial records indicates that Westport's special education costs as a percentage of total expenditures has remained relatively stable for the time period 2012-2013 to 2016-2017 (see Figure 13). Westport's special education costs as a percentage of total expenditures for 2016-2017 was also 4.8% lower than the DRG A average (see Figure 13) and was ranked the lowest in comparison to all DRG A districts (see Figure 14).

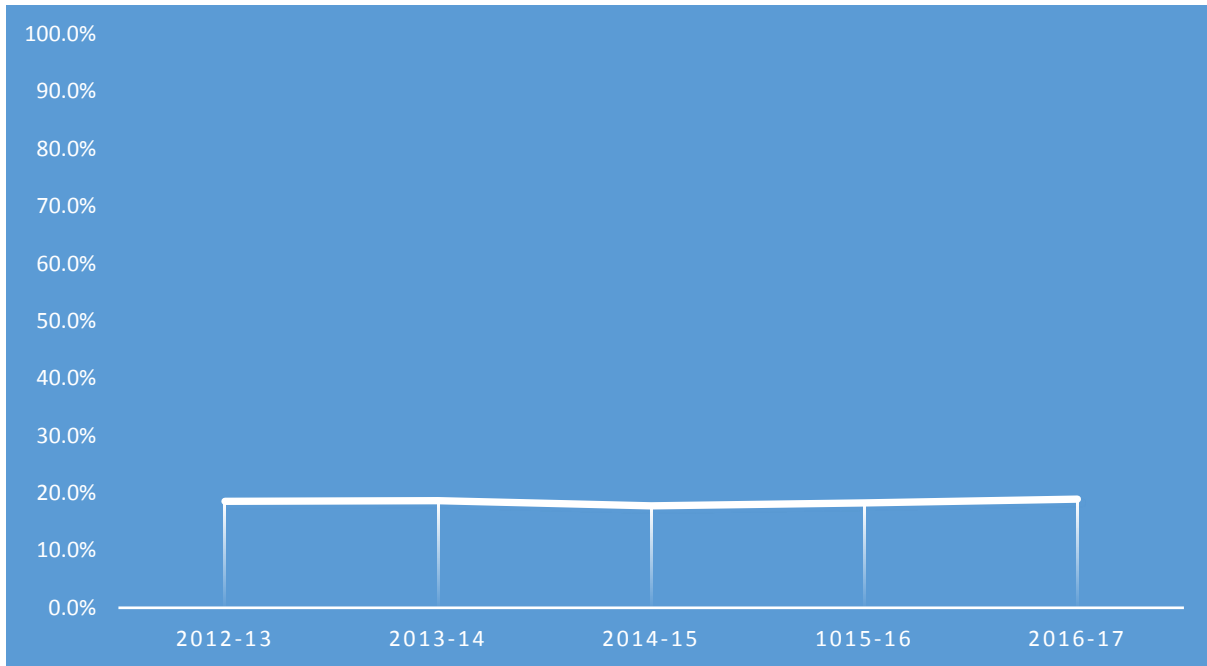


Figure 12. Special Education as a % of Total Current Expenditures (TCE)

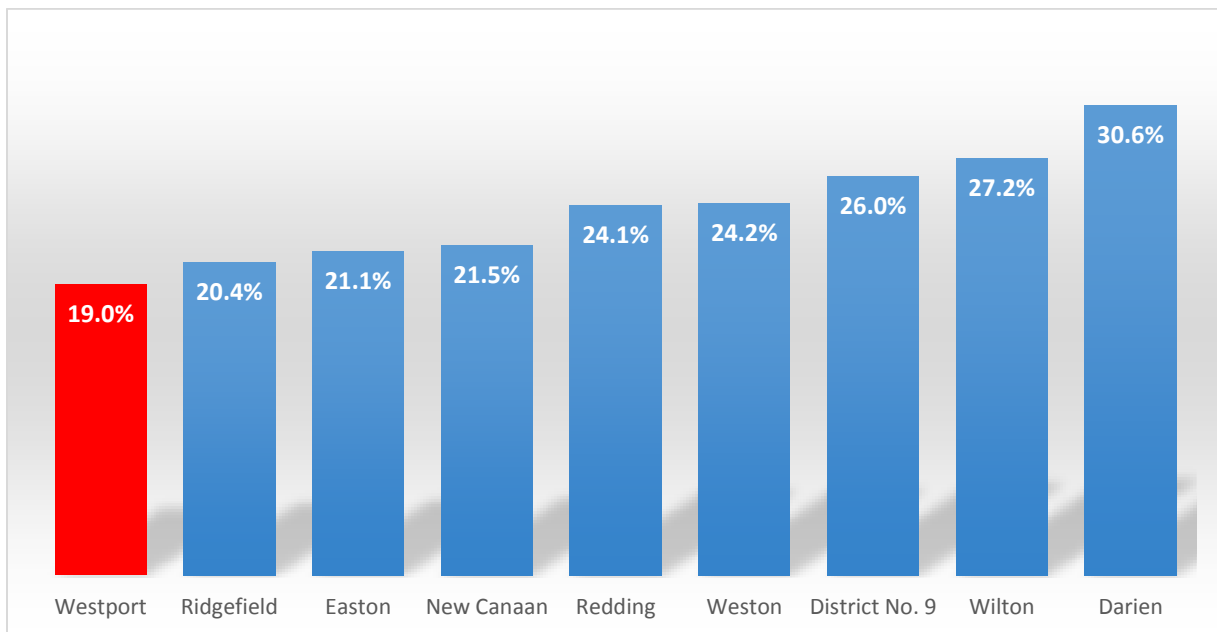


Figure 13. DRG A Special Education as a % of Total Current Expenditures (TCE).

4.0 COMMENDATIONS

The following commendations are made for Westport's ongoing efforts in meeting the needs of its special education students:

Westport is commended for:

- The consistency of special education services delivery demonstrated by the school based special education administration model. This model affords the building level staff to focus on instructional issues, demonstrate administrative support for special education and provide high quality supervision for teachers that produces enhanced outcomes for students with disabilities. This model is also cost effective as it provides immediate customer service, thus decreasing litigation and out of district tuition, as indicated by the District Reference Groups. This model allows the district to provide an unparalleled and personalized academic experience for students with needs.
- Full compliance with federal and state requirements for Individual Education Program (IEP) development as evidenced by the 2016/2017 Connecticut State Department of Education SEDAC Desk Audit and File Review.
- Inclusion teams at the elementary school level that consist of the assistant principal-special education, teachers, and related services that monitors inclusive practices. The teams focus is to develop and maintain a comprehensive plan that promotes best practice for supporting students in inclusive setting and to provide access to general education curriculum through differentiation.
- Fiscal mindedness in budget development and managing special education costs.
- Its capacity to contain costs when managing unanticipated changes in student needs.
- Well-trained special education teachers and related services specialists who provide a continuum of high quality, specialized instruction to students with varying degrees of disability in the regular, resource, and separate classroom as well as alternative and community settings.
- Providing a continuum of special education services including specialized in-district programming for students with significant learning challenges.
- Strong sense of teamwork and collaboration among building-level teams.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Comprehensive Program Review offers non-prioritized areas of focus for the Westport leadership team to consider. As such, it is recommended that Westport:

1. Maintain the current building-level special education administrative structure as a viable model for providing special education services at each individual school within the district. This is an effective long-standing model that has strong community support.
2. Expand the role of Director of Pupil Services to assume greater responsibility for coordinating curriculum and monitoring academic progress district-wide, particularly as it relates to special education students.
3. Relocate the Office of Pupil Services from the high school to Central Office as space permits. It is also recommended that a central repository for all student-specific special education files be created to allow for maintenance and control of the “official” record under the direct supervision of the district’s Custodian of Records.
4. Provide additional special education coordination services at the high school, as the present model of one coordinator is not sufficient. It is recommended that the psychological services coordinator share the coordination responsibilities at the high school with the special education coordinator in lieu of having the assistant principals acting as chair of the PPT meeting when the special education coordinator is unable to attend. Given that the current caseload for the coordinator is 225 students, a minimum of two days per week of additional support from the psychological services coordinator appears warranted with flexible scheduling of up to three days per week for attending annual review PPT meetings.
5. Expand opportunities for collaboration between building staff when transitioning students from one school to the next, especially between elementary school to the middle school. This is critical to provide a continuum of special education services in the least restrictive environment.
6. The tracking of students for instruction in the middle school particularly for mathematics, needs to cease as those students are not afforded the same curriculum teachings as the other students, and therefore, fall behind with academics. This practice is also prevalent within the high school where classes are “leveled” and in which there is a propensity to place special education students in lower level classrooms. As such, it is recommended that the current level system be restructured to eliminate Level B and lower classes.
7. Update the Parent Satisfaction Survey for students with a disability, as the last survey was completed in 2009 by Diagnostics Plus.
8. Develop department goals for Pupil Services aligned with the district’s strategic plan. The department needs to identify specific learning objectives aligned with

accompanying outcomes measures for all professional development activities related to special education and in alignment with the strategic plan. In keeping with best practice, it is recommended that baseline data and goal targets be included in order to evaluate growth as a result of these activities.

9. Update the "*Model Special Education Policies and Procedure Manual*" consistent with the latest revision provided by the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, and that the district ensure that the updated manual is available to all staff.

APPENDIX A

DRG A SCHOOL DISTRICTS

DRG A School Districts
Darien
Redding
Easton
Westport
New Canaan
Wilton
Weston
Ridgefield
District No. 9

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To: Colleen Palmer, Superintendent of Schools
From: Maria Zachery, World Languages Coordinator, K-12
Subject: FY 2019 Cost Estimate for AAPL Assessments
Date: January 8, 2018

This is the estimate (based on current enrollment) for administering the AAPPL Assessments during the 2018-2019 school year. The results can be used as evidence of meeting the criteria for the Seal of Biliteracy. They will also provide valuable data regarding our WL program. Please let me know if you have any questions or suggestions.

Tests for 2 Domains:

- Interpersonal Speaking/Listening
- Interpretive Listening

Tests for 4 Domains:

- Interpersonal Speaking/Listening
- Interpretive Listening
- Presentational Writing
- Interpretive Reading

Grade	# of Students	2 Domains	4 Domains
5th	421	\$4,210	
8th	396	\$3,960	
10th	434		\$8,680
11th	492		\$9,840
12th	445		\$8,900
Non-English Primary Language @SHS: 93 sts			\$1,860

Total: **\$37,450**

*** Additional tests are \$5 per domain/\$20 for four domains per student**

If every student at SHS needed to retest in one domain: **\$7,320**

If half of the students needed to retest in one domain: **\$3,660**

Adjusted Total (including option to retest in one domain): **\$44,770** maximum