

**GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT**  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This Executive Summary is the result of a comprehensive Program Review of the Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) Special Education system. The Program Review was initiated at the request of GRPS in response to issues and concerns that had been raised by parents, school staff and members of the Grand Rapids Public Schools community to the Superintendent and/or the Board. This Executive Summary highlights the key elements of the Special Education Program Review, the key findings of the Special Education Program Review Team and includes a complete set of the Recommendations made by the Program Review Team, as prepared and presented by the Special Education Program Review Consultant.

In addition to direct input from the GRPS Superintendent and the GRPS Board of Education, a Special Education Program Review Team was developed as a “steering committee” to provide focus areas. The process was designed in a manner that would ensure that the findings and recommendations were data-based and properly reflected broad and genuine stakeholder input and collaboration through a variety of input methods. The Program Review Report is offered and the recommendations at the conclusion of the Report are made with the knowledge and understanding that GRPS is in the midst of implementing several multi-year district-wide initiatives, plans and reforms.

**The Process and Implementation of the Process**

The GRPS Special Education Program Review was conducted over a period of one-year. The Program Review Team which consisted of 28 members of stakeholders from GRPS Administration, staff and parents who were selected on a volunteer basis through an open invitation for participation distributed to the buildings through the Special Education Administrators, Building Principals and Executive Directors for the District. The Special Education Program Review Team met on 6 occasions over the course of the year. Input was provided by the GRPS Administration (including the Superintendent, the GRPS Executive Directors and Special Education Administrators), the Program Review Team, and the Program Review Consultant. Input was also provided by the Grand Rapids Public Schools Board of Education during a meeting with the Board on April 18, 2016.

In addition to the input from the stakeholders, the Administration and the GRPS Board of Education, the Special Education Program Review Consultant also reviewed relevant information and documents from the District and the Michigan Department of Education through the MI School Data System. Input and data for the Report was also collected from the GRPS Staff and the GRPS Parent Community through two separate surveys that were developed by the Program Review Team and implemented with the assistance of the Grand Valley State University Statistical Consulting Center. Finally, the Special Education Program Review

Consultant conducted multiple site visits to various special education programs at locations throughout the GRPS School District.

### **Recommendations**

1. Develop a Special Education Strategic Plan to be implemented over a 3-5 year timeline.
  - a. Design, develop, and implement the Strategic Plan in a manner that is consistent with the existing district school improvement plan with input from stakeholders, under the leadership of the Executive Director of Special Education.
  - b. The overarching goal of the Strategic Plan is to break down the barriers that exist (whether real or perceived) around programming for students with IEPs, and build inter and intra department relationships.
  - c. Include a communication and implementation plan.
  - d. Include a mechanism for adjusting goal(s) when the data demonstrate the need to do so, where the priorities of the District otherwise require it, or when necessary to respond to changes in the law or its implementation.
  - e. Data derived from this Report would suggest key goal areas within the Strategic Plan could include:
    - i. Graduation Rates for students with IEPs;
    - ii. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) data, with a long-term, well-defined and well-communicated plan to move toward State targets for LRE and best practices for inclusion;
    - iii. Special Education Discipline, including a plan to continue to reduce suspension and expulsion at both the building and district level and a plan to avoid the recurrence of significant disproportionality;
    - iv. Curriculum initiatives that emphasize the identification and implementation of curriculum and assessments that are demonstrably aligned to the state standards, with specific emphasis on effective techniques to accommodate and assess student need.
    - v. In conjunction with other ongoing technology reviews, assessment and improvement initiatives, develop a goal based upon research that supports and provides guidance regarding instructional/assistive technology needs to promote effective classroom and teaching practices for students with IEPs;
    - vi. Assurance of district wide, aligned professional development, taking into account the Staff Survey Results and the input from the Program Review Team. Including the deployment of professional learning that:
      - de-emphasizes the separation between special education and general education staff;

- emphasizes staff proficiency in grade level curriculum and methods of accommodating and modifying curriculum to facilitate student access to and progress in the general curriculum, while still expecting rigor and appropriate student outcomes; and
  - takes into account the key areas related to data collection, implementation of IEPs, student discipline, least restrictive environment, inclusion, and other relevant indicators and targets.
2. Review the *Futures Education Reports* from 2010, including most notably, the recommendations section of both the GRPS local and Center Based Program Reports. Several of the recommendations in those reports are supported by the data and results of the current Program Review. To the extent appropriate, portions of the recommendations from the *Futures Education Reports* can be included in the Strategic Plan.
  3. As it relates to deployment and use of staff, the District revealed that a process of realignment of local Special Education Supervisors is already underway to address previous issues related to duplication of effort and an operational limitation on the Supervisors' exposure to the broadest portion of the K-12 system as possible. In addition, consider the data-based and Program Review Team perspective (also confirmed in the *Futures Education Report*) that there is significant room for growth in the coordination and communication at the building level between general education and special education administrators and staff. Although this is not a challenge that is unique or more pronounced within GRPS, a more-unified GRPS system will assist in addressing the renewed state and federal agency emphasis on least restrictive environment and expectations for system-wide data collection and documentation of IEP implementation.
  4. Study the data referenced and included in this Report and Appendix and the implications that data presents in the context of center program operation. In particular, explore Grand Rapids Public Schools ongoing operation of center-based programs on behalf of other Kent ISD districts or the Kent ISD. Review the data implications to GRPS as it relates to the impact operation of these programs has on the GRPS special education population for educational setting (LRE); GRPS special education student graduation and dropout rates; suspension / discipline data; and Human Resources capacity.
  5. Grand Rapids Board of Education Policies, Procedures and Administrative Guidelines do not appear to include criteria through which a Certificate of Completion would be earned / awarded. Therefore, it is recommended that the Grand Rapids Public Schools and the Board of Education define and develop a specific set of criteria and

- expected outcomes for students with disabilities who may receive a Certificate of Completion or other alternative to a regular High School Diploma.
6. Review current policies and procedures for the use of the Personal Curriculum for students with IEPs. The data from the District strongly suggests that the Personal Curriculum is being underutilized and may assist in increasing opportunities for graduation of students with a disability with a regular high school diploma.
  7. Explore the interplay between the IEP process and the Section 504 process and evaluate current Section 504 policies, procedures and practices.
  8. Consider a 3 year review cycle for the Program Review Process.