Fairfax County Public Schools: Special Education Comprehensive Program Review

Year 2 Final Report

Lindsey Hayes, Allison Gandhi, Caitlyn Majeika, Diandra Best, Dia Jackson, Isabelle D'Souza, and Sana Fatima

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Executive Summary

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) contracted with the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) in October 2020 to conduct an independent, third-party review of its special education program. This comprehensive review covers four broad goals with respect to FCPS's special education program: (a) evaluate the system's design, structure, and established processes; (b) evaluate the adequacy of human capital resources; (c) analyze the alignment of services with evidence-based practices; and (d) evaluate the effectiveness of communication with stakeholders.

The comprehensive review of FCPS's special education program occurred in two phases. Phase 1 (October 2020–September 2021) included extant data analysis, document analysis, an audit of a random yet representative sample of individualized education programs (IEPs), staff and parent surveys, and key informant focus groups. Phase 1 culminated in the delivery of a preliminary interim report and presentation to the Fairfax County School Board on September 21, 2021. Phase 2 (October 2021–October 2022) included on-site classroom observations, additional stakeholder focus groups, and an additional analysis of extant data (including survey and IEP data). Phase 2 culminated in the delivery of the final report and presentation.

This final report provides a comprehensive summary of findings from all data sources across both years of the project. In this report, we briefly describe the background information that led to the commissioning of the review and our methods for Phase 1 and Phase 2 data collection activities. We then present 54 review findings organized by 21 research questions across the four goal areas (summarized in Exhibit 1). The report concludes with 19 recommendations for changes in policies, processes, and practices to address the findings in the report (summarized in Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 1. Findings by Research Question

Research question	Finding
1a. Design, structure, processes	1a.1. FCPS has robust division-level leadership and infrastructure for special education services.
	1a.2. FCPS students with a disability (SWDs) perform substantially lower on state exams than FCPS students without disabilities across all subjects and all racial-ethnic groups, but consistently exceed the state performance for SWDs in both reading and mathematics.
	1a.3. SWDs disproportionally receive in- and out-of-school suspensions compared with peers without disabilities.
	1a.4. Parents of SWDs report many instances of positive feedback about the quality and effectiveness of FCPS instructional staff.

Research question	Finding
1b. Referral and eligibility	1b.1. FCPS complies with state timelines for determining initial eligibility for special education nearly 100% of the time.
	1b.2. Parents of SWDs and FCPS staff report varied experiences with the ease and efficiency of the initial referral and evaluation process.
	1b.3. Most initial evaluation reports include information across multiple domains.
	1b.4. Subgroups of students vary in the likelihood of identification for special education.
1c. Child Find	1c.1. FCPS has an efficient process for identifying young children suspected of having a disability via the Early Childhood Child Find Process.
1d. New programs	1d.1. Some stakeholders feel less proactively included in the planning and implementation of new programs and services, especially those supporting students with more complex needs.
1e. Inclusionary practices	1e.1. FCPS does not meet the Virginia state targets for percentage of time SWDs are included in the general education setting.
	1e.2. Parents are generally satisfied with opportunities for academic and social inclusion for their children.
1f. Developing individualized education programs (IEPs)	1f.1. FCPS has detailed documentation of the processes and guidance for developing IEPs.
	1f.2. Most present levels of performance statements rely on subjective information rather than objective, measurable terms.
	1f.3. Annual IEP goals and short-term objectives include measurable behaviors and a criterion, but most goals lack conditions under which the behavior will occur.
	1f.4. While most parents report having adequate input in their child's IEP development, some IEPs lack documentation of parent input and collaboration.
1g. Services and accommodations	1g.1. IEPs do not consistently document detailed rationales for placement decisions.
	1g.2. Parents perceive that the special education services students receive meet their needs.
	1g.3. Accommodations included in IEPs and 504 plans align with students' areas of need.
1h. Transitions	1h.1. Processes to facilitate transitions into postsecondary opportunities are clearly defined at the district level.
	1h.2. FCPS meets federal regulations that require transition plans in IEPs when appropriate.
	1h.3. IEP transition goals and the transition services students receive may lack alignment.

Research question	Finding
	1h.4. The quality of transition planning and programming varies by disability category.
	1h.5. FCPS meets or exceeds Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) performance indicators related to postsecondary outcomes for SWDs.
	1h.6. Processes to facilitate transitions between grade levels and schools are not clearly defined at the district level.
1i. Services received	1i.1. IEP progress reports do not provide sufficiently detailed, data-based information.
	1i.2. Accommodations written on IEPs are implemented with higher fidelity and consistency than those written on 504 plans.
1j. Reevaluation	1j.1. FCPS's stated processes and guidance for reevaluations meet or exceed national and state standards.
	1j.2. Eligibilities consistently use multiple sources of student-level information but most lack documentation of parent input.
1k. Fidelity	1k.1. District-level guidance on monitoring fidelity of the implementation of special education intervention programs is minimal and inconsistent across programs.
	1k.2. Special education services are implemented inconsistently across the district.
2a. Recruiting, hiring, and retaining	2a.1. FCPS experienced approximately 90% average annual retention of special education personnel from 2015 to 2019.
	2a.2. FCPS engages in special education-specific recruitment and retention initiatives.
	2a.3. Publicly available information about special education career pathways lacks important details needed by prospective employees.
2b. Caseloads and workloads	2b.1. FCPS recently released guidance to promote school-level compliance with state regulations governing special education caseload sizes.
	2b.2. Staff identify workload and compensation as interrelated factors with substantial influence on FCPS's ability to recruit, hire, and retain special education personnel, especially when competing with neighboring school districts.
2c. Staffing	2c.1. FCPS has maintained a consistently lower student-to-teacher ratio in special education than the Virginia state average in recent years.
	2c.2. Staff perceive inefficiencies in the staffing allocation process.
2d. Professional development	2d.1. FCPS policy documents demonstrate a breadth and depth of professional development offerings.
	2d.2. Novice teachers lack preparation to adequately support SWDs and need tailored professional development opportunities.
	2d.3. Professional development opportunities related to educating SWDs are not sufficiently aligned with staff roles and identified areas of need.

Research question	Finding
2e. Central office support	2e.1. FCPS has strong central office infrastructure to provide leadership, guidance, and resources about special education instruction and service provision.
	2e.2. Procedural support liaisons are an effective link between Department of Special Services (DSS) and school-based staff to communicate procedural expectations and division policies.
3a. Evidence-based practices	3a.1. Use of explicit instruction varies across classrooms.
	3a.2. Access to evidence-based practices for SWDs varies.
3b. Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)	3b.1. FCPS staff have limited knowledge about and understanding of MTSS.
	3b.2. Implementation of MTSS procedures is inconsistent across schools.
3c. Continuum of services	3c.1. Parents are generally satisfied with the continuum of services offered by FCPS, although there is some variation in perception between parents and staff.
4a. Communication	4a.1. FCPS has an established infrastructure for disseminating special education-related communication to staff, families, and community members.
	4a.2. Communication from the district about special education can be inconsistent and difficult to access.
	4a.3. At the school level, communication challenges include a lack of timely information from administrators, insufficient time to collaborate, and demanding workloads for special education teachers.
4b. Family and community members	4b.1. Parent satisfaction with the amount and quality of communication from staff varies by parent subgroup and school level.
	4b.2. Parents and staff have different opinions about the quality of parent–staff communication.
	4b.3. Although offered by FCPS, translation services are not widely or easily accessible for all who need them.

Exhibit 2. Recommendations by Topic Area

Topic area	Recommendation
1. Data-driven IEP development	1a. Create a standardized process and guidance for how staff should gather and document parent input during the eligibility determination and IEP development processes.
	1b. Create a framework for parents and staff to enhance collaboration during the eligibility determination and IEP development processes.
	1c. Establish guidance for staff to collect and report data more consistently to develop and monitor IEPs.
	1d. Revise the IEP progress report template and expectations so staff report progress based on criteria specified in student IEPs rather than on a rating scale.

Topic area	Recommendation
	1e. Monitor postsecondary transition planning supports to ensure students across all disability categories and their families have equitable access.
	1f. Establish guidance on placement decisions for SWDs.
2. Multi-tiered systems of support	2a. Clarify the relationships among MTSS, local screening, and special education.
	2b. Ensure fidelity of school-level implementation of MTSS.
3. Instructional supports and resources	3a. Ensure equity and consistency in school-level programming, especially the availability and use of evidence-based strategies and programs for SWDs.
	3b. Ensure quality of instruction in inclusive settings.
	3c. Promote explicit instruction as a high-leverage strategy to enhance learning for SWDs across all grade levels and content areas.
4. Staff supports and resources	4a. Disseminate guidance on special education caseloads and class sizes.
	4b. Establish strategies to reduce special education teacher workload.
	4c. Expand the information available to prospective special education employees on the FCPS website.
5. Professional learning systems	5a. Develop and implement a comprehensive, division-wide professional development plan with differentiated offerings targeted to the needs of special education teachers, instructional support staff, general education teachers, and administrators.
	5b. Develop and implement a comprehensive support plan for novice and/or provisionally licensed teachers to include instructional coaching, mentorship, and professional development.
6. Communications and stakeholder engagement	6a. Promote equitable access to translation services across FCPS.
	6b. Provide district-wide guidance on procedures for communication between schools and parents.
	6c. Establish centralized systems for distributing vital information to staff from administrators in each school and from central office.

Background

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) is the 11th largest school division in the United States. It encompasses approximately 198 schools and centers. FCPS serves a diverse student population of approximately 178,635 students in Grades PK–12 (Virginia Department of Education, 2021-2022). Students in the district speak more than 200 languages. In all, 31.7% of the total student population is economically disadvantaged, 19.0% are English learners (ELs), and 14.9% are students with disabilities (SWDs).

In December 2019, the Fairfax County School Board requested that the FCPS Office of Auditor General (OAG) amend the annual audit plan to conduct a comprehensive review of FCPS's special education program. In May 2020, FCPS issued a request for proposals to solicit a comprehensive review of its special education services. Subsequently, FCPS identified the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) to perform the review. OAG serves as the project liaison and has since met biweekly with AIR researchers to discuss progress of the review.

The official kickoff for Phase 1 of the project with FCPS occurred on November 10, 2020. Phase 1 culminated in the delivery of a preliminary interim report and presentation to the Fairfax County School Board on September 21, 2021. Please note that the interim report was intended as a summary of emerging themes at the midpoint of the project. Emerging themes identified in the interim report may have changed or may not be present in the final report based on additional data gathered during Phase 2 of data collection. Phase 2 commenced in October 2021, culminating in the delivery of this final report and presentation. This report represents the final, comprehensive summary of the findings of AIR's review.

This comprehensive review covers four goals with respect to FCPS's special education program: (a) evaluate the system's design, structure, and established processes; (b) evaluate the adequacy of human capital resources; (c) analyze the alignment of services with evidence-based practices; and (d) evaluate the effectiveness of communication with stakeholders (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. Comprehensive Review Goal Areas

Goal 1: Design, structure, and processes

Goal 2: Human capital

Goal 3: Evidence-based practices

Goal 4: Communication

FCPS's four original goals for this review reflect aspects of a robust special education program that are commonly addressed in comprehensive reviews of this type. The goals also reflect the unique priorities for the FCPS community. In the initial request for proposals, FCPS listed 21 research questions spread across the four goal areas of the review. The data collection activities in Phases I and II are designed to align with these 21 research questions. The complete list of research questions and the data sources used to address them are in Appendix A.

Given the timing of the review, it is important to note how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced decisions about the design of the review. The Fairfax County School Board initiated the request for the comprehensive review in December 2019, prior to the start of the pandemic. At that time, the school board charged researchers with evaluating the effectiveness of FCPS's special education services. The goal is to generate recommendations for short-term, intermediate, and long-term program improvement goals. Considering the original intent of the review, FCPS decided that the review should focus on data collection activities that would reflect normal processes implemented to support SWDs and their families. Although the pandemic undoubtedly presented challenges for supporting SWDs, many of these challenges do not reflect special education programming in a typical school year. As such, an evaluation of special education services provided during the pandemic may lead to recommendations that are not directly applicable or useful as schools return to normal operations. To ensure that the findings and recommendations from this review are relevant after the pandemic, the scope of this review does not address special education programming during COVID-19.

Methods

AIR gathered data from eight major sources from December 2020 through May 2022 (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Data Collection Timeline
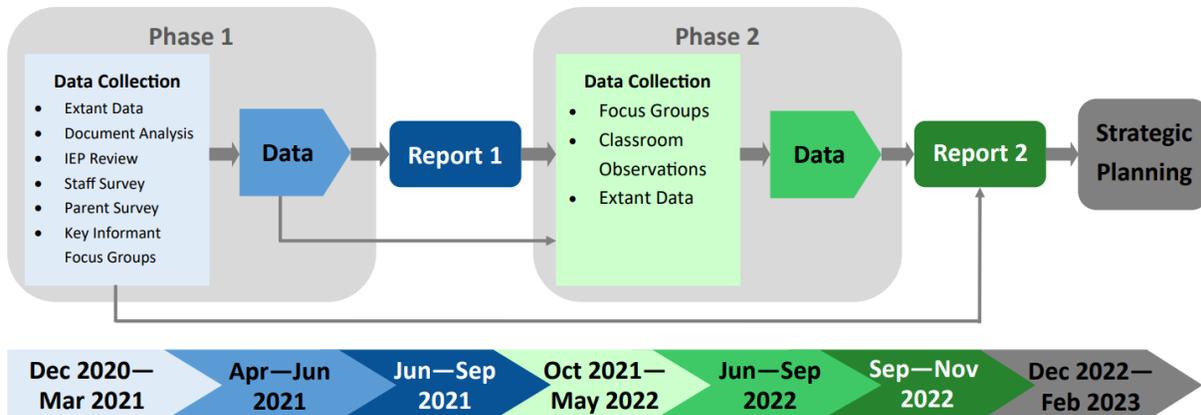
The eight data sources are listed as follows:

1. Extant data on special education programming and student performance disaggregated by school and key demographic variables

2. Documents related to FCPS infrastructure, strategic planning, guidance on policies and procedures, professional development offerings, and documentation of stakeholder feedback

3. A review of IEPs for a randomly selected, representative sample of 300 SWDs

4. An AIR-administered survey of FCPS school staff

5. An AIR-administered survey of all parents of students with IEPs and Section 504 plans

6. Two key informant focus groups with selected leaders from the FCPS central office and school-based administrators

7. Forty-one role-specific focus groups with key special education stakeholders, including families, educators, and administrators

8. Observations in 150 classrooms across 50 schools

Extant Data Analysis

The AIR team reviewed publicly available extant data as well as data provided by the FCPS [Department of Special Services](#) (DSS), Office of Special Education Procedural Support. The publicly available data included the following from the Commonwealth of Virginia's Department of Education (VDOE):

- State and division-level State Performance Plan (SPP)/Annual Performance Report (APR) data as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- Standards of learning (SOL) assessment data

- Fall membership reports for student enrollment and demographics

Other extant data provided by FCPS included the following:

- Deidentified student-level demographic data for students with IEPs, with associated disability category, school, region, grade level, gender, race or ethnicity, and limited English proficiency designation

- Student rates of suspensions and expulsions for students with and without disabilities

- Special education compliance data, including compliance rates for annual and triennial timelines, referral rates of students for special education services, frequency and distribution of specialized service hours, progress toward IEP goals, and rates of students exiting special education services

- Section 504 plan data, including referral rates, eligibility status, grade level, gender, race, and limited English proficiency designation

- Special education employee data, which included attrition rates and certification frequency for special education teachers and the number of special education and related services staff by school

Several research questions require comparison with "similarly situated divisions" in proximity to FCPS. In consultation with FCPS, AIR selected five districts for comparison with FCPS. These districts include Arlington, Prince William, and Loudoun counties in Virginia, as well as Montgomery County, Maryland, and Wake County, North Carolina. The Montgomery County and Wake County school districts were selected as comparison districts because their sizes are comparable with FCPS. It is important to note that because Montgomery County and Wake County are not Virginia school divisions, their state special education requirements may differ from Virginia special education requirements. To address districts in neighboring states, the AIR team reviewed publicly available data from the Maryland State Department of Education and the North Carolina Department of Instruction to acquire performance reports as required by

IDEA. For some research questions, we could not compare similar situations because public data were not available (e.g., special education caseload sizes). In these cases, we used Virginia state average data as a comparison point.

After presentation of the interim report in September 2021, the Fairfax County School Board requested an additional analysis of the extant data to better understand variability at the school and program levels. This request, which was beyond the original scope of the research questions focused on division-level trends, required the AIR team to obtain new datasets to allow for disaggregation of the data. The AIR team conducted these additional analyses in Phase 2.

After collecting all data, both public and nonpublic, the AIR team organized, cleaned, and (when appropriate) merged data sets to identify salient data points or trends. The team reviewed graphs, tables, and charts that visualized compliance with internal performance targets, variances between the general education and special education populations, comparisons with the state and similar districts, and trends across time. An extant data summary is in Appendix B.

Document Analysis

In conjunction with the collection and analysis of extant data, AIR collected and analyzed documents with information pertaining to FCPS's special education programming. Artifacts included publicly available documents, including information collected from the FCPS website. In particular, AIR conducted a comprehensive review of the FCPS DSS main webpage and all subpages associated with the four offices. AIR also requested internal documents that were provided by FCPS officials. Categories of the documents reviewed included the following:

- Strategic planning and organization documents (e.g., FCPS strategic plan, school improvement plans, district leadership organizational charts)

- Special education service delivery guidance (e.g., handbooks, procedural guidance documents, curricular programming guidance documents, caseload and class sizes guidance document, specialized special education program sites by region document)

- Educator professional development materials (e.g., professional development materials, professional development survey results, educator observation forms and instruments)

- Parent materials (e.g., websites of advocacy groups, parent advocacy guides, Special Education Handbook for Parents, Transition Planning Toolkit for Parents)

- Fairfax County School Board materials (e.g., meeting minutes, budget documents)

After collecting and organizing the files by document type, AIR reviewed the documents to gather information describing FCPS's special education program offerings, policies, and

procedures. The data collected were displayed in a table that described the document topic and title, the research question(s) addressed, a summary of the contents, any relevant quotes, and a link to the document. The analysis of these documents focused on the alignment of district policy with practice in the four goal areas and their associated research questions.

IEP Sample Review

AIR performed a review of a random, representative sample of IEPs for 300 SWDs, along with a review of the full eligibility histories for a subset of 50 of those students. To identify the sample, AIR used a dataset provided by FCPS that contained data on all SWDs in the district in 2018–19 with their grade, disability type, school region, limited English proficiency designation, and demographic characteristics (race, ethnicity, and gender). We created two strata of the population based on grade level (PK, K–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12) and school region (Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and nonpublic placements). We then sampled 300 of the total population using Stata, a statistical software package. The program drew a random sample of 300 SWDs while maintaining similar proportions of representation from the two strata in the larger population. The number of students identified as American Indian and Hawaiian Pacific Islander was small enough that those students would likely be dropped in Stata's random sampling, so we coded the sampling procedure to ensure that at least one student from each group would be kept. After drawing the sample of 300 students, we ran statistical tests of proportionality between the new sample and the original population on the following demographic variables: primary disability designation, gender, limited English proficiency designation, and race and ethnicity. We tested for whether the proportions for the variables in the drawn sample were so different as to be statistically significant, at the 99% level, from the proportions of the same variables in the population. We repeated this process two more times to generate three total samples, running three different sets of proportion tests. The sample with the fewest number of statistically significant differences was the sample we used. We followed a similar process to identify a subsample of 50 IEPs for which we requested access to the full histories (including initial and most recent eligibility determinations) to conduct a deeper analysis. Information about the sample demographics is located in Appendix C.

After identifying the sample, AIR analysts reviewed and coded the sample of 300 IEPs for evidence of quality and compliance for present levels of performance (PLOP) statements, annual goals and objectives, accommodations, instructional settings, and transition goals. AIR staff analyzed the full histories to ascertain the team members present, the assessment data gathered, and eligibility categories. The protocols used to conduct the review were reviewed by content experts in the FCPS DSS and cross-walked with the relevant regulations governing special education programs for SWDs from Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE's) Division of Special Education and Student Services.

Staff Survey

All FCPS instructional staff were invited to complete an online survey developed by AIR. Instructional staff included FCPS general and special education teachers, school-level administrators, instructional assistants, public health training assistants and attendants, school counselors, and related services providers. The survey covered topics aligned with the four goal areas of the review, including the special education referral and eligibility process, IEP development, transition planning, inclusionary practices, professional development, school staffing supports, evidence-based practices, instruction, data-driven decision making, and communication. The survey included Likert-scale items (e.g., strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) and three open-ended response items. At the discretion of the superintendent, this survey received an exemption from FCPS's review process for surveys. OAG and content experts in the FCPS DSS reviewed the content of the survey. School board members were invited to review and give feedback on the survey protocol. With assistance from OAG and the FCPS Office of Communication and Community Relations (OCCR) staff, email blasts, newsletters, and social media promoted the survey to all FCPS staff. The survey was open for 2 weeks in March 2021. The response rate was 32%, which exceeds the response rate that AIR has achieved for the special education staff survey conducted for a similar review in a comparably sized school district.

After the survey administration window closed, AIR researchers summarized the quantitative data from the survey and conducted a qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses. Please note that many survey questions offered a "not applicable or not sure" response option. When reporting the quantitative survey results, we calculated the results after removing the "not applicable or not sure" responses from the total. In instances in which "not applicable or not sure" responses were relevant to the context of the finding, we reported the results separately. For the qualitative analysis, after reading through the responses AIR researchers used an open coding process to break the response data into discrete parts and label each part with a descriptive code. Next, AIR researchers looked for patterns among the descriptive codes to identify common themes across the sample of respondents. When appropriate, AIR researchers identified participant quotes to provide illustrative examples of the respondents' experiences. The results of the staff survey are in Appendix D.

Parent Survey

All parents of SWDs in FCPS in the 2018–19 school year were invited to complete an online survey developed by AIR. Development of the survey allowed for branching logic so that parents of students with IEPs and parents of students with Section 504 plans would receive questions targeted to their experience. Like the staff survey, the parent survey covered topics aligned with the four goal areas of the review, including the referral and eligibility process,

IEP/Section 504 plan development, transition planning, inclusionary practices, school staffing, parent support, instruction, and communication. The survey included Likert-scale items and one open-ended response item. To address the linguistic diversity of FCPS families, AIR collaborated with FCPS language service specialists to translate the survey into eight additional languages: Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, Spanish, Urdu, and Vietnamese. AIR used the same process to review and obtain approval for the parent survey as for the staff survey. With assistance from OAG and OCCR staff, email blasts, newsletters, and social media promoted the survey to parents. The survey was open for two weeks in March 2021. The response rate was 55%, which exceeds the response rate that AIR has achieved for a special education parent survey conducted for a similar review in a comparably sized school district.

AIR researchers used a similar process to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data from the parent survey as for the staff survey. However, given the number of responses to the open-ended item (n = 4,267) across a variety of languages, AIR employed some additional steps to analyze the qualitative data from the parent survey. First, FCPS worked with their language service specialists to translate responses in languages other than English and Spanish (AIR had internal capacity to translate responses from Spanish). Next, AIR researchers used a technique called natural language processing to examine patterns in the frequencies and types of words used by parents in their responses. Finally, a technique called topic modeling categorized the responses into a set of themes. Combining natural language processing with topic modeling allowed the research team to group responses into similar themes for further qualitative analysis. The results of the parent survey are in Appendix E.

Key Informant Focus Groups

AIR researchers conducted two hour-long focus groups in December 2020 with key FCPS leaders. The first focus group had five FCPS administrators who were school building principals or region assistant superintendents. The second focus group had five FCPS central office staff representing multiple offices within the DSS, Career and Transition Services, and Multi-Tiered System of Supports. A sixth participant unexpectedly could not attend but gave feedback after the focus group in a short telephone conversation.

The purpose of the key informant focus groups was to gather information from FCPS district officials and school leaders on important background context and perspective on FCPS policies and instructional decisions related to special education. To ensure the inclusion of information from sources beyond FCPS employees, at OAG's request AIR gathered written documentation of feedback related to special education from school board members and parent advocacy group members. Written documentation of these concerns was collected via a Google form that was open to members of these groups during March 2021. This feedback was collected and

analyzed along with focus group information and used to inform other Phase 1 data collection activities, such as the IEP review and surveys.

Focus Groups

AIR researchers conducted focus groups with 41 role-specific groups of FCPS stakeholders between January and May 2022. The purpose of these focus groups was to provide more explanatory detail on issues surfaced in Phase 1 data collection activities. AIR researchers used findings from Phase 1 data collection activities and input from FCPS officials to identify specific stakeholder role groups of interest. Role-specific focus groups included the following:

- Special education teachers

- Instructional assistants, public health attendants, and public heath training assistants

- General education teachers

- Related services providers (e.g., speech language therapist, occupational therapists)

- Social workers

- School psychologists

- Building-level administrators

- Central office staff and human resources

- Parents and families

- Members of the Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD; i.e., the state-mandated special education advisory committee)

Eligible participants in each role group were randomly selected for participation. Efforts were made so that selection was mutually exclusive within stakeholder groups. For example, if a parent was eligible for multiple groups (e.g., ACSD and middle school parents), a parent was only eligible to be selected once. Efforts were also made to ensure participants were not selected as part of the final group across stakeholder groups. For example, some FCPS staff are parents of SWDs. During the sampling, we ensured that staff members were not selected to participate in the parent focus groups.

Focus groups lasted for 90 minutes and were held virtually. AIR scheduled staff and parent focus groups to occur after normal school and business hours to accommodate school staff and working parents. Interpreters were present during parent sessions as needed. Focus group protocols were tailored to issues relevant to the specific stakeholder group (e.g., asking parents of ELs with disabilities about their experiences with special education and English and a second language [ESL] services).

After conducting focus groups, AIR used a transcription service to transcribe the focus group dialogue. Next, transcriptions were coded using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The AIR team used a deductive or closed coding process; that is, transcript data were coded using a predefined set of codes determined by key terms and concepts from the research questions. Intercoder reliability was established by having more than one researcher code a subsample of the transcripts, discussing the results, and achieving consensus. After completing all coding, the researchers met to discuss and document key themes from the coding process. Information gathered from focus groups is used throughout the report to support and illustrate examples of findings from other data sources.

Classroom Observations

Between February and May 2022, AIR researchers conducted 150 on-site classroom observations across 50 schools. With input from the FCPS DSS, AIR researchers created a sampling plan to ensure a balanced, representative sample of FCPS schools in which SWDs are taught. Five of the 50 observations were reserved for schools with special designations (i.e., one career center, one public day school for students with intellectual disabilities and/or autism, one public day elementary/middle school serving students with a variety of eligibilities, one public day high school serving students with a variety of eligibilities, and one alternative learning center). The remaining 45 observations were divided evenly among the five regions, and schools were randomly yet representatively selected within regions to ensure a representative distribution of school levels (i.e., elementary, middle, high schools) and specialized program types (i.e., enhanced autism, intellectual disabilities, intellectual disabilities severe, comprehensive services site, early childhood special education, preschool autism class, visual impairment, hearing impairment, secondary transition employment program).

After the 50 schools were selected, AIR researchers requested a staff list and school schedule from each school building leader. Using these items, AIR researchers randomly selected three classrooms to observe in which the special education teacher was providing specially designed instruction in (a) the specialized program of interest (i.e., enhanced autism, intellectual disabilities, etc.); (b) the general education setting; and (c) a special education setting that was *not* within the context of a specialized program. In the five schools with special designations, researchers randomly selected classrooms to observe.

Observations were conducted by a team of seven AIR researchers, all of whom are experienced special education teachers, administrators, and researchers. Each selected classroom was observed by one AIR observer. Observers were accompanied onsite by an FCPS representative. With the aid of the schedule and communication with school building leaders, observers made every attempt to be present for a full lesson or class period in order to observe a complete instructional cycle.

Observers used the RESET Explicit Instruction Rubric (Johnson et al., 2017) to observe delivery of instruction. The RESET Rubric, developed through a U.S. Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences–funded project, is an observation instrument grounded in evidence-based instructional practices for SWDs that is used to evaluate and provide feedback on special education teacher performance. The RESET Rubric focuses on explicit instruction, a set of interrelated practices for delivering direct, clear, systematically designed instruction. Explicit instruction has strong evidence of effectiveness with SWDs. In addition, the RESET Rubric has been studied and validated for use in classrooms with SWDs and is widely used as a special education teacher observation instrument.

The RESET rubric includes 25 items describing levels of implementation grouped into the seven components of explicit instruction. Scores range from 1—not implemented to 3—fully implemented. Respondents had an option to mark the item as "not applicable" if it was not applicable within the context of the lesson. In addition to quantitative scores for each item observed, observers took extensive notes during the observations to aid their scoring of items. After the observations were completed, both the quantitative and qualitative data from the observations were compiled and summarized. Summarized quantitative results of the classroom observations are in Appendix F.

Findings

The AIR team of researchers, all of whom have a background in special education practice and policy, conducted the data analysis process collaboratively. Using all data sources from Phases 1 and 2, the research team generated findings for the final report through an iterative process that involved (a) descriptive synthesis and coding of each data source; (b) a review of each data source to identify evidence pertinent to the research questions; (c) a collective review of evidence across all data sources to identify emerging findings statements; (d) an in-depth, follow-up review of select data sources to confirm supporting evidence for findings statements; and (e) finalization of findings statements and associated supporting evidence. Given the nature of the research questions, findings statements include a combination of descriptive statements (e.g., a description of current programs, policies, or processes) and evaluative statements (e.g., the effectiveness of current programs, policies, or processes).

Goal 1: Special Education Design, Structure, and Processes

The purpose of this set of research questions is to evaluate (a) the design, structure, and established processes of educational services offered by FCPS to meet the needs of SWDs; (b) the fidelity of implementation of special education services at schools; and (c) the continuous monitoring of the effectiveness of those processes. This section presents findings and supporting evidence for 11 research questions (RQs).

RQ1a. What design, structure, and processes does FCPS utilize to provide special education services to SWDs? Are the current design, structure, and processes effective?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups, classroom observations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **1a.1.** FCPS has robust division-level leadership and infrastructure for special education services.
- **1a.2.** FCPS SWDs perform substantially lower on state exams than FCPS students without disabilities across all subjects and all racial-ethnic groups, but consistently exceed the state performance for SWDs in both reading and mathematics.
- **1a.3.** SWDs disproportionally receive in- and out-of-school suspensions compared with peers without disabilities.
- **1a.4.** Parents of SWDs report many instances of positive feedback about the quality and effectiveness of FCPS instructional staff.

Note. Research question 1a serves as an overarching question for this review. It has two components: a descriptive component (what design, structure and processes does FCPS utilize to provide special education services to SWDs) and an evaluative component (are the current design, structure, and processes effective). Finding 1a.1 addresses the descriptive component of the RQ by providing an overview of the governance structure of FCPS's special education program and a summary of special education service offerings. Findings 1a.2 through 1a.4 address the effectiveness component of the RQ as measured through academic outcomes, discipline outcomes, and parent satisfaction. Additional methods of measuring program effectiveness are addressed in subsequent RQs (e.g., compliance with special education processes and timelines in RQ1b, postsecondary outcomes in RQ1h). The remaining 20 RQs in this review probe specific aspects of FCPS's special education program (e.g., referral and eligibility, IEP development, instruction, fidelity) to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of FCPS's current design, structure, and processes for special education.

Finding 1a.1. FCPS has robust division-level leadership and infrastructure for special education services.

In the 2018–19 school year, approximately 27,492 FCPS students or 14.6% of the student population received special education services via an IEP as outlined in IDEA 2004. In addition, approximately 2,096 students received accommodations via a 504 plan in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Exhibit 3 shows the number and percentage of students in the 2018–19 school year by the 14 disability classifications recognized in IDEA.

Exhibit 3. FCPS SWDs by IDEA Disability Classification

IEP Status	Number	Percentage
Autism spectrum disorder	4,058	14.76%
Deaf-blindness	1	—
Deafness	14	0.05%
Developmental delay	3,643	13.25%
Emotional disturbance	1,597	5.81%
Hearing impairment	187	0.68%
Intellectual disability	948	3.45%
Multiple disabilities	431	1.57%
Orthopedic impairment	128	0.47%
Other health impairment	3,890	14.15%
Specific learning disability	9,514	34.61%
Speech or language impairment	2,954	10.74%
Traumatic brain injury	37	0.13%
Visual impairment	90	0.33%

FCPS employed approximately 6,372 special education personnel across 198 schools and centers in the 2018–19 school year. Of these personnel, 2,602 were special education teachers and 2,940 were instructional assistants, public health attendants, or public health assistants with direct responsibilities for supporting SWDs to access instruction. SWDs were supported also by 830 related services providers (e.g., school psychologists, speech language therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists) who provide services outlined in the student's IEP.

Special education in FCPS is overseen by the DSS within the FCPS Central Office. DSS is divided into four offices, each of which is overseen by a director who reports to the assistant superintendent for special services. The Office of Special Education Procedural Support includes procedural support liaisons (PSLs) who provide support to schools and families to ensure the compliance and quality of IEPs and special education processes. The Office of Intervention and

Prevention Services oversees psychology services, social work services, and student safety and wellness initiatives. The Office of Operations and Strategic Planning oversees fiscal, data, and information management requirements. The Office of Special Education Instruction supports the implementation of all educational programs and services within special education.

In addition, other FCPS departments and offices provide support for special education. The Instructional Services Department (ISD) develops curriculum and instructional programs for FCPS in collaboration with local, national, and international experts. Within the Department of School Improvement and Supports, the Office of School Support (OSS) staff are divided into teams according to the five FCPS regions. In collaboration with region leaders, OSS staff support schools with a specific focus on equity and closing achievement gaps. They use data to ensure human and fiscal resource support goes to schools demonstrating the most need. Finally, the Office of the Ombudsman maintains a liaison for special education–related issues.

FCPS is divided into five geographic regions comprising two to four high school pyramids and their feeder elementary and middle schools. For the purposes of analyzing special education, schools or facilities not affiliated with a geographic region that provide IDEA-mandated services for FCPS SWDs are designated Region 9 (e.g., alternative learning centers, private schools, contract schools, early childhood resource centers). At the school level, special education is typically supervised by a school-level administrator with support from a special education department chair and/or local screening committee (LSC) chair. The LSC coordinates the special education referral process for each school. The LSC also oversees pre-referral intervention and support services.

As mandated in IDEA, FCPS offers a full continuum of special education services for students who have been found eligible to receive special education services. Special education services are provided in a range of educational settings along a continuum. Placement of students in educational settings along the continuum is determined by a multidisciplinary IEP team consisting of the student (as appropriate), educators, administrators, related services providers, and parent/guardians. Per IDEA, SWDs must be educated in the least restrictive environment, meaning 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."

The most common setting in which FCPS SWDs receive special education services is the general education or regular classroom. This practice is called inclusion. Students in inclusive settings receive special education support from special education teachers and other personnel in order to access instruction in the general education setting alongside their general education peers (see RQ1e for information about the extent to which SWDs are served in inclusive settings). Students requiring additional support may also receive services in a resource or "pull-out" setting in which they receive instruction or intervention in a separate classroom with other

students in special education before returning to the general education setting. Students requiring even more intensive support may receive instruction in self-contained classrooms consisting entirely of students receiving special education services.

To facilitate a full continuum of special education services, FCPS offers a range of "specialized special education program sites" dedicated to providing services to students in certain disability categories or students with specialized needs. Examples of specialized special education program sites in the 2021–22 school year include enhanced autism, intellectual disabilities, intellectual disabilities severe, early childhood special education, preschool autism, physical disabilities, hearing impairment, visual impairment, and the secondary transition employment program. FCPS also maintains comprehensive services sites located in regular school buildings that provide a range of wraparound supports to SWDs with a variety of special education eligibilities. In addition, FCPS operates five public day schools that are separate school buildings serving only students in special education.

Finding 1a.2. FCPS SWDs perform substantially lower on state exams than FCPS students without disabilities across all subjects and all racial-ethnic groups, but consistently exceed the state performance for SWDs in both reading and mathematics.

Academic performance for SWDs is one measure of the effectiveness of FCPS's special education design, structure, and processes. Per state requirements, FCPS students take Virginia SOL assessments in Grades 3–12. In 2018–19, 99% of FCPS SWDs participated in the reading and mathematics SOL exams, exceeding the state target of 95% (see Appendix Exhibit B1). Students who do not participate in the SOL assessments take part in the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP), which is designed to evaluate the performance of students with significant cognitive disabilities.

SOL performance of FCPS SWDs compared with neighboring school divisions. In 2018–19, 56% of SWDs in FCPS achieved proficient scores on SOL reading assessments and 62% achieved proficient scores on the mathematics assessments in tested grades (see Appendix Exhibit B1). From 2016 to 2019, SWDs in FCPS consistently exceeded the Virginia state performance targets set for SOLs by an average of 10.3 percentage points in reading and 6.7 percentage points in mathematics. Compared with neighboring school divisions, during this time period SWDs in FCPS passed reading and mathematics SOLs at higher rates than Prince William County but lower rates than SWDs in Arlington and Loudoun counties (see Appendix Exhibits B2 and B3).

SOL performance of FCPS SWDs compared with FCPS students without disabilities. Within FCPS, SOL pass rates for SWDs are substantially lower than pass rates for students without disabilities. From 2016 to 2019, the SOL pass rate was consistently about 30% lower for

students with IEPs than for students without IEPs across all tested subjects and all regions (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4. Standards of Learning Pass Rates: Students With an IEP Versus Students Without an IEP, 2016–2019
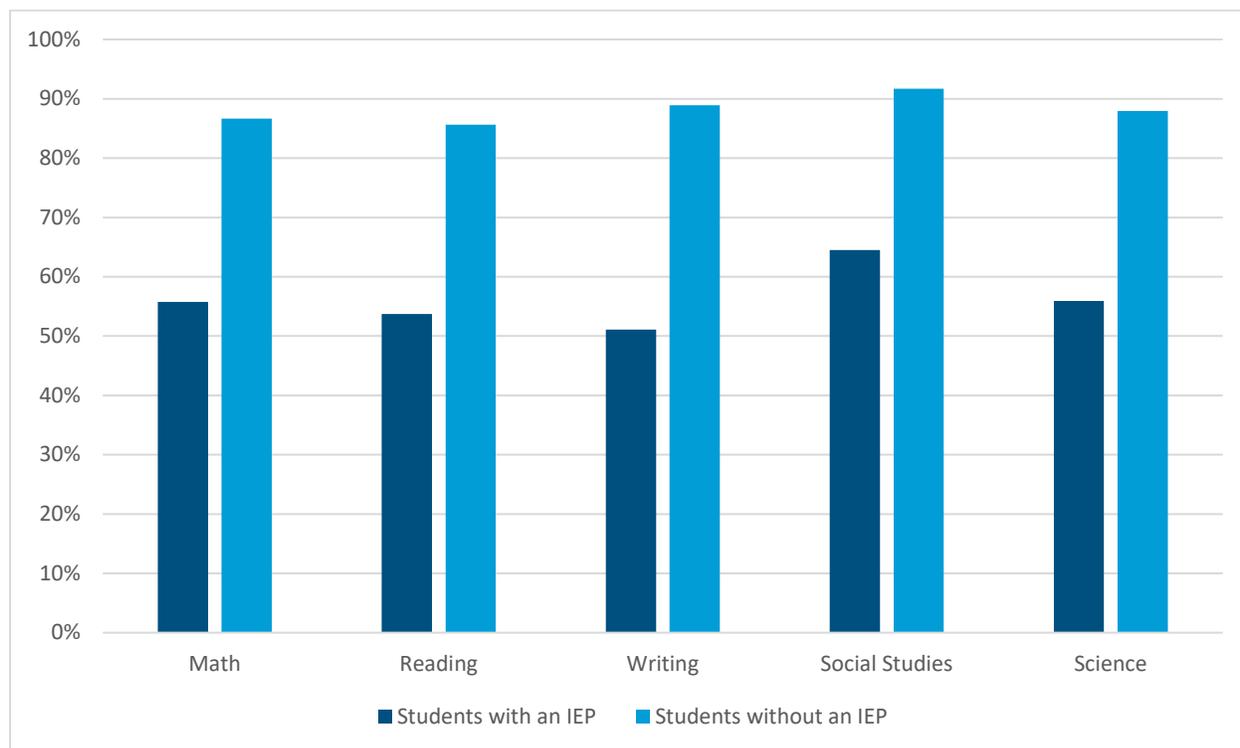
SOL performance for FCPS SWDs by region. SOL data were examined to determine whether patterns for SWDs vary across schools by region (see Appendix Exhibit B4). SWDs exhibit relatively comparable performance on SOLs across Regions 1, 4, and 5. However SWDs in Regions 2 and 3 pass SOLs in reading, math, writing, social studies, and science at rates lower than SWDs in Regions 1, 4, and 5. For SWDs in Region 2, the pass rates across subjects are all with 5 percentage points of the FCPS averages for all SWDs. However, in Region 3, the SOL pass rates across subjects are approximately 10 percentage points lower. Additionally, SWDs in Region 9 pass SOLs at rates roughly 20% to 40% lower than the average SOL pass rates of SWDs across FCPS. The largest gaps for SWDs in region 9 are for math (41% lower than FCPS average) and social studies (35% lower). The gaps are smaller but still notable in reading (27%), writing (27%), and science (29%).

SOL performance for FCPS SWDs by race/ethnicity. We explored average SOL performance data for SWDs by race/ethnicity from 2016 to 2019 (see Appendix Exhibit B5). In reading, the average SOL pass rate for SWDs was 54%. Performance on reading SOLs for Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Islander/Other Pacific Islander SWDs fell below the

average pass rate for SWDs in FCPS. In comparison, Asian, White, and SWDs who identify with two or more races/ethnicities performed above the average pass rates for SWDs in FCPS.

SOL pass rates for Asian, White, and SWDs of two or more race/ethnicities consistently exceeded pass rates of Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Islander/Other Pacific Islander SWDs across all subjects (except for the reading performance for Native Islander/Other Pacific Islander SWDs, which fell below the average). When compared with the average pass rate for all SWDs, Black SWDs performed between 18 and 21 percentage points lower in each subject. Similarly, when compared with the average pass rate for all SWDs, Hispanic SWDs performed between 13 and 17 percentage points lower in each subject.

When examining differences in SOL performance between students with and without IEPs by racial-ethnic groups from 2016 to 2019, the gap in SOL pass rates between students with and without IEPs is greater for Black or African American students than it is for any other racial/ethnic group. Among Black students, the gap between the performance of students with IEPs and students without IEPs ranged between 43 and 49 percentage points across all tested subjects. For example, among Black students, 36% of those with IEPs passed reading SOLs compared with 79% of those without IEPs (a gap of 43 percentage points). Comparatively, the gap in reading SOL pass rates between students with and without IEPs for every other racial/ethnic group ranged between 23 and 39 percentage points. A similar pattern exists for all other subjects. In addition, Black SWDs consistently had the lowest pass rates on SOLs among all racial/ethnic groups (mathematics = 35%; writing = 31%; science = 36%; social studies = 44%).

VAAP performance. We also examined VAAP pass rates for SWDs across 2016–2019. Exhibit 5 shows average pass rates across subject areas.

Exhibit 5. Virginia Alternate Assessment Program Pass Rates: 2016–2019
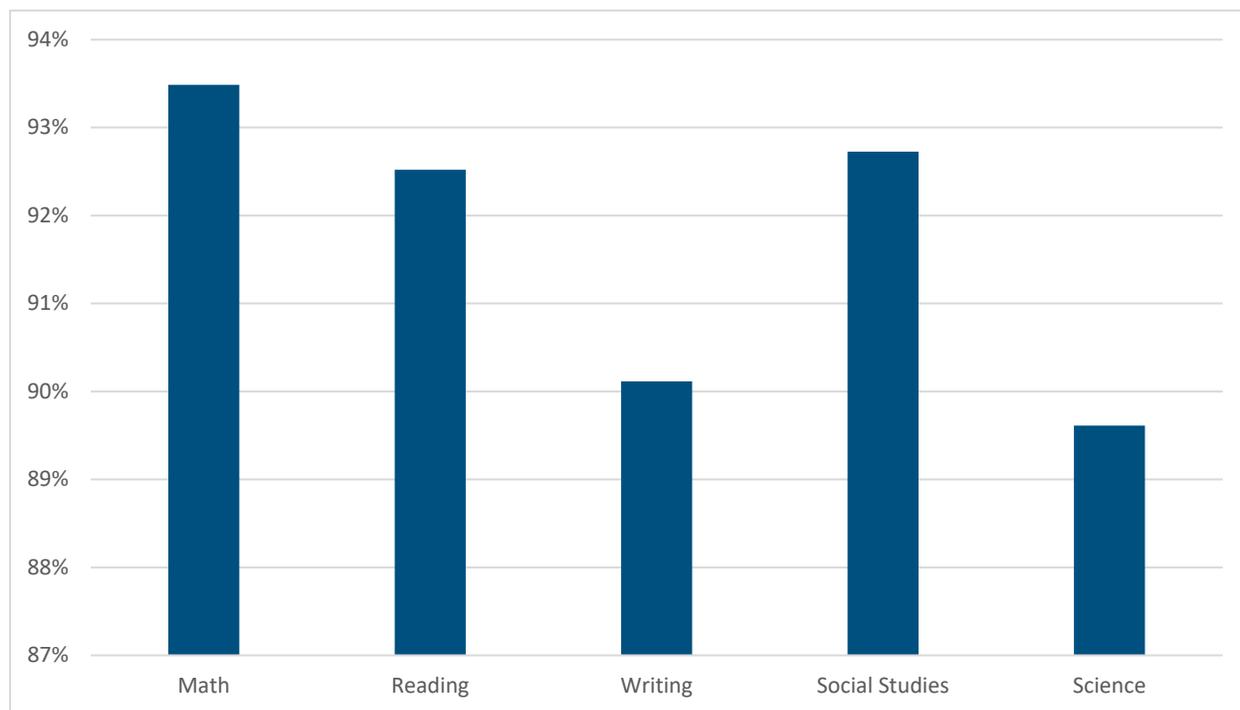
When analyzing VAAP pass rates by race/ethnicity, White students had the lowest average pass rates in math (90.7%) compared with students of all other races/ethnicities whose pass rates were 93.1% or higher (see Appendix Exhibit B6). We note a similar pattern for White students in reading. White (89.8%) and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (87.5%) students had the lowest average VAAP pass rates in reading compared with students of all other races/ethnicities whose pass rates were 93.2% or higher. When analyzing across regions, VAAP pass rates are 89% or above across all subjects except for Region 9, in which VAAP pass rates are 73% or lower in all subjects (see Appendix Exhibit B7).

Finding 1a.3. SWDs disproportionally receive in- and out-of-school suspensions compared with peers without disabilities.

Disciplinary outcomes for SWDs is another measure of the effectiveness of FCPS's special education design, structure, and processes. Within its discipline procedures webpage, FCPS indicates it is "committed to the consistent and equitable implementation of discipline policy, regulations, and practice across all schools and educational programs." These procedures first outline a positive, proactive approach to teaching expected behavior and then list disciplinary actions for which a student would need a referral.

Although procedures for discipline are in place, division-level data for students in special education show evidence of disparities in disciplinary actions when comparing SWDs to the general education population and when comparing groups of SWDs by race/ethnicity and

region. From 2016 to 2019, data from IDEA SPP/APR Indicator 4a show that FCPS was identified as a division having significant discrepancy in the rate of suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 days in a school year for children with IEPs (see Appendix Exhibit B8). Students in special education were at a higher risk of being suspended or expelled for greater than 10 days in a school year when compared with their non–special education peers. These data are similar to Prince William and Loudon school divisions.

Further data based on IDEA SPP/APR Indicator 4b revealed that from 2016 to 2019 FCPS was identified as having a significant discrepancy by race or ethnicity in the rate of suspensions and expulsions greater than 10 days in a school year for children with IEPs (see Appendix Exhibit B8). This means that among students in special education, students in some racial-ethnic groups are at a higher risk of being suspended or expelled for greater than 10 days than their special education peers in all other racial groups. We describe specific differences by race the next paragraph. These data are similar to those in the Prince William County school division. However, the Arlington and Loudoun school divisions were not identified as having discrepancies in this area during this time frame. It is important to note that although FCPS was found to have significant discrepancies for these indicators, the FCPS Special Education Performance Report for those respective years indicates a response of "no" to the following prompt: "The VDOE concluded that the policies, procedures[,] or practices contributed to the significant discrepancy and do not comply with requirements relating to the development of IEPs, the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and procedural safeguards." In other words, the state department of education did not find evidence of FCPS policies, practices, or procedures that were contributing to significant disproportionality in discipline.

To further explore the issue of disproportionality in discipline, our team calculated risk ratios using extant data on discipline outcomes. A risk ratio is a numerical comparison, expressed as a decimal, that compares the risk of an outcome (e.g., being suspended, being identified for special education) among one group of students with the same risk among another groups of students. A risk ratio of 1.0 means there is no difference in the amount of risk experienced by the two groups. A risk ratio greater than 1.0 indicates an increased risk of the outcome for the group of interest. For example, when comparing suspension rates for students with IEPs (the group of interest) with students without IEPs, a risk ratio of 1.4 indicates that students with IEPs are 1.4 times more likely to be suspended than students without IEPs. A risk ratio less than 1.0 means there is a reduced risk in the group of interest.

An analysis of discipline data from 2016 to 2019 revealed that some populations of students in FCPS disproportionately received disciplinary actions (in-school or out-of-school suspensions) during that time. VDOE defines significant disproportionality in special education discipline data as relative risk thresholds of 3.0 or greater for three consecutive years (p. 13). First, we

compared disproportionality in the rates of in-school suspensions for students with IEPs and students without IEPs (Exhibit 6). Overall, students with IEPs in FCPS were 3.1 times more likely to receive an in-school suspension than their peers without an IEP. The pattern of disproportionality in rates of in-school suspensions held true across all regions except Region 9, which is composed of schools and facilities serving students for whom FCPS must provide services as mandated in IDEA (e.g., alternative learning centers). In Region 9, students *without* an IEP were 2.8 times more likely to receive an in-school suspension than peers in that region with an IEP. Disproportionality in rates of in-school suspensions also held true regardless of race (Exhibit 7). Data show that the students at greatest risk of in-school suspensions were Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students.

Exhibit 6. Risk of Getting an In-School Suspension, By Region

IEP status	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 9	All FCPS students
With IEP	3.5	2.9	2.5	4.9	3.6	0.4	3.1
Without IEP	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	2.8	0.3

Exhibit 7. Risk of Getting an In-School Suspension, By Race/Ethnicity

IEP status	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or more races	All FCPS students
With IEP	1.8	4.5	3.2	2.2	6.3	3.1	4.4	3.1
Without IEP	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.3

Next, we compared disproportionality in the rates of out-of-school suspensions for students with IEPs and students without IEPs. For out-of-school suspensions, students with an IEP were 4.4 times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than peers without an IEP (Exhibit 8). This pattern held true regardless of race/ethnicity (Exhibit 9). Data show that the students at greatest risk of out-of-school suspensions were Asian students. The pattern also held cross all regions except for students in Region 9. In Region 9, students *without* an IEP were two times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than peers in that region with an IEP.

Exhibit 8. Risk of Getting an Out-of-School Suspension, By Region

IEP status	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 9	All FCPS students
With IEP	6.8	3.3	3.5	5.2	5.4	0.5	4.4
Without IEP	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	2.0	0.2

Exhibit 9. Risk of Getting an Out-of-School Suspension, By Race/Ethnicity

IEP status	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or more races	All FCPS students
With IEP	4.6	6.3	3.9	2.9	3.2	4.7	5.9	4.4
Without IEP	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2

Finding 1a.4. Parents of SWDs report many instances of positive feedback about the quality and effectiveness of FCPS instructional staff.

Responses from the parent survey and comments from the focus groups indicated that parents of students with IEPs and 504 plans are satisfied with the quality of FCPS instructional staff (see Appendix Exhibits E17 and E30). A significant majority of the parent respondents (87.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the quality of teaching staff in their child's school, and 85.5% of parents agreed that they were satisfied with the quality of related services staff. In addition, 84.7% of the parent respondents believe that school staff did a good job delivering the services and/or accommodations written on their child's IEP or 504 plan. Open-ended responses from the parent survey and focus group comments helped illustrate the ways in which many parents are satisfied with the quality of FCPS instructional staff. The following are some examples of the positive comments offered by parents:

- "Thank you for the IEP services provided. My son has benefited tremendously, and I believe he could not have made the progress he has made without the support of his IEP and school teachers."

- "All of the FCPS staff that I have encountered are dedicated to ensuring that my child receives the best learning experience."

- "FCPS teachers and support staff are resourceful, caring, and genuinely interested in educating our children. Thank you!"

Parents who made positive comments about the quality of FCPS instructional staff cited the caring nature of FCPS staff members, often expressing appreciation for the staff of specific schools or specific staff members.

RQ1b. How does FCPS evaluate and identify students who may require special education services? To what extent is the referral and eligibility determination process, including local screening, working in terms of identifying SWDs? For example, is the period between the time of referral and service eligibility status determination reasonable?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups, classroom observations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **1b.1.** FCPS complies with state timelines for determining initial eligibility for special education nearly 100% of the time.
- **1b.2.** Parents of SWDs and FCPS staff report varied experiences with the ease and efficiency of the initial referral and evaluation process.
- **1b.3.** Most initial evaluation reports include information across multiple domains.
- **1b.4.** Subgroups of students vary in the likelihood of identification for special education.

Finding 1b.1. FCPS complies with state timelines for determining initial eligibility for special education nearly 100% of the time.

Students can be referred for special education services through Child Find, through a school's local screening process, or through a parent request. Federal regulations stipulate that a full evaluation must occur prior to a student being found eligible for and receiving special education services. According to Virginia regulations, the evaluation process for determining initial eligibility of special education must be completed within 65 business days of the date that the referral was received by the school's designated staff member for receiving referrals. FCPS's Special Education Procedures webpage outlines procedures for the Child Find, local screening, and evaluation processes to identify SWDs.

Extant data from IDEA SPP/APR Indicators 11 and 12 show FCPS is complying with timelines for initial evaluation and eligibility determination (Exhibit B1). In the 2018–19 school year, for 99% of students with parent consent, FCPS conducted an evaluation and determined eligibility within 65 days. These rates are slightly higher than the average for the state of Virginia (98.85%). For early childhood students, 100% of students were determined eligible and IEPs were developed and implemented by their third birthdays. On average between 2016 and

2019, for 99.2% of students with parent consent, FCPS conducted an evaluation and determined eligibility within 65 days, meeting or exceeding the state average.

Finding 1b.2. Parents of SWDs and FCPS staff report varied experiences with the ease and efficiency of the initial referral and evaluation process.

Parents are an integral part of the initial referral and evaluation process. FCPS maintains a Due Process and Eligibility webpage. In addition, the Special Education Handbook for Parents provides an overview of FCPS procedures for this process. Results of the parent survey show that most parents agreed or strongly agreed that the process for having their child referred and evaluated for special education services was easy (79.1%) and timely (80.2%; Exhibit E11). It is important to note that our survey did not define "timely." Therefore, parents may have interpreted timely to mean within regulatory eligibility timelines or meaning the amount of time to begin the initial evaluation and eligibility process.

An analysis of disaggregated survey data shows varied parent perceptions of the initial evaluation and eligibility process based on school level, disability type, and native language. Parents of early childhood students (88.4%) agreed or strongly agreed at rates nearly 10% higher than parents of elementary (79.8%), middle (77.1%), and high school (76.5%) students that the special education referral and evaluation process was easy. Data show a similar pattern for parent perceptions of timeliness for their child to be identified for special education services. Again, parents of early childhood students (89.2%) agreed at rates nearly 10% higher than parents of elementary (80.6%), middle (76.1%), and high school (79.4%) students (Exhibit 10).

Exhibit 10. Percentage of Parents of Students With an IEP Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey About Statements Related to the Referral and Eligibility Process
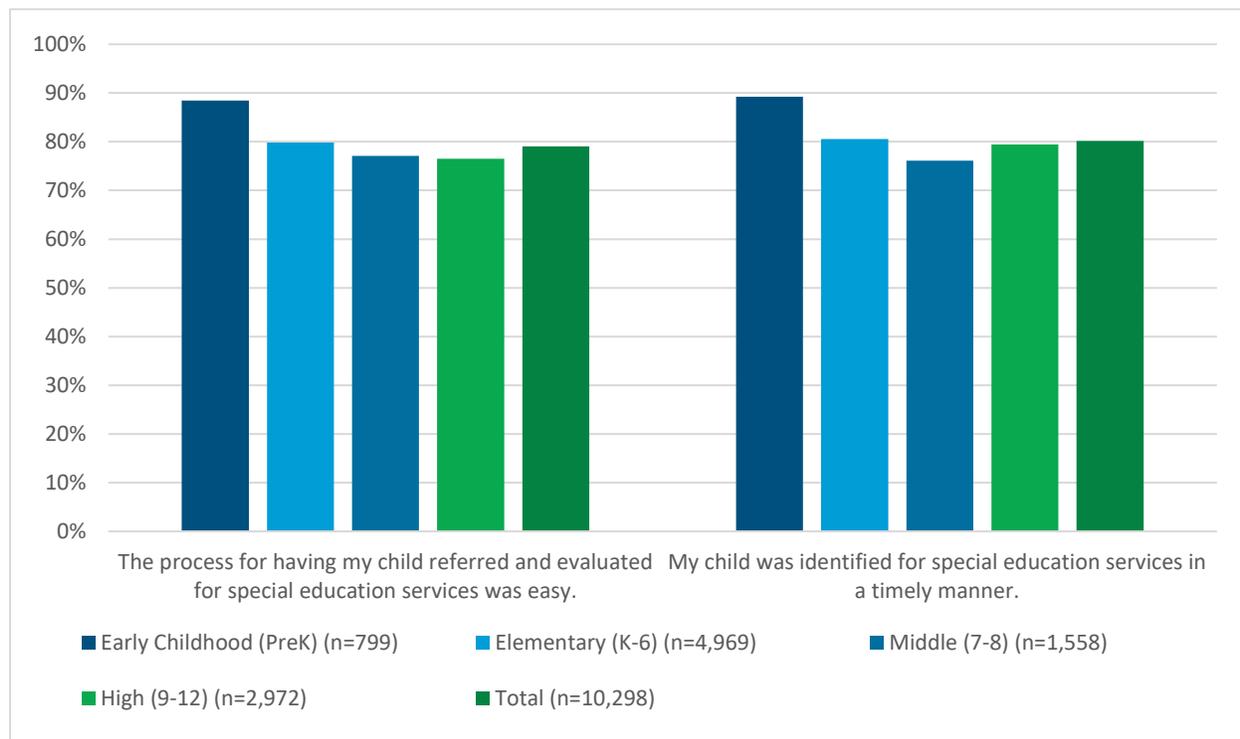
We also noted different responses by parents of students across disability categories. Between 65% and 71% of parents of students with specific learning disabilities, other health impairments, and emotional disturbance agreed that the referral and evaluation process for special education services was easy and timely. These data are notable as parents of students in all other disability categories agreed at levels of 80% or more. When we analyzed parent perception by native language, we found that fewer than 80% of parents who reported English as their native language agreed that the referral and evaluation process was easy and timely, compared with 88% or more of parents whose native language was not English.[1]

When analyzing survey responses by the race/ethnicity of the child, fewer than three quarters of parents of White and American Indian/Alaska Native students agreed or strongly agreed that the referral and evaluation process was easy (71.7% and 72.4%, respectively) and timely (72.8% and 66.7%, respectively). These parents agreed at rates about 17% lower than parents of Hispanic and Asian students, who agreed at the highest levels. Nearly 90% or more of parents of Hispanic and Asian students agreed that the referral and evaluation process was easy (89.8% and 89.2%, respectively) and timely (89.6% and 91.2%, respectively).

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[1] Except for parent respondents for these items who spoke Urdu (*n* = 45), who agreed at rates near 83%.

Comments shared from parents during focus groups illustrate the varied experiences they face. For example, one parent noted how positive the initial evaluation and eligibility experience with FCPS was:

> But the early process I would say was easy. It was much more difficult to navigate through early intervention than it was to navigate through the county. So the services were very consistent and very clearly communicated.

Offering an example of a different experience in FCPS, another parent commented on inconsistencies across schools related to the initial evaluation and eligibility experience:

> …For my oldest, it was much easier. It was more so the teachers. I mean the teachers, the school psychologists, that whole entire team. They were like, "Oh, [they don't] have to be failing in order to get an IEP." When I switched schools and my other [child] needed an IEP, it was like, "Well, [they're] not failing."… So what are the actual policy and procedures? Put that out there for everyone to see, and not a whole bunch of 10,000-word booklets that they hand you every time you go to an IEP meeting. It should be straightforward.… And you just don't get that with FCPS, and you don't get it district-wide.

FCPS staff also had varying experiences with the initial referral, evaluation, and eligibility processes. On the staff survey, most FCPS staff (92.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that they are knowledgeable about FCPS policies regarding the referral and eligibility of students for special education services (see Exhibit D5). However, fewer staff agreed or strongly agreed that FCPS has effective processes for identifying SWDs (87.3%) or that identifying SWDs occurs in a timely manner (78.4%). As noted previously, our survey did not define "timely." Therefore, staff may have interpreted timely to mean within regulatory eligibility timelines or interpreted timely as the amount of time to begin the eligibility process.

Staff survey responses related to referral and eligibility were similar across school levels with one exception. Elementary school staff had the lowest level of agreement that identifying SWDs occurs in a timely manner (75.1%). Early childhood (79.1%), middle school (80.6%), and high school (82.9%) staff agreed at higher rates.

In addition, there was variation by staff role in agreement about the effectiveness and timeliness of the identification process. General education teachers had the lowest levels of agreement. Specifically, 82.2% agreed or strongly agreed that FCPS has effective processes for identifying SWDs (compared with 90% or higher for all other staff roles) and 69.6% agreed that processes for identifying SWDs happen in a timely manner (compared with 85% or higher for all other staff roles).

Information gathered from the focus groups helps to illustrate discrepancies and variance in procedures related to screening and eligibility, even though FCPS is complying with state eligibility timelines. For example, one staff member commented about a lack of consistency in decisions to move forward with the local screening process:

> *I think it often depends on the number of reevaluation or evaluation cases in the school in general. And just the logistics are what's driving some of the decision making at some schools about to test or not to test.*

In a different focus group, a staff member commented about a similar issue in how the local screening process moves forward more quickly when a parent request is involved:

> *…One of the things that I wish that we could have input for is if we believe and data show that a student does need to go to local screening, that we could advocate for that student without getting our hand slapped. Because there is definitely not equity when it comes to who goes to local screening, I believe. And sometimes parents may not understand the process. I've talked about this with others. Parents may not understand the process, so really it's up to myself or the teachers to advocate…. Where, if a staff member says, "We've tried this, this, this, and this, why not take it to that next level?" "No." But then, if a parent reaches out, then, "Yes." They get to go.*

In the 2020–21 school year, 30.8% of SWDs in FCPS were dually identified for special education services and EL services, meaning they actively received services in both areas during the school year. When including former ELs, 34.8% of all SWDs at some point in their school career actively received both special education and EL services. Identification of ELs came up in the staff focus groups as an area meriting further exploration. In one focus group, a special education staff member commented specifically about challenges with identification of ELs with disabilities.

> *…[S]ome of Fairfax County schools have an over-identification of ELs with disabilities, and some schools in Fairfax County have a vast under identification. And so that disparity is greatly depending on which school you go to. At my specific school, we have a great overidentification of ELs and we're trying to work on that and make sure we're really doing big data digs, and that our ESOL support team is also a part of our MTSS core team, and we are meeting weekly to talk about all of these students and the interventions that are in place.*

In a different focus group, another staff member shared a comment to illustrate the local screening process with ELs:

> *…what strategies do special ed teachers use, or team classes use, that we could use with our ESOL students? So sometimes I hear, well, we're doing all of this and we need to go to local screening, and they may not have done certain accommodations that we would*

use as data to then go forward. So I think more sharing of some of those strategies to help in the ESOL classroom to see, to try to tease out some of the difference between the language and if there's a disability.

Finding 1b.3. Most initial evaluation reports include information across multiple domains.
Federal regulations require evaluations to include multiple assessments that can help provide information about a student's academic, functional, and developmental strengths and needs. Our team analyzed initial eligibility reports for 50 SWDs (see Appendix C). Our review analyzed the extent to which the reports included information across four categories or domains: (a) educational information (e.g., SOL data, progress monitoring data); (b) medical and developmental information (e.g., adaptive behavior, speech/language evaluation); (c) sociocultural information (e.g., language assessment); and (d) psychological information (e.g., psychological evaluation, social history). Of the reports we reviewed, 87.8% included information in two or more of these categories.

Although most include information from multiple domains, we noted an overreliance on subjective and anecdotal forms of information. Specifically, 73% of the reports included evidence of direct classroom observations as a source of data for determining eligibility (see Exhibit C24). In contrast, only one third reported a formal educational evaluation (27%). In addition, for 12% of the initial evaluations, we did not find any documentation of educational assessments, observations, or information. Furthermore, 34% of initial evaluations did not include any data or information related to medical, developmental, or speech assessments; sociocultural assessments; or psychological assessments. It is important to note that while information about the "child's physical condition, social or cultural background, and adaptive behavior" is required, all the assessments listed here are not required for all initial evaluations.

Finding 1b.4. Subgroups of students vary in the likelihood of identification for special education.
Our team calculated risk ratios for special education identification using extant data from 2016 to 2019 (Exhibit 11; see finding 1a.3 for an explanation of the definition of risk ratios). Guidance from VDOE stipulates that a risk ratio threshold of 2.0 or above indicates disproportionate representation in special education identification. Our analysis of risk ratios for special education identification for multiple subgroups in FCPS did not indicate the presence of any disproportionate representation. Nonetheless, examining patterns of variation in special education identification by subgroup is a useful activity to assess equity of services to SWDs.

As noted in Exhibit 11, male students were 1.9 times more likely to be identified for special education than female students. This pattern was consistent across all regions. With respect to race/ethnicity, Hispanic students were 1.3 times more likely, Black students 1.2 times more likely, and White students 1.1 times more likely to be identified for special education than

students in other racial/ethnic categories. In Region 9, White students were 2.1 times more likely to be identified as needing special education services than all other students. Finally, data showed that students identified as having limited English proficiency (LEP) were 1.7 times more likely to be identified as needing special education services than students who are not identified as LEP. We noted similar trends with respect to LEP status all regions except Region 9. In Region 9, we noted the opposite; students not identified as LEP were 5.4 times more likely to be identified as needing special education services than students identified as LEP.

Exhibit 11. Risk Ratios for Special Education Identification

Group	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 9	All FCPS students
Female	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.5
Male	1.8	1.8	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.4	1.9
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.2	1.2	0.9	1.0	1.0	0.5	1.0
Asian	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.4	1.0	0.5
Black or African American	1.5	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.3	0.9	1.2
Hispanic or Latino	1.4	1.5	1.0	1.2	1.5	0.4	1.3
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.9	0.7	1.2	0.6	1.0	1.1	1.0
White	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.3	2.1	1.1
Two or more races	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.3	0.9
Non-LEP	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	5.4	0.6
LEP	1.8	2.1	1.6	2.1	2.0	0.2	1.7

RQ1c. How effective is Child Find and Early Childhood Special Education Services at identifying young children suspected of having a developmental delay or disability and providing/getting families access to services?

> **DATA SOURCES REVIEWED:** Extant data, document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups
>
> **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**
>
> - **1c.1.** FCPS has an efficient process for identifying young children suspected of having a disability via the Early Childhood Child Find Process.

Finding 1c.1. FCPS has an efficient process for identifying young children suspected of having a disability via the Early Childhood Child Find Process.

Child Find is a process to locate, identify, and evaluate children who may require special education and related services. FCPS's Early Childhood Identification and Services (ECID&S) program coordinates Child Find services for children ages 20 months through 5 years. Services provided by ECID&S include free screenings, parent and community education activities on the importance of early intervention, and interagency coordination. ECID&S staff act as liaisons to community preschools and child care centers, Head Start, and Family and Early Childhood Education Programs (FECEP).

ECID&S has a clear, well-documented process for moving children through the Early Childhood Child Find process, potentially culminating in a referral to a local screening committee and possible eligibility for special education services. Family-initiated referrals are handled by intake coordinators who make an initial determination about whether the child is exhibiting age-appropriate skills based on information provided by the family. If a disability is suspected, then the intake coordinator may refer the child directly to local screening, eliminating the need for any prescreening activities. If the intake coordinator determines that more information is needed, then the child is scheduled for a developmental screening. If the developmental screening determines that the child is exhibiting age-appropriate skills, then the intake process concludes. If the developmental screening suggests that the child has a possible disability, then the child is referred for local screening.

For some children, the Child Find process culminates in a referral to an LSC. With parent consent, evaluations are administered and an eligibility meeting is convened. The eligibility team then determines whether the child is eligible for special education services. From 2016 to 2019, roughly one third of the initial evaluation referrals in each school year were for preschool students. In the 2018–19 school year, 1,802 preschool students were referred for initial special

education evaluation through local screening. Of those children, 1,600 were found eligible for special education services and 202 were found not eligible. In all years, there were markedly fewer initial evaluation referrals for kindergarten students than preschool students (average of approximately 500 kindergarten initial evaluation referrals per year compared with 1,750 preschool referrals), suggesting that these processes are helpful in identifying students at the earliest point of their school-age career.

Parent survey results showed that parents of preschool-age children who went through the initial referral and eligibility process were more satisfied with their experience than parents of elementary and secondary students who went through the initial referral and eligibility process. For example, 88.4% of parents of preschool-age students agreed or strongly agreed that the process for having their child referred and evaluated for special education services was easy, compared with 77.8% of other parents. In addition, 89.2% of parents of preschool-age students agreed or strongly agreed that their child was identified for special education services in a timely manner, compared with 78.7% of other parents (note: survey did not define "timely" as explained in finding 1b.2). On survey items related to IEP development, parents of preschool students expressed higher rates of satisfaction than parents of elementary, middle, and high school students on items related to adequate opportunities for input into IEP development, school staff listening to their concerns, and school staff taking time to explain the IEP process and evaluation results.

RQ1d. How does FCPS ensure the needs of special education students are included in the planning and implementation of new programs and services?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups, classroom observations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **1d.1.** Some stakeholders feel less proactively included in the planning and implementation of new programs and services, especially those supporting students with dual identifications.

Finding 1d.1. Some stakeholders feel less proactively included in the planning and implementation of new programs and services, especially those supporting students with dual identifications.

Parents are critical sources of information about the needs of SWDs. On the parent survey, 81.2% of parents of students with IEPs agreed or strongly agreed that FCPS ensures that SWDs are included when planning new programs and services (see Exhibit E21). Comparatively, 82.3%

of staff survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that FCPS ensures that SWDs are included when planning new programs and services (see Exhibit D20). When reviewing data by staff position, special education staff had the lowest level of agreement (73.6%), whereas administrators (85.7%), general education staff (84.1%), and related services providers (86.5%) agreed at higher levels.

Across parent groups, there was variation by school level, student disability category, and race/ethnicity among those who agreed or strongly agreed that FCPS ensures SWDs are included when planning new programs and services. When analyzing data by school level, early childhood parents had 91.4% agreement, whereas middle school and high school parents agreed at 78.8%. Parents of elementary students agreed at 82.4%. We also reviewed parent survey responses by student disability category. Parents of students with a speech/language impairment (90.1%) agreed at the highest levels that FCPS ensures that SWDs are included when planning new programs and services. Parents of students with specific learning disabilities (80%), developmental delays (86.6%), emotional disturbance (81.8%), and sensory disabilities[2] (84.3%) agreed at levels near the district average. However, agreement was below 80% for parents of students with autism spectrum disorders (75.4%), other health impairments (71.8%), intellectual disabilities (71.6%), and low-incidence disabilities[3] (74%). We also noted differences in perceptions of parents by student race/ethnicity. Parents of Hispanic (92.4%) and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (94.7%) students agreed at the highest levels. Parents with the lowest levels of agreement that FCPS ensures SWDs are included when planning new programs and services include parents whose children identify as White (74.9%), American Indian/Alaska Native (69.6%), and not specified (73.4%).

Although there were relatively high levels of agreement with the statement that the needs of SWDs are included in the planning and implementation of new programs and services, it is important to acknowledge that roughly one of five participants on both the staff and parent surveys disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. An analysis of open-ended items on the survey, focus group comments, and documentation from school board and parent advocacy group members helped to illustrate staff and parents' specific and often highly situational concerns about the programs and services available to students, typically focused at the school, classroom, or even teacher levels. Across this highly individualized feedback, parents and staff shared important information particularly relevant to planning and implementation of programs and services for the following two groups of students: twice-exceptional (2e) learners and ELs. These groups of students have dual identifications requiring

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[2] For our reporting purposes, sensory disabilities are defined as deafness, deaf-blindness, hearing impairments, and visual impairments.
[3] For our reporting purposes, low-incidence disabilities are defined as traumatic brain injury, orthopedic impairment, and multiple disabilities.

coordinated access to special education programming and services in addition to other specialized types of programming and services aligned with their learning needs.

2e learners. FCPS defines 2e learners, or twice-exceptional learners, as students who have the ability to think, reason, and problem-solve at very high levels who also have special education needs. The FCPS Twice-Exceptional (2e) Handbook notes the following:

> *FCPS believes that each student is entitled to an excellent education that meets his or her individual needs, and that partnerships among students, parents, educators, and the community are critical to student success. The district is committed to evidence-based identification processes, interventions, and instructional practices designed to meet the diverse needs of 2e students. FCPS embraces a student-centered, strengths-based approach to educating all students. For 2e learners, the focus is on addressing the students' high abilities while supporting their unique learning needs. (p. 6)*

However, comments from surveys, focus groups, and document analysis indicate that the programming and services in place for these students may not reflect the procedures and expectations outlined within the handbook. Parent comments noted that the quality of instructional programming and placements for 2e learners is a concern, particularly regarding the rigor of content and the ability for 2e learners to take classes that meet their needs. The following are some examples of parent comments:

- "We feel that we have had to fight with teachers and administrators to get our twice-exceptional student fair access to a challenging curriculum."

- "Not enough being done for twice-exceptional students. The standards for AAP [advanced academic programs] are for neurotypical students. Atypical students, whose giftedness would manifest in slightly different ways, are not being given adequate opportunities to AAP."

- "Twice exceptionality is not just 'typical special-ed' plus 'typical honors course.' Often these students can use their stronger abilities to scaffold their weaker ones, and the accommodations that help them may be different than those that help other students with the same eligibility category."

- "The issue now for my twice-exceptional student is lack of access to honors classes. They're insisting on keeping him in [a] team-taught class which they don't offer at the honors level."

- "2e kids and their parents are commonly told in IEP meetings that either they could take the regular class and have it be team taught or they could take the honors class without support."

Staff comments from focus groups also point to concerns with access to and quality of programming and instruction for 2e learners, particularly at the middle and high school levels. Below we share examples that illustrate these concerns:

- "…they still need accommodations, even when they're in the advanced academic program. [I]f they have an IEP they still need these accommodations. It shouldn't prohibit them from being able to be successful in an environment where they can academically align with their peers. A lot of times it's a staffing issue, like trying to figure out schedules and how to get people into the level four classrooms for one kid. Because we don't have a ton of twice exceptional students, so it's hard resource wise to divvy it up."

- "And I think moving on from just the elementary level, it's thinking about middle and high school honors, AP and IB classes. That the reality is you pick. Either, do you want to be in an AP class or do you want to get your SPED services, because they're not offering you both? And from an equity perspective, how are we getting away with that? I don't quite understand. I think we're much better at the elementary level. There's just a fluidness. Whereas there's a rigidity to the period system at middle and high school, but that just feels a little wrong to me. And has for, it's been that way forever. Like it's in either or, and just feels like that's something that would need to change at the secondary level."

- "I do think freshman year, if we have freshmen coming in that are in honors classes, the case manager really has to have those discussions with the parents and also the teachers, because sometimes they're like, the accommodations and things like that. But I also agree, going back to what I think was said earlier, the conversation when we're looking at doing an honors or an AP class, is them understanding that it's not like a team taught class, right. There is no other support in that class. You're kind of on your own. So that discussion has to be had. It changes their hours and things like that. So when we have a student go AP or honors, they're pretty strong. Like we feel that they're strong enough that they can do it without that additional support."

- "I feel like every school in Fairfax is going to do stuff a little bit different. So I know high schools that have worked really hard to have students supported in honors, and IB, with IEP… They've worked to scaffold that. And then I know schools that are like, take no prisoner with their honors and AP classes. And so we are all little silos of practice."

ELs. ELs with disabilities represent another population of students with complex needs. On the staff survey, only 69.2% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that that there are sufficient resources, interventions, and specialized programs at their school to meet the needs of ELs with disabilities (see Exhibit D15). To help contextualize this survey finding, staff comments during focus groups offered examples of specific concerns that impact programming and instruction

for ELs with disabilities. To begin, in a key informant focus group, one staff member expressed concern with staff understanding of EL needs versus special education needs:

> … [I]t gets…tricky when we start thinking about our English learners and kind of the connection between language, proficiency, and language development, and [the] team making that determination between…referring students for eligibility and making those determinations between that disability and language proficiency, and I think teams often struggle with that.

In other comments, staff members expressed concern with ESOL caseload size impacting service delivery for ELs with disabilities. For example, one staff member commented:

> …at the elementary level, ESOL caseloads are just simply too high. So it's inequitable because a [special education] teacher might be servicing seven students, and an ESOL teacher might be servicing several hundred students. And so that disparity makes it really hard for ESOL teachers to support students with disabilities, knowing they're already getting a lot of support via the special education route.

Another staff member shared this same perception:

> ESOL is spread too thin and a kid probably [doesn't] get enough services in that area.

Staff also shared thoughts on attitudes and perceptions among staff that create a siloed/either or approach for ESOL and special education supports that impacts service provision. To illustrate this point, one staff member commented:

> I also believe that there's this negative lingo in Fairfax County where people start to say, '[special education] trumps ESOL or ESOL trumps [special education] when your decision making.' And I think that we need to get away from that and really work together collaboratively to ensure that students who are ELs, who also receive services as a student with disability, do have access and opportunity to both types of services because they are different, and very much different in nature. And I think that a lot of times, SPED students get pulled and then it's happening simultaneously as ESOL groups are being pulled. And then, so that student then loses access to both services.

Similarly, another staff member reported:

> …[O]ne of the things I find challenging is that there's a level of respect, more for [special education] than for ESOL. And oftentimes the history has been to defer to the [special education] side of it for a dually identified student and not recognizing the linguistic needs of the student, and really not respecting and honoring the data and the research behind that in a way that is giving deference to the [special education] side.

In addition, a staff member commented about resource constraints impacting service delivery for dually identified students:

> But then we also realized that our ESOL teachers want some of our [special education] kids in one of their elective classes, and we can't give up that period because of their schedules…So it …is making it into more of a discussion. And we're not sure what is the right way. Do they go into any ESOL class because they need the support, or do they go into a [special education] class because they need that support[?]

RQ1e. How are inclusionary practices, both academic and social, being implemented, tracked, and monitored across schools and educational settings?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups, classroom observations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **1e.1.** FCPS does not meet Virginia state targets for the percentage of time SWDs are included in the general education setting.
- **1e.2.** Parents are generally satisfied with opportunities for academic and social inclusion for their children.

Finding 1e.1. FCPS does not meet Virginia state targets for the percentage of time SWDs are included in the general education setting.

Extant data highlight how the inclusion of SWDs compares with surrounding divisions. In 2018–19, IDEA SPP/APR Indicator 5a shows that 54% of FCPS students with IEPs ages 6–21 were in regular classrooms 80% or more of the day, which did not meet the Virginia state target of at least 70% of students receiving service in regular classrooms for 80% or more of the day. In addition, the percentage of SWDs served in regular classrooms 80% or more of the day in FCPS is lower than both the Virginia average and all other comparison districts, which ranged from approximately 63% to 68% (see Exhibit B1). These patterns were consistent when analyzing trends in data for the 2016–17 and 2017–18 school years as well. In both school years, 54% of FCPS students with IEPs ages 6–21 were in regular classrooms 80% or more of the day. This percentage of time fell below the Virginia state target and was lower than other comparison districts.

In 2018–19, IDEA SPP/APR Indicator 5b shows that 11% of FCPS students with IEPs ages 6–21 were in regular classrooms less than 40% of the day in FCPS, which did not meet the Virginia state target of less than 8% of students receiving service in regular classrooms less than 40% of the day. The FCPS rate was higher than Arlington (4.48%), Loudoun (9.26%), and Virginia as a whole (9.3%) but lower than Montgomery (14.02%), Prince William (12.31%), and Wake Forest

(15.92%) (see Exhibit B1). These data for FCPS were consistent in 2016–17 (12%) and the 2017–18 (11%) school years.

Inclusion data for preschool-age students also show that FCPS is not meeting targets for inclusion. In 2018–19, IDEA SPP/APR Indicator 6a shows 25.2% of the students with IEPs ages 3–5 attended regular early childhood programs in FCPS, which did not meet the Virginia state target of having more than 35% of students attend regular early childhood programs. This rate shows a considerable decline from 2016–17 and 2017–18, in which 31.7% and 33.8%, respectively, of students attended regular early childhood programs (see Exhibit B9). At 46.3%, the percentage of preschool students with IEPs attending a separate special education class, separate school, or residential facility (IDEA APP/APR Indicator 6b) also did not meet the Virginia state target, which was less than 17% of students. FCPS was higher than both the Virginia average (29.3%) and all other comparison districts except for Montgomery (48.9%; see Exhibit B10). This rate also was a considerable increase from 2016–17 and 2017–18, in which 36.6% and 31.2%, respectively, of preschool students with IEPs in FCPS attended separate classes, schools, or facilities.

Although IDEA APP/APR data do not include inclusion metrics or targets for SWDs who are dually identified as ELs, we calculated the extent to which this population received Level I services (i.e., provision of special education services for less than 50% of the instructional day; less than 15 hours per week) versus Level II services (i.e., provision of special education services for 50% or more of the instructional day; 15 hours or more hours per week). Extant data from the 2018–19 school year (Exhibit 12) show that dually identified SWDs/ELs were more likely to receive Level II services than SWDs who were not dually identified as ELs. Conversely, SWDs/ELs were less likely to receive Level I services. This means that SWDs/ELs were less likely to be educated in inclusive settings than their non-EL SWD peers.

Exhibit 12. Dually Identified SWDs/ELs by Service Setting, 2018–19

Services	SWDs who are ELs		SWDs who are not ELs		Total
Level I	2,114	26%	9,047	47%	11,161
Level II	5,934	74%	10,398	53%	16,332
Total	8,048		19,445		27,493

Finding 1e.2. Parents are generally satisfied with opportunities for academic and social inclusion for their children.

On the parent survey, parents were to share their perceptions of inclusion opportunities for SWDs in FCPS (see Exhibit E16). Overall, 89.7% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the amount of time their child spent in the general education classroom was appropriate for their

needs. Parents of students at the early childhood (86%), elementary (90.1%), middle (88.5%), and high (90%) school levels agreed at similar levels. When reviewing data by disability category (Exhibit 13), we noted a wider range of agreement levels. For example, we note lower than average agreement for parents of students with autism spectrum disorders (83.1%), intellectual disabilities (82.2%), and low-incidence disabilities (81.3%). Parents of students with developmental delays (89.4%), other health impairment (90.3%), emotional disturbance (90.7%), specific learning disabilities (92%), sensory disabilities (92.8%), and speech/language impairment (94.1%) agreed at or above the average level of agreement.

Exhibit 13. Percentage of Parents of Students With an IEP Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey That the Amount of Time Their Child Spent in the General Education Classroom Was Appropriate for Their Needs
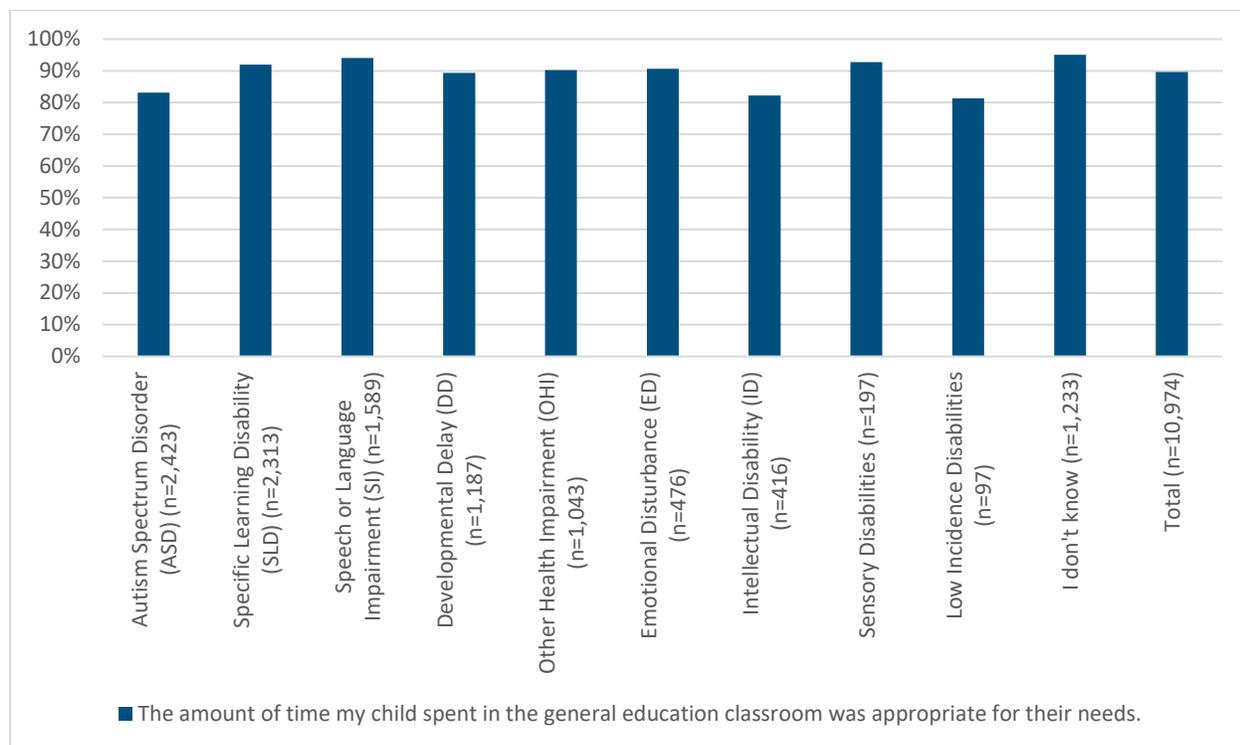
The survey also asked about parent perceptions of the adequacy of academic and social inclusion opportunities for their child (Exhibit 14).

Exhibit 14. Percentage of Parents of Students With an IEP Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey That Their Child Had Opportunities for Social and Academic Inclusion
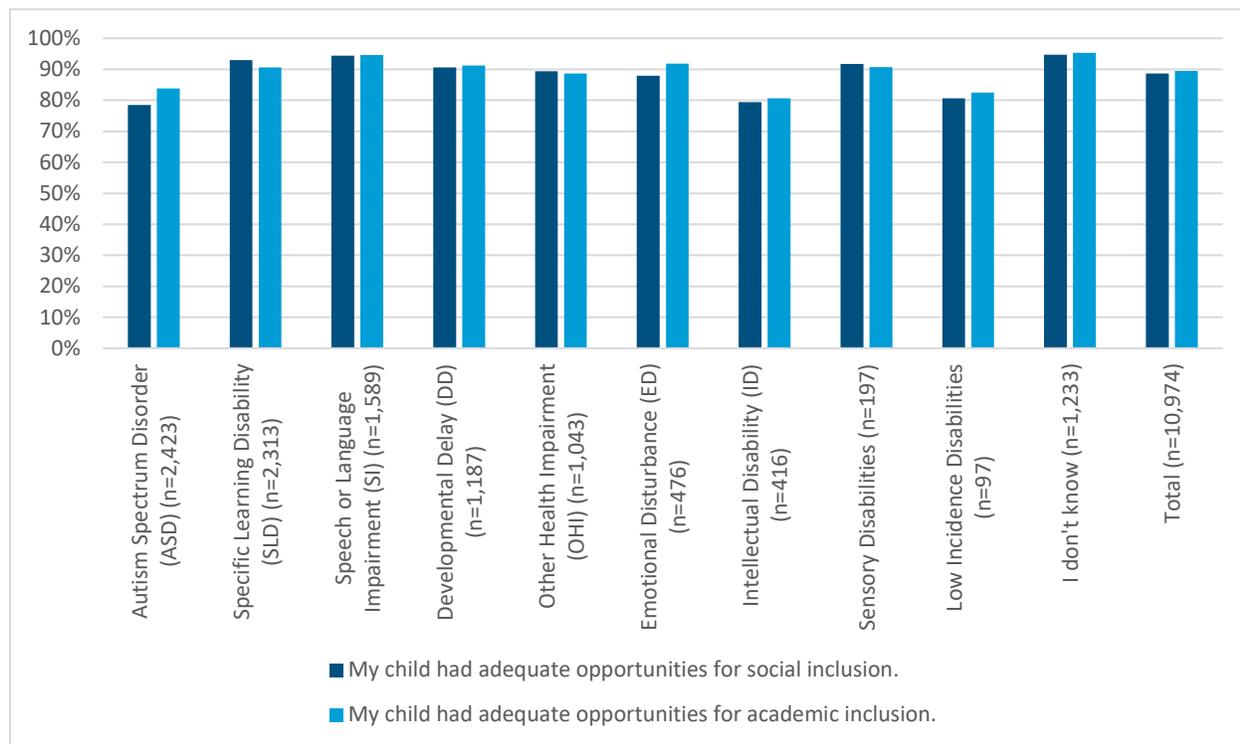
Overall, 88.6% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child had adequate opportunities for social inclusion. The level of agreement was similar across parents of students at the early childhood (89.5%), elementary (90.9%), middle (87.1%), and high (85.6%) school levels. The majority of parents across all disability categories agreed at levels at or above the average. However, parents of students with autism spectrum disorders (78.5%), intellectual disabilities (79.4%), and low-incidence disabilities (80.6%) agreed at levels nearly 10% lower. One parent focus group participant shared an example of what social inclusion looks like for their child:

> *My son is older. So for him it looks a little bit different because he definitely has to be in a [w]holey special ed environment most of the time.… But they go out of their way to take him to pep rallies and they let him hand out goodies at the school store, so that he does have interaction with the gen ed students, but just not in the educational setting, which I am totally fine with. I like the way that they do it for him.*

The survey also asked about parent perceptions of academic inclusion opportunities. Overall, 89.5% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child had adequate opportunities for academic inclusion. The level of agreement was similar across parents of students at the early childhood (90.7%), elementary (90.8%), middle (89.5%), and high (87.3%) school levels. The level of agreement was nearly at or above average for most of the disability subgroups.

However, we noted lower agreement for parents of students with autism spectrum disorders (83.8%), intellectual disabilities (80.6%), and low-incidence disabilities (82.5%; see Exhibit 14). During the parent focus group, one parent described opportunities for inclusion for their child:

> I mean, all my kids can do the before school or after school enrichment programs, the school clubs, I've got one in the AAP program. He started that in third grade. They are able to access this. And my son that's in the CSS program, he does get mainstreamed for reading and math and science. He doesn't always manage to stay in the gen ed class for the whole time, but he does get pushed in for those topics.

RQ1f. What processes are in place to support the individual educational needs of SWDs? What data and resources are used to develop the instructional goals, special education service hours, and accommodations required?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Document review, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups, document review

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **1f.1.** FCPS has detailed documentation of the processes and guidance for developing IEPs.
- **1f.2.** Most present levels of performance statements rely on subjective information rather than objective, measurable terms.
- **1f.3.** Annual IEP goals and short-term objectives include measurable behaviors and a criterion, but most goals lack conditions under which the behavior will occur.
- **1f.4.** Although most parents report having adequate input into their child's IEP development, some IEPs lack documentation of parent input and collaboration.

Finding 1f.1. FCPS has detailed documentation of the processes and guidance for developing IEPs. FCPS's Special Education Process and Special Education Procedures webpages provide information about district special education procedures related to referral, evaluation, eligibility, IEP development, reevaluation, dismissal, and service provision. To assist with oversight of special education procedures, FCPS has a Procedural Support Services program. With this program, FCPS allocates one PSL per pyramid to provide guidance on federal and state special education polices and to support staff in the implementation of special education procedures. As an additional resource available to staff, SEA-STARS is a secure online program that houses data for all evaluations and reevaluations for students who receive special education and 504 services, IEPs, and 504 plans. Special education teachers receive training on the use of SEA-STARS annually. To support parents, the FCPS website includes published

resources specifically designed to help parents understand and navigate the special education process. The Special Education Handbook for Parents and the IEP Meeting Agenda for Parents describe the IEP process, describe how parents can participate in IEP development, and outline how goals within the IEP will be developed.

Finding 1f.2. Most present levels of performance statements rely on subjective information rather than objective, measurable terms.

Within each student's IEP, state regulations require the PLOP statement to include the child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance and a rationale for how the child's disability affects involvement and progress in the general curriculum (34 CFR 300.320(a)(1)). The regulations also require PLOP statements to be written in objective, measurable terms to the greatest extent possible and include test scores, if appropriate. Finally, PLOP statements should be directly related to the other components of the IEP. Within FCPS IEPs, a PLOP statement appears with each annual goal and is customized for that particular area. Therefore, if an IEP includes an annual goal for reading and an annual goal for mathematics, there are two unique PLOP statements. Quality PLOP statements should clearly identify all areas of need as well as the supports necessary to address those needs, specific and measurable baseline data, and strengths related to the areas of need. PLOP statements can include data from state testing, diagnostic assessments, classroom assessments, progress monitoring, universal screeners, teacher reports, observation data, and other sources.

Our review identified a discrepancy between staff and parent perceptions about use of data within the IEPs and the documentation of data within the IEPs reviewed. On the staff survey, 95.7% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that IEPs are developed in alignment with each student's present level of academic and functional performance, and 94.5% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that present levels of academic and functional performance are based on data, including comprehensive evaluation results (see Appendix Exhibit D7). Results from the parent survey were similar; 93.2% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child's IEP was developed using multiple sources of data, including results from evaluations (see Appendix Exhibit E13). Despite these perceptions, results from the IEP review point to a lack of quantitative data reported within IEP documents.

AIR reviewed all PLOP statements in the IEPs (see Appendix Exhibit C9). In addition, we reviewed other sections of the IEP (i.e., information related to the PLOP page) to understand whether the IEPs noted any data elsewhere in relation to PLOP statements. Our team defined objective, measurable data as any numerical or quantifiable information (e.g., solves problems with 95% accuracy, reads at a fifth-grade reading level). Our review found that only 26% of the IEPs in our sample included objective, measurable data in the PLOP statements. The other 74% of IEPs reported subjective information rather than objective, measurable data. For example, one PLOP

statement for a mathematics goal read as follows: [*Student's name] is an enthusiastic student who enjoys experiencing success in math class. She has shown the ability to solve grade-level math problems with the aid of a calculator. [Student's name] sometimes experiences difficulty solving more complex, multistep math problems. She sometimes requires extra help to learn a new math concept*. Although this example is in parent-friendly language, it does not provide enough detail to clearly articulate the baseline level of performance. The term "sometimes" is subjective and should be clarified to give the reader a clear picture of how often the student has difficulty with multistep problems (e.g., three of five times, 60% of the time). In addition, the sample PLOP statement names a general area of need (e.g., complex multistep math problems) but does not provide any details on what constitutes a "complex multistep math problem." More detail is needed to fully explain the type of multistep math problem the student struggles with (e.g., multistep problems involving multiplication, multistep word problems involving addition with regrouping).

Despite agreement from parents that data are used to develop IEPs, the lack of objective, measurable data reported within PLOP statements (i.e., areas of strengths and needs) was palpable to some parents as reported in focus groups. For example, one parent commented:

> So for me, I had to do a written request to get the IEP goals one week in advance of the IEP meeting. And I found a lot of the goals were not, or even the areas of strengths and needs were not well written. There were literally a cut and paste of the same paragraph repeated over several sections. My child had just been through a triennial eligibility assessment, which have multiple assessments for speech and psychological assessment. And the teacher assessments…BRIGANCE and all those things, none of that narrative was included in his areas of strengths and needs that would drive some of the goals. I, as a parent, had to go back through all those tests and sift out the areas of strengths and needs and send a draft to the teacher to include in the follow-up IEP meeting.

PLOP statements should be data driven and individualized to describe the current levels of each student. Moreover, PLOPs must be written in objective, measurable terms and include multiple sources of data documented within the IEP itself to ensure accurate record keeping over time and across case managers.

Finding 1f.3. Annual IEP goals and short-term objectives include measurable behaviors and a criterion, but most goals lack conditions under which the behavior will occur.
Federal special education regulations require each IEP to include measurable annual goals (34 CFR 300.320(a)(2)). The goals are derived from the student's current level of performance and are highly aligned with the PLOP statements. To be considered measurable, a goal should include a measurable behavior (e.g., oral reading, counting), the condition under which the behavior is expected to occur (e.g., when given a passage of grade-level text), and a criterion

for measuring performance (e.g., with 85% accuracy in three of four opportunities). In addition to measurable annual goals, IEPs may, but are not required to, include short-term objectives (STOs) for each annual goal. STOs also should be measurable.

Results from the parent survey revealed that 90.9% of parents agreed that their child's IEP included measurable goals that were appropriate for their needs (see Appendix Exhibit E13). In a similar vein, 94.5% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that IEPs include measurable goals aligned to grade-level standards (or alternative standards, as appropriate; see Appendix Exhibit D7). As an illustrative example of how one staff member uses data, during one focus group, a staff member shared:

> … I look at where they are developmentally or where they are grade level wise. And I look at foundational skills and I write goals for the skills they need to get to the grade level standard. So that's how I come up with their goals…I look at their deficits, but then I look at the skills they need to eventually get to where they are, where the curriculum standard is. And I also use data sheets, work samples, notes, anything I can to document progress.

Results from the IEP review partially supported parent and staff perceptions from the surveys. Ninety-two percent of IEPs included annual goals aligned with areas of need outlined in the PLOP statements. In addition, 92% of annual goals included a measurable and observable behavior. However, other elements of the goal structure were not conducive to measuring progress. For example, 20% of the IEPs included annual goals without specifying the conditions under which the behavior was expected. For example, "[Student's name] will receptively identify four words per quarter with 75% accuracy on two out of three occasions measured quarterly." The goal is not specific enough to inform the IEP team about the context of or the conditions under which a student will identify words (i.e., from a list, using flash cards, during a structured task). In addition, although most IEPs (89%) provided annual goals with a criterion for measuring performance, for some goals the criterion included "with 80% accuracy," regardless of whether that criterion made sense given the targeted behavior. For example, one goal read as follows: "During inclusion times, using multimodal (i.e., AAC [augmentative and alternative communication] device, vocalizations, etc.) means of communication, [student's name] will independently join the learning games and activities of his general education peers with no more than two prompts on four out of five data opportunities per quarter with 80% accuracy." Here, the part of the goal noting "with no more than two prompts on four out of five data opportunities" is an appropriate criterion to measure progress toward the goal. It does not make sense to also measure the "accuracy" of joining an activity with peers.

Comments from the focus groups help to illustrate parent and staff perceptions of difficulties with writing specific, measurable IEP goal statements. During a parent focus group, one parent commented:

> The first draft of the IEP that I received left a lot to be desired…. What I found most concerning around that initial batch of goals was the lack of… Everybody talks about measurable outcomes, but the lack of how the data were going to be collected, how those data were going to be presented. I specifically said, "When are you collecting data? Is it going to be a daily thing, a weekly thing, or just sort of the end of that quarter, like, oh, I need my four data points?" Those are very, very different scenarios in terms of progress…. So I do feel like they were receptive to what I had to say and then adapted the goals, but it wasn't until one of our last meetings in February that there was a person from the district level [who] was participating in our meeting. And she revised the goals so that they were more measurable and I felt way more comfortable about what those goals look like. For reading, math, again I still don't feel like that's I guess the goal, the one goal that we have for math, I don't feel like captures what it needs to capture, but the reading goals, I'm much more impressed with at this point.

In a focus group with staff, one staff member commented:

> …[T]here is a need for some professional development on writing goals that are meaningful and grade level specific…. I have one of the goals for an eighth-grade student was to be able to, from the beginning of the year to write complex sentences X amount of times when that is actually an end-of-course goal for eighth grade. So why would you give a student a goal to meet that they and all of their peers need to meet before the end of eighth grade? It is a real problem and it short changes our students to not give them an opportunity to succeed. And it contributes to the burnout and turnover of special educators and co-teachers specifically in English classrooms because it's a thankless task to do those progress reports and to track that data.

Finding 1f.4. Although most parents report having adequate input into their child's IEP development, some IEPs lack documentation of parent input and collaboration.
According to federal regulations, the IEP development process should be a collaboration between all members of the multidisciplinary team. On the FCPS IEP form, IEP teams must provide a statement of parent/family concerns regarding their child's education to guide the PLOP statement (e.g., parent reports that the child likes school, parent would like the child placed in all general education classes).

Our review identified a discrepancy between perceptions of parent involvement in the IEP process from the surveys and parent input documented on the IEPs. The parent and staff

surveys asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement that IEPs were developed with adequate input from parents (see Appendix Exhibits D7 and E13). Results show similar rates of agreement among staff (92.2%) and parents (93.9%). Despite these perceptions, results from the IEP sample review show minimal documentation of parent input on IEP documents (see Appendix Exhibit C8). Nearly 38% of the IEPs in our sample did not include any written evidence of parent input within the IEP itself. Moreover, among the subsample of the full history evaluations, 84% included evidence that parents were present for the reevaluation meeting, but only 20% of reports included evidence of parent input on the reevaluation reports. Documenting parent input and concerns within the IEP is a way to document compliance with federal special education regulations that require IEP teams to consider "the concerns of the parents for enhancing the education of their child."

RQ1g. To what extent do IEPs and Section 504 plans identify specific needs, services, and accommodations that are aligned to the needs of SWDs identified by the individual assessments?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

- **1g.1.** IEPs do not consistently document detailed rationales for placement decisions.
- **1g.2.** Parents perceive that the special education services students receive meet their needs.
- **1g.3.** Accommodations included in IEPs and Section 504 plans align with students' areas of need.

Finding 1g.1. IEPs do not consistently document detailed rationales for placement decisions.
As part of the annual IEP meeting, the IEP team selects the most appropriate instructional setting(s) and services to support the individual needs of each student. The selection of setting(s) and services should be based on available evaluation data, PLOP statements, and annual goals paired with teacher and parent input. Specific to FCPS, the Special Education Program Sites webpage provides an overview of the programs available to SWDs. In addition, the Special Education Instruction webpage on the FCPS website provides links to the various services available to SWDs.

In addition to the surveys, our team assessed the extent to which the IEP sample included a rationale for why the special education setting(s) and services were selected (see Appendix Exhibit C21). This includes a rationale for why a student receives special education services in a

general education class or why a student receives special education in a separate setting. Only 36% of the reviewed IEPs included a detailed rationale statement. The other 64% of IEPs either had a generic statement not individualized to the student (e.g., "[Student's name] needs specialized instruction") or did not provide a reason why the placement would meet the needs of the student. These types of statements do not explain the extent to which the student's needs will be met in the selected special education setting(s).

Comments shared by staff during the focus groups provide some insight as to why there are neither detailed nor data-driven rationales for the selection of special education settings documented in IEPs. For example, a staff member commented about parents driving the decisions:

> I also think that if you have attorneys and advocates involved, the process is different. We, as a team, may feel based on goals, what the child needs, how they're functioning in our setting, that certain things are appropriate. If the parents have an advocate or an attorney, what we feel as professionals is not necessarily valued. And I feel like sometimes my PSL comes in, or the office of eligibility will just be like, "Oh, we're just going to do what they say. We're just going to do it." And sometimes, we don't have the staff and we don't have the ability to truly meet the child's needs. But because there's an advocate and attorney, we're placing kids in programs and giving them hours. And how we're doing their hours is different than we would with another family. It's not allowing us to give kids... Even if it is a more restrictive environment, if that's what they need, that's what they need. And I think sometimes the process is different depending on if you can afford an advocate and a lawyer, and if you can't.

In a different focus group, one staff member commented about staffing or availability of settings driving placement decisions:

> I find that as far as academic or the placement... that it's not necessarily my students' strengths or weaknesses, it's that there's not space in class and things like that. So it doesn't even come to that point of discussion because it's just not going to happen.

Finding 1g.2. Parents perceive that the special education services students receive meet their needs.

Analysis of survey data revealed that 86.7% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child's IEP included service hours that were appropriate for their needs (see Appendix Exhibit E13). When disaggregated, we observed higher agreement for early childhood parents (90%) than for elementary (87.3%), middle (86.1%), and high school (85.4%) parents (see Exhibit 15). Compared with parent perceptions, more staff (91.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that services noted in students' IEPs were appropriate (see Appendix Exhibit D7). Of note, when we disaggregated staff survey results by role, we noted the largest discrepancy in agreement rates between general

education teachers (88%) and special education teachers (95.9%) and administrators (94.7%). The agreement for related services providers (92.1%) fell around the average.

Exhibit 15. Percentage of Parents of Students With an IEP Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey About the Service Hours on Their Child's IEP and the Delivery of Services for Their Child
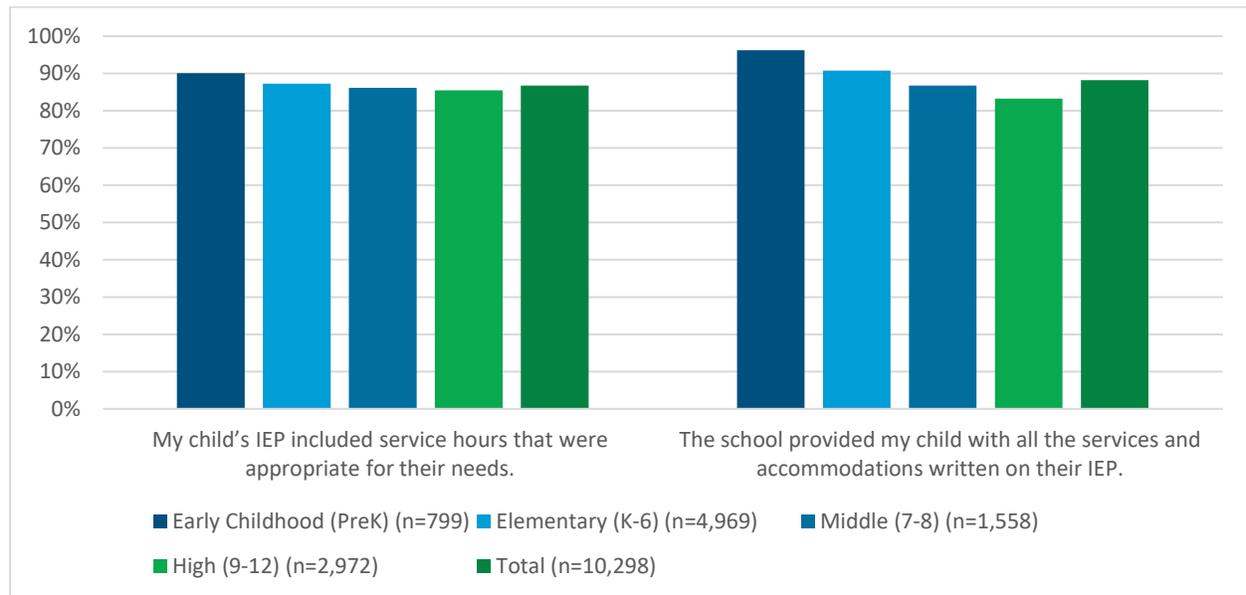
The parent survey also asked about the actual delivery of services for their child (see Appendix Exhibit E13). On average, 88.2% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child's school provided all the services and accommodations written on their IEP. When disaggregated by level, we again noted higher agreement for parents of early childhood students (96.2%) than for parents of students in high school (83.2%), middle school (86.7%), and elementary school (90.8%).

Finding 1g.3. Accommodations included in IEPs and Section 504 plans align with students' areas of need.

When creating Section 504 plans and IEPs, multidisciplinary teams should evaluate the extent to which each student would benefit from classroom accommodations and assessment accommodations. Classroom accommodations are provided during instruction in a classroom setting, whereas assessment accommodations are provided during classroom, district, and state assessments. Classroom accommodations should align with the areas of need outlined in PLOP statements and goal areas. Furthermore, assessment accommodations should be consistent with the classroom accommodations that the student receives during instruction. The FCPS website includes resources that can help staff and parents understand and select accommodations. The Accommodations and Modifications webpage defines the difference between accommodations

and modifications and provides examples of various classroom accommodations. In addition, the IEP/Section 504 Test Accommodations webpage describes the various assessment accommodations available to SWDs. There do not appear to be district-published policies or written guidance for monitoring implementation of accommodations for SWDs. Specific to parents, the Special Education Handbook for Parents and the IEP Meeting Agenda for Parents also provide information about accommodations for students.

Data from the parent and staff surveys align with findings from the IEP review related to accommodations included in IEP documents. We found similar rates of agreement among staff (94.6%) and parents (92.2%) that IEPs include accommodations that are appropriate to the needs of their child (see Appendix Exhibits D7 and E13). Mirroring these perceptions, results from the IEP review show that 92% of IEPs included classroom accommodations that aligned with areas of need specified on the IEP (see Appendix Exhibit C16). In addition, 100% of assessment accommodations were aligned with classroom assessments (see Appendix Exhibit C18). We noted similar parent perceptions for those who have children with Section 504 plans; 92.9% felt their child's 504 plan included accommodations that were appropriate for their needs (see Appendix Exhibit E29).

RQ1h. What processes and support are in place to facilitate seamless transitions between grade levels and into postsecondary opportunities?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups, classroom observations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

- **1h.1.** Processes to facilitate transitions into postsecondary opportunities are clearly defined at the district level.
- **1h.2.** FCPS meets federal regulations that require transition plans in IEPs, when appropriate.
- **1h.3.** IEP transition goals and the transition services that students receive may lack alignment.
- **1h.4.** The quality of transition planning and programming varies by disability category.
- **1h.5.** FCPS meets or exceeds IDEA performance indicators related to postsecondary outcomes for SWDs.
- **1h.6.** Processes to facilitate transitions between grade levels and schools are not clearly defined at the district level.

Finding 1h.1. Processes to facilitate transitions into postsecondary opportunities are clearly defined at the district level.

Federal regulations mandate that no later than the age of 16, the IEP must include postsecondary goals and transition services. Within FCPS, such transition plans are required for all IEPs starting at age 14 or Grade 8, whichever comes first. FCPS offers a wide array of career and transition services and programming to facilitate successful transitions to postsecondary settings. The Transition Resource Guide helps students, staff, and families understand and facilitate the postsecondary transition planning process. This guide includes the Transition Tool Kit for parents, directions for completing a student's transition plan and summary, a transition assessment guide, transition resources, and sample transition plans. In addition to the information posted on the website, FCPS also employs employment and transition representatives to support postsecondary transitions for SWDs and their families.

Finding 1h.2. FCPS meets federal regulations that require transition plans in IEPs, when appropriate.

During 2018–19, data from IDEA SPP/APR Indicator 13 show that 98% of youth aged 16 and older had an IEP that includes (a) appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that are annually updated and based upon an age-appropriate transition assessment; (b) transition services, including courses of study that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals; and (c) annual IEP goals related to the student's transition service needs (see Appendix Exhibit B1). In comparison, 99.25% of eligible students in the state of Virginia met this indicator. Data from our IEP review corroborated the extant data analysis. Of the transition-eligible IEPs we reviewed in our sample [*n* = 104], 97% included transition goals (see Appendix Exhibit C5). Interestingly, results from the parent survey show that only 27.7% of parents with students of transition age reported their child had a postsecondary transition plan in their IEP before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 (see Appendix Exhibit E14). This large discrepancy in parent perception may be due to a lack of understanding or knowledge regarding the IEP transition plan.

Finding 1h.3. IEP transition goals and the transition services that students receive may lack alignment.

Data from the IEP review show differences in the quality of transition goals and services among students across disability categories (see Appendix Exhibit C6). We analyzed all transition IEPs in our sample, which included 104 IEP students with a transition plan or who were in eighth grade or higher. Our team analyzed the extent to which transition goals aligned with the transition services selected. An example of alignment is an IEP in which the student has an independent living transition goal and receives independent living skills classes as part of their transition services. An example of a misalignment is an IEP in which the student has an independent living goal but only receives job coach services. The review of IEPs found that across all students in

our sample, only 65% of IEPs demonstrated alignment between the transition goals and selected transition services for all goals. Although an additional 23% of IEPs were mostly aligned as they relate to transition goals and services (meaning 50–99% of transition goals were aligned with services), there was some disconnect. Notably, when disaggregated by disability type, the results were lower than average for IEPs of students with specific learning disabilities, with only 58% of IEPs demonstrating alignment between all transition goals and transition services. See Appendix Exhibit C6 for full reporting across all disability categories.

Finding 1h.4. The quality of transition planning and programming varies by disability category.
Our review of the IEP sample and parent survey data highlight differences in transition goals and services between groups of students by disability category. These data provide evidence that some groups of SWDs (e.g., those with low-incidence disabilities, such as multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injuries) may have access to better, more intentionally thought-out transition plans and services.

Transition planning includes services that the district can provide as well as relevant community-based resources for students or families. In all, 90.8% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that students are given adequate supports to transition to postsecondary education, employment, or independent living (see Appendix Exhibit D9). Similarly, 87.6% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the school provided supports and services to help their child achieve their goals related to postsecondary education, employment, and/or independent living (see Appendix Exhibit E15). The level of agreement was highest among parents of students with low-incidence disabilities (100%), speech or language impairments (96.3%), and developmental delays (95.2%). Agreement levels were lowest for parents of students with autism spectrum disorders (82.7%), other health impairments (81.6%), and intellectual disabilities (81%) (see Exhibit 16).

Exhibit 16. Percentage of Parents of Students With an IEP Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey That Their Child's School Provided Information and Supports to Aid Transition Planning and Goal Progress

Legend:
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (n=2,423)
- Specific Learning Disability (SLD) (n=2,313)
- Speech or Language Impairment (SI) (n=1,589)
- Developmental Delay (DD) (n=1,187)
- Other Health Impairment (OHI) (n=1,043)
- Emotional Disturbance (ED) (n=476)
- Intellectual Disability (ID) (n=416)
- Sensory Disabilities (n=197)
- Low Incidence Disabilities (n=97)
- I don't know (n=1,233)
- Total (n=10,974)
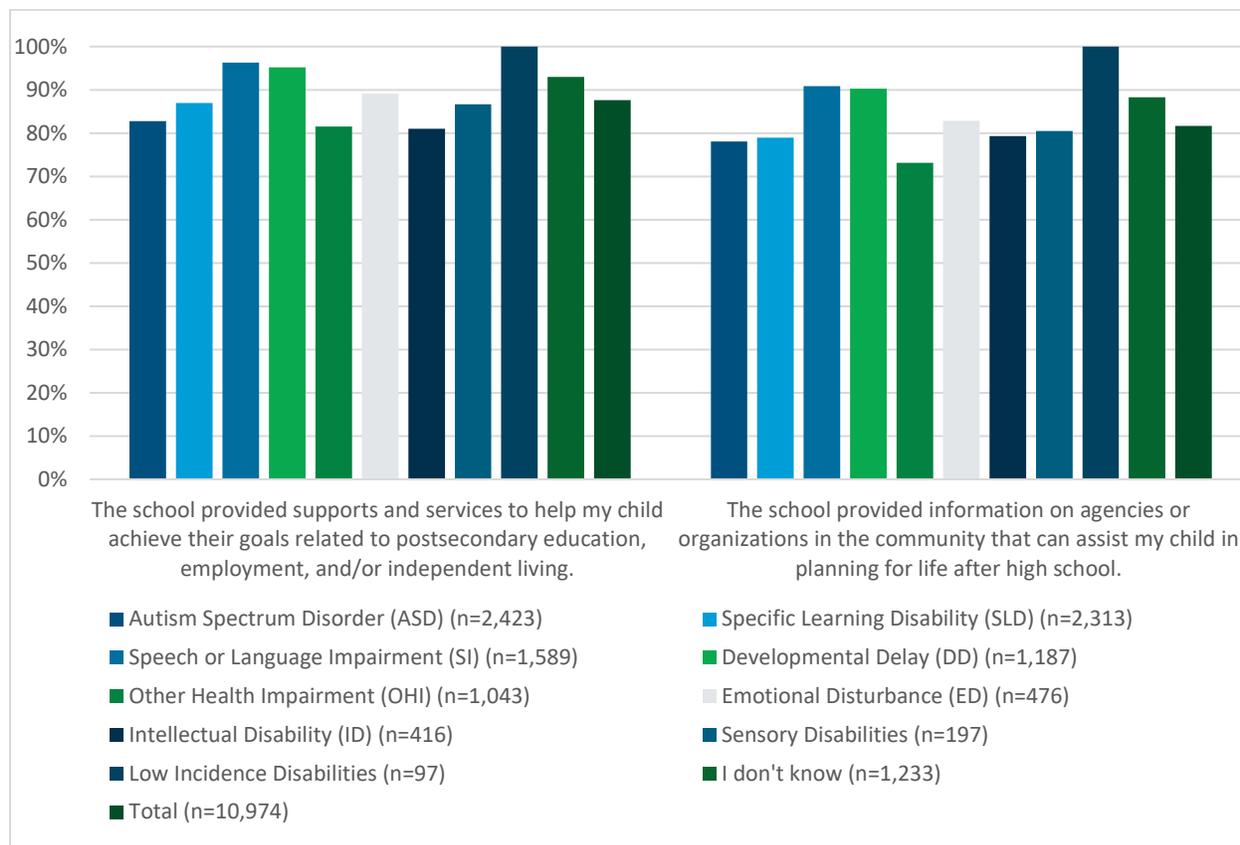
Data from the surveys related to access to community-based organizations during transition show that staff and parents perceive this as less available than the school-based supports. In all, 86.4% of staff agreed that postsecondary transition planning for students involves community-based organizations (see Appendix Exhibit D9). From the parent perspective, 81.6% agreed that the school provided information on agencies or organizations in the community that can assist their child in planning their life after high school (see Appendix Exhibit E15). When disaggregated, the level of agreement was highest among parents of students with low-incidence disabilities (100%), speech or language impairments (90.8%), and developmental delays (90.3%). Agreement levels were lowest for parents of students with intellectual disabilities (79.3%), specific learning disabilities (79%), autism spectrum disorders (78.1%), and other health impairments (73.2%) (see Exhibit 16).

AIR also gathered data from classroom observations, including classrooms in career/transition programs (*n* = 6). The results from observations in these settings provide evidence of explicit instruction across observations of classrooms; scores averaged 2.95 out of 3 on the RESET. This

was one of the highest scoring programs that AIR observed (see Finding 3a.1 for more information), demonstrating high-quality services in these settings.

Finding 1h.5. FCPS meets or exceeds IDEA performance indicators related to postsecondary outcomes for SWDs.

For IDEA performance indicator data in 2018–19, FCPS exceeded their target goals for all three indicators related to postsecondary outcomes for SWDs (see Appendix Exhibit B1). For indicator 14a, 49% of SWDs were enrolled in higher education within 1 year of leaving high school. This percentage exceeded FCPS's target goal of 36% and exceeded the 34.9% of SWDs across the state of Virginia who met this goal. For indicator 14b, 69% of SWDs in FCPS were enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within 1 year of leaving high school. This exceeded FCPS's target of 64% and was higher than the 66.1% of SWDs across the state of Virginia who met this indicator. For indicator 14c, 75% of SWDs were enrolled in higher education or some other postsecondary education or training program, or competitively employed or in some other employment within 1 year of leaving high school. This exceeded FCPS's target of 72% and exceeded the 74.3% of SWDs across the state of Virginia who met this indicator. See Appendix Exhibit B11 for comparisons of postsecondary indicators for SWDs in neighboring school divisions.

Finding 1h.6. Processes to facilitate transitions between grade levels and schools are not clearly defined at the district level.

Federal special education regulations outline transition requirements for SWDs transitioning from early intervention to early childhood special education and when planning for postsecondary transitions. Although federal regulations do not specify requirements or supports for the transition between grade levels or schools, seamless transitions are paramount to ensure consistency in services for SWDs. Results from the parent survey show that 86.3% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the school supported their child's transition between grade levels and schools (see Appendix Exhibit E13). Agreement rates were highest for parents of students at the early childhood level (95.1%) and lower for parents of students at the elementary (88%), middle (84.4%), and high school (83.6%) levels. On the staff survey, 76.4% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that communication with staff from the feeder or receiving schools when an SWD transitioned to their school was adequate (see Appendix Exhibit D7). Although agreement rates were similar among staff across levels, results disaggregated by staff role show that special education teachers (73%) had a lower rate of agreement and administrators had a higher rate of agreement (81.4%) than staff in other roles (see Exhibit 17).

Exhibit 17. Percentage of Staff Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey That Communication Between Schools was Adequate for SWDs Transitioning From Other Schools

Bar chart showing percentages by role:
- Administrator (n=199): ~81%
- General education teacher (n=1,689): ~77%
- Special education teacher (n=1,105): ~73%
- Related service provider (n=440): ~78%
- Total (n=3,433): ~76%

■ For students transitioning from other schools, the IEP process incorporates adequate communication with staff from the feeder or receiving schools.
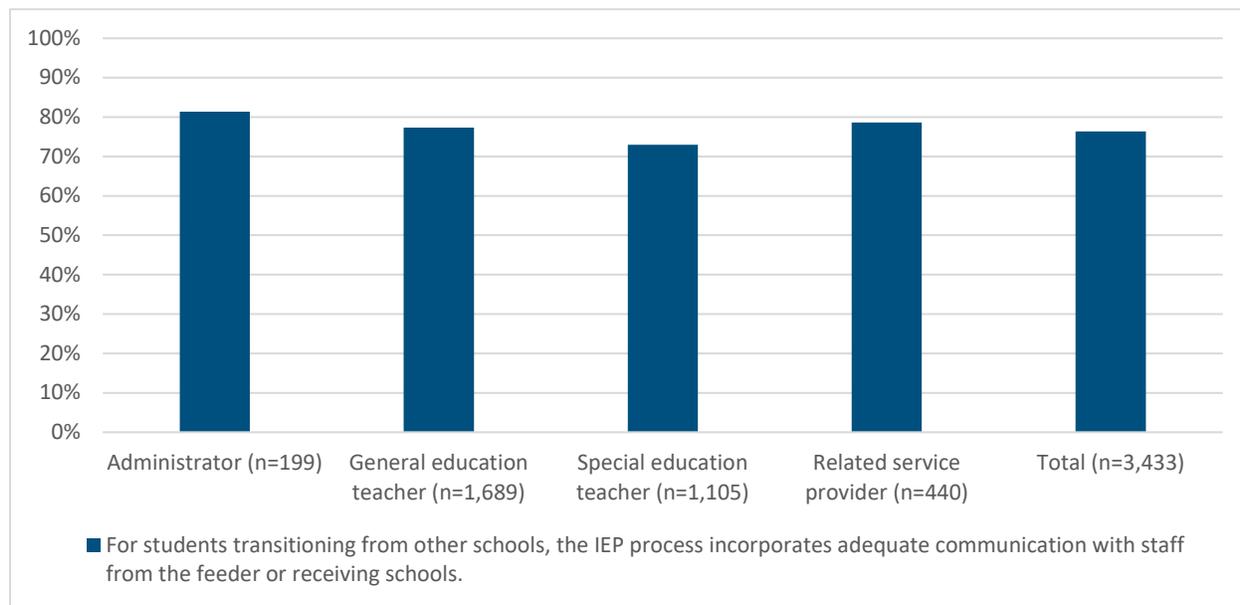
Data from the focus groups illustrate specific challenges that parents and staff may face related to transitions between grades and schools, which include a lack of published guidance to support school staff and parents for transitions between grade levels and schools. During a focus group, one parent shared a need for more information specifically geared toward parents of kids who receive special education during the transition process. The parent noted:

> I feel like, at least for me, I'm kind of going into it a little bit blind, in terms of what supports my child would need based on what the curriculum would look like for him in kindergarten. So it would definitely be nice to have a more special ed oriented sort of kindergarten orientation to give parents some sort of idea into the future of what would look like for their kids.

In a staff focus group, two FCPS special education teachers noted inconsistencies across schools related to the transition to a new school for an SWD:

> I guess, my point is the one thing is I feel like as a whole, the county discounts the importance of these early childhood transitions in these early childhood years, this is the foundation that we're building. That is going to carry through these kids for the next 12 years. If you have a horrible transition into kindergarten, that's going to impact that parent child's relations, family relationship, child relationship going forward through that whole year. And I think the emphasis needs to be how important these are, and more acceptance of parents and coming in and like it to be more welcoming and supportive than what we find in some places. Some places do a great job. Other places,

we really need to strengthen that. And I think as a whole, it'll make the county as a whole stronger if we can work on those.

Another special education teacher commented:

And I think, that's one of the problems too…is the discrepancies among the different schools. I have 12 kids transitioning this year to eight different schools and those policies are different at every school…some of them are doing kindergarten orientations or open houses, some of them are not. As a teacher, it's hard to even inform the parents as to what is available. Procedures are different at every school as to how the meeting's set up, who's to be invited. It's very challenging time.

RQ1i. To what extent do IEPs and Section 504 plans provide evidence that all identified services, accommodations, and/or goals were received by the students?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

- **1i.1.** IEP progress reports do not provide sufficiently detailed, data-based information.
- **1i.2.** Accommodations written on IEPs are implemented with higher fidelity and consistency than those written on Section 504 plans.

Finding 1i.1. IEP progress reports do not provide sufficiently detailed, data-based information. District procedures dictate that progress reports for IEP annual goals be sent to parents quarterly, on the same schedule as report cards. These progress reports include a rating scale of 1–5 to indicate progress toward each IEP goal. There is no centralized process for monitoring service hour delivery. However, whenever there is a concern or question regarding service delivery, FCPS leaders are able pull a student's schedule, service log, and related service provider notes to provide documentation of service delivery.

The rating scales used within the progress reports are subjective and not operationally defined. For example, a rating of 3 indicates, "The student has demonstrated some progress toward achieving this goal." A rating of 4 indicates, "The student is making sufficient progress toward achieving this goal within the duration of this IEP." These definitions do not include guidance on what denotes "some" versus "sufficient" progress for teachers who are completing these reports or for parents who are reviewing them quarterly.

During a parent focus group, one parent made a comment that helps illustrate the difficulty that parents experience with the progress report:

> *Everybody talks about measurable outcomes, but the lack of how the data were going to be collected, how those data were going to be presented. I specifically said, "When are you collecting data? Is it going to be a daily thing, a weekly thing, or just sort of the end of that quarter, like, oh, I need my four data points." Those are very, very different scenarios in terms of progress.*

Another parent noted a challenge with the progress report accurately reflecting services provided:

> *…Finally after hours and hours and hours…you get an IEP that you breathe a sigh of relief that, okay, we got it. Then the problem becomes that they don't implement it. And then they collect data that doesn't support that they've implemented it, but they report that they have implemented it.*

A different parent noted the lack of integration between data collected for progress reports on their child's IEP goals and their child's academic programming:

> *…They're not running the goals and the way they're doing their data collection is not appropriate and they're putting more work. I'm speaking specifically for my [middle schooler], they're putting more work on [my child] so they can collect data as opposed to integrating what needs to be done within the classroom setting. So now they're giving like extra assignments … which puts more anxiety on [my child] to complete them, just so they can collect data. As opposed to teaching [my child], more around the goals so [my child] can achieve them. It's just like a reporting mechanism at this point and that doesn't work.*

The current subjective nature of progress reports may not encourage staff to track data for the purpose of measuring goals as written in the IEP and may minimize the utility of progress reports for staff and parents. Corroborating this evidence are data from the full history review of the IEP sample. Our team explored the type of data included in triennial reevaluation reports. Data in these reports are used to document each student's progress and needs for continued special education services. Our team noted that only 20% of the reports referenced IEP progress reports or service provider reports (see Appendix Exhibit C28). So, although progress reports are produced by teachers quarterly and used to show progress on IEP goals, teachers are not documenting these data in their reevaluation reports.

Finding 1i.2. Accommodations written on IEPs are implemented with higher fidelity and consistency than those written on Section 504 plans.

In a previous section, Finding 1g.3 noted that staff and parents perceive that accommodations documented in IEPs and Section 504 plans match students' areas of need. Results from the IEP review corroborated this evidence. Based on data from the surveys, we found that 91.2% of staff and 88.2% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that accommodations written on IEPs were *provided* to students (see Appendix Exhibits D7 and E13). However, for parents of students with Section 504 plans, despite high levels of agreement about the *appropriateness* of the accommodations written into their child's 504 plan (92.9%), only 80.0% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child was *provided* with all the accommodations written on their 504 plan (see Appendix Exhibit E29). Similarly, only 78.9% agreed or strongly agreed that school staff did a good job delivering the accommodations written in their child's Section 504 plan (see Appendix Exhibit E30).

Comments made during the focus group may help to illustrate why we noted lower agreement from staff and parents related to the actual implementation of accommodations. During one focus group, a staff member commented:

> *I'll add this about the 504, and just a frustration that we experience at my school is that when we have students coming in from sixth grade, it's a seventh grade teacher, that the accommodations may be undoable for us…. There were several students who came in with the accommodation, the student must take all assessments in a quiet room, in a separate room, in a separate space…. That's just really not doable at our middle school because these are students who were not in a teamed class. They had 504s, they were in my classroom and it was just me. So I could send them in the hallway, but I didn't think that was the spirit of what was behind it. They needed maybe a quiet environment or something. And it was a challenge because the question is we had six or seven students coming in from this elementary school and how do we accommodate them and make sure that we're doing our best for the student when we just don't have the resources.*

Selecting appropriate classroom and assessment accommodations based on student needs is paramount to Section 504 plans. However, students only benefit when they have consistent access to the identified accommodations across all instructional settings.

RQ1j. To what extent is the IEP and Section 504 reevaluation process being implemented?

> **DATA SOURCES REVIEWED:** Extant data, document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups
>
> **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:**
>
> - **1j.1.** FCPS's stated processes and guidance for reevaluations meet or exceed national and state standards.
> - **1j.2.** Eligibilities consistently use multiple sources of student-level information but most lack documentation of parent input.

Finding 1j.1. FCPS's stated processes and guidance for reevaluations meet or exceed national and state standards.

Federal regulations require a reevaluation for special education to occur at least once every 3 years. Federal and state regulations dictate that eligibility determinations include a review of assessments and other evaluation materials by a team of qualified professionals and the parent(s) of the child. The team determines whether the child is, or continues to be, a child with a disability. The review of evaluation data for the purpose of determining whether a child has a disability and deciding on the educational needs of the child must

- use information from a variety of sources, including aptitude and achievement tests, parent input and teacher recommendations, and information about the child's physical condition, social or cultural background, and adaptive behavior; and

- ensure that information from all these sources is documented and carefully considered.

The FCPS website includes a Special Education Procedures webpage outlining the procedures and timelines for the reevaluation process for special education. The Procedural Support Services program and each pyramid's PSL are available to support the IEP and Section 504 reevaluation procedures. The Special Education Handbook for Parents describes the reevaluation process for parents. Reevaluations of Section 504 plans occur on a triennial schedule as well. The Section 504: Identification, Evaluation, and Reevaluation Procedures webpage describes FCPS procedures.

FCPS's compliance with triennial evaluation timelines was above 94% for school years 2016–2019 (see Exhibit 18). In 2019, FCPS had a compliance rate of nearly 92%, and in 2020, the compliance rate fell right below 88%. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted school years 2019–20 and 2020–21; initial eligibilities were prioritized, thus affecting triennial completion rates.

Exhibit 18. Compliance Rate With Triennial Evaluation Timelines, Fairfax County Public Schools, 2016–2021
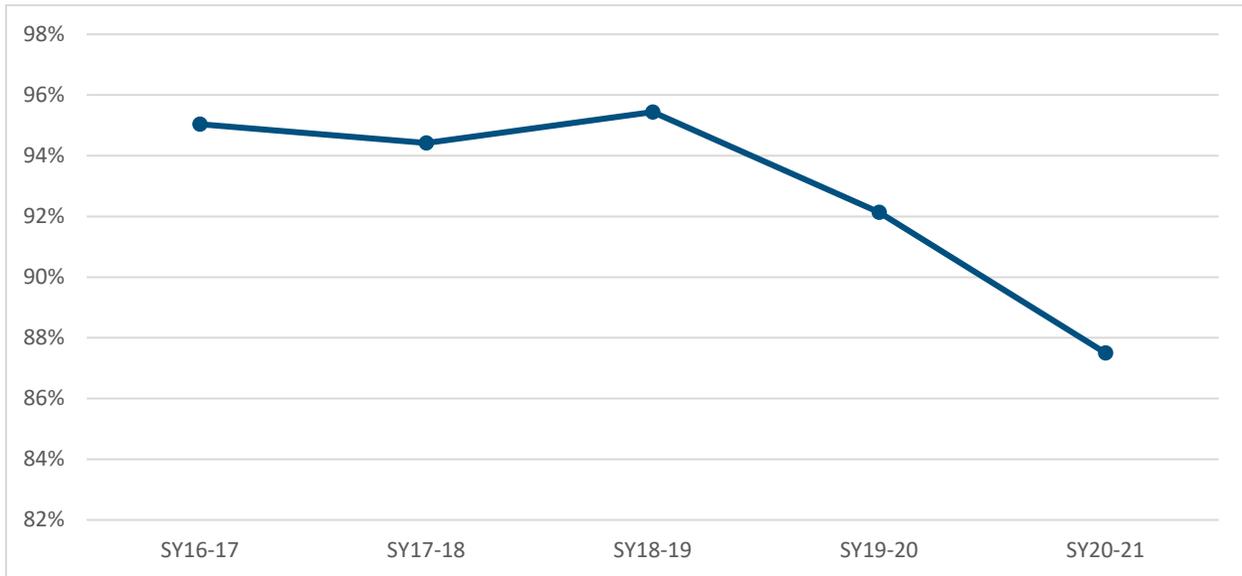
Note. SY = school year. For the 2020–21 school year, data were obtained up until December 1, 2020.

Finding 1j.2. Eligibilities consistently use multiple sources of student-level information but most lack documentation of parent input.

Federal regulations require that reevaluations occur at least every 3 years. During each reevaluation, IEP teams must consider (a) information provided by the parents of the child; (b) current classroom-based, local, or state assessments and classroom-based observations; and (c) observations by teachers and related services providers. Of the 50 full history packets we reviewed, 49 included a reevaluation report. One hundred percent included at least two sources of information in their report. Our review noted that reevaluation reports relied most heavily on observational data (65%) and teacher narratives (59%) (see Appendix Exhibit C28). Nearly half considered achievement test scores (51%) or prior educational evaluations (41%) and psychological evaluations (43%). In addition, we examined the reevaluation reports to determine the extent to which parent input was documented, as stipulated by federal regulations. We found evidence of parent input in only 20% of reports.

RQ1k. To what extent do schools implement special education services with fidelity?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups

Finding 1k.1. District-level guidance on monitoring fidelity of the implementation of special education intervention programs is minimal and inconsistent across programs.

SWDs receive specialized intervention programs as part of their services. These programs should be evidence based and implemented by staff with fidelity. The National Center on Intensive Intervention provides an overview of five elements of fidelity: (a) adherence, (b) exposure/duration, (c) quality of delivery, (d) program specificity, and (e) student engagement. Combined, these elements provide a comprehensive measure of the extent to which a specific intervention is delivered as intended. For students receiving special education interventions, there are additional considerations when a standard program needs to be adapted to meet a student's individual needs. In these circumstances, fidelity also includes an evaluation of the process by which teachers select and implement those adaptations (e.g., data-based individualization approach).

FCPS publishes lists of approved evidence-based academic and behavior interventions (see Finding 3a.2 for more information about lists of evidence-based practices [EBPs]); however, district-level guidance on monitoring fidelity of the implementation of these programs is minimal and inconsistent. For example, the EBP list for the adapted curriculum has a footnote about fidelity that reads, "Each program dictates its fidelity implementation guidelines. OSEI [Office of Special Education Instruction] works with teachers to ensure fidelity to the program within the service delivery model they are using with each student. If you have any questions regarding the amount of time necessary to receive the benefits of program use, please contact OSEI." In contrast, the EBP lists for high-incidence disabilities has a note about fidelity that reads, "Fidelity of implementation of programs is determined by IEP teams and is based on individual student needs." This information shows inconsistencies in who is responsible for measuring fidelity (e.g., individual teachers versus IEP teams) and what materials to use (e.g., program materials or those based on individual student needs).

During one focus group with administrators, one staff member's comment illustrates a lack of a consistent process for gathering fidelity data from staff on the implementation of interventions in buildings. The staff member noted:

> …[W]e have to start out from a position of trust. We hire professionals. Our expectations are very high. I think there's a lot of peer pressure for new hires by their new teams. And

the other part, the other side of that is that we don't do a very good job. At least I don't, with monitoring how teachers are delivering those programs. I mean, if kids are making progress and if there's general joy in the area, then I don't bother them too much. It's like that old phrase where 20% of the people take up 80% of your time. And we really only zone in on the ones where we know there's a problem. And those are the ones that get our attention. But I think we rely on trust and professionalism and our teachers are great. They rock it. For the most part, they really do rock what they're doing.

In the same focus group, another administrator commented:

…[W]e relied a lot on the student progress monitoring data and if students seemed to be doing well, I operate on the assumption that things in the program are going well, which is not always the case. I get that that's not the case, which is why we have to look at, are they doing well across the board? But I think, for me, if there's discrepancies, "Oh, the kid's doing great in this evidence-based program, but not doing well on any other type of reading assessment." And they're showing no growth. Then we start like digging deeper about, well, what's going on with this program and those types of things.

1k.2. Special education services are implemented inconsistently across the district.

In the staff and parent surveys, we asked stakeholders to report their perceptions on the fidelity of special education in FCPS. The survey did not provide a definition of fidelity, so respondents may have varying levels of knowledge related to what is fidelity. Results revealed that parents and staff have similar perceptions of fidelity; however, there were differences in the extent to which parents and staff believed that special education services were being implemented with fidelity based on school level and disability type.

In all, 79.8% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that FCPS schools implement special education services with fidelity (see Appendix Exhibit E21). Parents of students at the early childhood level had the highest levels of agreement (90.9%). Agreement levels were lower for parents of students at the elementary (81.2%), middle (78.7%), and high school (76.3%) levels. There also were differences in agreement based on parents of students across disability types. For example, agreement about special education fidelity was between 80% and 90% for parents of students with sensory disabilities, speech and language impairments, and developmental delays. Agreement was between 70% and 80% for parents of students with autism spectrum disorders, specific learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, intellectual disabilities, and low-incidence disabilities. Agreement was 67.4% for parents of students with other health impairments (see Exhibit 19).

Exhibit 19. Percentage of Parents of Students With an IEP Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey That FCPS Schools Implement Services for SWDs With Fidelity

Legend: FCPS schools implement services for students with disabilities with fidelity.

Categories (x-axis): Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (n=2,423); Specific Learning Disability (SLD) (n=2,313); Speech or Language Impairment (SI) (n=1,589); Developmental Delay (DD) (n=1,187); Other Health Impairment (OHI) (n=1,043); Emotional Disturbance (ED) (n=476); Intellectual Disability (ID) (n=416); Sensory Disabilities (n=197); Low-Incidence Disabilities (n=97); I don't know (n=1,233); Total (n=10,974)
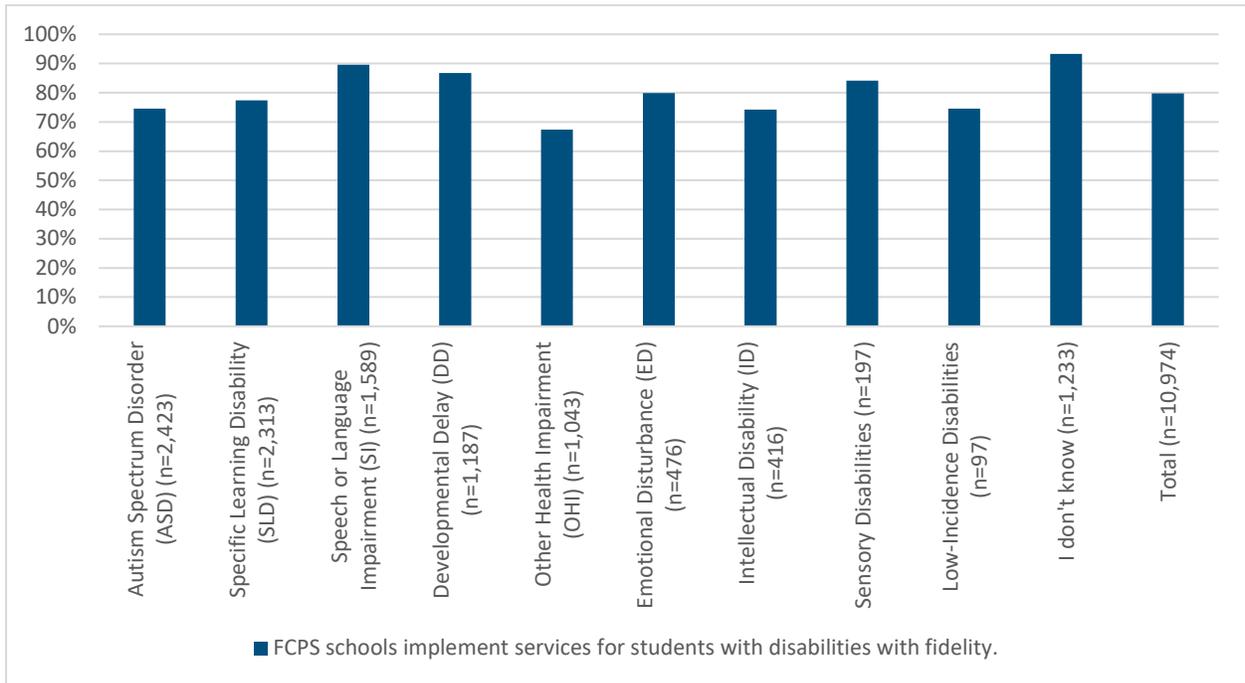
Similar to the overall results of the parent survey, 81.5% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that FCPS schools implement special education services with fidelity (see Appendix Exhibit D20). Special education teachers (78.1%) and general education teachers (79.7%) had lower levels of agreement about fidelity than administrators (83.7%) and related services providers (87.4%) (see Exhibit 20). When disaggregating by school levels, staff at the early childhood (84.4%) and high school (84.8%) levels had higher levels of agreement that FCPS schools implement special education with fidelity than staff at the elementary (79.7%) and middle school (80.3%) levels.

Exhibit 20. Percentage of Staff Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey That FCPS Schools Implement Services for SWDs With Fidelity

Legend: ■ FCPS schools implement services for students with disabilities with fidelity.
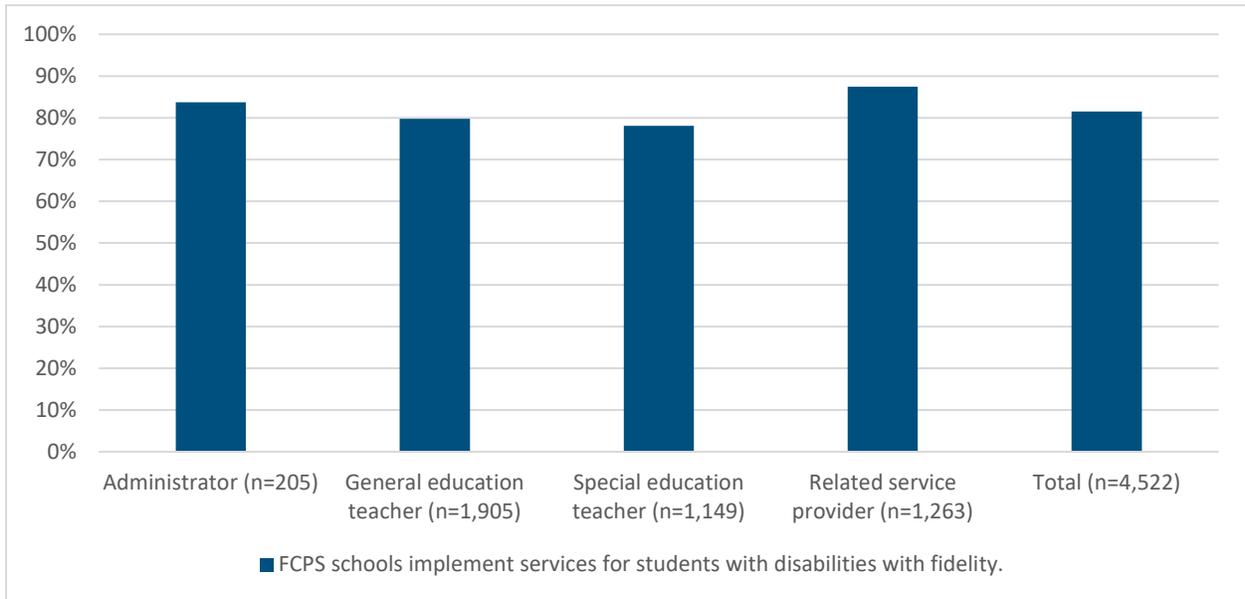
Goal 2: Human Capital Resources

The purpose of this set of RQs is to evaluate the adequacy of human capital resources assigned to students receiving special education services, the qualifications of the staff who provide services to these students, and the level of professional development supports received by staff. This section presents findings and supporting evidence for five RQs.

RQ2a. How effective is FCPS in recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified and effective staff servicing SWDs, including teachers, paraprofessionals such as instructional assistants, public health training assistants and public health attendants, and school administrators?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

- **2a.1.** FCPS experienced approximately 90% average annual retention of special education personnel from 2015 to 2019.
- **2a.2.** FCPS engages in special education-specific recruitment and retention initiatives.
- **2a.3.** Publicly available information about special education career pathways lacks important details needed by prospective employees.

Finding 2a.1. FCPS experienced approximately 90% average annual retention of special education personnel from 2015 to 2019.

From 2015 to 2019, FCPS experienced 89.74% average annual retention of special education personnel, defined as special education teachers, special education instructional assistants, public health training assistants, and public health attendants. During the same time period, average annual retention was 90.96% for other instructional personnel, defined as teachers and instructional assistants excluding all special education personnel. Special education personnel had comparable rates of retention with other instructional personnel across all years in this time period (see Exhibit 21).

Exhibit 21. Average Annual Retention of FCPS Personnel, 2015–19

School Year	Instructional Personnel Retention[a]	Special Education Personnel Retention
2015–16	90.11%	88.71%
2016–17	91.10%	90.39%
2017–18	91.12%	89.83%
2018–19	91.52%	90.04%

[a] Excludes special education personnel.

Although data show that actual special education personnel retention rates in FCPS are comparable with general education personnel, staff perception of the effectiveness of FCPS's recruitment and retention efforts for staff serving SWDs is notably lower (see Appendix Exhibit D13). On the staff survey, 72.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that FCPS is effective at recruiting high-quality personnel to serve SWDs. Comparatively, 56.5% of staff respondents agreed or strongly agreed that FCPS is effective at retaining those personnel. Staff responses also were analyzed by staff role (see Exhibit 22). All staff across roles perceived FCPS as being better able to recruit high-quality personnel for SWDs than retain personnel. Related services providers had the highest agreement that FCPS effectively recruits high-quality personnel (80.6%) and that they retain those personnel (68.3%). Administrators, general education teachers, and special education teachers had lower levels of agreement that FCPS is effective at recruiting and retaining personnel for SWDs.

Exhibit 22. Percentage of Staff Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey That FCPS Effectively Recruits and Retains Personnel Who Serve SWDs
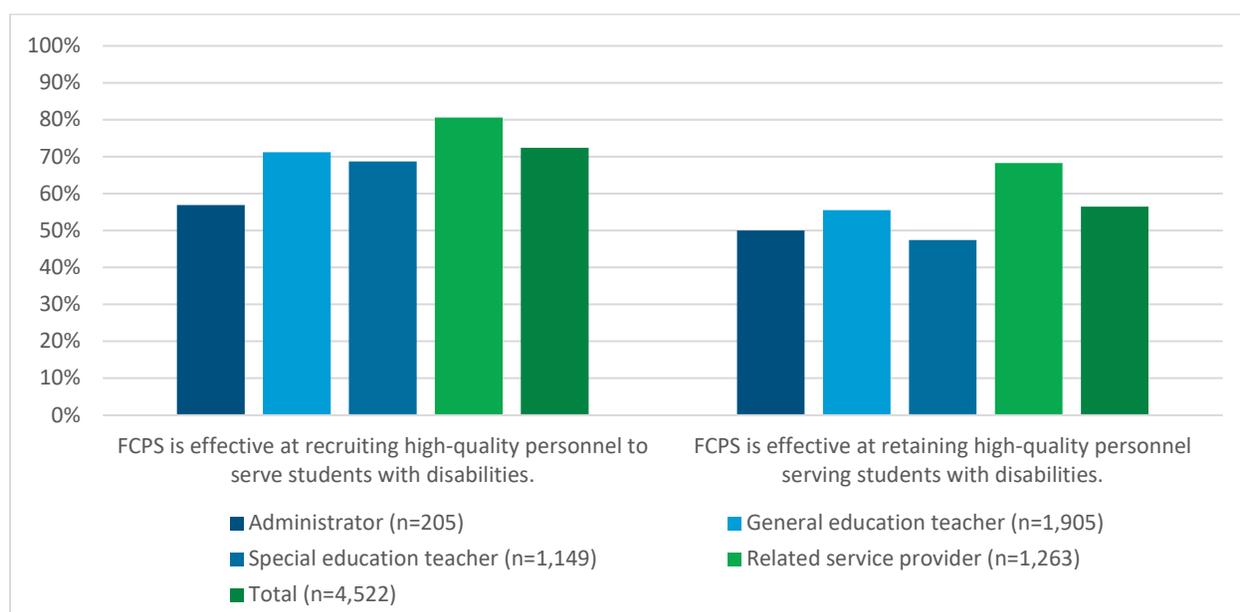
Finding 2a.2. FCPS engages in special education-specific recruitment and retention initiatives.
FCPS's Department of Human Resources (HR) supports recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts for the division. This support is provided through four offices within the department: the Office of Talent Acquisition & Management (TAM), the Office of Human Resource Business Services, the Office of Benefit Services, and the Office of Equity and Employee Relations. Collectively, these offices offer a range of programs and supports that recruit and retain high-quality staff.

TAM is responsible for overseeing FCPS's recruitment initiatives. These initiatives include conducting in-state and out-of-state recruitment events and forging partnerships with teacher preparation programs to strengthen the pipeline for hiring novice teachers into FCPS. Beginning in 2017, HR, in collaboration with DSS, expanded recruitment event participation to events that historically produce the quantity and caliber of special education teacher candidates that FCPS seeks. The team gradually added events in 2017 and beyond, including at the University of Kansas, University of Texas, Texas State University, University of Texas at Austin, University of Kentucky, University of Florida, Florida State University, Bowling Green University, and Vanderbilt University. These events were in addition to other notably numerous recruitment events at Virginia-based universities and career fairs that support FCPS's goal of growing their pool of high-quality special educators (note that the COVID-19 pandemic did impact FCPS's ability to travel and maintain a recruitment presence at some colleges and universities). In addition, DSS staff take part in a number of preservice teacher trainings and information sessions with partner colleges and universities.

There also have been a number of recent efforts to expand special education-specific recruitment initiatives. For example, the Professional Growth and Career Development (PGCD) team, in collaboration with HR and DSS, has a launched a successful program using Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds that supports a "grow-your-own" pipeline into special education. As another example, as part of FCPS's efforts to bolster recruitment efforts leading up to the 2022–23 school year, FCPS launched a series of special education teaching career information sessions. After a successful first series of sessions in 2022, FCPS plans to continue the sessions in support of year-round efforts to recruit special education teachers. In addition, beginning in 2017, the HR team partnered with OCCR to develop a targeted advertisement campaign aimed at growing the special education teacher applicant pool. This targeted recruitment effort has continued and expanded, including in May 2022 when a targeted advertisement was run in 25 states. Finally, all special education jobs are posted on the job boards of the National Association of Special Education Teachers, EdWeek, Teachers to Teachers, EDJOIN, Diversity in ED, Indeed, Glassdoor, and Handshake, which are platforms that source to more than 700 colleges and universities. As part of the Teachers to Teachers posting, all FCPS jobs are routinely scraped and posted on the Teach Virginia website.

Most of FCPS's major retention strategies apply to all types of teachers, and, as such, are not tailored specifically for special education personnel. For example, the FCPS website includes information about salary and benefits and employee recognition programs; both factors are important for teacher retention. One notable retention initiative that is differentiated for special education teachers is the Great Beginnings teacher induction program, which is designed to support new FCPS teachers and increase retention through quality mentoring practices, professional teaching standards, and classroom-based teacher learning. The Great Beginnings program is available to all new instructional staff in FCPS. Beginning in the 2018–19 school year, the program implemented a more focused, differentiated approach for new special education teachers. DSS staff have worked collaboratively with the Great Beginnings program to differentiate the foundational curriculum to address the unique roles and responsibilities of special education teachers.

Finding 2a.3. Publicly available information about special education career pathways lacks important details needed by prospective employees.

Prospective employees seeking information about special education careers in FCPS can find information about open special education positions on FCPS's Special Education Career Opportunities webpage. This page lists available positions by school level (early childhood, elementary, and middle/high) and links to their job descriptions. At the bottom of the webpage is a link to the Special Education Teacher Career Interest webpage, which provides information about career pathways for non-licensed individuals who want to pursue a career in special education. Career pathway information on this page is organized in three sections: (a) Do I need a current teaching license?, (b) How do I continue my education?, and (c) What are the different types of special education teaching jobs? As of the publication time of this report (September 2022), it appears that this webpage is still under construction and is missing important information that would benefit prospective special education teachers as they navigate what requirements they would need to meet to obtain a teaching license. For example, for those individuals who have not taken an introduction to special education course but have a bachelor's degree, the instructions under next steps have incomplete or missing information about options for taking an online introductory special education course and opportunities for tuition reimbursement. In addition, there is language about submitting a form to be contacted about FCPS-funded opportunities to take this course, but there is no form on the webpage. Furthermore, the section of the webpage providing an overview of the different types of special education teaching jobs does not mention instructional assistants nor other types of positions, such as public health attendants and public health training assistants.

RQ2b. How do FCPS's caseloads (number of students) and workloads (intensity of services per student) compare with similarly situated divisions and those in nearby proximity to FCPS?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **2b.1.** FCPS recently released guidance to promote school-level compliance with state regulations governing special education caseload sizes.
- **2b.2.** Staff identify workload and compensation as interrelated factors with substantial influence on FCPS's ability to recruit, hire, and retain special education personnel, especially when competing with neighboring school districts.

Finding 2b.1. FCPS recently released guidance to promote school-level compliance with state regulations governing special education caseload sizes.

In August 2022, FCPS published an internal guidance document on special education caseloads and class size maximums. The purpose of the guidance document is to ensure that FCPS's special education caseload and class size maximums are within limits set by the state of Virginia ([Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia](#)). Caseload maximum is defined as the maximum number of students for which the teacher serves as the primary case manager. Class size maximum is defined as the maximum number of students with disabilities that can be in a special education class (i.e., class in a special education setting). For a discussion of special education class sizes, please see Finding 2c.1.

Data on caseload sizes for neighboring school divisions were not available; however, Virginia regulations set forth clear standards for caseload sizes ([Caseload 8VAC20-81-340](#)). The maximum number of students assigned to a special education teacher's caseload depends on three factors: (1) the primary disability of the students, (2) the amount of special education services they receive, and (3) the presence of a paraprofessional 100% of the time. The amount of special education services that a student receives is classified as Level I services (i.e., provision of special education services for less than 50% of the instructional day, less than 15 hours per week) or Level II services (i.e., provision of special education services for 50% or more of the instructional day, 15 or more hours per week). If a special education teacher's caseload consists of students with varying disabilities and/or levels of services, then maximum caseload size is determined using a building average, which is calculated using a points system. The building average must equal or be less than 20 to be in compliance with state regulations. If the teacher's caseload consists of students receiving similar levels of services and the students are

clustered in particular disability categories, then maximum caseload sizes are determined for individual case managers. Case managers for students receiving Level I services only may have up to 24 students on their caseload. If the teacher is the case manager for students receiving Level II services, they may have up to eight or 10 students on their caseload depending on their disability category.

The creation of this guidance document and its dissemination to school-based staff is an important step toward ensuring school-level compliance with state regulations governing special education caseload sizes. It also is an important step toward increasing transparency about the caseload assignment process. Caseload assignments are made at the school level, usually by a school administrator, special education department chair, or school counselor. Lack of transparency in the caseload assignment process was a recurring theme in the staff survey comments and focus groups. By increasing awareness and understanding of the formulas used to calculate caseload maximums, this guidance document can help address the concerns of teachers who perceive the caseload assignment process to be unfair or inequitable. The document affirms the importance of an equitable, transparent process for assigning caseloads, especially in schools that use a building average to determine caseload sizes, stating that "While each case manager is not required to be under 20 points individually, we want to be mindful to have equitable caseloads across the building." As school-based staff become familiar with the guidance document over the course of the 2022–23 school year, it may be productive to investigate changes in caseload sizes along with changes in teacher and school leader perceptions of the caseload assignment process.

Finding 2b.2. Staff identify workload and compensation as interrelated factors with substantial influence on FCPS's ability to recruit, hire, and retain special education personnel, especially when competing with neighboring school districts.

In January 2019, the FCPS Office of Research and Strategic Improvement conducted research into FCPS's teacher turnover trends. This research, requested by the FCPS School Board's Human Resources Advisory Committee, used data from the 2016–17 school year to identify teacher characteristics, school demographics, and school climate factors significantly associated with teacher turnover at the district level. It is important to note that among school demographic factors, the percentage of SWDs in a school did not predict teacher turnover at a level of significance. However, certain school climate factors may provide more useful insight into the root causes underlying teacher turnover. At the elementary school level, "overall engagement" and "positive work environment" were school climate factors significantly associated with lower teacher turnover (no school climate factors were significantly associated with teacher turnover at the middle/high school level). Overall engagement was defined using the overall engagement scale from the FCPS Employee Engagement Survey. The survey also included data on six drivers of engagement: shared values, leadership, communications,

feedback and recognition, work environment, and career growth and training opportunities. When analyzed individually, positive work environment—including factors such as staff independence, mutual respect, fairness, and morale—was the only driver significantly related to lower teacher turnover. The findings suggest that "when looking for places where FCPS might intervene in support of lower levels of turnover, the significant association of overall engagement and the work environment driver to turnover and transfer at the elementary level open the possibility of improving in these areas."

Qualitative information gathered from the staff survey and staff focus groups substantiates and contextualizes the finding about the importance of a positive work environment with a focus on the perceptions of FCPS special education personnel. Workload manageability is an important aspect of a positive working environment for special education teachers. Challenges with managing workload—including both instructional and noninstructional responsibilities—was a theme raised repeatedly by special education teachers and other personnel in the staff survey comments and focus groups.

Four major themes emerged from the staff survey and focus group data about workload challenges. The first theme deals with challenges managing instructional responsibilities. In addition to providing direct instruction hours to SWDs, special education teachers' instructional responsibilities include lesson planning, preparing accessible instructional materials, and progress monitoring. Although the FCPS student-to-special education teacher ratio is lower than the state average (see Finding 2c.1), many staff members reported feeling unable to provide SWDs with sufficient individualized instructional attention in classroom settings. One focus group member shared the following:

> Workload is an issue. We don't get to use planning time to write IEPs, so we have to do that after school hours. We're asked to cover at times of day when service hours need to be covered. More things are added to our plates and less is taken off; for example, lunch duty.

The second theme deals with special education teachers' noninstructional responsibilities. Examples of these duties include developing IEPs, preparing for and facilitating IEP meetings, consulting with teachers and related services providers, communicating with families, documenting IEP progress, and other tasks required for compliance with local, state, and federal special education requirements. Open-ended responses on the staff survey revealed that many staff feel overwhelmed by case management and paperwork duties. Staff survey responses cited overwhelming stress and burnout trying to balance instructional and noninstructional responsibilities as key reasons why teachers leave the district. Staff survey and focus group participants alike expressed concern that the overwhelming amount of noninstructional duties they are responsible for makes it difficult to attend to their instructional

duties, even going as far as to report that they are concerned about their ability to meet hours on students' IEPs. One focus group respondent explained:

> *I have like five jobs. I put them all out one day and I was like, oh, I actually have five different jobs here. So, I was talking to my admin. I was like, "I'm really having a hard time getting everything done." My caseload has grown. I'm up to 12 kids and I'm a local screening chair. And I schedule all the MTSS [multi-tiered system of supports] meetings, too. And I've got all this, and my lead teacher…so, I asked her, I said, "I'm having trouble." She looks at me and just says, "Well, you need to learn to prioritize." I felt like saying, "What? Do I prioritize the kids? Or the paperwork? Something's going to give. Do I give on the timelines? Or do I give on the support?" At this point in the year, those are my two choices. We can't give up on the kids. So, then we're staying up until midnight or longer trying to get our work done. And everybody's like, why do you work so much? I can't not see the children, and then there's timelines hanging over my head.*

The third theme that staff expressed is that their workloads impact their ability to seek out support and training opportunities. As many of the district professional development opportunities are self-paced and asynchronous, staff must find time to attend the courses consistently. Teachers noted that most also are optional. Instructional staff with large workloads find it difficult to be available for these training courses. One focus group participant noted:

> *Our workload makes attending PD [professional development] very difficult. And many are optional, which would be great if we had time. There is a lot available, but there's not much support available that helps pick what you need to do or what would be most beneficial. It would be nice to have coaching available or time to engage in more targeted training.*

The final theme is that workload responsibilities prevent special education teachers from having time to collaborate with their colleagues. Teachers noted that due to attending meetings across multiple grade levels as well as attending IEP meetings with "unpredictable timeframes," they regularly miss collaborative planning time with their general education teacher colleagues.

Data to compare the intensity of the workloads of FCPS's special education teachers with the workloads of special education teachers in other school districts is not available. Unlike caseload sizes or class sizes, there are no state or federal mechanisms for collecting or reporting data on workloads (note that Finding 2b.1 discusses caseload sizes and Finding 2c.1 discusses class sizes). Although caseload and class sizes can serve as proxy measures for intensity of workload, these measures do not include many of the factors that special education personnel specifically identify as integral to workload manageability, such as the amount of time available

to complete IEP paperwork, handle case management duties, collaborate with colleagues, and so forth. Collecting data on these factors would require gathering perception data on workload intensity from teachers in other districts to compare with FCPS, which is not feasible within the context of an internal program review.

Given that this information is not available, an alternative way to consider FCPS's competitiveness with neighboring divisions is to compare special education teacher compensation across neighboring districts. If we assume that special education teachers generally have the same types of responsibilities regardless of their district of employment, an alternative way to consider workload would be to compare salaries. Exhibit 23 shows the projected 2022–23 salary for a teacher with zero years of experience and a bachelor's degree across similarly situated divisions.

Exhibit 23. Teacher Salaries in Neighboring School Districts: 2022–23

District	Salary	Contract Length
Fairfax County, Virginia	$53,313	195 days
Prince William County, Virginia	$53,570	195 days
Arlington, Virginia	$53,280	200 days
Loudoun County, Virginia	$55,889	197 days
Montgomery County, Maryland	$52,286	200 days[a]

[a] Montgomery County, Maryland, provided 10 months as their contract length. An estimate of 200 days was included in the exhibit to make the contract lengths easily comparable across districts.

Although these salary figures are for the upcoming school year and thus reflect the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the job market, it is important to note that the competitiveness of FCPS's pay with neighboring districts has been a concern for some time. FCPS has been aware of the heightened workload issue for special education teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and addressed it with a 2-year (2021–22 and 2022–23 school years) salary increase using ESSER funds. The funding was specifically intended to compensate special education teachers for the time they would need to handle IEPs. Therefore, extended-day pay (7% salary enhancement) for special education teachers was approved by the Fairfax County School Board, making their starting salary $57,045 during the 2021–22 and 2022–23 school years.

Although Exhibit 23 presents FCPS salary information as similar to its neighboring divisions, and therefore competitive, FCPS staff noted that compensation may not be as competitive for more specific positions. Salary and benefits were discussed at length in staff survey comments and focus groups as factors that greatly influence teachers' decisions to stay with or leave FCPS. Focus group responses reveal that staff feel as though FCPS may not be able to offer

competitive salaries for some specialized positions, such as related services providers, impacting the ability to recruit and retain high-quality personnel. One administrator noted:

> We struggle with staffing RSPs [related services providers] and go for long periods with holes there. Our salaries for RSPs just don't compete with outside opportunities they can get.

Furthermore, despite the temporary salary enhancement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, FCPS' compensation structure (salary alone) may not incentivize a candidate to come to FCPS instead of other districts, assuming there are similar workload challenges across these divisions.

RQ2c. How efficiently and consistently does FCPS allocate staffing to meet the needs of its population of SWDs?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

- **2c.1.** FCPS has maintained a consistently lower student-to-teacher ratio for special education than the Virginia state average in recent years.
- **2c.2.** Staff perceive inefficiencies in the staffing allocation process.

Finding 2c.1. FCPS has maintained a consistently lower student-to-teacher ratio for special education than the Virginia state average in recent years.

The average number of students served per special education teacher in FCPS has remained consistently lower than the Virginia state average over the last several years. Extant data provided by FCPS were used to calculate the ratio of SWDs to special education staff. The student-to-staff ratio was first calculated at the school level and then averaged for each school year. Data from the state of Virginia for 2016–17 and 2018–19 show that the average ratio of SWDs to special education teachers was 15. In FCPS, this ratio has remained steady at 10 students per special education teacher since 2016–17, and it decreased to nine students in 2020–21 (see Appendix Exhibit B12). This ratio is substantially lower than the state average. The ratio of SWDs to instructional assistants in FCPS remained relatively consistent from 2016–17 to 2020–21 at approximately 10 students per instructional assistant (see Appendix Exhibit B13). Appendix Exhibit B14 shows student-to-staff ratios broken down by region and staff role for 2016–21, including the ratios for public health attendants, public health training assistants, and different types of related services providers.

As discussed in Finding 2b.1, in August 2022, FCPS recently published an internal guidance document on special education caseload and class size maximums based on Virginia state regulations. This guidance has implications for student-to-teacher ratios specifically for classes in special education settings (e.g., self-contained classes). Class size maximum is defined as the maximum number of students with disabilities that can be in a special education class (i.e., class in a special education setting) (Class Size 8VAC20-81-40). At the K–12 level, Virginia regulations allow for up to 14 students with disabilities per class if the students are of similar achievement levels and only one subject and level are taught. For classes where students have varying achievement levels, the maximum class size is 10 students. Surpassing the state requirements, FCPS recommends a maximum class size of six to eight students for enhanced autism classrooms and a maximum of eight students for intellectual disabilities severe classrooms, along with paraprofessional support.

2c.2. Staff perceive inefficiencies in the staffing allocation process.

Although the previous finding demonstrates that FCPS's student-to teacher ratio for special education compares favorably with the Virginia state average, there is a perception among FCPS staff that staff are not allocated efficiently to meet the needs of SWDs (see Appendix Exhibit D13). On the staff survey, 63.6% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that special education and related services staff are allocated across the district in an efficient manner. Comparatively, 74.6% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that special education and related services staff are allocated across their school in an efficient manner. The school staffing survey item with the lowest score was "When a school needs new staff to support students with disabilities, FCPS is able to quickly respond to and fill the staff need," with 45.5% of staff agreeing or strongly agreeing. When disaggregated by staff role, related services providers had the highest agreement for all three survey questions (see Exhibit 24): 73.7% agreed or strongly that staff were allocated across the district efficiently, 80.6% agreed or strongly agreed that staff were allocated across their school efficiently, and 57.6% agreed or strongly agreed that staffing needs were filled quickly by FCPS. The trend was similar for all staff roles in that there was higher agreement that staff were allocated efficiently across their schools than across the district. The survey item about FCPS being able to quickly fill staffing needs had the lowest levels of agreement across all staff roles, ranging from roughly 26% to 57%. Notably, only 26.1% of administrators agreed that FCPS was able to quickly respond to fill staffing needs to support SWDs.

Exhibit 24. Percentage of Staff Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey About School Staffing
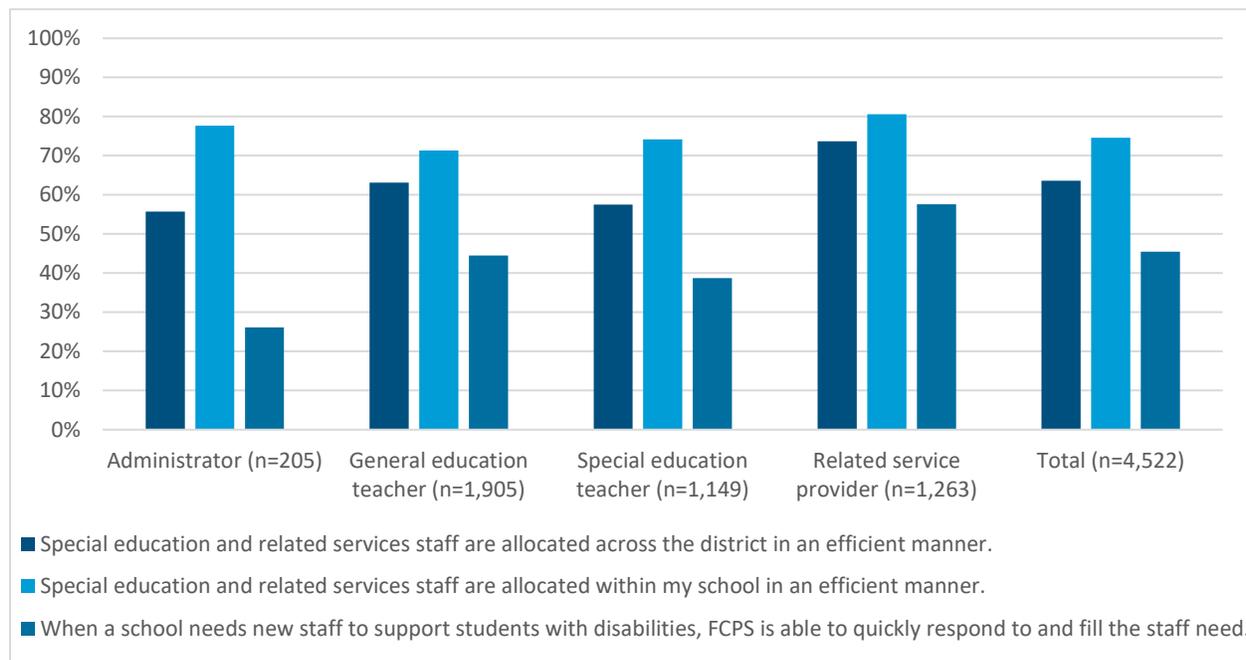
Echoing the perception from the staff survey that FCPS has limited ability to respond quickly to fill positions, staff focus group participants noted that the staffing allocation timeline and process limits schools' flexibility to address midyear caseload and personnel changes. New students added to caseloads midyear can significantly impact instructional schedules and service delivery. Focus group participants noted that the staffing formula does not allow for staffing changes to account for additional SWDs identified throughout the year or changes in students' service hours. As such, schools must constantly rearrange their special education staff to make do with what they have. One administrator said:

> The numbers used in staffing allocation are taken so early that it is difficult to mirror what schools look like the following year. So as the year goes on there is not enough staff to meet needs and everyone is being pulled in every direction.

In addition, staffing challenges in FCPS are reflected in staff survey comments. The following are comments from the staff survey that illustrate the perception among staff that more special education personnel are needed to provide SWDs with a personalized instructional experience.

- *We're following the same service model and staffing allocations, and all of that has been the same, but our student needs have shifted, and we need more support.*

- *The staffing formulas are antiquated and don't take into account student needs which can be more intensive than what comes across from a label or service hours.*

RQ2d. To what extent does the professional development FCPS offers adequately prepare and continually support school professionals, including teachers, paraprofessionals such as instructional assistants, public health training assistants and public health attendants, and school administrators, to provide consistent services to SWDs?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

- **2d.1.** FCPS policy documents demonstrate a breadth and depth of professional development offerings.
- **2d.2.** Novice teachers lack preparation to adequately support SWDs and need tailored professional development opportunities.
- **2d.3.** Professional development opportunities related to educating SWDs are not sufficiently aligned with staff roles and identified areas of need.

Finding 2d.1. FCPS policy documents demonstrate a breadth and depth of professional development offerings.

FCPS offers a broad range of professional development opportunities for staff who support SWDs. These opportunities are led by the Professional Growth and Career Development (PGCD) team within FCPS's Office of Professional Learning and Family Engagement. This team oversees the management of systemwide professional development, leadership training, and the FCPS instructional coaching program. The content of professional development related to special education is created by subject matter experts in DSS and ISD, and the role of PGCD is to offer collaboration and support.

Professional development opportunities include a library of online courses and resources available through the MyPDE platform, training and support from the Academy Course Program, and the Great Beginnings program for new instructional staff. The FCPS Academy Course Program provides a wide array of professional learning to contracted instructional staff, enhances knowledge and skills aligned with division priorities, and supports the comprehensive professional development system serving to develop and retain a premier workforce in FCPS. The Great Beginnings program is a comprehensive program with a unified mission of supporting new teachers through quality mentoring practices; professional teaching standards; classroom-based teacher learning, commitment, and support; and ongoing program assessment.

Throughout the 2019–21 school years, FCPS reported offering 18 distinct synchronous professional development opportunities related to special education topics. In addition, 28 asynchronous professional development opportunities were offered, including training on specific intervention programs (e.g., Vmath, Read Well, Lexia Core5 Reading). Early child special education professional development opportunities were offered on content-based instructional strategies (e.g., one-to-one principle and number sequencing) as well as numerous opportunities for enhancing learning opportunities related to instruction, social skills, and play in the virtual environment. A total of 76.6% of staff surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that professional development opportunities provided on topics related to SWDs were of high quality (see Appendix Exhibit D11).

Finding 2d.2. Novice teachers lack preparation to adequately support SWDs and need tailored professional development opportunities.

An analysis of extant data, documents, the staff survey, and focus group responses showed that novice teacher support is an area of concern for both general education and special education teachers. In focus groups, staff noted concerns about the qualifications of FCPS novice special education teachers, especially those who are not fully licensed, and their preparation to work with SWDs. In the 2020–21 school year, FCPS employed approximately 500 provisionally licensed special education teachers and 2,774 fully licensed special education teachers (see Exhibit 25). Data from the VDOE School Quality Profiles show that in the 2018–19 school year, 2.3% of special education teachers in FCPS were provisionally licensed, which was higher than the Virginia state average (1.9%) and the rates for the neighboring Arlington (1.0%), Loudoun (2.1%), and Prince William (2.0%) school districts. Some of the comments suggested that FCPS should adopt a more stringent process for hiring new special education teachers with the qualifications for working with SWDs.

Exhibit 25. Number of Fully Licensed and Provisionally Licensed Special Education Teachers, Fairfax County Public Schools, 2016–2021

Year	Fully licensed	Emergency (provisionally) licensed
2016–17	2,629	466
2017–18	2,595	539
2018–19	2,669	502
2019–20	2,756	447
2020–21	2,774	500

As noted in Finding 2a.2, several recent changes have been made to increase the support available to novice special education teachers. For example, FCPS offers the Great Beginnings program to new instructional staff. Significant changes were made to the Great Beginnings program for special education teachers beginning in the 2018–19 school year. Specifically, the program now offers cohorts for new special education teachers by teaching category (e.g., early childhood special education, high-incidence, low-incidence, and related services cohorts). In addition, through the ESSER-funded "grow-your-own" program, mentoring and coaching will be provided to special education teachers in this initiative during fiscal years 2023 and 2024. PGCD also offers tailored professional development for mentors of new special education teachers.

In all, 63.4% of staff survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that teachers new to the profession or new to teaching SWDs received additional, specialized supports related to teaching SWDs (see Appendix Exhibit D11). General education teachers were the least likely to agree or strongly that new teachers received specialized supports related to teaching SWDs (45.5%) and the least likely to agree or strongly agree that professional development on topics related to SWDs was of high quality (67.6%). Staff noted that many novice general education teachers lack basic knowledge of instructional strategies for SWDs and would benefit from additional professional development on working with SWDs.

Finding 2d.3. Professional development opportunities related to educating SWDs are not sufficiently aligned with staff roles and identified areas of need.

Although regular training and activities are offered to instructional staff on various topics, data suggest that professional development opportunities are not sufficiently aligned with identified staff roles or areas of need. For example, on the staff survey, 74.7% of staff agreed that they received adequate opportunities for professional development related to their work with SWDs (see Appendix Exhibit D11). A total of 61.3% of staff agreed or strongly that their professional development plan was individualized based on their specific needs related to students. Rates of agreement were the lowest among general education teachers (see Exhibit 26): 62.5% of general educators agreed or strongly agreed that they received adequate opportunities for professional development related to the needs of SWDs, and only 45.1% of general education teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their professional development plan was individualized based on their specific needs related to working with SWDs.
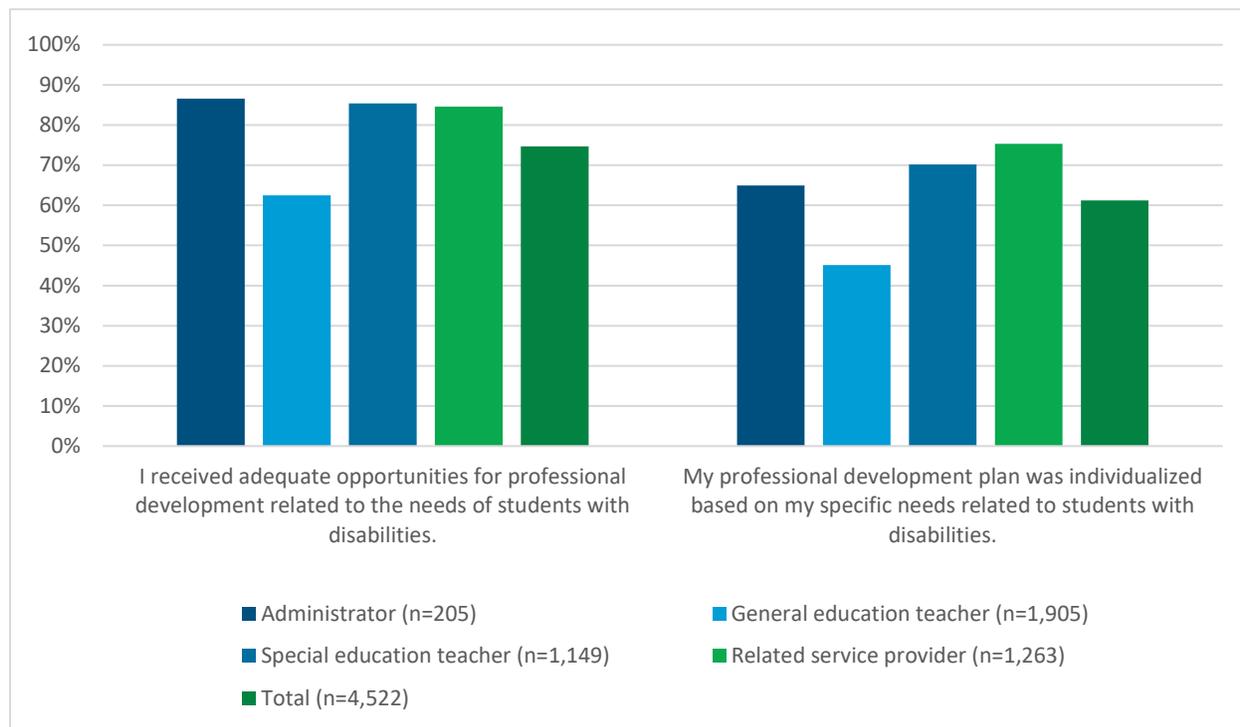
Special education teachers also referred to gaps in their professional development support. For example, 43.2% of special education teachers surveyed noted that they did not receive formal professional development on developing and contributing to IEPs. Focus group participants shared their perception that the district does not provide or require enough of these opportunities in the areas of greatest need. For instance, staff noted in focus groups that although FCPS consistently offers professional development opportunities, there are relatively fewer professional development offerings on the highest-need topics, such as instructional strategies for students performing multiple years below grade level or behavior management. One special education teacher focus group participant said:

> There is a lot of PD available, but I'm not sure if there's enough of what we need. We would benefit from someone that helps pick what we need to do or what would be most beneficial. It would be nice to have non-evaluative coaching available as well.

School administrators also need targeted supports for working with SWDs. On the staff survey, 86.6% of school administrator respondents agreed that they receive adequate opportunities for professional development related to the needs of SWDs (see Exhibit 27). However, a smaller percentage (64.9%) of administrators agreed that the professional development provided was individualized considering their specific needs related to SWDs. Focus group data supported

this finding, with one participant noting a need for administrators to have more specialized training on SWDs:

> Many of our building administrators do not have experience or a background in special education. So, they are not informed or knowledgeable enough to make decisions or support the teachers. They need more specific and thoughtful PD. Everyone involved needs to understand.

Another theme drawn from focus group data was that instructional assistants need training in best practices and instructional strategies to support SWDs. Staff noted that instructional assistants typically have no time for collaborative planning, coaching, or professional development in their daily schedules. Several staff focus group participants noted that instructional assistants are regularly pulled in to substitute for teachers or float to other classrooms, impacting their ability to meet the needs of SWDs. A special education teacher focus group participant elaborated on how instructional assistants' ever-expanding duties take away from time they could be devoting to professional development activities:

> There is some training available, but time is an issue. IAs [Instructional assistants] are usually not available. Over the years, required training has gotten less and less. Now, [it feels like] "choose your own adventure," so some work on PDs that don't apply to the skills they need to develop. Sometimes our teachers and IAs are even required to join a specific training but it doesn't relate to their needs or program.

RQ2e. How effective is the support from central office personnel, such as DSS and ISD, in providing leadership, guidance, and resources to staff servicing SWDs?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **2e.1.** FCPS has strong central office infrastructure to provide leadership, guidance, and resources about special education instruction and service provision.
- **2e.2.** Procedural support liaisons are an effective link between DSS and school-based staff to communicate procedural expectations and division policies.

Finding 2e.1. FCPS has strong central office infrastructure to provide leadership, guidance, and resources about special education instruction and service provision.

FCPS DSS provides a network of support staff to help schools meet the needs of SWDs and their families. DSS has four offices: the Office of Intervention and Prevention Services, the Office of

Operations and Strategic Planning, the Office of Special Education Procedural Support, and the Office of Special Education Instruction.

All DSS offices play a direct role in providing support for special education service provision. For example, the Office of Intervention and Prevention Services is responsible for psychology services, social work services, and student safety and wellness. This office ensures that related services are available to every student and provides a network of support to staff, students, and families. It also is responsible for equity, student conduct, and social and emotional learning. The Office of Operations and Strategic Planning ensures that DSS programs and special education students are adequately supported in their fiscal, data, and information requirements. Other services include data management, financial management, web development, school health services, and student registration. The Office of Special Education Procedural Support provides direct assistance to school-based staff engaged in Section 504 plan and IEP development and case management. This office also supports interpretation of and compliance with federal, state, and local regulations pertaining to special education (e.g., IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act) as well as inclusive practices and other identified school needs. This office coordinates PSLs across the district (see Finding 2e.2 for more information about PSLs).

The Office of Special Education Instruction (OSEI) is the primary DSS office, providing leadership, guidance, and resources about special education instruction. OSEI directs and supports the development, implementation, operation, and evaluation of PK–12 education programs, curricula, and services for SWDs. OSEI plans and provides special education-related professional development for staff and administrators, and offers instructional leadership and supervision, coordination, and evaluation of early childhood, elementary, secondary, career, and transition programs and services. Of staff survey respondents who received support from OSEI, 70.2% found the support moderately helpful or very helpful for matters related to SWDs.

Outside of DSS, the Instructional Services Department (ISD) houses several offices that provide important supports for special education instruction and service provision. For example, the Office of PreK–12 Curriculum and Instruction provides instructional leadership and support for schools across all subject areas as well as instructional technology and library services. The Office of Counseling and College and Career Readiness offers important supports related to career and transition services. The Office of ESOL services provides instructional leadership and supports for ELs, including those dually identified as SWDs.

Within the Department of School Improvement and Supports, the Office of School Support (OSS) provides instructional leadership at the regional level. OSS staff are divided into teams according to the five FCPS regions and provide direct support to staff in schools, with a focus on

equity and closing achievement gaps for all students. Finally, the Office of the Ombudsman maintains a liaison for special education-related issues.

Finding 2e.2. Procedural support liaisons are an effective link between DSS and school-based staff to communicate procedural expectations and division policies.

As described in finding 2e.1, the Office of Special Education Procedural Support serves as a resource for staff, families, and students in the implementation of and compliance with federal, state, and local policies related to SWDs. A PSL is assigned to each school pyramid. These individuals engage with families and staff to provide information on policies, procedures, practices, and services for SWDs.

Although PSLs may provide support to staff and families, they typically work with special education department chairs and school-based administrators. Therefore, it is not expected that every staff member and parent will have a reason or need to interact with a PSL, although the option remains available if they do need support. Of stakeholders who did receive support from the Office of Special Education Procedural Support, 76.2% of staff, 77.3% of parents of students with an IEP, and 79.9% of parents of students with a Section 504 plan found the support moderately helpful or very helpful for matters related to SWDs (see Appendix Exhibits D14, E18, and E31).

Focus group participants offered illustrative examples of how PSLs provide helpful and consistent guidance and support to instructional staff about compliance, case management, and IEP development. A school administrator noted:

> Our procedural support liaisons have been a really integral part in bridging the policies that are coming from the federal and the state level to Fairfax County and then taking those best practices that we know and aligning them together so that we are maximizing our time and meeting the student needs. Between the Office of School Support and our PSL, they've been a huge help for us in collaboration of how to best meet the needs of our students while staying under the guidance and purview of the policies in law.

Another focus group participant noted that PSLs are a readily available resource:

> We typically are in contact with our PSL when there's something procedurally, procedural support that we need help with. If there's a disconnect between the staff and the parent on services or what might be appropriate in the classroom, the PSL can be a useful mediator. They're typically involved when it's something that can't be handled at the school level or if it's a question of special education law and policies.

Staff focus group participants reported that PSLs are one of the main facilitators when inconsistencies occur in communication across the district (see Finding 4a.2 for further discussion of communication between central office and school staff). One staff focus group participant stated:

> One of the things that I do rely heavily on, and again, this probably is where I didn't fully explain this, but our PSLs, our procedural liaisons, ours is set up to meet with me and the other department chair. And just to make sure that we are on the same page, that we have any questions, she's become like a surrogate mentor for us, just to make sure that we have somewhere to just bounce ideas off of, because we don't have any institutional knowledge here.

Staff in the focus groups reported leaning on PSLs to provide support when these inconsistencies occur, such as when resources are located in different places or when needing to understand the difference between nonnegotiable federal guidance and optional guidance, and how to implement this guidance in schools. PSLs are described by staff focus group participants as collaborative partners who can provide support and training and can engage in problem solving as needed. They help facilitate knowledge and understanding among staff and provide support in navigating special education policies and procedures. A staff focus group participant noted, "They've been a huge help for us in collaboration of how to best meet the needs of our students while staying under the purview of the policies in law."

Goal 3: Evidence-Based Practices

The purpose of this set of RQs is to analyze the degree to which the implementation of special education services at FCPS schools aligns with evidence-based practices. This section presents findings and associated evidence for three RQs.

RQ3a. To what extent do the instructional delivery models demonstrate evidence-based practices?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups, classroom observations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
- **3a.1.** Use of explicit instruction varies across classrooms.
- **3a.2.** Access to evidence-based practices for SWDs varies.

Finding 3a.1. Use of explicit instruction varies across classrooms.

Explicit instruction is an important instructional strategy for teaching SWDs and other learners who require intensive supports. Archer and Hughes (2011) define explicit instruction as:

> *"a structured, systematic...direct teaching approach that includes both instructional design and delivery procedures. Explicit instruction is characterized by a series of supports or scaffolds, whereby students are guided through the learning process...." (p. 1)*

During explicit instruction, the teacher clearly states to the student the learning goals and rationale for learning the new skill or strategy, provides clear explanations and demonstrations of the learning goals, and systematically withdraws support as students move toward independent performance. Based on research studies relating to effective teaching practices, explicit instruction is known as a robust evidence-based practice for SWDs because it incorporates multiple underlying principles of effective instruction: active student engagement, promoting high levels of success, increasing content coverage, instructional grouping, scaffolding instruction, and addressing different forms of knowledge. Decades of research across writing, math, and reading instruction speaks to the effectiveness of explicit instruction, particularly for students with severe and persistent learning challenges (McLeskey et al., 2017).

AIR staff used the RESET rubric (Johnson et al., 2017) to observe explicit instruction in 150 classrooms, which represented a range of instructional delivery models across 50 schools (see the classroom observations portion of the methodology section of this report for more

information about the RESET rubric and sampling procedures). The RESET rubric consists of 25 items grouped into seven components of explicit instruction. Exhibit 27 lists the seven components, the corresponding rubric items, and their descriptions.

Exhibit 27. RESET Rubric Components

Component	Items	Description
1. Identifying and communicating goals	1–3	Specific and observable objectives or goals must be named to identify a purpose for instruction. Objectives or goals are critical skills and must be clearly communicated to students.
2. Alignment	4–6	Instructional activities (e.g., strategies, examples, practice activities) should be consistent with each other and the objective or goal of the lesson to maintain instructional intensity and reduce cognitive load.
3. Teaching procedures	7–13	Materials presented to students must include explanations or demonstrations by the teacher and be understood by the students. Teachers should focus on developing one idea, strategy, skill, or procedure at a time.
4. Guided practice	14–15	Appropriate levels of support must be provided to students in extensive practice of activities related to the lesson objective or goal.
5. Pacing	16–18	Teachers must plan and be responsive to student needs to provide instruction at an appropriate pace.
6. Engagement	19–21	Teachers must encourage and maintain student involvement and engagement in the lesson.
7. Monitoring and feedback	22–25	Student learning must be monitored, and their needs must be addressed. Teachers must provide appropriate feedback.

The RESET rubric rating scale ranges from a score of 1 (not implemented) to 3 (implemented). A score of 2 means the item is partially implemented. The partially implemented category is further divided to allow for assigning a 2- (score=1.5) for items with a low level of partial implementation or a 2+ (score=2.5) for items that are almost but not quite fully implemented.

General summary. Across the 150 observed classrooms, average scores for each of the seven components ranged between 2.17 and 2.77 (see Exhibit 28). The component with the lowest average score (2.17) was identifying and communicating goals. The component with the highest average score was alignment (2.77).

Exhibit 28. Average RESET Scores by Component: All Schools
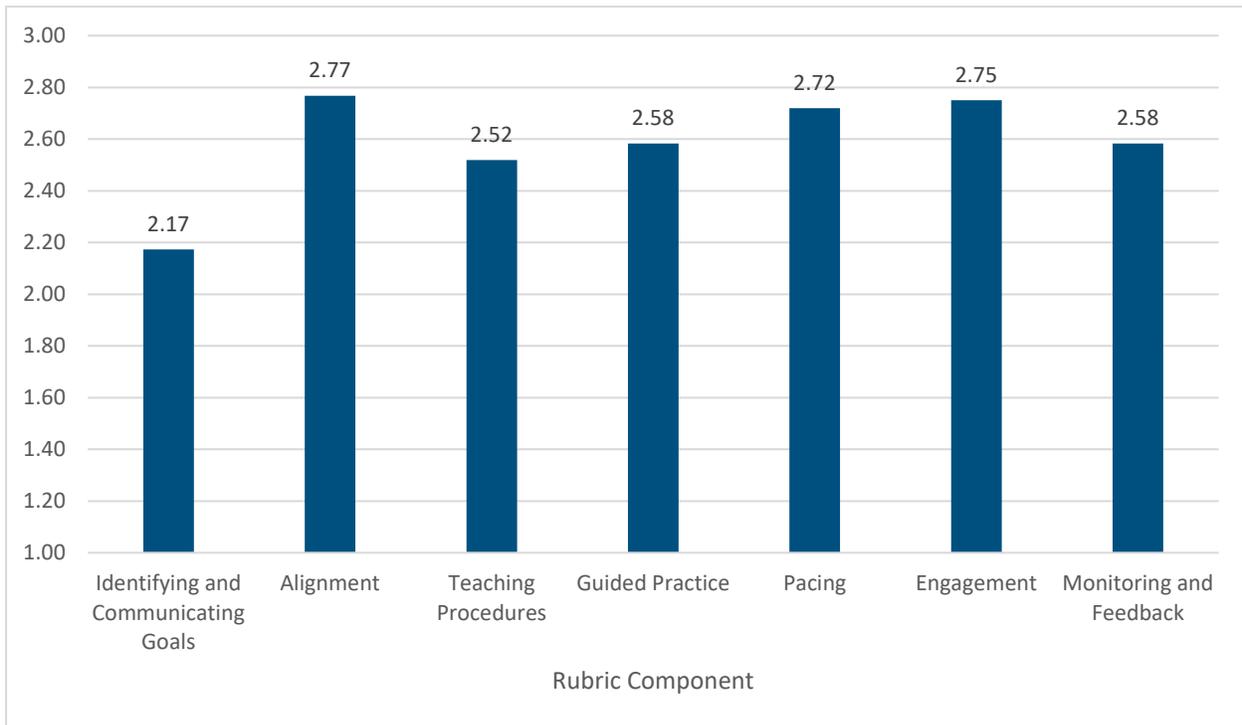
At the item level, the lowest scored item was item 3 (the teacher clearly explains the relevance of the stated goal to students; 1.74). The highest scored items were item 4 (instruction is completely aligned to the stated or implied goal; 2.79) and item 21 (the teacher monitors students to ensure they remain engaged; 2.79). See Appendix Exhibit F1 for average item scores across all schools, and see Appendix Exhibits F2–F8 for these item scores and descriptions broken down by component.

Analysis by region. AIR used random yet representative sampling to select 50 schools in which to conduct classroom observations (see methodology section for details about sampling procedures). Not including three specialized school types (career centers, alternative learning centers, and public day schools) in the sample, the remaining 45 schools were distributed evenly across the five regions. Schools in Region 4 consistently scored higher than schools in other regions, with average scores ranging from 2.36 to 2.9 (see Exhibit 29). In all regions, variation by component mirrored the pattern for FCPS overall. The component with the lowest scores was identifying and communicating goals, with average scores ranging from 1.8 to 2.36. The components with the highest scores across regions were alignment (average scores ranging from 2.64 to 2.9) and engagement (average scores ranging from 2.65 to 2.83).

Exhibit 29. Average RESET Component Scores by Region
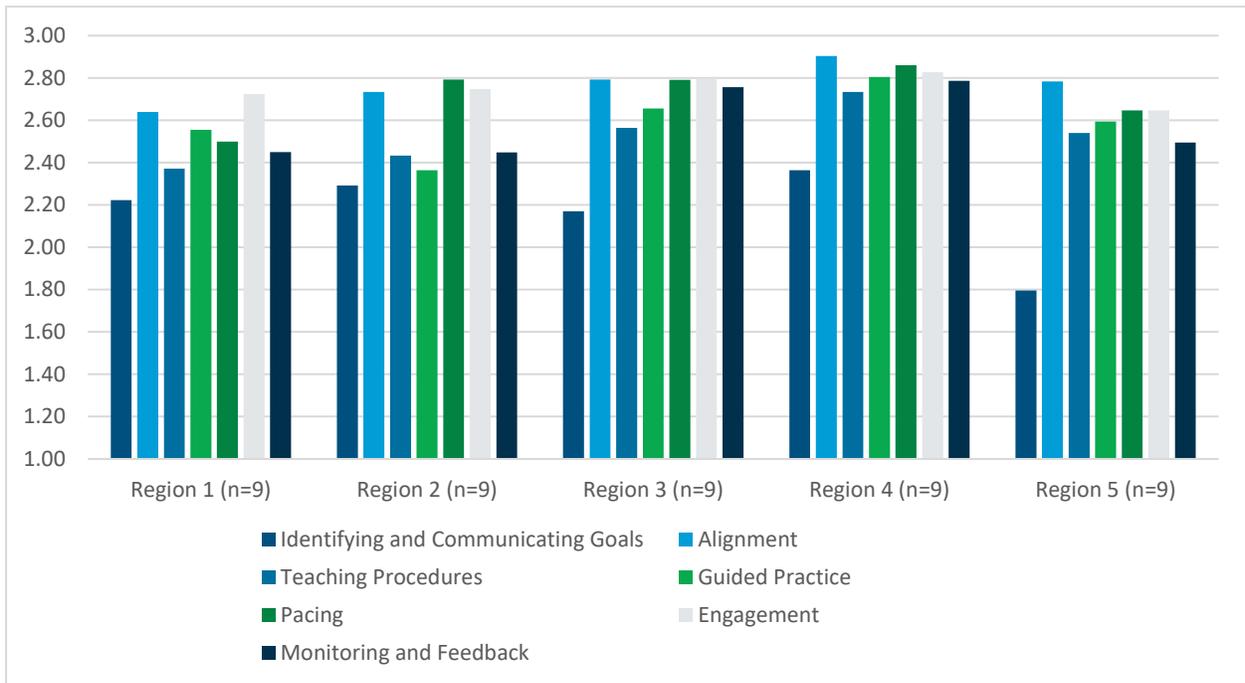
Analysis by school type. The sample of 50 schools that were randomly selected for classroom observations included six different school types: 25 elementary schools, 10 middle schools, 10 high schools, three public day schools, one career center, and one alternative learning center (see Exhibit 30).[4]

Exhibit 30. Average RESET Scores by School Type

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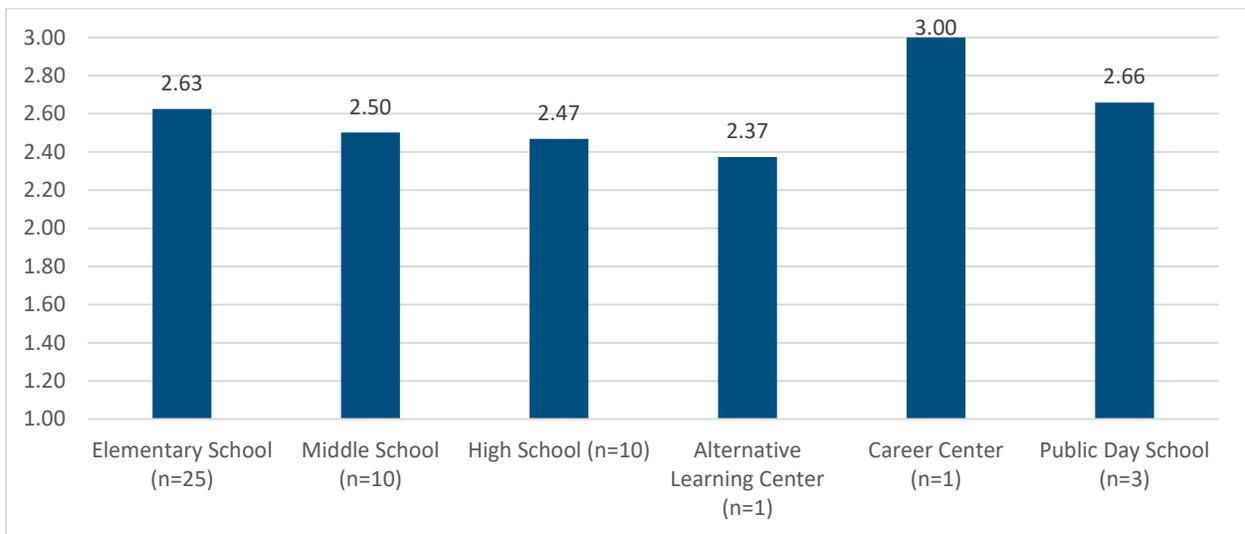
[4] AIR also conducted observations in a range of early childhood classrooms. Disaggregated analysis of early childhood classroom observations are presented in the next section on analysis by classroom type.

The career center had the highest average score among school types (3.00), followed by public day schools (2.66). The alternative learning center had the lowest average score (2.37). Please note that for these three school types *n* sizes were small, with only one to three schools observed. Elementary schools had a higher average score (2.63) than middle (2.50) and high (2.47) schools.

Although average scores differed by school type, there were similarities in areas of strength and relative weakness, mirroring patterns for the district overall (see Exhibit 31). Areas of strength across school type include alignment, pacing, and engagement. At the elementary level, the alignment component (2.81) and the engagement component (2.82) were the highest. At the middle school level, the highest component also was alignment (2.72). The highest scored components for high schools were engagement (2.74), pacing (2.70), and alignment (2.70). For the alternative learning center, the highest scored component was engagement (2.67), and for the three public day schools, the highest scored component was pacing (2.90). For all school types (other than the career center, which scored 3.0 for all components), the lowest scored component was identifying and communicating goals. We also examined individual item scores across school types (see Appendix Exhibits F9–F14).

Exhibit 31. Average RESET Component Scores by School Type
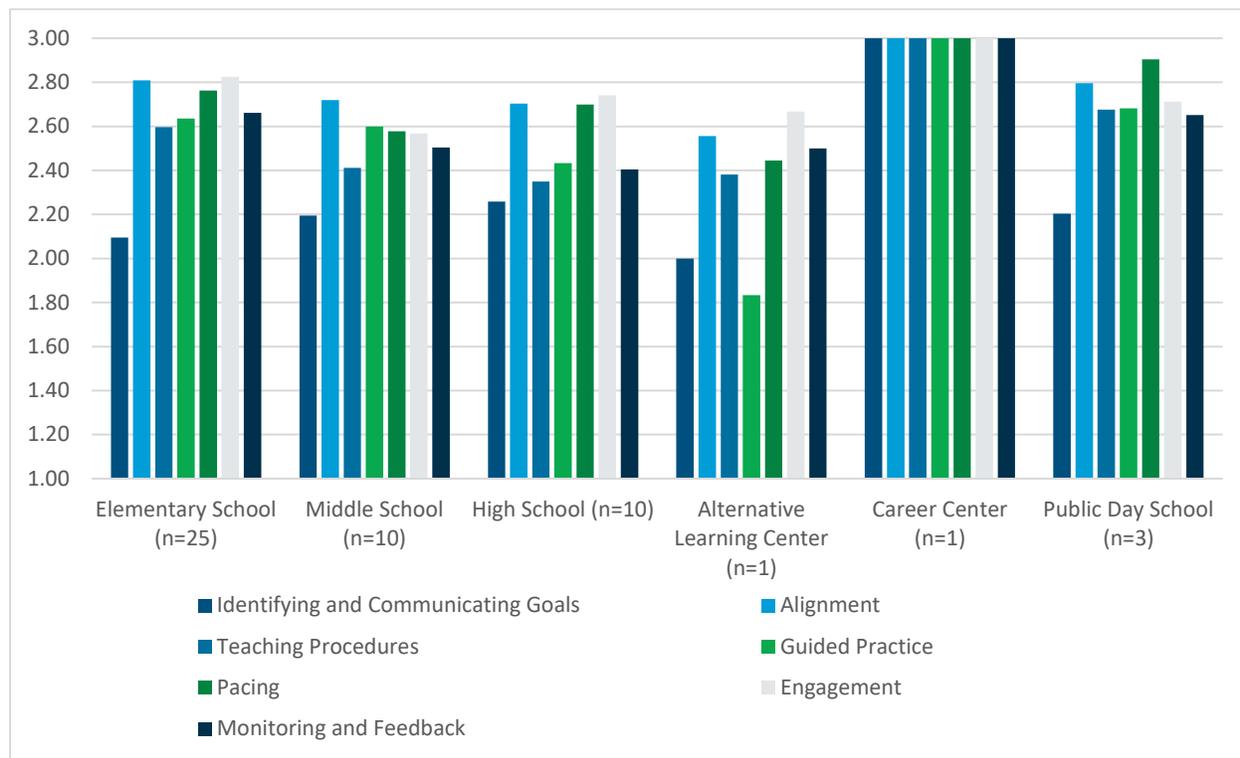
Analysis by classroom type. Once 50 schools were selected for the sample, AIR conducted classroom-level sampling to select three classrooms for observation per school. The goal of

classroom-level sampling was to observe a range of instruction across different settings, including specialized instruction delivered in the general education setting (i.e., inclusion) and specialized instruction delivered in more restrictive settings (i.e., resource, self-contained). AIR also was interested in observing instruction aligned with particular specialized programs. Programs of interest were enhanced autism (AUT), intellectual disabilities (ID), intellectual disabilities severe (IDS), comprehensive services site (CSS), early childhood special education (EC), preschool autism class (PAC), visual impairment (VI), hearing impairment (HI), and secondary transition employment program (STEP). Sampling across settings and specialized programs allowed AIR to observe both Category A services for students accessing the general curriculum as well as Category B services for students accessing the adapted curriculum.

RESET scores varied by classroom type (see Exhibit 32). IDS classrooms received the lowest average score of 2.34. The VI classroom and career/transition classrooms received the highest average scores of 2.95 and 2.95, respectively. However, only a small number of classrooms were observed for these classroom types (*n*=3 for IDS, *n*=1 for VI, and *n*=5 for career/transition). Although there is variation in average scores by classroom type, there also are similarities. For example, the AUT and PAC programs scored 2.71 and 2.73, respectively. Similarly scored were resource and self-contained classrooms (2.60 and 2.59, respectively), and STEP and career/transition classrooms (2.92 and 2.95, respectively). It is important to note that all classroom types scored, on average, above 2.00, meaning rubric components were more than "partially implemented."

Exhibit 32. Average RESET Scores by Classroom Type
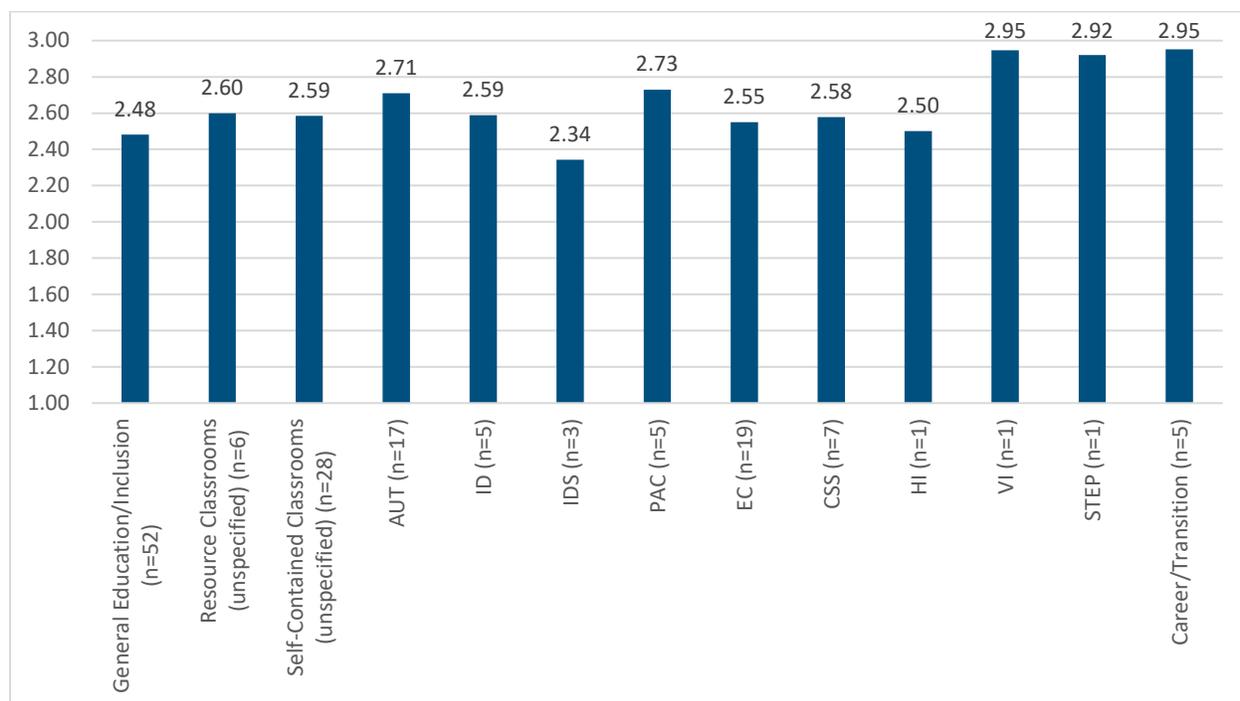
Exhibit 33 compares average RESET component scores for general education/inclusion and unspecified self-contained classrooms.[5] General education classrooms (*n*=52) and self-contained classrooms (*n*=28) were of particular interest because together they make up more than half of all classrooms observed and allow us to compare less restrictive and more restrictive instructional settings. Self-contained classrooms (2.6) scored slightly higher than general education classrooms (2.5) overall. At the component level, self-contained classrooms scored slightly higher than general education classrooms in all but one component. General education classrooms (2.19) scored nearly equally but slightly higher than self-contained classrooms (2.17) on the identifying and communicating goals component. At the item level, item 3 (the teacher clearly explains the relevance of the stated goal to students) was the lowest scoring item for both general education classrooms (1.72) and self-contained classrooms (1.69). However, the highest scoring item between these classroom types differed. General education classrooms scored highest on item 5 (all of the examples or materials selected are aligned to the stated or implied goal; 2.75), whereas self-contained classrooms scored highest on item 17 (the teacher allows adequate time for students to think or respond throughout the lesson; 2.87). Appendix Exhibit F15 shows average RESET scores by item for observed general education classrooms, and Appendix Exhibit F16 shows scores for self-contained classrooms.

Exhibit 33. Average RESET Component Scores for General Education and Self-Contained Classrooms

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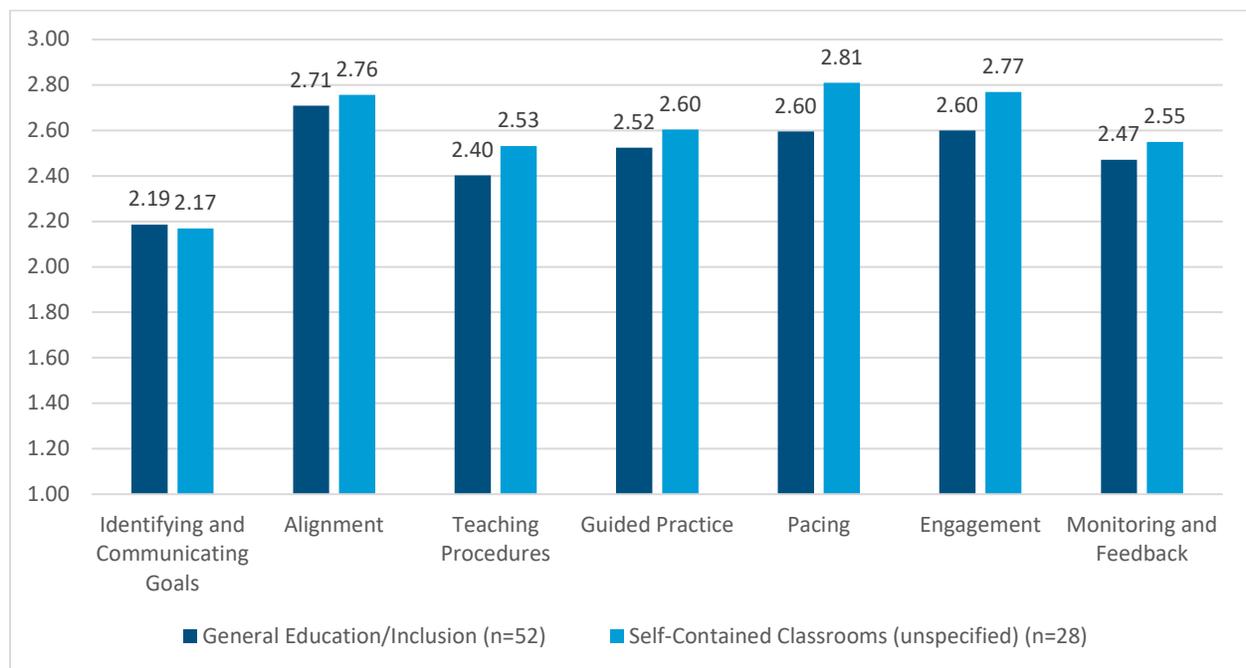
[5] Unspecified self-contained classrooms means self-contained classrooms that were independent of self-contained classrooms observed for the nine specialized programs of interest (AUT, ID, IDS, CSS, EC, PAC, VI, HI, and STEP).

Finding 3a.2. Access to evidence-based practices for SWDs varies.

Data from the document review, focus groups, and the staff survey indicate that FCPS supports and encourages the use of evidence-based intervention programs. FCPS is currently in the process of shifting to exclusively using evidence-based practices (EBPs).

As part of our document review, we analyzed FCPS-provided lists of EBPs, also called EBP matrices. FCPS publishes lists of approved EBPs that are organized by level/population (e.g., adapted curriculum, high-incidence) and content area (e.g., mathematics, literacy). These lists are published by various departments (e.g., Office of Special Education Instruction) and are updated regularly. Each list shares the name of the program, the targeted students (e.g., students in Grades 1–5, students in Grades 6–12 with ID), and a description of the program (e.g., a comprehensive math program designed to teach students to compute, solve problems, and think mathematically; intensive instruction that connects skills to "big idea" concepts; lessons that incorporate oral and written responses).

The format and details of each EBP list or matrix varies. For example, the literacy matrices provide details on the specific reading skills covered in each program. The high-incidence literacy EBP matrix includes programs in the following categories: decoding, fluency, reading comprehension, comprehensive programs (covering phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension), and writing programs. The adapted curriculum literacy EBP matrix shows alignment across the following literacy skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing. For the mathematics EBP matrices, there is limited information about skills covered in programs on the adapted curriculum math EBP matrix and virtually no information about math skills covered in programs on the high-incidence math EBP list.

In addition to target skills, all EBP matrices reference research-based practices found across programs (e.g., systematic, explicit instruction, modeling, guided practice, positive reinforcement). The number of programs varies by list, with literacy options being more expansive than math. For example, the adapted curriculum math EBP list includes two program options for elementary students, four options for middle school students, and five options for high school students. The adapted curriculum literacy EBP list is more expansive, with seven programs for elementary students, nine programs for middle school students, and seven for high schoolers. FCPS does not have a published EBP list for behavior programs, such as academic lists. DSS's approach to behavior interventions draws from applied behavior analysis (ABA) and its associated EBPs.

During the shift to exclusively using EBPs, staff reported engaging in practices to determine which programs meet the needs of their students. However, the availability of interventions for

students with certain needs varies, and stakeholders report that accessing and implementing these programs can be challenging. In focus groups, staff shared that FCPS prioritizes evidence-based intervention programs by disseminating an approved list of such interventions and promoting procedures for "data digging," a process described by focus group participants as looking for evidence to support the effectiveness of the intervention or practice. However, comments from the focus group offer illustrative examples of barriers that staff have faced when attempting to access interventions that meet the needs of their specific students. For example, barriers that exist for some staff are that (a) the approved list of EBPs does not include enough interventions to meet all student needs, (b) there are not enough staff (especially trained staff) to implement interventions, or (c) they do not have access to the intervention due to resource constraints. One staff member commented that the availability of intervention materials varies by school or teacher type, noting that special education teachers do not always have access to evidence-based curricula needed for their students.

> *The first one that comes to mind is [the] adapted curriculum...but they don't have to supply it. We're supposed to teach it. We're supposed to teach an evidence-based curriculum, but they don't send it down to us, and we don't get the money.... So right now, my kids are super low.... We're building ridiculous stuff out of our own money when they're recommending stuff that we couldn't possibly do.*

Another staff member commented about the difficulty obtaining EBPs.

> *...[W]hen I went through all the motions, did the data digging, gave the placement tests, all that, came up with what programs [interventions] my students needed, and then I was told in October by the curriculum office, "We do not have enough materials to loan out to your schools. So, you don't get them, but we still expect you to do the program. So, your school needs to buy them."*

This participant went on to explain that by the time her school ordered the intervention, it was March and much of the school year had passed. Although the teacher wanted to have students participate in the intervention and be prepared to implement it, "the materials just weren't there."

Another staff member commented on the varied training opportunities for staff to be trained on the programs on the EBP list.

> *It depends on the program. There are some programs where they've developed synchronous trainings. There're other programs where you have to do [an] asynchronous training.*

In a different focus group, a staff member remarked that it also is challenging getting instructional assistants trained so they can support implementation.

> *Part of the challenge in getting IAs trained is that trainings are not held regularly, and they fill up very quickly. This makes implementation difficult because only staff who have been trained should be implementing the intervention to ensure fidelity.*

Finally, another staff member expressed frustration that sometimes a child could benefit from a specific program but because it was not on the list, they could not provide it.

> *[The] biggest challenge for me is for... My population is deaf and hard of hearing students. It's a very small group of students throughout the county, but getting appropriate reading programs... There's all kinds of different programs that have been approved [for] reading, but they don't apply for deaf and hard of hearing. They require you to wear headphones or special equipment, and it doesn't really apply to my programs. And they don't think about how to accommodate that, so we're left with approved curriculum.*

Staff survey data provide additional support for the finding that evidence-based interventions may not be available for all student needs (see Exhibit D15). More than 30% of staff survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that there were sufficient resources, interventions, and specialized programs at their school to meet the needs of students with emotional/behavioral disorders (37%), dyslexia (30.5%), and ELs with disabilities (30.8%), showing that this is an area that FCPS may want to investigate and strengthen, particularly for these student groups.

RQ3b. How and to what extent do schools utilize a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework to identify all students who require support and document any necessary interventions or remediation using monitoring systems?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups, classroom observations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **3b.1.** FCPS staff have limited knowledge about and understanding of MTSS.
- **3b.2.** Implementation of MTSS procedures is inconsistent across schools.

Finding 3b.1. FCPS staff have limited knowledge about and understanding of MTSS.

On the FCPS MTSS webpage, MTSS is defined as a framework with which school teams make "data-informed decisions in order to provide high quality instruction." MTSS is used to address the varied academic, behavior, and/or social-emotional wellness needs of students across three tiers of increasing intervention. Tier 1 includes schoolwide, core instruction that all students receive. Tier 2 is small-group, targeted intervention for students who need support above and beyond core instruction. Finally, Tier 3 is intensive intervention provided to the few students who need highly individualized support in addition to core instruction. The MTSS webpage provides a graphic that defines each of these tiers and lists key components in MTSS within FCPS, which include:

- Collective responsibility: Belief that all students will achieve high levels of learning.

- High-quality core instruction: Instruction in academics, behavior, and wellness.

- Monitoring student progress: Practice of reviewing students' data over time to evaluate progress.

- Data-informed decision making across the tiers: Decisions based on data to inform instruction.

- Early implementation of evidence-based interventions: Provision of timely support.

- Family, school, and community partnership: Active partnerships to ensure student success.

FCPS's Office of School Support (OSS) provides support and resources for MTSS implementation in each school. The goal is for administrators and staff in each school to understand MTSS and be equipped to implement MTSS systems and processes. Supports from OSS for MTSS include funding, resources, coaching, and professional learning opportunities.

The results from MTSS-related items on the staff survey showed that only 64.6% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that they are knowledgeable about MTSS (see Appendix Exhibit D17). What was most striking, however, was that 18.4% of staff responded "NA" or "not sure." This is notable because MTSS processes should involve *all* school personnel. When we analyzed responses without those who indicated "NA" or "not sure," 79.2% of staff agreed they were knowledgeable about MTSS. When asked about MTSS professional development, 65.2% of staff agreed that professional development on MTSS was moderately or very helpful (see Appendix Exhibit D12). These responses were fairly consistent across school levels (e.g., early childhood through high school), but there were notable differences among staff by role. For example, agreement was nearly 10% lower for general educators (59.6%) and special educators (61%) compared with administrators (73.1%) and related services providers (77.4%). General

education teachers and special education teachers are essential implementers of MTSS, however, and the training they receive on MTSS is paramount to its successful implementation.

Focus group comments allowed us to provide context on the varied understanding and perceptions of MTSS among staff. For example, we recorded comments from staff who viewed MTSS as a system for all students (including those with disabilities). As an illustrative example this view, one staff member commented:

> *I mean, I think that's an evolving process, it's been evolving over the years, but I think as we define the tiers here in Fairfax County, I'd start there. I don't know if any of my other colleagues would want to add to that, but we defined our tiers here in Fairfax, and we said that all students should, and we expect that all students get access to high quality tier one instruction. And that would include all students, our students with disabilities included. Tier two, we define that as the reteaching of essential grade level standards. And again, that would be the expectation that any students, even students with disabilities that require that reteaching of essential grade level standards are included in those conversations.*

In a similar vein, a staff member in another group shared:

> *In my school, if you have a student with a disability or an EL or any student who's struggling behaviorally or academically, they're going to go through MTSS and we're going to facilitate it as a team approach. We're going to do a data dig. We're going to talk about where some gaps are or what some behaviors are that we're seeing. And then we're going to start observing, doing informal observations… in general, this is very individualized because that's what the MTSS process is.*

On the other hand, we also recorded comments from other staff members who viewed MTSS and special education as siloed systems. More specifically, the view was that MTSS is the "gateway" to special education. One staff member noted:

> *…Currently in my building, MTSS is seen as the process that you have to go through to get to special education. Now, that is not what I think FCPS is trying to get. And that's all the work that we're doing, and that's why we're having the central office support and the MTSS coach. But that is definitely where we're at."*

A staff member in a different focus group commented:

> *We tend to use MTSS as it's almost like how you get [special education] … And then once you're a [special education] student, it's really the IEP, and the teacher, and the [special education] team handling your interventions. I mean, we have some co-teaching models*

in our building that work really well. And we have some general ed teachers who are on it, but my experience is, MTSS is just a way to get referred.

In addition, a different staff member noted:

I have found that if a student who receives special education services is struggling in an area that's not identified by their IEP, it still goes to the IEP team and not to the MTSS team. So it's defaults. A couple years back, there was a lot of conversation about special ed air, general ed air, who's breathing what air. And I think that we've chosen these lanes. And so that's why MTSS does sometimes become a gateway for special education or is seen that way.

Relatedly, comments alluded to the perception among some staff that special education is Tier 3 within MTSS. In one focus group, a staff member relayed:

It was really hard to get people to understand that special education is not a Tier 3 intervention. Special education is what they need to just access Tier 1. And so that took some time. I wish I could say that we're at the place where everybody says, "Oh yeah." Everybody gets everything, but it's coming. It's coming.

When our team conducted the full history review (*n*=50), none of the initial eligibility reports documented response to intervention (RTI)/MTSS data in the initial eligibility process, and only 4% of the triennial reevaluation eligibility reports documented RTI/MTSS data (see Appendix Exhibit C24 and Exhibit C28). Although these specific data are not required by federal regulations, FCPS schools should have access to at least some MTSS data that could be used for eligibility determinations. Although we do not know the reason for the limited use of MTSS data in eligibility determinations, this evidence may reflect limited knowledge and understanding about MTSS among FCPS staff.

Finding 3b.2. Implementation of MTSS procedures is inconsistent across schools.

Data from the staff survey, document review, and focus groups indicate that the MTSS process in FCPS is implemented inconsistently across schools. Inconsistencies are mainly with how MTSS procedures are implemented at the school level. On one hand, this is expected as FCPS allows each school has autonomy for the implementation of MTSS. However, we would expect key MTSS components to be in place across schools. Our data also show inconsistencies in the extent to which components of MTSS are implemented with *fidelity* across schools. A lack of consistent implementation with fidelity can contribute to staff confusion and inefficiencies/ineffectiveness of the system.

On the staff survey, we asked staff to rate their agreement about the implementation of key components of MTSS in their school (see Appendix Exhibit D17). Particularly notable were the

high percentages of staff, sometimes as high as a one quarter of responses, who responded "NA" or "not sure" to each question. These results mirror those presented above (see Finding 3b.1) and may indicate a general lack of knowledge about implementation of key components of MTSS among staff. To further analyze staff perceptions, we removed the "NA" or "not sure" responses to review perceptions of staff who had knowledge of MTSS. Data show staff agree that most key components of MTSS implementation are in place in their school. For example, 90.8% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that their school uses screening data to identify struggling learners. Similarly, 88.9% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that their school provides high-quality core instruction at Tier 1 to all students, including students with disabilities. A total of 88.3% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that their school provides small-group targeted intervention at Tier 2 to some students, in addition to high-quality core instruction. 85.2% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that their school provides intensive intervention at Tier 3 to a few students, in addition to high-quality core instruction. A total of 85.7% of staff agreed that their school has teams and processes in place to regularly review student data related to MTSS. We noted the lowest agreement related to staff agreement that their school has effective processes in place for progress monitoring at Tier 2 and Tier 3 (78.3%).

Comments from staff across focus groups help illustrate that MTSS structures are in place across schools but to varied capacities. A staff focus group participant noted how the MTSS process works well for students in their school:

> I really like the way that my school does MTSS. So, if it's for academic concerns, they have quarterly meetings and are like resource teachers who help with CTs and such. They really lead the charge on what benchmarks the kids need to be meeting, and then that kind of is where we base the data off…and what we know to collect as interventions take place.

Relatedly, a staff member in a different focus group reported that MTSS is better in their school but recognizes the variation across schools:

> I'm grateful that MTSS has stepped up a little bit, that they're trying to do these pre-referral Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 interventions so that it doesn't go straight to special education referral…I think early on in my career, everything went to local screening and everything went to testing. It was just kind of like that's just…the one thing they had in their back pocket. And so, I'm grateful that they are actually trying this tiered approach. And again, it varies between schools and even between, and with teachers, classrooms, administrators. I mean it's so varied that it's really hard to find this consistent fidelity with how even special education is run.

One other hand, another focus group participant shared a comment about the inconsistency in programs available to students across schools:

> And that, I think, just speaks to the equity issue and what's available... ...[W]e, as Fairfax County, do a very nice job of saying we have all of this available, but it looks so different, and it can be so different...and that's just maddening sometimes because you're like...Is it being implemented with fidelity and are we making sure that every kid really has the access to this? And I don't think we do a great job at that, unfortunately.

There also were comments about the lack of understanding of MTSS or the lack of fidelity, which may inhibit its utility. For example, one staff member noted:

> ... MTSS, at least at my school, is not thorough enough. We have a lot of resistance from the teachers because they don't understand what it means to be doing an intervention and what it means to be taking data on that intervention, and what it means when the kid isn't making progress or is making progress. It's just not thorough enough.

Related, a staff member in another focus group commented about overall inconsistency in MTSS implementation and how that can impact special education referrals:

> I think that's true also with, we're supposed to use multi-tiered systems [of] support before we look at special education and I think the implementation of that is highly variable at individual schools. And it's often not clear in a meeting whether interventions have happened or what the data is from them, and yet we're trying to look at should we do evaluations, but I think we're not as strong at the first part. So, it gets hard at the second decision to realize, to think whether you've done enough already to rule out that they would respond to interventions.

RQ3c. To what extent does the continuum of services offered by FCPS for SWDs address the needs of students? How do these services compare with other divisions (benchmarking)?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Extant data, document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups, classroom observations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **3c.1.** Parents are generally satisfied with the continuum of services offered by FCPS, although there is some variation in perception between parents and staff.

Finding 3c.1. Parents are generally satisfied with the continuum of services offered by FCPS, although there is some variation in perception between parents and staff.

As stated in Finding 1e.1, SWDs in FCPS are educated in inclusive settings at lower rates than the Virginia state target and neighboring divisions. Nonetheless, parents generally express satisfaction with the opportunities their children have for academic and social inclusion (Finding 1e.2). Analyzing the relationship between the inclusiveness of the setting in which a child receives instruction and their academic and social outcomes requires access to detailed student-level data that were not available for this review. Furthermore, these data are not publicly available for comparative districts, thus preventing us from being able to directly address RQ3c. This finding, therefore, relies on perception data from parent and staff surveys about the effectiveness of the continuum of services in FCPS.

Parent survey respondents were asked if they were satisfied with the quality of instruction that their child received in the special education setting and the general education setting. More than 85% of parents of students with an IEP reported satisfaction in special education (85.1%) and in general education (85.9%) settings, indicating similar rates of satisfaction regardless of the inclusiveness of the setting (see Appendix Exhibit E19). In addition, nearly 90% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child had adequate opportunities for social inclusion (88.6%) and academic inclusion (89.5%) (see Finding 1e.2 and Appendix Exhibit E16).

One parent focus group participant described their satisfaction with how their child is offered social inclusion opportunities while still addressing their needs in a more restrictive setting:

> So for him it looks a little bit different because he definitely has to be in a wholly special ed environment most of the time. He's nonverbal, he just cannot be... But they go out of their way to take him to pep rallies and they let him hand out goodies at the school store, so that he does have interaction with the gen ed students, but just not in the educational setting, which I am totally fine with. I like the way that they do it for him.

Another parent described their satisfaction with the process of placing their child in a more restrictive, but appropriate, setting:

> It was honestly a very ... it was very well done the way that gave me opportunity to tour those schools between [a public day school] and I think it was [a traditional high school]. And I was so impressed with both of them, it was great, I really just looked ... I kind of looked to them for guidance because they both came highly recommended and they were wonderful just about, really taking a look at my daughter. And at the end of the day, it was determined it would be best for her to go to [the public day school]. But I could honestly say it was a wonderful process because I felt like all three schools were communicating very well and keeping me in the loop and it's like, I'd known them

forever. So it was pretty smooth going to [the public day school] and then as soon as we started there and it was the right place.

In addition, parents and staff survey respondents were asked for their agreement with the statement "FCPS offers a continuum of services that meet the needs of SWDs" (see Appendix Exhibits D20, E21, and E34). Results showed that 88.4% of staff, 81.2% of parents of students with an IEP, and 78.3% of parents of students with a Section 504 plan agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. These agreement rates varied by school level, with opposite patterns for staff and parents. Specifically, staff agreement was slightly higher for high school staff (91%) than middle school staff (88.5%), elementary school staff (87.5%), and early childhood staff (82.4%). Among parents, agreement was nearly 10 percentage points higher for parents of early childhood students (91.5%) than for those of elementary (82.2%), middle (79.2%), or high (79%) school students (see Exhibit 34).

Exhibit 34. Percentage of Parents of Students With an IEP and Staff Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey That FCPS Offers a Continuum of Services That Meets the Needs of SWDs
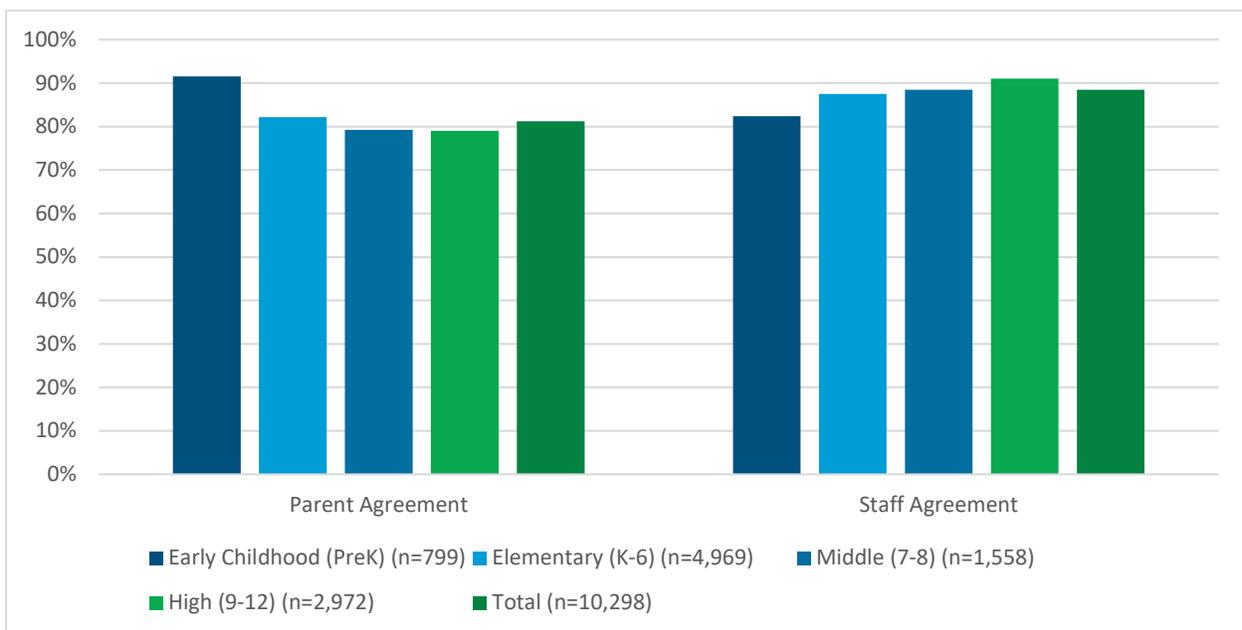
Among parents, agreement also varied by disability category. For example, parents of students with autism spectrum disorder (75.2%), intellectual disabilities (75.2%), and other health impairments (72.7%) had the lowest levels of agreement, whereas parents of students with speech-language impairments (90.2%) had the highest level of agreement that FCPS offers a continuum of services to meet SWDs' needs.

Goal 4: Communications

The purpose of this set of RQs is to evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies to keep stakeholders informed about services for SWDs. This section presents findings and associated evidence for two RQs.

RQ4a. How effective are communication efforts in reaching targeted audiences with pertinent information (e.g., division to school, school to division, division to parent, school to parent, teacher to teacher, case manager to case manager at transition points, etc.)?

DATA SOURCES REVIEWED: Document analysis, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **4a.1.** FCPS has an established infrastructure for disseminating special education-related communication to staff, families, and community members.
- **4a.2.** Communication from the district about special education can be inconsistent and difficult to access.
- **4a.3.** At the school level, communication challenges include a lack of timely information from administrators, insufficient time to collaborate, and demanding workloads for special education teachers.

Finding 4a.1. FCPS has an established infrastructure for disseminating special education-related communication to staff, families, and community members.

A review of communication documents and stakeholder feedback demonstrates that FCPS views communication about special education processes and procedures with staff, families, and community members as a top priority. During the past several years, FCPS has actively taken steps to improve their communication and clarity about special education processes and procedures. For example, one notable action was the appointment of an assistant ombudsman for special education in July 2019. The ombudsman serves as a link between parents and FCPS leadership, and acts as an impartial party for parents to contact when an issue arises with their child who receives special education services (Office of the Ombudsman).

FCPS uses a variety of formal and informal communications strategies, and multiple division-level departments and offices have a direct role in disseminating important information about special education policies and practices to key stakeholders. DSS holds monthly special education department chair team lead meetings in which important updates and information are shared with school representatives. They also coordinate with divisionwide communication

channels to disseminate special education-specific information to staff, families, and the community. In addition, FCPS's Office of Communication and Community Relations (OCCR) distributes information to target audiences via weekly online newsletters to families and the community, weekly staff newsletters, and email, phone, and text messages for emergencies. The office also uses video and other media to share information with the public, such as recordings of school board meetings. These communications include divisionwide special education-specific information when requested by DSS.

In addition, FCPS uses an email subscription service, News You Choose, in which members of the public and staff can sign up for a variety of email lists to receive only the most relevant information. For example, after special education advisory meetings take place, recordings and notes are sent to members of the associated email lists. This service also is used for DSS administrators to share important updates with the rest of their staff.

For internal staff-only communication, information and resources are distributed through the FCPS Employee Hub, which is not accessible to the public. DSS uses various channels within the Employee Hub to share information and resources about SWDs with staff. In some cases, the Employee Hub links back to the FCPS website where information is publicly available. In other cases, information is shared with staff through the intranet, such as staff procedure guidance documents. The intranet also includes access to Google Sites, where resources may be posted, and Schoology, where staff may sign up for different platforms to discuss and share resources with colleagues. Another intranet pathway for staff to access resources and guidance documents is the electronic Curriculum, Assessment, and Resource Tool (eCART), which is accessed through Schoology. This is an online platform where staff can access links to official documents for the school year, such as the curriculum, lesson plans, and instructional materials.

In addition, the FCPS website includes special education-related information and resources for staff, families, and community members. Within DSS, the Office of Special Education Instruction includes individual webpages with information on more than 15 services for SWDs (e.g., behavioral services, speech and language services, assistive technology, adapted curriculum). Service pages either provide a description of the service and contact information to learn more, or they link to more information related to the service. The Office of Special Education Procedural Support offers resources to support eligibility and referral procedures, including a due process and eligibility webpage; a webpage dedicated to special education procedures, including screening, parental consent, evaluation, eligibility, the IEP, and reevaluation; and a webpage dedicated to Section 504 identification, evaluation, and reevaluation.

Although FCPS has made improvements in their communication efforts, especially in their infrastructure for dissemination methods, there are still challenges and barriers to efficient and consistent communication with staff, as explained in Findings 2e.2, 4a.2, and 4a.3. There also are challenges and barriers to communication with parents, as explained in Findings 1d.1 and 4b.1.

Finding 4a.2. Communication from the district about special education can be inconsistent and difficult to access.

Participants in staff focus groups reported inconsistencies in communication from the district and across schools about special education policies, procedures, and practices. For example, the district provides informational resources for schools and staff on some topics (e.g., procedural guidance documents) but not on others (e.g., school-level communication procedures, managing workloads). In addition, aside from federal IEP requirements, FCPS schools have autonomy in how they communicate with staff and families regarding practices for SWDs. Therefore, staff and families with SWDs in the district have different experiences when dealing with different schools. Overall, staff expressed a need for more clear and consistent guidance on existing policies and procedures.

One particular area in which communication is inconsistent has to do with student transitions between schools (see Finding 1h.6 for more information about the transition processes between schools). For example, participants in staff and administrator focus groups specifically cited transitions between schools (e.g., elementary school to middle school) as a time when a lack of consistent school-level policies creates challenges for school-parent communication. Although 76.4% of staff survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the IEP process incorporates adequate communication with staff from the feeder or receiving school for students transitioning between schools (see Appendix Exhibit D7), staff in the focus groups still noted "there's no consistency from pyramid to pyramid about how those transition meetings happen." A staff member in one focus group noted:

> And I think, that's one of the problems too. Is the discrepancies among the different schools. I have 12 kids transitioning this year to eight different schools and those policies are different at every school. And some of them are doing kindergarten orientations or open houses, some of them are not. As a teacher, it's hard to even inform the parents as to what is available. Procedures are different at every school as to how the meeting's set up, who's to be invited. It's very challenging time.

Another example of inconsistent communication and lack of procedural clarity is access to and use of assistive technology (AT) by SWDs. Assistive Technology Services (ATS) staff need clear and consistent guidance on how and when to conduct evaluations. In addition, ATS staff need clear guidance about when and how to communicate with parents on how to support their children outside of school, and teachers need clear guidance on how to use AT. One parent

focus group participant noted: "The teachers in the classrooms are not trained or equipped to support the students with using their assistive technology….Teachers need more training in AT. My son essentially ended up not using 90% of the technology that was available to him because he felt that it was inaccessible."

In addition to concerns about consistency, staff reported that accessing information can be a challenge. On the staff survey, 79.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that staff are kept informed about services for SWDs (see Appendix Exhibit D19). Although this suggests relatively high agreement, a sizeable minority (20.6%) of staff have concerns about being kept informed. Furthermore, in focus groups, staff reported that accessing information is difficult because it is not all in the same place or staff are unsure of where to look or whom to ask for help.

As described in Finding 2e.2, staff focus group participants reported experiencing communication challenges with the central office, particularly due to inconsistencies in how, to whom, or what information is shared with staff and administrators. One staff member reported, "if you ask one person in one office and another person in that same office that answer's different of whether those exist or not, what it means, how it's supported." Furthermore, approximately half of the staff survey respondents did not receive support from the following special education central office entities: Office of Special Education Instruction (43.1%), Office of Intervention and Prevention Services (59.5%), Office of Counseling and College and Career Readiness (67.9%), and other FCPS central office staff (53.6%). Of those who did report receiving support from these entities, 69.7% reported that the support was moderately or very helpful for matters related to SWDs (see Appendix Exhibit D14).

Staff focus group participants reported that information and guidance from the central office is one directional and takes time to reach school staff. The central office provides resources and information, but there is little to no collaborative process or opportunity for feedback from staff and administrators, or at least staff are unaware of such a process. One staff member reported:

> I would say it's a lot of one-sided communication. It's email and it's pushing information out, is what I feel like the primary means of communication, or information that is available through webpages, Schoology, or Google sites.

Staff focus group respondents reported needing an effective system for providing input and feedback on policy and procedures to the central office. At the school level, staff reported being able to provide input and feedback on programs and services related to SWDs. However, it is not clear whether or how that feedback is used. At the district level, staff perceived having little to no input into policies and procedures shared by the central office. Although some guidance at this level is nonnegotiable, such as legal mandates related to IEPs, staff need a mechanism for providing feedback on optional guidance where schools have some level of autonomy over

implementation. Staff remain largely unaware of the existing methods that FCPS uses to solicit feedback from its staff, such as surveys, working groups, and committee meetings. In terms of feedback and opportunities for input, another staff member expressed:

> I don't feel like I have any. I provide feedback to people who I know in central office, and the people who I can go to directly seem to either acknowledge or share, but then nothing ever comes much of that.

Finding 4a.3. At the school level, communication challenges include a lack of timely information from administrators, insufficient time to collaborate, and demanding workloads for special education teachers.

School-level leaders have the autonomy to set up their own communication strategies related to special education concurrent with district-level communication structures described in Finding 4a.1. They have the latitude to set up communication structures with their special education staff in the way they see fit (e.g., faculty meetings, distributed leadership structures, caseload assignments, supervision responsibilities). School administrators also can set up their communication structures with families of SWDs as they see fit (e.g., newsletters, special events), with the exception being that there are legal requirements for the IEP process that necessitate mandatory communication (e.g., regular meetings, progress reports). For example, one staff focus group participant reported:

> So, there's no expectation set at all for communicating with the parents besides the beginning of the school year, IEPs, and progress reports. I mean, I communicate with my parents a lot, but it's completely up to the case manager…. I mean, if a student has a big change or if the team's concerned, we'll reach out for reasons like that. But there's not like a standard contact once a month or, "Go have a conversation about the progress report."

Within schools, administrators and staff must communicate and collaborate consistently and clearly to ensure successful instruction and support for SWDs. Staff focus group participants reported facing challenges with communication and collaboration that include not getting information from administrators in a timely manner. One staff focus group participant explained their experiences with two different administrators:

> It's interesting being at two different schools. I had one school where a principal was very…It was very important to her that admin was very present when it came to special ed, and there was an effort for at least one administrator to attend every special ed CLT [collaborative learning team]. My current school, I have to request, like unless there's an admin in my IEP meeting, because they have to be there, I have to request a discussion with them to go over something with them. So it's interesting, the different approaches my principals have taken. One took a very hands-on approach, and the other one was like I don't want to know unless there's a problem. So it was interesting.

Staff focus group participants also reported feeling isolated from other teachers in the building due to a lack of time to meet and collaborate with one another. A staff member expressed the following in a focus group about their schedule and a lack of collaboration time with other staff:

> *It is really hard and challenging for collaboration, at least on my team here. We don't have common CLT [collaborative learning team] time, and we do flexible groups. So our kids see…Some students on my caseload might go to another one of my colleagues for reading. And it's just really hard to find the time to communicate. We pass around, we send datasheets and data to each other, but actual talking during contract hours is almost impossible.*

Special education teachers identify frequent meetings (including conflicting meetings across multiple subject area departments and grade levels) and heavy workloads that cut into their planning time as factors that decrease their opportunities to collaborate with colleagues. Special education teachers are unable to adequately support student needs and communicate effectively with families if their time and energy is being taken up by a high workload of paperwork and meetings. In contrast, parents requesting a possibly unreasonable amount of time and communication from teachers and staff increases their workload and does not allow them to focus on their other responsibilities, such as planning, meeting, and instructional time. A staff member expressed in a focus group:

> *I mean, one challenge I would say with family–school communication is that there are some families where the expectations of communication are unrealistic, in terms of maybe daily phone calls or nightly emails, or responding to lengthy emails when our teachers have several families with whom they're working.*

Furthermore, when advocates and attorneys are brought into IEP meetings by parents, staff described a large increase in their workload because of an increase in volume and duration of meetings, as well as the additional communication required to prepare for and follow up from those meetings. Another staff member reported in a focus group that they may be "spending a lot of time with the communication and paperwork and IEP after IEP after IEP with a particular family, which oftentimes, causes the work to even be more because you have one child but you still have 13 other kids that you have to navigate."

RQ4b. To what extent are families and community members kept informed about services for SWDs?

> **DATA SOURCES REVIEWED:** Document analysis, IEP review, staff survey, parent survey, focus groups
>
> **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**
> - **4b.1.** Parent satisfaction with the amount and quality of communication from staff varies by parent subgroup and school level.
> - **4b.2.** Parents and staff have different opinions about the quality of parent–staff communication.
> - **4b.3.** Although offered by FCPS, translation services are not widely or easily accessible for all who need them.

Finding 4b.1. Parent satisfaction with the amount and quality of communication from staff varies by parent subgroup and school level.

As described in Finding 4a.1, FCPS uses various communication strategies to disseminate information to internal and external stakeholders about services for SWDs. For example, the FCPS website houses a wealth of resources and information aimed at parents of SWDs. The Special Education Handbook for Parents, special education-specific information in OCCR communications (e.g., newsletters), and special education updates provided through the Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) monthly meetings are further examples of communication methods that FCPS employs to inform families of services for SWDs. ACSD is a state-required committee appointed by the FCPS School Board to advise the School Board of needs in the education of children with disabilities. For the 2022-2023 school year, ACSD's charge is to review evidence-based and research-based practices to improve public day schools in FCPS, specifically related to the referral and eligibility process and staffing standards. ACSD is made up of school board member representatives, as well as region, community, and teacher representatives. Parents, staff, and community members are welcome to attend meetings or submit questions to the committee.

Comments from school board members and special education advocates indicate the importance of consistent communication with parents in reinforcing and promoting learning in the home. This continuity between school and home is critical for SWDs. However, multiple data sources indicate that parent satisfaction with communication about special education services and IEP goal progress reporting for SWDs varies by parent subgroup and school level.

Communication about services for SWDs. On average, 80.2% of parents of students with an IEP reported on the survey that they were satisfied with the amount of communication they receive from their child's school (see Appendix Exhibit E20). However, there were inconsistencies in the extent of satisfaction among different groups of parents. For example, English- and Farsi-speaking parents had lower rates of satisfaction (77.5% and 75.5%, respectively) than parents across all other languages (87.5–95.1%). Rates of satisfaction from parents of children in early childhood (92.4%) were higher than for parents of elementary school children (82.6%). Parents of middle and high school children had even lower rates of satisfaction (76% and 76.4%, respectively) (see Exhibit 35). Furthermore, only 69.9% of parents of students with a Section 504 plan reported on the survey that they were satisfied with the amount of communication from their child's school (see Appendix Exhibit E33).

Exhibit 35. Percentage of Parents of Students With an IEP Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey That They Were Satisfied With the Amount of Communication Received From Their Child's School
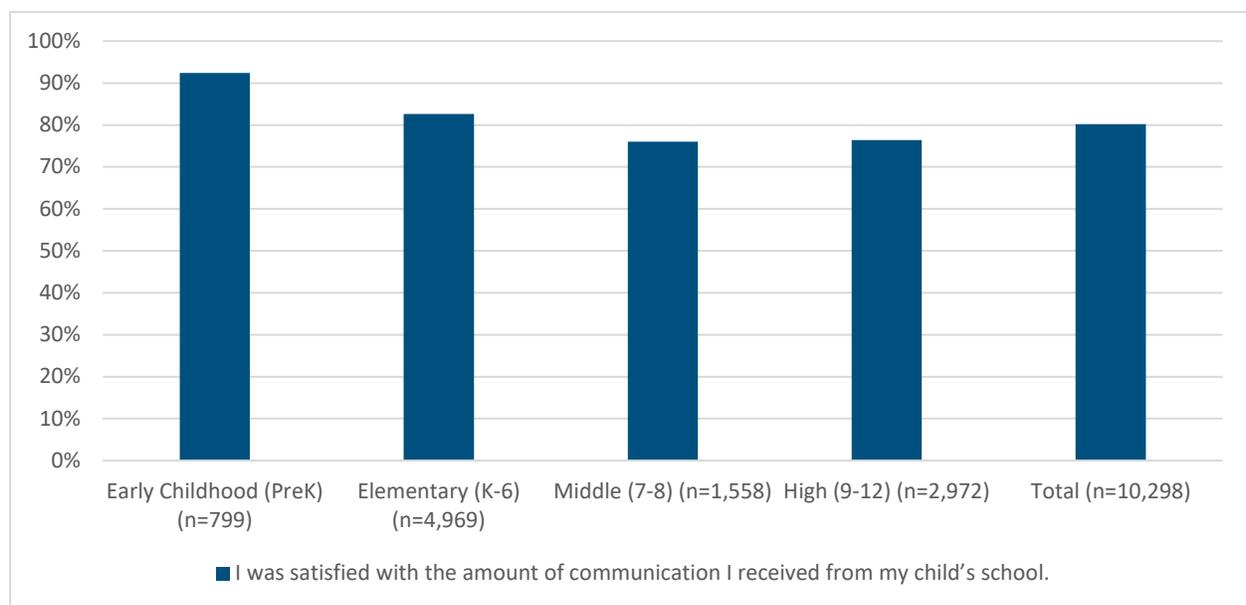
Further analysis of the open-ended comments on the parent survey, especially responses from those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with communication from their child's school, showed that a common reason for their dissatisfaction was the variability of staff–parent communication practices across schools. For example, parents whose child had attended more than one FCPS school had positive working relationships with staff in some schools but negative experiences with staff in other schools.

Focus group data further illustrate the finding about variation in parent satisfaction with the amount and quality of communication from staff by school level. While some parents

experience regular, informative communication from their child's teachers, others reported a lack of communication. One participant described how the lack of communication seems to increase in middle and high school:

> Once we got to middle and definitely by high school, and you have what? Seven, eight teachers. If my kid has a question and they need to follow up with their teacher, it's really hard. A lot of those teachers are out the door the minute that last bell rings. They don't want to stick around. I get it. They've put in a long day. Open office hours or a way to get with them, which means you've got to build time into these teachers calendars to allow them to be accessible.

Although many middle and high schools have a block built into their schedules for this type of communication, the format through which it is offered may not be an effective method or there may be other challenges preventing communication from happening. Parents still describe a lack of communication despite having these structures in place, which suggests a further need for improvement. However, as an exception, parents of students in public day school settings who participated in focus groups noted that communication with parents is consistent and collaborative. One participant stated:

> First of all, I get an email like every day, but communication about, Hey, remember the IEP's coming up, you know how he's doing because of the goal sheets that they send home, instead of report cards, you know how he's been doing with the current goals, these are the things that each different therapist, teacher for math, reading and everything else, this is kind of where we think we would like to go. What is your input? I've always been asked for my input on everything. Do these look appropriate to you? Is there anything you'd like to change? Anything you'd like to request in terms of goal setting? So I felt very much a part of the process for many, many years. So it's worked out really well for us.

Communication about progress reporting of IEP goals. As described in goal 1, IDEA mandates that IEP meetings occur at least annually, with an evaluation every 3 years. Additional meetings may occur at the request of the parent/guardian. These meetings include the student (as appropriate), the student's parents/guardians, teachers, and the case manager. They also may include related services providers, school counselors, and other school personnel. However, beyond these legal nonnegotiables, schools have the flexibility to implement communication strategies that will help facilitate the learning process and IEP development.

IEP progress reports are important opportunities for communication between the school and an SWD's family. In FCPS, IEP progress reports are sent home at the same time as report cards or other classroom progress documents, with a rating scale of 1–5 to document goal progress.

In all, 87.2% of parent survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the school effectively communicated to them their child's progress on their IEP goals (see Appendix Exhibit E13). Although agreement with this statement was high across school levels, agreement was higher among parents of SWDs in early childhood (94.9%), than elementary parents (88.8%), middle school parents (84.9%), and high school parents (84.5%) (see Exhibit 36).

Exhibit 36. Percentage of Parents of Students With an IEP Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed on the Survey That the School Effectively Communicated Their Child's Progress on Their IEP Goals With Them
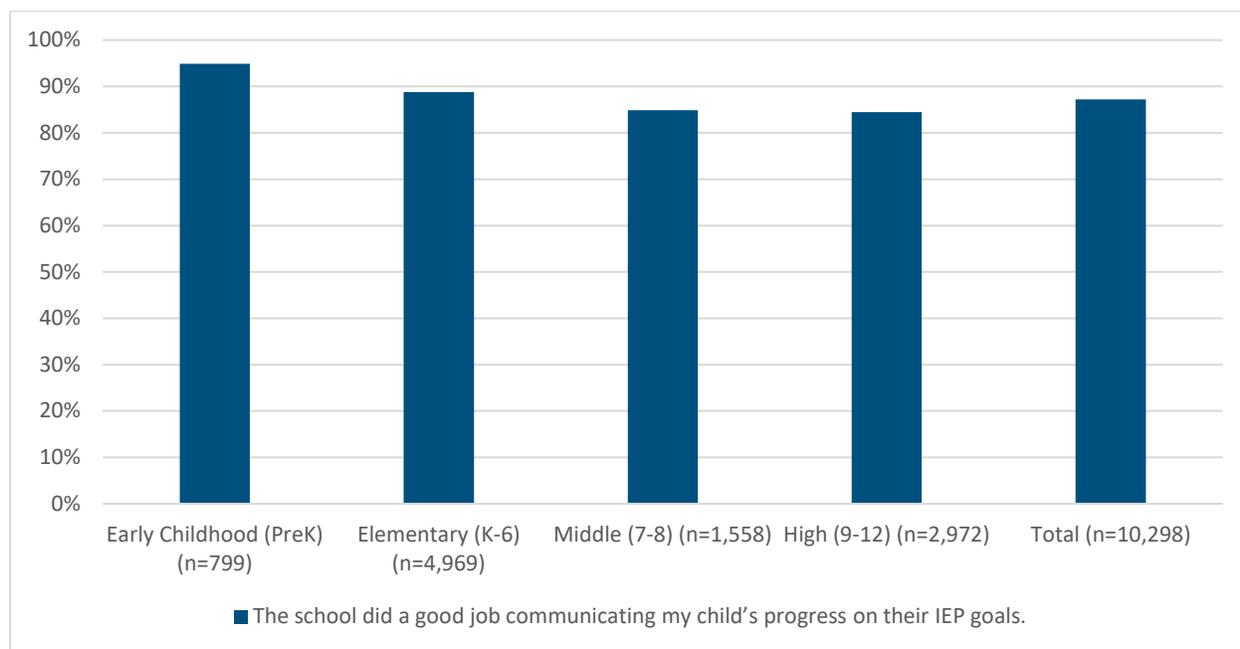
Agreement also varied among subgroups of parents. For example, 77.4% of parents of American Indian/Alaska Native students agreed or strongly agreed that their child's school did a good job communicating progress on their child's IEP goals to them. Comparatively, 87.2% of parents of students in all other racial and ethnic backgrounds agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. When examining the data by child's disability type, agreement with this statement was higher for parents of SWDs with speech or language impairments (93.2%) than parents of SWDs with specific learning disabilities (84.6%). Furthermore, only 78.8% of parents of SWDs with other health impairments agreed or strongly agreed, while 88.1% of parents of SWDs with all other disability types agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

In parent focus groups, some participants explained their dissatisfaction with quarterly progress reports. For example, they expressed wanting or having to advocate for more frequent or detailed progress reporting on their child's IEP goals. Specifically, they noted that the reports

provide a number/rating without sufficient information to show where the student is and is not making progress. One parent participant reported:

> *We get a progress note attached to the report card at the end of the quarter. That is usually a form that, it's like the IEP report card. Oh, you've got a four, and then it might sometimes give…a lot of times it'll give like, oh, [Student Name] was 80% on four out of five tries in the last core. You know, it doesn't actually give me any information that to me is helpful. You're giving me just a number that is one out of five. Okay. It's a four. That sounds good to me. You're giving me some test measure, but you're not actually saying "These are the things we've seen [Student Name] do better this quarter," or something. Honestly, I find the progress reports and the report cards completely useless.*

For additional information on IEP progress monitoring and goal reporting, see Finding 1i.1.

Finding 4b.2. Parents and staff have different opinions about the quality of parent–staff communication.

An analysis of multiple data sources revealed that staff and parents have different perspectives on the extent and quality of information provided to families regarding programs and services for SWDs and for their child. In all, 92% of the staff respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "Staff at my school provide information to families on how to support their child's learning" (see Appendix Exhibit D19). In contrast, 80.1% of parent respondents of students with IEPs agreed or strongly agreed that they received helpful information from the school and district about services for SWDs (see Appendix Exhibit E20). The rate of agreement for parents of students with Section 504 plans was slightly lower; 75.4% of the parent respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they received helpful information from the school and district (see Appendix Exhibit E33). Statements from focus group participants reflect that the district communicates information to families. However, some families lack awareness of the complexities of the special education process and could benefit from communication that is more individualized to their child. In total, 92.4% of staff agreed that school staff effectively involves families in decisions about how to address individual student needs (see Appendix Exhibit D19). Agreement in the parent survey was lower for parents of students with an IEP (84.1%) and parents of students with a Section 504 plan (73.5%) (see Appendix Exhibits E20 and E33).

As described in Finding 4b.1, IEP meetings are federally mandated by IDEA and must occur annually. For SWDs and their families, these meetings are critical times for communication and collaboration. The IEP development process should be a collaboration among all members of the multidisciplinary team. However, data from multiple sources suggest that FCPS staff and parents have different perceptions of and satisfaction with the quality of their involvement in the IEP development process. For example, there was high agreement among parent survey respondents that they were

given adequate opportunities for input during IEP meetings. However, as described in Finding 1f.4, little to no parent input was documented on the IEPs reviewed.

In addition, 91.7% of parents of students with a Section 504 plan agreed on the survey that staff listened to their concerns and recommendations about their child (see Appendix Exhibit E29). Similarly, 92.2% of parent survey respondents of students with an IEP agreed that school staff listened to their concerns and recommendations about their child during IEP meetings (see Appendix Exhibit E13).

An analysis of the open-ended comments from the surveys and statements from the focus groups also shows discrepancies in how parents and staff perceive collaboration with one another during the IEP development process. For example, staff reported feeling that parents have too much influence in the IEP development process, especially when advocates and attorneys are present, and their professional opinions are routinely disregarded in favor of the parent's wishes. However, parent survey responses and focus group comments suggest the opposite—they do not feel that their input is considered or valued in the IEP development process. Following are two quotes from focus group participants illustrating this discrepancy:

> *If the parents have an advocate or an attorney, what we feel as professionals is not necessarily valued. And I feel like sometimes my PSL comes in, or the office of eligibility will just be like, "Oh, we're just going to do what they say. We're just going to do it." And sometimes, we don't have the staff and we don't have the ability to truly meet the child's needs. But because there's an advocate and attorney, we're placing kids in programs and giving them hours. And how we're doing their hours is different than we would with another family. —Staff focus group participant*

> *I didn't feel, neither did my husband, like we had a lot of input or a lot of weight put upon what we're bringing to the table. Like I said, the minute we said, "You know what? We have a lawyer and we're going to fight you on this." It was a different ball game altogether. So then there was a lot more partnership in designing this. —Parent focus group participant*

Finding 4b.3. Although offered by FCPS, translation services are not widely or easily accessible for all who need them.

The diverse makeup of FCPS requires that effort be made to communicate and collaborate with parents in multiple languages. FCPS's Office of Language Services provides translation services for seven languages to use in IEP meetings and district communication to families. Options for translation services include hiring an in-person interpreter, calling into a language line, or using virtual meeting platform services (e.g., Zoom translations). IEPs and progress reports are sent home in English unless otherwise requested by a parent. Some teachers also use TalkingPoints,

a free messaging app/website, as a translation service to communicate with parents in their home language.

It is important to note that parent survey respondents positively acknowledged that they receive accessible communication from their child's school in their preferred language (see Appendix Exhibits E20 and E33). Specifically, along all parent survey respondents, 94.7% of parents of students with an IEP and 92.6% parents of students with a Section 504 plan agreed or strongly agreed that they were provided information about their child in a way or form they could understand. In addition, 97.6% of parents of students with an IEP and 97.2% of parents of students with a Section 504 plan agreed that they received information in their primary language. There also was high agreement among parents of students with an IEP whose primary language is not English that they were provided information about their child in a way or form they could understand (96.3%) and that they received information in their primary language (96%).

Although FCPS attempts to support equitable access to translation services, there is still room for improvement to ensure that all families can obtain the appropriate services. Specifically, information shared by FCPS staff members demonstrates that not all staff members feel able to access or provide appropriate supports to parents who need translation services. Although translation services are available, staff focus group participants noted that it is difficult to secure interpreters for meetings because "there's so many languages that sometimes it's really a challenge to find an interpreter who's available, and to coordinate with them for the parents." Another staff member explains this challenge further and the impact it has on equity for families:

> I just wanted to piggyback on the issue with the interpreters, because over in [school name omitted] we need a lot of interpreters. I mean, many of our meetings have interpreters, and I was observing in a preschool class the other day and the teacher said she called 18 people before she was able to get an interpreter. Then, she had another meeting she needed interpreted with a language we don't have anybody [who] speaks that language, and so the Language Services has to contract out and they gave her a hard time about wanting to get that interpreter for the meeting because it was costing us money. I feel like we talk about equity and the one thing that people we can give them that would make some of this a little bit more equitable is that access to that interpreted meeting and also just interpreted documents.

Even when translation services are provided for IEP meetings, day-to-day communication and information can still be a challenge. A staff member in a focus group reported:

> A lot of the students that I have in my classes, their home doesn't speak English. So we have one parent support liaison who speaks Spanish, but that's the only language she

speaks. So we've got all these other languages that I'm like, okay, I'm trusting my freshman student to go home and tell his mom this. I don't know if that's going to work.

Focus group participants also reported a lack of access to special education documents written in languages other than English for all families who request them, specifically citing IEPs and IEP progress reports. In response to a question asking if IEPs are translated for families after the meeting has happened and the IEP is finalized, a staff member in a focus group explained:

It is not. Our response to that is the interpreters, and I think if you were going to look at our 30,000 families, we do have a lot who have translated documents. I mean, we would need a team of thousands to be able to do that for every special ed. Process. So, I mean, maybe you want to say that's a challenge because that is a question that we've received multiple times, is can they get the IEP translated as well? And we have not been able to accommodate that for every family.

Recommendations

The purpose of this comprehensive review is to evaluate the current design, structure, and processes of services for SWDs with an aim to better understand FCPS's current capacity for meeting the needs of this population. Another desired outcome of the review is to identify areas of improvement to strengthen FCPS's provision of special education services. Building on the findings in the four goal areas outlined in this report, AIR offers the following 19 recommendations to FCPS to strengthen the provision of special education services to SWDs. Exhibit 37 summarizes the recommendations and demonstrates their alignment to the review findings. AIR's recommendations have been organized into six topic areas: (a) data-driven IEP development, (b) MTSS, (c) instructional resources and support, (d) staff support and resources, (e) professional learning supports, and (f) communications and stakeholder engagement. We believe that these recommendations, if prioritized by FCPS, are likely to lead to substantial improvements in FCPS's capacity to meet the needs of SWDs.

Exhibit 37. Summary of Recommendations

Topic Area	Recommendation	Findings
1. Data-driven IEP development	1a. Create a standardized process and guidance for how staff should gather and document parent input during the eligibility determination and IEP development processes.	1f.4, 1j.2, 4b.2
	1b. Create a framework for parents and staff to enhance collaboration during the eligibility determination and IEP development processes.	1b.2, 4a.3, 4b.2
	1c. Establish guidance for staff to collect and report data more consistently to develop and monitor IEPs.	1b.3, 1f.2, 1f.3, 1f.4, 1g.1, 1i.1
	1d. Revise the IEP progress report template and expectations so that staff report progress based on criteria specified in student IEPs rather than on a rating scale.	1i.1
	1e. Monitor postsecondary transition planning supports to ensure that students across all disability categories and their families have equitable access.	1h.3, 1h.4
	1f. Establish guidance on placement decisions for SWDs.	1g.1
2. Multi-tiered systems of support	2a. Clarify the relationships among MTSS, local screening, and special education.	3b.1
	2b. Ensure fidelity of school-level implementation of MTSS.	1a.3, 1b.4, 3b.1, 3b.2

Topic Area	Recommendation	Findings
3. Instructional supports and resources	3a. Ensure equity and consistency in school-level programming, especially the availability and use of evidence-based strategies and programs for SWDs.	1d.1, 1i.2, 1k.1, 1k.2, 3a.2
	3b. Ensure quality of instruction in inclusive settings.	1a.2, 1e.1
	3c. Promote explicit instruction as a high-leverage strategy to enhance learning for SWDs across all grade levels and content areas.	3a.1
4. Staff supports and resources	4a. Disseminate guidance on special education caseloads and class sizes.	2b.1, 2c.2
	4b. Establish strategies to reduce special education teacher workload.	2b.2, 4a.3
	4c. Expand the information available to prospective special education employees on the FCPS website.	2a.3
5. Professional learning systems	5a. Develop and implement a comprehensive, divisionwide professional development plan with differentiated offerings targeted to the needs of special education teachers, instructional support staff, general education teachers, and administrators.	2d.3
	5b. Develop and implement a comprehensive support plan for novice and/or provisionally licensed teachers to include instructional coaching, mentorship, and professional development.	2d.2
6. Communications and stakeholder engagement	6a. Promote equitable access to translation services across FCPS.	4b.3
	6b. Provide districtwide guidance on procedures for communication between schools and parents.	1h.6, 4b.1, 4b.2
	6c. Establish centralized systems for distributing vital information to staff from administrators in each school and from the central office.	2e.2, 4a.2, 4a.3

Area 1: Data-Driven IEP Development

Recommendation 1a. Create a standardized process and guidance for how staff should gather and document parent input during the eligibility determination and IEP development processes. *(Findings 1f.4, 1j.2, and 4b.2)*

Documenting parent input and concerns is paramount to keeping an accurate record of a student's performance and needs across time and demonstrates that parents have been included in the eligibility determination and IEP development processes in a meaningful way. It is an essential strategy to ensure that families can effectively advocate for their students. Data

collected during the review showed that although most staff perceive that parent input is meaningfully incorporated into the IEP process, parents generally do not share this same perception (Finding 4b.2). Furthermore, there was limited evidence from the review of the IEP sample to demonstrate that parent input is fully and consistently documented within eligibility and IEP paperwork (Findings 1f.4 and 1j.2). Based on these findings, we recommend that FCPS establish standardized processes and guidance for how staff should gather and document parent input during the eligibility determination and IEP development process. Establishing guidance for staff will result in more purposeful inclusion of parent input at all stages of the special education process, and will have the ancillary benefit of documenting this input for compliance purposes. We believe this recommendation will help staff have a clearer understanding of how to meaningfully involve parents in decisions about their child's education and will ensure that the information documented in eligibility and IEP paperwork accurately reflects input from all stakeholders.

Recommendation 1b. Create a framework for parents and staff to enhance collaboration during the eligibility determination and IEP development processes. *(Findings 1b.2, 4a.3., and 4b.2)*

Parents are required members of the IEP team, and their role should be as collaborative partners with school staff. However, data collected during the review showed that both staff and parents routinely experience frustration and difficulties in the collaborative process to develop IEPs (Findings 4a.3 and 4b.2). In addition, some groups of parents reported dissatisfaction with the ease and efficiency of collaboration during the initial referral and evaluation process (Finding 1b.2). The positive examples of collaboration shared during this review demonstrate how strong family–school partnerships benefit students. However, the negative examples shared during this review demonstrate a concerning "us versus them" mentality in which families and school staff experience challenges, if not outright conflict, during the eligibility determination and IEP development process. For example, staff expressed that their professional expertise is not always respected by district administrators and parents. Moreover, parents expressed that their concerns about their child are not always taken seriously. As a result, many resort to hiring attorneys or advocates to get their child the support they need. This, in turn, increases the workload of teachers who are then limited in their ability to carry out quality implementation of programs and services for SWDs (Finding 4a.3). This creates a cycle of limited communication and collaboration; with an increased workload, teachers cannot effectively communicate with parents and families, which takes time that they may not have. We believe a collaboration framework will offer staff and parents tools to facilitate more purposeful family–school partnerships.

Recommendation 1c. Establish guidance for staff to collect and report data more consistently to develop and monitor IEPs. *(Findings 1b.3, 1f.2, 1f.3, 1f.4, 1g.1, and 1i.1)*

FCPS staff and parents overwhelmingly believe that IEPs are appropriately developed using multiple sources of data. However, our review of 300 IEPs found inconsistent quality and insufficient data-based information to guide IEP planning (Findings 1f.2, 1f.3, 1f.4, 1g.1, and 1i.1). Further review showed that although most initial evaluation reports include information from multiple domains, there was a preference for anecdotal forms of data (e.g., teacher input, observations) over more objective sources of data (Finding 1b.3). Based on these findings, we recommend that the district provide more individualized training to teachers and instructional assistants on data collection and reporting specifically tailored to the IEP process. These trainings should expand beyond the basics (e.g., how to navigate SEA-STARS) and focus on training staff to evaluate and report student progress using a data-driven approach. Acting on this recommendation will result in more individualized IEPs based on student needs. We believe a more tailored staff training is likely to lead to substantive improvements because a data-driven process will allow for a more accurate accounting of student needs and more appropriate goal setting.

Recommendation 1d. Revise the IEP progress report template and expectations so that staff report progress based on criteria specified in student IEPs rather than on a rating scale. *(Finding 1i.1)*

Data collected for this review showed a misalignment between IEP goals and the method for reporting progress on progress reports (Finding 1i.1). Data were obtained from an analysis of federal regulations for IEP reporting, a review of current progress report documents, and parent perceptions of the usefulness of the information from the progress reports. Based on these findings, we recommend that FCPS revise the progress report template to require staff to report progress based on the criterion outlined in each annual goal:

- <u>Sample goal</u>: [student's name] will solve multistep grade-level problems (i.e., compare, order, and find equivalent fractions, decimals, and percentages; solve practical problems using proportional reasoning; solve one- and two-step linear equations in one variable), as shown by 75% accuracy on two of three assignments/assessments quarterly.

- <u>Current method of reporting progress</u>: 3—Student is making some progress toward the goal.

- <u>Suggested progress report update</u>: [student's name] solves multistep grade-level problems with 65% accuracy, 68% accuracy, and 62% accuracy on the last three assessments in quarter 2.

Acting on this recommendation will result in a more individualized, cohesive, and data-driven approach to monitoring progress on annual goals. We believe that this revision of the progress

report template and expectations is likely to lead to substantive improvements because it will reinforce a data-driven approach to writing and monitoring annual IEP goals for staff and will provide more individuated information to parents of SWDs each quarter. Improvements in the progress report template will allow for a more accurate accounting of student progress over time and will enhance communication with parents.

Recommendation 1e. Monitor postsecondary transition planning supports to ensure that students across all disability categories and their families have equitable access. *(Findings 1h.3 and 1h.4)*

Federal regulations require transition planning for all SWDs starting at the age of 16 (or earlier if required by a certain state). Data collected for this review showed that although transition plans are included in most FCPS IEPs, inequities exist for the quality of transition supports across disability categories (Finding 1h.4). Specifically, we noted that parents perceive access to school- and community-based supports differently based on the disability of their child. We also noted misalignment between transition goals and transition services, more notably for some disability categories than others (Finding 1h.3). Based on these findings, we recommend that FCPS monitor transition-planning supports to ensure that students across all disability categories and their families have equitable access. Actively monitoring transition planning and services will result in more equitable access to these services across all SWDs.

Recommendation 1f. Establish guidance on placement decisions for SWDs. *(Finding 1g.1)*

Data collected for this review showed that most IEPs do not provide a written rationale for the selection of IEP placement and services (Finding 1g.1). Based on this finding, we recommend that FCPS establish district guidance on making and documenting placement decisions. The guidance should include considerations for student needs, parent input, and the least restrictive environment. Creating this guidance will provide IEP teams with a consistent framework for making decisions and will establish expectations for how these decisions are documented in each IEP.

Area 2: MTSS

Recommendation 2a. Clarify the relationships among MTSS, local screening, and special education. *(Finding 3b.1)*

Some FCPS staff perceive MTSS primarily as a prereferral process to special education (Finding 3b.1). The prereferral process is managed through school-level local screening committees that review student data and recommend further evaluation for special education services if appropriate. Based on data collected from school staff members, some view MTSS as synonymous with local screening and recognize it as an eventual pathway to special education. Although screening is an important function of MTSS, it differs from the local screening process

to evaluate the need for special education (specifically, MTSS uses a *universal* screening process for all students). FCPS staff and administrators need to place more emphasis on MTSS as (a) a coordinated prevention system designed to proactively identify and intervene for students at risk for poor learning and behavioral outcomes, and (b) a system to organize instruction and intervention across multiple levels of intensity to meet the varied needs of learners. Investing in the proactive, preventive intervention aspects of MTSS can help to reduce the need for students to be referred for special education services. For those students who are on a path to evaluation for special education, MTSS can help to ensure that the provision of evaluation is not delayed.

Recommendation 2b. Ensure fidelity of school-level implementation of MTSS. *(Findings 1a.3, 1b.4, 3b.1, and 3b.2)*

FCPS currently has the infrastructure capabilities to administer MTSS at the district level. However, our review found inconsistent knowledge and implementation of the MTSS process across schools (Findings 3b.1 and 3b.2). We recommend that FCPS leverage the office that supports MTSS to send clear messaging about school-level expectations for MTSS. In addition, we recommend that FCPS develop and implement a process to ensure fidelity of MTSS implementation across schools. FCPS will not see a significant impact on student performance until schools are fully and consistently implementing the essential components of a tiered system of supports with fidelity. Evidence suggests that effective implementation of a tiered system of supports that integrates both academics and behavior can reduce disproportionality in special education identification (Finding 1b.4) and disciplinary outcomes (Finding 1a.3). By implementing an effective tiered system of supports across all schools, FCPS can more consistently identify and meet the needs of all students through a data-based preventative framework.

Area 3: Instructional Supports and Resources

Recommendation 3a. Ensure equity and consistency in school-level programming, especially the availability and use of evidence-based strategies and programs for SWDs. *(Findings 1d.1, 1i.2, 1k.1, 1k.2, and 3a.2)*

A lack of consistency and poor fidelity of implementation across schools was a persistent theme during this review, especially as it pertains to programmatic offerings. Parents and staff had varying perceptions of the fidelity of implementation for special education accommodations and services across schools (Findings 1i.2 and 1k.2). Parents and staff also expressed concerns about the availability of evidence-based intervention programs and strategies for SWDs across the district, noting that not all schools have access to all programs, nor do they have staff trained to implement those programs (Findings 1k.1 and 3a.2). There was particular concern for students with more complex needs, such as 2e learners and ELs (Finding 1d.1). The FCPS Office of Special Education Instruction maintains matrices detailing the available programs in reading

and mathematics for students with high-incidence disabilities and those accessing the adapted curriculum. Evidence-based programs and strategies are available in other areas (e.g., early childhood, autism, behavior) but are not documented in a central location. We recommend that FCPS conduct an internal review to generate a comprehensive list of evidence-based programs and strategies available to SWDs across content areas, grade levels, disability subgroups, and so on. Next, FCPS should determine which schools are using these programs and have staff trained to implement the programs. This information can help FCPS communicate guidance about program offerings to parents and school staff, and generate a plan to ensure that educators have access to the needed training.

Recommendation 3b. Ensure quality of instruction in inclusive settings. *(Findings 1a.2 and 1e.1)*

Achievement data show that FCPS SWDs lag behind their peers without disabilities in all subject areas (Finding 1a.2). Because many FCPS SWDs receive instruction in inclusive settings for considerable portions of the school day, it is essential that the teachers educating these students, both special education and general education teachers, have adequate preparation and training to deliver instruction in inclusive settings. Several strategies to improve the quality of instruction in inclusive settings include investing in collaborative planning time, instructional coaching, and joint professional development between general and special educators (e.g., professional development on coteaching strategies). FCPS has already taken steps toward implementing some of these strategies, but may benefit from targeting these supports to the needs of educators working in inclusive settings. Improving the quality of instruction in inclusive settings will lead to better student outcomes, especially related to academic achievement. These improvements also can help to increase the amount of time that SWDs are included in the general education setting (Finding 1e.1).

Recommendation 3c. Promote explicit instruction as a high-leverage strategy to enhance learning for SWDs across all grade levels and content areas. *(Finding 3a.1)*

Explicit instruction is defined as "a structured, systematic, and direct teaching approach that includes both instructional design and delivery procedures based on research studies relating to effective teaching practices" (Archer, & Hughes, 2011, p.1). Explicit instruction is an important instructional strategy for students with severe and persistent learning needs. Classroom observation data gathered through this review showed adequate implementation of explicit instruction, with some room for improvement (Finding 3a.1). To build teacher capacity in this area, we recommend that FCPS develop and implement comprehensive professional development on all components of explicit instruction, particularly identifying and communicating instructional goals, teaching procedures, and monitoring and feedback. The use of explicit instruction is best supported through a professional development plan that provides teachers with consistent and clear expectations for instructional delivery and unpacks each

component with examples, nonexamples, and opportunities for teachers to demonstrate its use and receive feedback on their instructional delivery. A comprehensive plan also should include alignment between teacher evaluation procedures (e.g., observation rubrics) and the principles of explicit instruction. Providing clear messaging and job-embedded coaching and training on the use of explicit instruction, particularly at Tier 1 in inclusive settings, will help to enhance instruction for SWDs.

Area 4: Staff Supports and Resources

Recommendation 4a. Disseminate guidance on special education caseloads and class sizes. *(Findings 2b.1 and 2c.2)*

FCPS recently published an internal guidance document on special education caseloads and class size maximums (Finding 2b.1). The purpose of the guidance document is to ensure that FCPS's special education caseload and class size maximums are compliant with Virginia state regulations. Although FCPS is in compliance with state regulations regarding staffing allocations, there is a perception among FCPS staff that the staffing allocation process is inefficient (Finding 2c.2). In fact, some emerging evidence from the review suggests that the staffing allocation formula may actually incentivize staff to inflate service hours on IEPs to trigger staffing increases, although more in-depth investigation is needed to determine how prevalent this practice might be and to rule out other possible explanations for the observed trends in IEP service hours (Finding 2c.2). Pairing the newly published guidance document with training and technical support for staff is a useful first step to addressing issues concerning staffing. However, further investigation may be needed to ensure that the staffing allocation formula offers flexibility for schools, especially as student numbers and needs fluctuate throughout the school year. Offering guidance and support to staff on this topic will help to improve alignment of staffing allocation and student needs.

Recommendation 4b. Establish strategies to reduce special education teacher workload. *(Findings 2b.2 and 4a.3)*

Data collected for this review reveal that staff have concerns regarding special education teacher workload and a lack of meeting or planning time (Findings 2b.2 and 4a.3). Staff noted that instructional responsibilities, in addition to administrative tasks, have a significant impact on their working conditions. Workload challenges include caseload duties, frequent communication with parents, and a high volume and duration of IEP meetings. It is important to acknowledge the steps that FCPS has already taken to address special education teacher workload and working conditions, especially in light of the staffing challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. To continue these measures while considering additional strategies, we recommend that the district develop a strategic plan to support reduced workload and improved working conditions for special education teachers. Strategies considered could

include innovative staffing structures, methods of scheduling, and permanently differentiated compensation models. This plan should include input from administrators, teachers, and staff across grade levels. It is important to note that these strategies are likely to have significant budgetary implications, especially related to personnel costs.

Recommendation 4c. Expand the information available to prospective special education employees on the FCPS website. *(Finding 2a.3)*

The FCPS website is an important source of information for job seekers. FCPS currently has several webpages for those interested in special education careers, but these webpages lack important details needed by prospective employees (Finding 2a.3). For example, as of the time of this report, critical information is missing from the website about education requirements and tuition reimbursement for individuals seeking provisional licensure. In addition, it may be beneficial to use the webpage as a "one-stop-shop" for all things related to the recruitment of special education personnel, including resources that are not currently posted on the website (e.g., posting recordings of special education teaching career information sessions for future reference). We recommend that FCPS conduct a full review of the content on its webpages for special education teacher recruitment, and consider developing the existing webpages to provide additional details for prospective special education employees.

Area 5: Professional Learning Systems

Recommendation 5a. Develop and implement a comprehensive, divisionwide professional development plan with differentiated offerings targeted to the needs of special education teachers, instructional support staff, general education teachers, and administrators. *(Finding 2d.3)*

Data collected for this review revealed that special education teachers need access to professional development offerings targeted to the areas of highest need, such as behavior management (Finding 2d.4). Although staff noted having access to many professional development opportunities in general, training on specific topics identified by special education teachers would greatly improve the quality of instruction for SWDs. Based on these findings, we recommend that the district develop a professional development plan in response to identified challenge areas. This plan should include school staff input and collaboration in development.

In addition, data collected for this review revealed that school building administrators, instructional assistants, and general education teachers would benefit from targeted professional development on special education processes as well as instructional strategies to support high-need SWDs (Finding 2d.3). Building administrators are making decisions regarding SWDs often without a full understanding of special education processes and practices. Implementing a comprehensive professional development plan for these stakeholders will result in more informed decision making and high-quality instructional practices. We believe

this recommendation is likely to lead to substantive improvements in the quality of instruction and daily practices; however, it is likely to have significant budgetary implications (e.g., early release time, hiring substitutes to cover classes during professional development, paid professional development during the summer or after contractual hours).

Recommendation 5b. Develop and implement a comprehensive support plan for novice and/or provisionally licensed teachers to include instructional coaching, mentorship, and professional development. *(Finding 2d.2)*

Data collected for this review revealed that novice teachers are not provided enough access to professional development opportunities or coaching to improve student performance (Finding 2d.2). Based on this finding, we recommend that FCPS establish a detailed support protocol for new teachers or teachers who are new to working with SWDs. Establishing this guidance for staff will result in more intentional support practices and improved instruction for SWDs throughout the building. This will have budgetary implications such hiring new teacher coaches and paying stipends to mentors. Some of the barriers to be addressed include a lack of experienced special education mentors due to their own workload, the amount of time needed to properly mentor, and inadequate compensation and recognition. We believe this recommendation is likely to improve teacher quality and staff retention because staff will have a clearer understanding of instructional best practices for serving SWDs.

Area 6: Communications and Stakeholder Engagement

Recommendation 6a. Promote equitable access to translation services across FCPS. *(Finding 4b.3)*

Data collected for this review showed that translation services can be difficult to obtain in FCPS (Finding 4b.3). It is challenging for staff to get interpreters for meetings and for parents to get important special education documents in a language other than English. Families with SWDs across the district and across an array of languages are having different experiences with the communication they receive and can understand when related to their SWDs. Access to interpreters and communicating materials and information in the home language of families is especially important in a large district such as FCPS due to the diversity of the community. Promoting equitable access to translation services and providing materials and information to all families in their primary language will allow families to receive similar experiences throughout the district. Doing so will lead to substantive improvements by ensuring that families are better informed about services for SWDs and that they can effectively collaborate with staff to better support their child.

Recommendation 6b. Provide districtwide guidance on procedures for communication between schools and parents. *(Findings 1h.6, 4b.1, and 4b.2)*

Data collected showed that schools have autonomy in structuring and implementing their communication methods to families and community members. Although some parents experience regular, informative communication from their child's teachers, many report a lack of communication (Findings 4b.1 and 4b.2). In addition, staff and families have different perspectives on the communication that families receive from schools on their child's learning. This inconsistency is an issue because satisfaction among parents related to the amount and quality of communication received varies across schools, and the experience of families within FCPS differs. It is important that all families receive high-quality communication from their child's school regardless of which school they attend within the district. We recommend that districtwide guidance on procedures for communication is given to help structure school communication with families. We believe that doing so will lead to substantive improvements because providing additional support and guidance at the district level will result in increased consistency in communication procedures and methods across schools. Common communication procedures will mediate the inconsistency of knowledge, understanding, and implementation across the district. They also will help in facilitating smooth transitions of students across schools, which was noted as a challenge (Finding 1h.6).

Recommendation 6c. Establish centralized systems for distributing vital information to staff from administrators in each school and from the central office. *(Findings 2e.2, 4a.2, and 4a.3)*

Data showed that staff need greater consistency in where and how information is distributed to them from administrators at the school level and from the central office at the district level (Findings 4a.2 and 4a.3). The findings reflect that although the central office provides resources and information for staff, they are not always effectively delivered (e.g., difficult to locate). We recommend that FCPS establish a centralized system for distributing information to staff, leveraging the PSLs that were consistently cited as a positive and helpful central office role (Finding 2e.2). Schools may have their own centralized systems for within-school resources and information as well as one that is districtwide. Each location where resources are currently posted (e.g., Google Sites, Schoology) can link to one central location where all resources should be officially posted for the future (e.g., the public FCPS website or primary pages of the Employee Hub). This system should include a mechanism for staff to provide regular feedback and a process for automatically signing individuals up for relevant mailing lists so that key personnel receive vital information. Taking these actions will result in greater access to resources and information for staff. We believe this will likely lead to substantive improvement because when staff are better informed, they will be better equipped to support student needs and communicate relevant updates with parents.

Summary

FCPS has a robust infrastructure for supporting the education of SWDs and is meeting or exceeding state targets and/or comparable divisions on several indicators of special education effectiveness. In addition, FCPS has demonstrated a clear commitment to improvement, as evidenced by the commissioning of this review and other recent and current efforts to engage the broader FCPS community in sharing input and suggestions for improvement strategies.

The findings contained in this report reflect areas for improvement that, if addressed, are likely to result in improved educational experiences and outcomes for SWDs in FCPS. We offer 19 recommendations across six topic areas for FCPS to consider as it embarks on its next steps following dissemination of this review. With continued commitment and ongoing engagement of stakeholders, FCPS is well positioned to realize success in the implementation of these recommendations.

To support FCPS's next steps, AIR will engage in 3 months of pro bono strategic planning with FCPS DSS after the delivery of this final report. The purpose of the strategic planning period is to support FCPS DSS in developing action steps based on the findings and recommendations from this report. As appropriate, AIR will provide summaries of current research, policy and practice scans, or peer-to-peer connections to help operationalize the recommendations. AIR is pleased to continue our partnership with FCPS, and we look forward to our next phase of collaboration to implement these recommendations.

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Appendix A. Crosswalk of Fairfax County Public Schools Research Questions With Data Sources

Exhibit A1. Research Questions Crosswalk to Data Sources

FCPS key questions	Research questions	Extant data	Document analysis	IEP review	Staff survey	Parent survey	Key informant interviews	Focus groups	Classroom observations
1. Goal 1. How and to what extent does the design, structure and established processes of FCPS' educational services meet the needs of SWDs? And to what degree are special education services at schools implemented with fidelity? And to what degree is the effectiveness of the process continuously monitored?	1a. What design, structure, and processes does FCPS utilize to provide special education services to SWDs? Are the current design, structure, and processes effective?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	1b. How does FCPS evaluate and identify students who may require special education services? To what extent is the referral and eligibility determination process, including local screening, working in terms of identifying SWDs? For example, is the period between the time of referral and service eligibility status determination reasonable?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
	1c. How effective is Child Find and Early Childhood Special Education Services at identifying young children suspected of having a developmental delay or disability and providing/getting families access to services?	X			X	X	X	X	
	1d. How does FCPS ensure the needs of special education students are included in the planning and implementation of new programs and services?		X		X	X	X	X	
	1e. How are inclusionary practices, both academic and social, being implemented, tracked, and monitored across schools and educational settings?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

FCPS key questions	Research questions	Extant data	Document analysis	IEP review	Staff survey	Parent survey	Key informant interviews	Focus groups	Classroom observations
						Data Sources			
	1f. What processes are in place to support the individual educational needs of SWDs? What data and resources are used to develop the instructional goals, special education service hours, and accommodations required?		X	X	X	X	X	X	
	1g. To what extent do IEPs and Section 504 plans identify the specific needs, services, and accommodations that are aligned to the needs of SWDs identified by the individual assessments?		X	X	X	X	X	X	
	1h. What processes and support are in place to facilitate seamless transitions between grade levels and into postsecondary opportunities?		X	X	X	X	X	X	
	1i. To what extent do IEPs and Section 504 plans provide evidence that all identified services, accommodations, and/or goals were received by the students?			X					
	1j. To what extent is the IEP and Section 504 reevaluation process being implemented?	X		X	X	X	X	X	
	1k. To what extent do schools implement special education services with fidelity?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	**X**
2. Goal 2. How and to what extent are the human capital resources assigned to special education students, the qualification of the staff, and the level of professional development received by them adequate?	2a. How effective is FCPS in recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified and effective staff servicing SWDs, including teachers, paraprofessionals such as instructional assistants, public health training assistants and public health attendants, and school administrators?		X		X		X	X	
	2b. How do FCPS's caseloads (number of students) and workloads (intensity of services per student) compare with similarly situated divisions and those in nearby proximity to FCPS?	X							
	2c. How efficiently and consistently does FCPS allocate staffing to meet the needs of its population of SWDs?				X		X	X	

FCPS key questions	Research questions	Data Sources							
		Extant data	Document analysis	IEP review	Staff survey	Parent survey	Key informant interviews	Focus groups	Classroom observations
	2d. To what extent does the professional development FCPS offers adequately prepare and continually support school professionals, including teachers, paraprofessionals such as instructional assistants, public health training assistants and public health attendants, and school administrators, to provide consistent services to SWDs?				X		X	X	
	2e. How effective is the support from central office personnel, such as DSS and the Instructional Services Department (ISD), in providing leadership, guidance, and resources to staff servicing SWDs?				X		X	X	
3. Goal 3. To what extent does the implementation of special education services at schools align with evidence-based practices?	3a. To what extent do the instructional delivery models demonstrate evidence-based practices?		X		X		X	X	X
	3b. How and to what extent do schools utilize a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework to identify all students who require support and document any necessary interventions or remediation using monitoring systems?		X		X		X	X	
	3c. To what extent does the continuum of services offered by FCPS for SWDs address the needs of students? How do these services compare to other divisions (benchmarking)?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4. Goal 4. How and to what extent are FCPS's communication strategies to keep stakeholders informed about services for SWDs effective?	4a. How effective are communication efforts in reaching targeted audiences with pertinent information (e.g., division to school, school to division, division to parent, school to parent, teacher to teacher, case manager to case manager at transition points, etc.)?				X	X	X	X	
	4b. To what extent are families and community members kept informed about services for SWDs?				X	X	X	X	

Appendix B. Extant Data

Exhibit B1. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Special Education Performance Indicators, Fairfax County Public Schools Versus Comparison Districts, 2018–19

Indicators	Description	Fairfax	Prince William	Loudoun	Arlington	Virginia	Montgomery	Wake
Indicator 1	Percentage of youth with IEPs graduating from high school with a regular diploma	70	64.14	78.55	72	61.24	68.81	—
Target 1		56	56	56	56	56	70.38	—
Indicator 2	Percentage of SWDs in Grades 7–12 who dropped out	1	1.49	0.47	0.41	1.51	2.1	—
Target 2		1	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	2.55	—
Indicator 3a	Percentage of districts that have a disability subgroup that meets the state's minimum "*n*" size meeting the state's AYP objectives for progress for disability subgroup	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Indicator 3b (Reading)	SWDs' participation rate for English/reading	99	99.05	99.34	99.07	98.36	—	95
Target 3b (Reading)		95	95	95	95	95	95	95
Indicator 3b (Math)	SWDs' participation rate for math	99	98.5	99.08	99.19	99.11	—	94.9
Target 3b (Math)		95	95	95	95	95	95	95
Indicator 3c (Reading)	SWDs' proficiency rate for English/reading	56	52.84	57.06	55.08	47.09	—	18.3
Target 3c (Reading)		46	46	46	46	46	—	56.55

Indicators	Description	Fairfax	Prince William	Loudoun	Arlington	Virginia	Montgomery	Wake
Indicator 3c (Math)	SWDs' proficiency rate for math	62	57.55	61.26	61.41	55.88	—	13.8
Target 3c (Math)		48	48	48	48	48	—	
Indicator 4a	Division identified with significant discrepancy in the rate of suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 days in a school year for children with IEPs	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	—	No
Indicator 4a (Virginia Department of Education [VDOE])	VDOE concluded that the policies, procedures, or practices contributed to the significant discrepancy and do not comply with requirements relating to the development of IEPs, the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and procedural safeguards.	No	No	No	No	Yes	—	No
Indicator 4b	Division identified with significant discrepancy, by race or ethnicity, in the rate of suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 days in a school year for children with IEPs	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	—	No
Indicator4b (VDOE)	VDOE concluded that the policies, procedures, or practices contributed to the significant discrepancy and do not comply with requirements relating to the development of IEPs, the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and procedural safeguards.	No	No	No	No	No	—	No
Indicator 5a	Percentage of students included in the regular classroom 80% or more of the day	54	65.13	68.11	66.52	67.6	67.45	62.93
Target 5a		>70	>70	>70	>70	>70	>70.9	>65

Indicators	Description	Fairfax	Prince William	Loudoun	Arlington	Virginia	Montgomery	Wake
Indicator 5b	Percentage of students included in the regular classroom less than 40% of the day	11	12.31	9.26	4.48	9.3	14.02	14.92
Target 5b		<8	<8	<8	<8	<8	<10.76	<15
Indicator 5c	Percentage of students served in a separate public or private school, or residential, home-based, or hospital facility	4	3.56	0.93	2.9	4.39	5.75	0.93
Target 5c		<3	<2.5	<2.5	<2.5	<2.5	<5.44	<2
Indicator 6a	Percentage of children aged 3 through 5 with IEPs who attend a regular early childhood program and receive the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program	25	19.95	27.05	33.65	31.44	34.61	37.53
Target 6a		>35	>35	>35	>35	>35	>65.1	>38
Indicator 6b	Percentage of children aged 3 through 5 with IEPs who attend a separate special education class, separate school, or residential facility	46	29.43	30.75	22.62	29.34	48.9	42.28
Target 6b		<17	<17	<17	<17	<17	<17.9	<19.7
Indicator 7a1	Preschool outcomes: positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships); percentage entered below age expectations	94	79.39	92.31	83.21	93.08	69.9	86.79
Target 7a1		90	90	90.1	90.1	90.1	68.78	82.55
Indicator 7a2	Preschool outcomes: positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships); percentage functioning within age expectations	44	48.81	47.84	41.51	51.32	52.25	37.64
Target 7a2		58	57.9	57.9	57.9	57.9	53	35.4
Indicator 7b1	Preschool outcomes: acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication and early literacy); percentage entered below age expectations	96	88.98	96.2	85.62	94.84	72.74	86.55
Target 7b1		94	94	94	94	94	72.37	82.6

Indicators	Description	Fairfax	Prince William	Loudoun	Arlington	Virginia	Montgomery	Wake
Indicator 7b2	Preschool outcomes: acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication and early literacy); percentage functioning within age expectations	38	31.13	47.22	46.54	43.06	49.88	42.38
Target 7b2		47	47	47	47	47	51.12	34.5
Indicator 7c1	Preschool outcomes: use of appropriate behavior to meet their needs; percentage entered below age expectations	94	75.14	92.9	84.33	92.52	72.58	86.85
Target 7c1		91	91	91	91	91	71.65	82
Indicator 7c2	Preschool outcomes: use of appropriate behavior to meet their needs; percentage functioning within age expectations	55	79.42	52.47	50.31	58.19	58.4	56
Target 7c2		65	65.3	65.3	65.3	65.3	59.48	52.2
Indicator 8	Percentage of parents who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities	87	83.98	67.38	82.76	89.48	--	--
Target 8		76	76	76	76	76	72	50
Indicator 9	Division identified with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education and related services that is the result of inappropriate identification	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Indicator 10	Division identified with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in specific disability categories that is the result of inappropriate identification.	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Indicator 11	Percentage of children with parental consent for initial evaluation who were evaluated, and eligibility was determined within 65 business days	99	96.73	100	99.29	98.85	99.46	81.57
Target 11		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Indicators	Description	Fairfax	Prince William	Loudoun	Arlington	Virginia	Montgomery	Wake
Indicator 12	Percentage of children determined eligible, and IEPs developed and implemented by their third birthday	100	100	99	100	99.7	100	85.65
Target 12		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Indicator 13	Percentage of youth aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that are annually updated and based upon an age-appropriate transition assessment; transition services, including courses of study, that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals; and annual IEP goals related to the student's transition services needs	98	100	100	100	99.25	64.16	—
Target 13		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Indicator 14a	Percentage enrolled in higher education within 1 year of leaving high school	49	28.81	55.84	59.09	34.87	—	57.69
Target 14a		36	36	36	36	36	—	40
Indicator 14b	Percentage enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within 1 year of leaving high school	69	57.06	74.81	79.8	66.11	—	73.08
Target 14b		64	63.5	63.5	63.5	63.5	—	63
Indicator 14c	Percentage enrolled in higher education or some other postsecondary education or training program, or competitively employed or in some other employment within 1 year of leaving high school	75	64.54	81.3	86.87	74.34	—	76.92
Target 14c		72	72	72	72	72	—	74

Note. IEP = individualized education program; SWDs = students with disabilities. Blank cells indicate that certain indicators were not reported or available for all districts in all years.

Exhibit B2. Standards of Learning Pass Rates in Reading for Students With an Individualized Education Program, Fairfax County Public Schools Versus Comparison Districts and State Average, 2016–2019
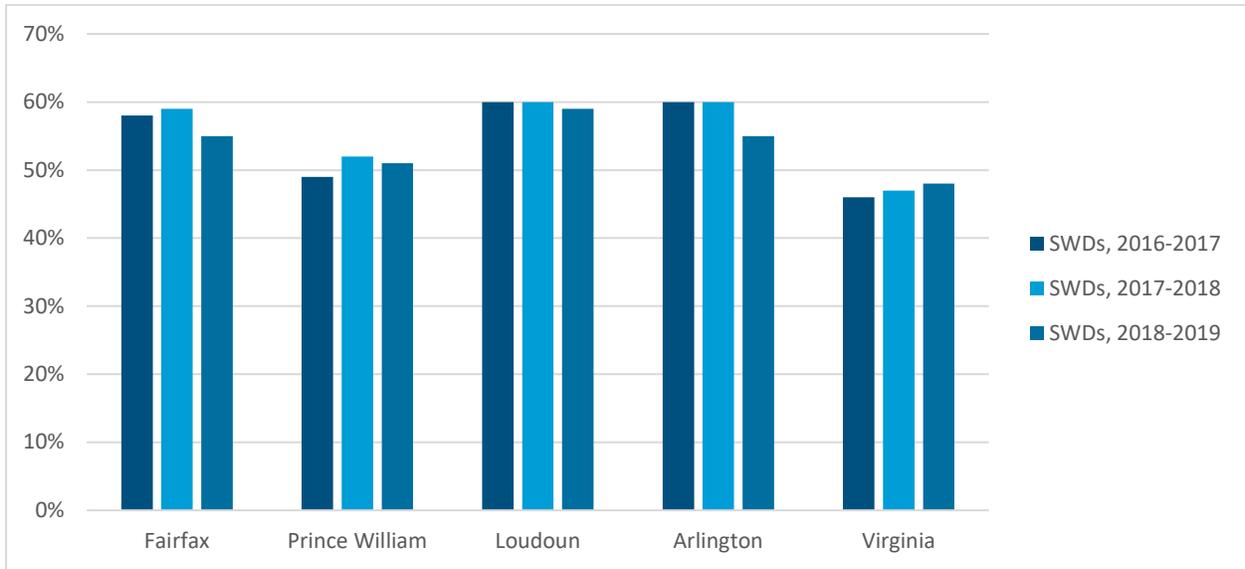
Note. SWDs = students with disabilities. This graph was created from Standards of Learning assessment data for 2016–2019.

Exhibit B3. Standards of Learning Pass Rates in Mathematics for Students With an Individualized Education Program, Fairfax County Public Schools Versus Comparison Districts and State Average, 2016–2019
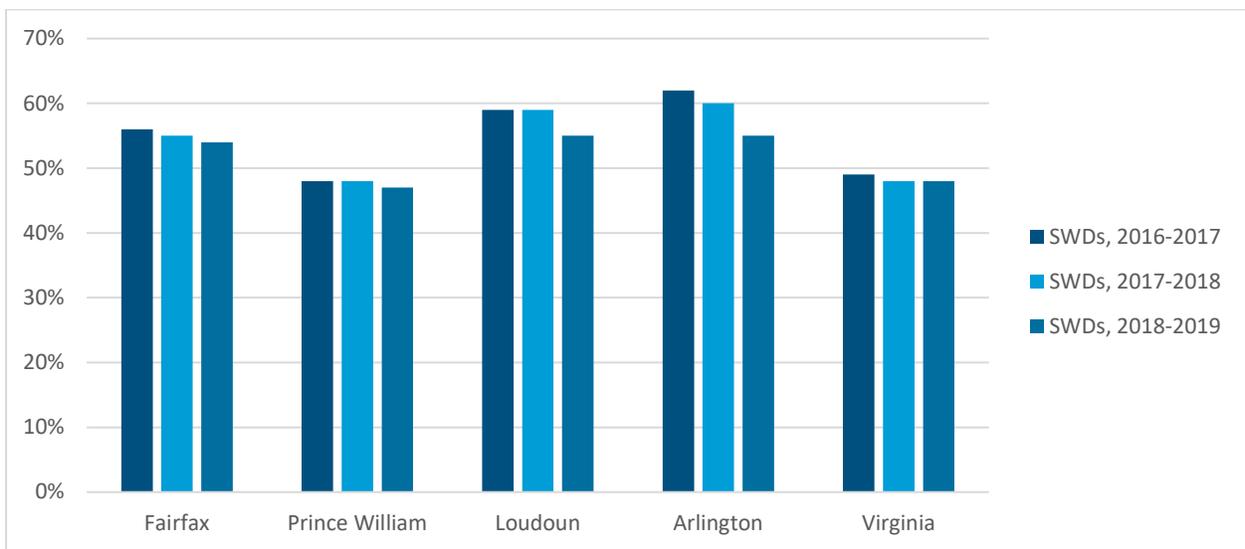
Note. SWDs = students with disabilities This graph was created from Standards of Learning assessment data for 2016–2019.

Exhibit B4. Standards of Learning Pass Rates, by Region: Students With an Individualized Education Program (IEP) Versus Students Without an IEP, 2016–2019
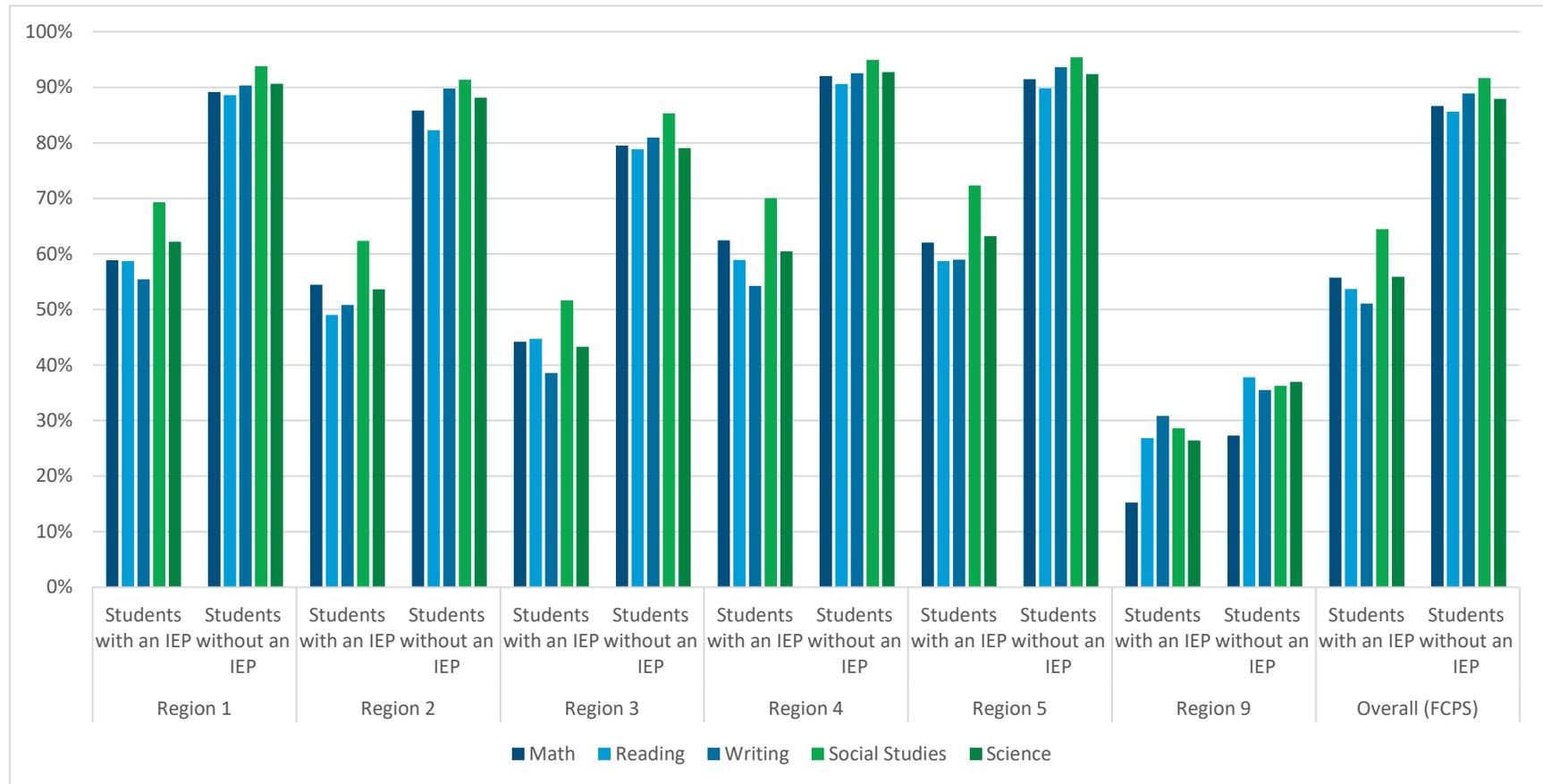
Exhibit B5. Standards of Learning Pass Rates, by Race/Ethnicity: Students With an Individualized Education Program (IEP) Versus Students Without an IEP, 2016–2019
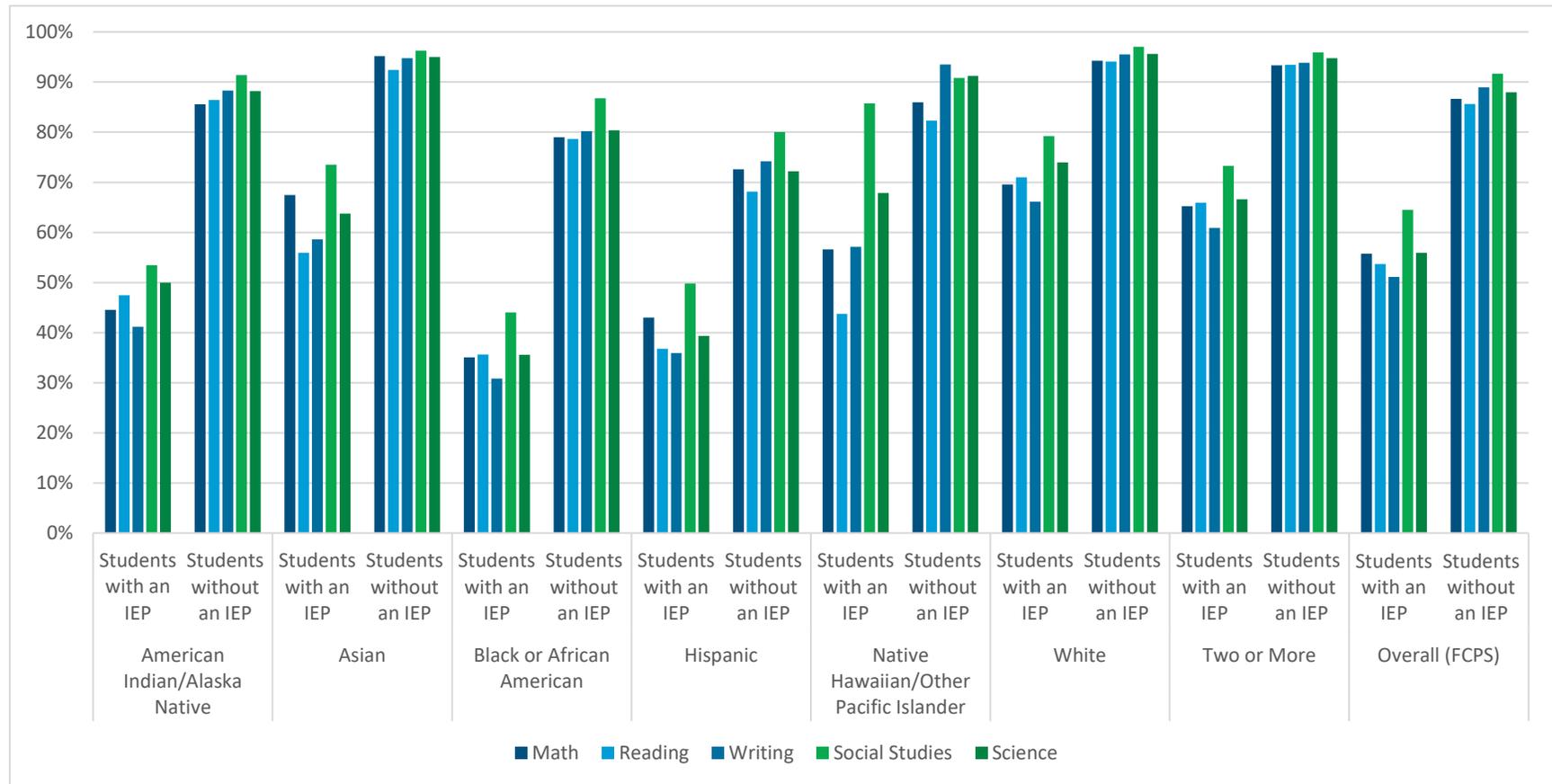
Exhibit B6. Virginia Alternate Assessment Program Pass Rates, by Race/Ethnicity: 2016–2019
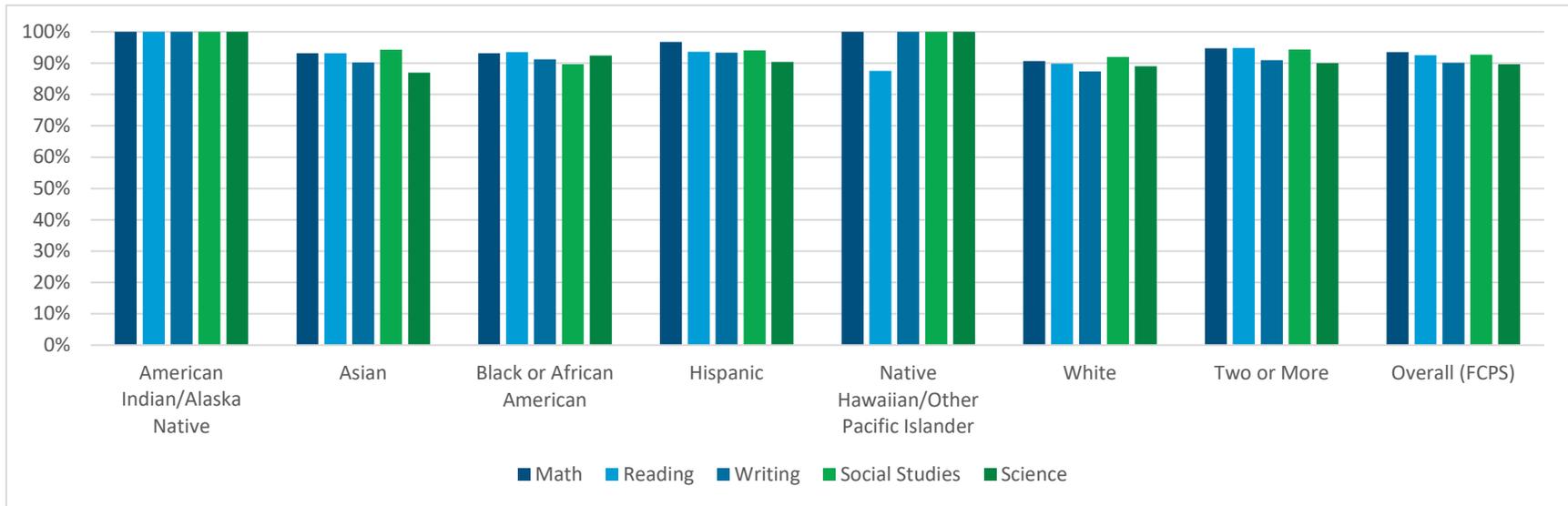
Exhibit B7. Virginia Alternate Assessment Program Pass Rates, by Region: 2016–2019
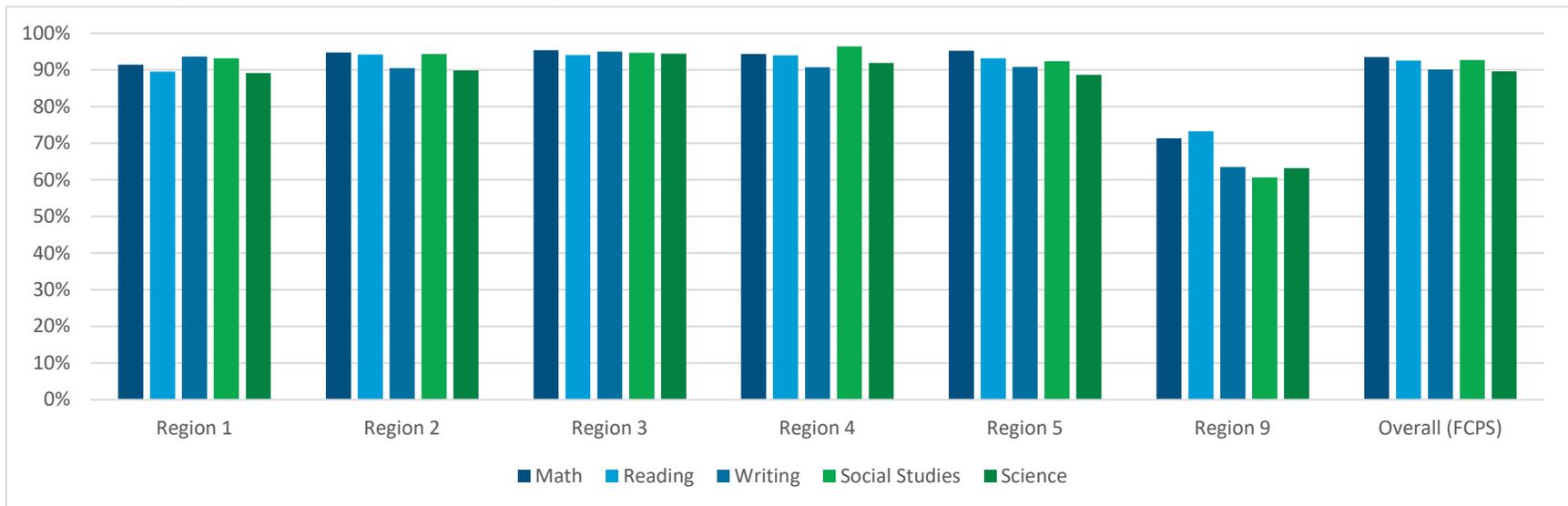
Exhibit B8. School Divisions Identified With Significant Discrepancies in the Rate of Suspensions and Expulsions of Greater Than 10 Days in a School Year for Children With Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Fairfax County Public Schools Versus Comparison Districts, 2016–2018

Division	2016	2017	2018	2019
Indicator 4a. Division identified with significant discrepancy in the rate of suspensions and expulsions (>10 days) in a school year for children with IEPs				
Arlington	No	No	No	No
Fairfax	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Loudon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Prince William	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Indicator 4b. Division identified with significant discrepancy, by race or ethnicity, in the rate of suspensions and expulsions (>10 days) in a school year for children with IEPs				
Arlington	No	No	No	No
Fairfax	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Loudon	No	No	No	No
Prince William	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note. Data are from the state- and divison-level Special Education Performance Report (2016–2018).

Exhibit B9. Percentage of Children (Ages 3–5) With Individualized Education Programs Attending a Regular Early Childhood Program, Fairfax County Public Schools Versus Comparison Districts, 2016–2018
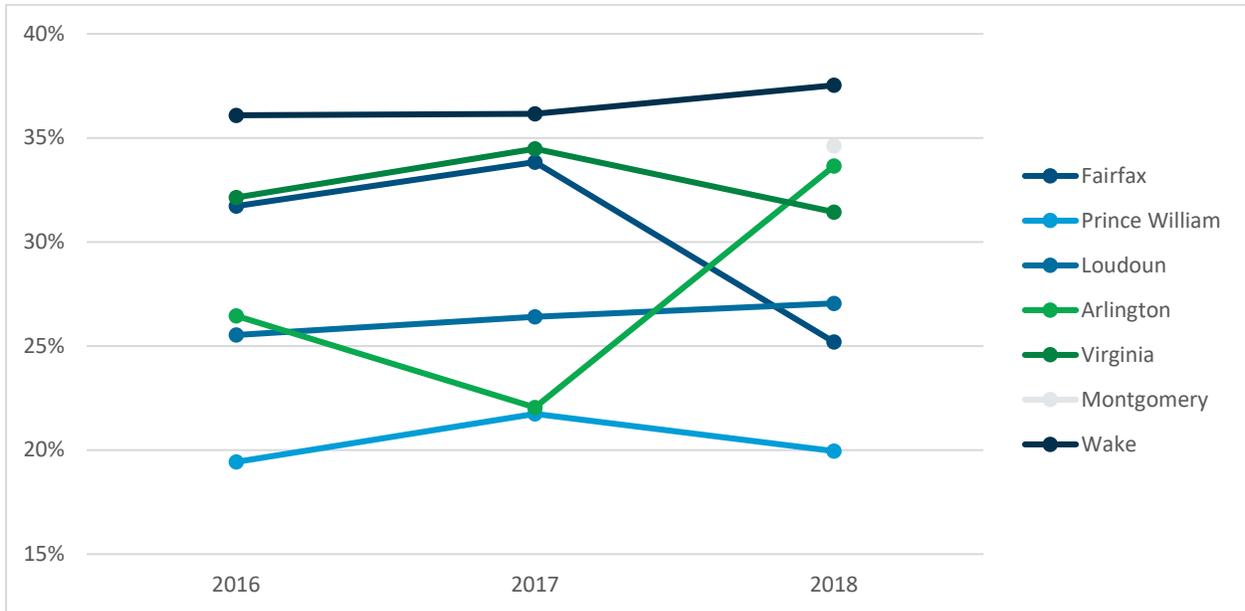
Note. This graph was created from the state- and divison-level Special Education Performance Report (2016–18).

Exhibit B10. Percentage of Children (Ages 3–5) With Individualized Education Programs Attending a Separate Special Education Class, Separate School, or Residential Facility, Fairfax County Public Schools Versus Comparison Districts, 2016–2018
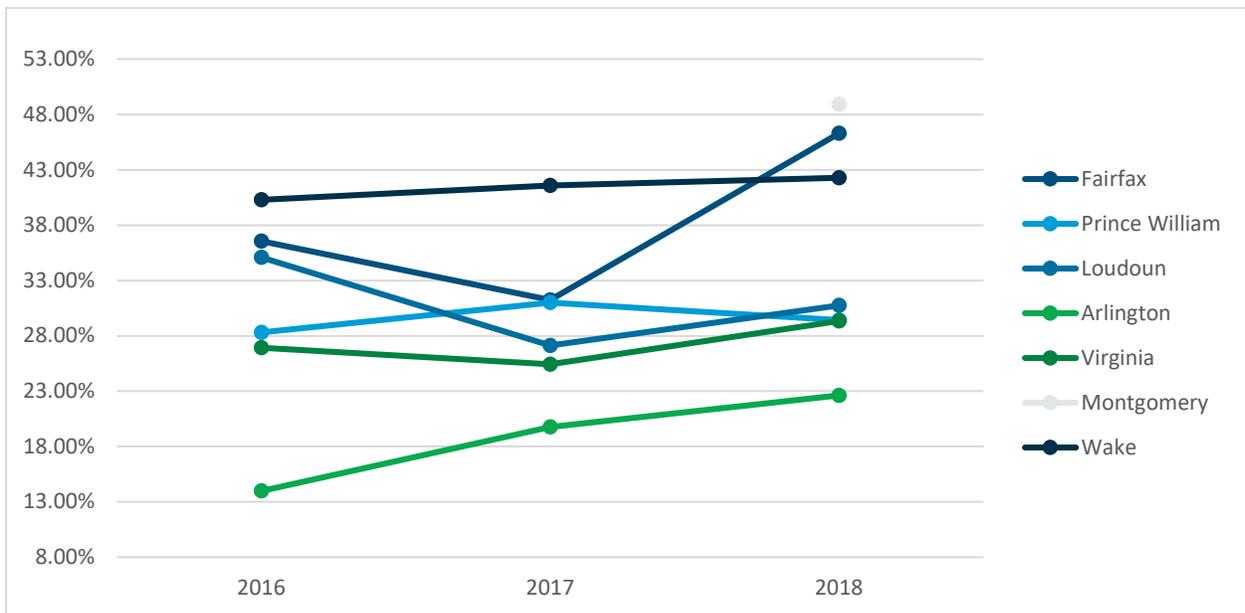
Note. This graph was created from the state- and divison-level Special Education Performance Report (2016–2018).

Exhibit B11. Percentage of Youth Enrolled in Higher Education or in Some Other Postsecondary Education or Training Program, or Competitively Employed or in Some Other Employment Within 1 Year of Leaving High School, Fairfax County Public Schools Versus Comparison Districts, 2016–2018
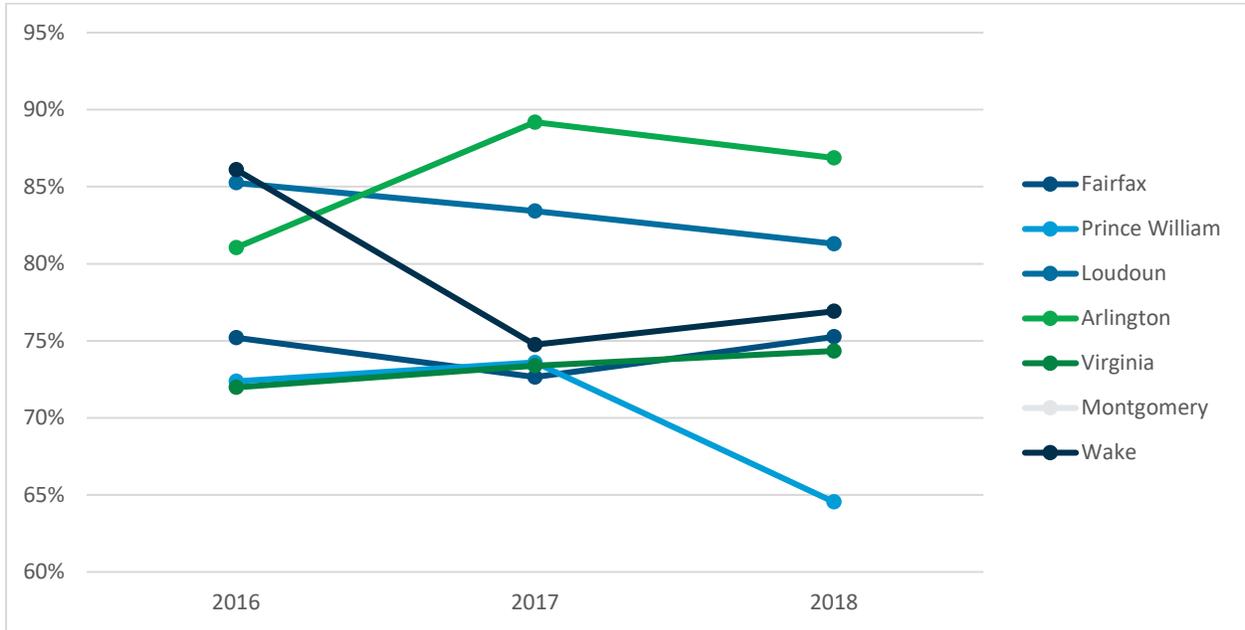
Exhibit B12. Special Education Teacher-to-Student Ratio, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) Versus Virginia, 2016–2021
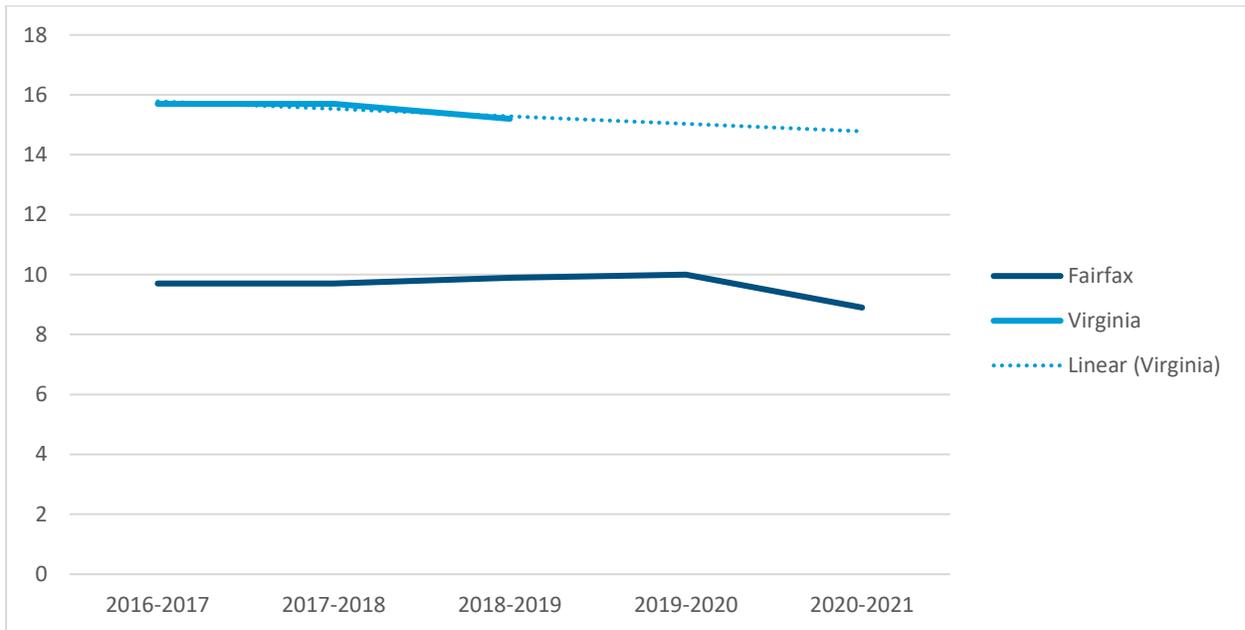
Note. This graph was created from FCPS special education employee data, 2016–2021. The trendline for Virginia is from 2018 to 2020.The COVID-19 pandemic impacted school years 2019–20 and 2020–21.

Exhibit B13. Instructional Assistant-to-Student Ratio, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) 2016–2021
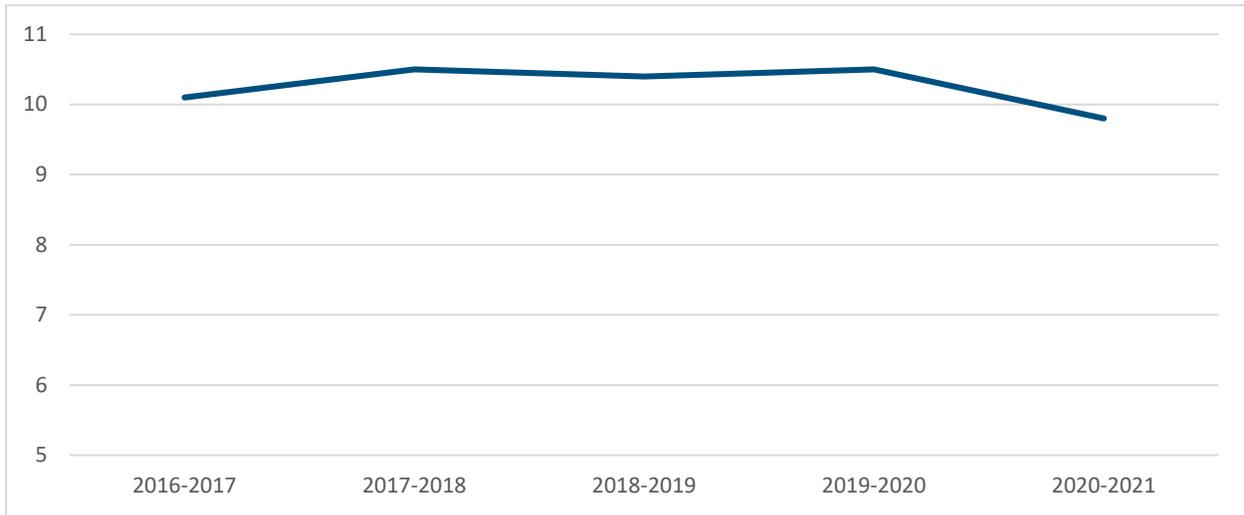
Note. This graph was created from FCPS special education employee data, 2016–2021. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted school years 2019–20 and 2020–21.

Exhibit B14. Student-to-Staff Ratio, by Region and Staff Role, 2016–2021

	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Overall (FCPS)
Special education teachers (e.g., self-contained, resource, inclusion)	10	10	10	10	9	10
Instructional assistants	11	10	9	10	10	10
Public health training assistants	98	73	80	117	96	92
Public health attendants	138	103	115	139	134	124
School psychologists	149	138	136	163	150	147
Social workers	152	132	133	161	154	145
School counselors	52	51	52	54	54	52
Speech-language pathologists	130	117	127	133	129	127
Adapted physical education itinerants	575	353	476	380	403	442

Appendix C. Individualized Education Program (IEP) Review Results

Exhibit C1. Grade Levels Represented in IEP Sample

Grade level	*n*	Percentage
PK	37	12.3
K	13	4.3
1	22	7.3
2	9	3.0
3	26	8.7
4	21	7.0
5	29	9.7
6	15	5.0
7	26	8.7
8	20	6.7
9	16	5.3
10	17	5.7
11	22	7.3
12	25	8.3
Other	2	0.6

Note. "Other" reflects two IEPs that listed the grade level as 150 and 170.

Exhibit C2. Home Languages Represented in IEP Sample

Home language	*n*	Percentage
Amharic	3	1
Arabic	7	2
Ashanti	1	<1
Bengali/Bangla	1	<1
Bulgarian	1	<1
Chinese/Mandarin	3	1.0
Creole (Haitian)	1	<1
English	151	50
Farsi/Persian	1	<1

Home language	n	Percentage
French	3	1
Gujarati	1	<1
Ibo/Igbo	1	<1
Korean	6	2
Lithuanian	1	<1
Pashtu	1	<1
Polish	1	<1
Russian	2	<1
Somali	2	<1
Spanish	77	26
Swedish	1	<1
Tagalog/Pilipino	4	1
Tamil	2	<1
Telugu	2	<1
Tigrinya	2	<1
Twi/Akan/Ashanti	2	<1
Urdu	7	2
Uzbek	1	<1
Vietnamese	10	3
Not reported	5	2

Exhibit C3. English Language Proficiency Levels Represented in IEP Sample

English language proficiency level	n	Percentage
1	23	8
2	20	7
3	36	12
4	12	4
6a	4	1
6b	5	2
6c	5	2
6d	4	1
9	5	2
10	15	5
None	171	57

Exhibit C4. Eligibility Categories Represented in IEP Sample

Eligibility category	n	Percentage
Autism spectrum disorder	47	16
Deaf-blindness	0	0
Deafness	0	0
Developmental delay	40	13
Emotional disability	21	7
Hearing impairment	3	1
Intellectual disability	9	3
Multiple disabilities	6	2
Orthopedic impairment	7	2
Other health impairment	55	18
Specific learning disability	125	42
Speech or language impairment	31	10
Traumatic brain injury	1	<1
Visual impairment	2	<1

Transition Goals

Descriptive Summary

- One hundred four IEPs included transition goals or were at Grade 8 or above.

- Of these, 97% of the IEPs (*n* = 101) included transition goals, and 3% of the IEPs (*n* = 3), all Grade 8, did not include transition goals.

Exhibit C5. Transition Goals Based on Assessments

	Yes (*n*)
Goals are based on age-appropriate transition assessments.	85% (86)

Note. Percentage based on a sample of IEPs that did include transition goals (*n* = 101).

Exhibit C6. Match Between Transition Goals and Transition Services

Eligibility category	All percentage (*n*)	Most percentage (*n*)	Few percentage (*n*)	None percentage (*n*)
All IEPs	**65% (66)**	**23% (23)**	**6% (6)**	**6% (6)**
Autism spectrum disorder	79% (11)	21% (3)	0%	0%
Developmental delay	-	-	-	-
Emotional disturbance	71% (5)	14% (1)	0%	14% (1)
Intellectual disability	100% (1)	0%	0%	0%
Low-incidence disabilities	75% (3)	0%	0%	25% (1)
Other health impairment	73% (16)	14% (3)	0%	14% (3)
Sensory disabilities	0%	0%	100% (1)	0%
Specific learning disability	58% (3)	31% (16)	10% (5)	2% (1)
Speech or language impairment	—	—	—	—

Note. Percentage is based on a sample of IEPs that did include transition goals (*n* = 101). All = 100% of transition goals aligned with services selected. Most = 50%–99% of transition goals aligned with services. Few = 1%–49% of transition goals aligned with services. None = 0% of transition goals aligned with services.

Exhibit C7. Transition Services Explored and Selected

Service	Explored Percentage (*n*)	Selected Percentage (*n*)
Career/college guidance	94% (95)	92% (93)
Academy support services	14% (14)	5% (5)
Career assessment (time limited)	4% (4)	3% (3)
Work awareness and transition	12% (12)	8% (8)
Job coach services (time limited)	5% (4)	3% (3)
Employment and transition services	42% (42)	31% (31)
Special education career center	9% (9)	9% (9)
Community work experience	13% (13)	13% (13)
Career-/college-related course(s)/experiences	73% (74)	69% (70)
Education for employment for the office	1% (1)	1% (1)
Other	7% (7)	7% (7)
None	4% (4)	5% (5)

Parent Input

Descriptive Summary

- Sixty-two percent of the IEPs (*n* =185) included information gathered from parents/caregivers.

Exhibit C8. Presence of Parent Input by Home Language

Home language	Parent input present on IEP	
	Yes Percentage (*n*)	Total Students (*n*)
Amharic	100% (3)	3
Arabic	71% (5)	7
Ashanti	100% (1)	1
Bengali/Bangla	100% (1)	1
Bulgarian	0% (0)	1
Chinese/Mandarin	100% (3)	3
Creole (Haitian)	0% (0)	1
English	66% (100)	151
Farsi/Persian	0% (0)	1
French	67% (2)	3
Gujarati	0% (0)	1
Ibo/Igbo	0% (0)	1
Korean	50% (3)	6
Lithuanian	0% (0)	1
Pashtu	100% (1)	1
Polish	100% (1)	1
Russian	50% (1)	2
Somali	100% (2)	2
Spanish	51% (39)	77
Swedish	100% (1)	1
Tagalog/Pilipino	75% (3)	4
Tamil	100% (2)	2

| Home language | Parent input present on IEP | |
	Yes Percentage (*n*)	Total Students (*n*)
Telugu	100% (2)	2
Tigrinya	100% (2)	2
Twi/Akan/Ashanti	0% (0)	2
Urdu	71% (5)	7
Uzbek	0% (0)	1
Vietnamese	40% (4)	10
Not reported	80% (4)	5
Grand total	**62% (185)**	**300**

Present Level of Performance (PLOP) Statements

Descriptive Summary

- Average number of unique PLOP statements per IEP: 3 (range 1–8)

Exhibit C9. Quality of PLOP Statements

Statement	All Percentage (*n*)	Most Percentage (*n*)	Few Percentage (*n*)	None Percentage (*n*)
The IEP includes a statement of the child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, including how the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum.	36% (107)	18% (55)	16% (49)	30% (89)
The PLOP statement shall be written in objective measurable terms, to the extent possible. Test scores, if appropriate, shall be self-explanatory or an explanation shall be included.	26% (77)	24% (73)	19% (58)	31% (92)

Note. Most = at least half but less than all IEPs. Few = more than none but less than half.

Annual Goals

Descriptive Summary

- Average number of annual goals per IEP: 4 (range 1–18)

Exhibit C10. Summary of Areas Addressed by Annual Goals

Area	Percentage (*n*)
Adaptive physical education	10% (29)
Banking skills	<1% (1)
Behavior	18% (53)
Cognitive/attention	16% (47)
Communication	38% (115)
Life skills	8% (24)
Mathematics	44% (132)
Reading	55% (165)
Social skills	15% (46)
Speech/language	1% (4)
Study skills	9% (27)
Writing/written language	50% (149)
Other	11% (32)

Note. These data reflect the percentage of IEPs that include at least one goal associated with each area. We did not gather data on the number of goals per area.

Exhibit C11. Quality of Annual Goals

Annual Goals	All Percentage (*n*)	Most Percentage (*n*)	Few Percentage (*n*)	None Percentage (*n*)
Annual goals **align** with the areas of need outlined in the PLOP.	92% (278)	4% (12)	1% (4)	2% (6)
Annual goals include the **condition** under which the behavior will occur.	39% (116)	33% (99)	15% (45)	13% (40)
Annual goals include an observable and measurable target **behavior**.	92% (275)	7% (20)	1% (3)	1% (2)
Annual goals include a **criterion** for acceptable performance.	89% (267)	9% (26)	1% (3)	1% (4)

Note. PLOP = present level of performance. Most = at least half but less than all IEPs. Few = more than none but less than half.

Exhibit C12. Summary of Annual Goals

Bar chart showing percentages for Align, Condition, Behavior, and Criterion across categories All, Most, Few, and None. Y-axis ranges from 0% to 100%.

All: Align ~92%, Condition ~39%, Behavior ~92%, Criterion ~89%
Most: Align ~4%, Condition ~33%, Behavior ~7%, Criterion ~9%
Few: Align ~1%, Condition ~15%, Behavior ~1%, Criterion ~1%
None: Align ~2%, Condition ~13%, Behavior ~1%, Criterion ~1%
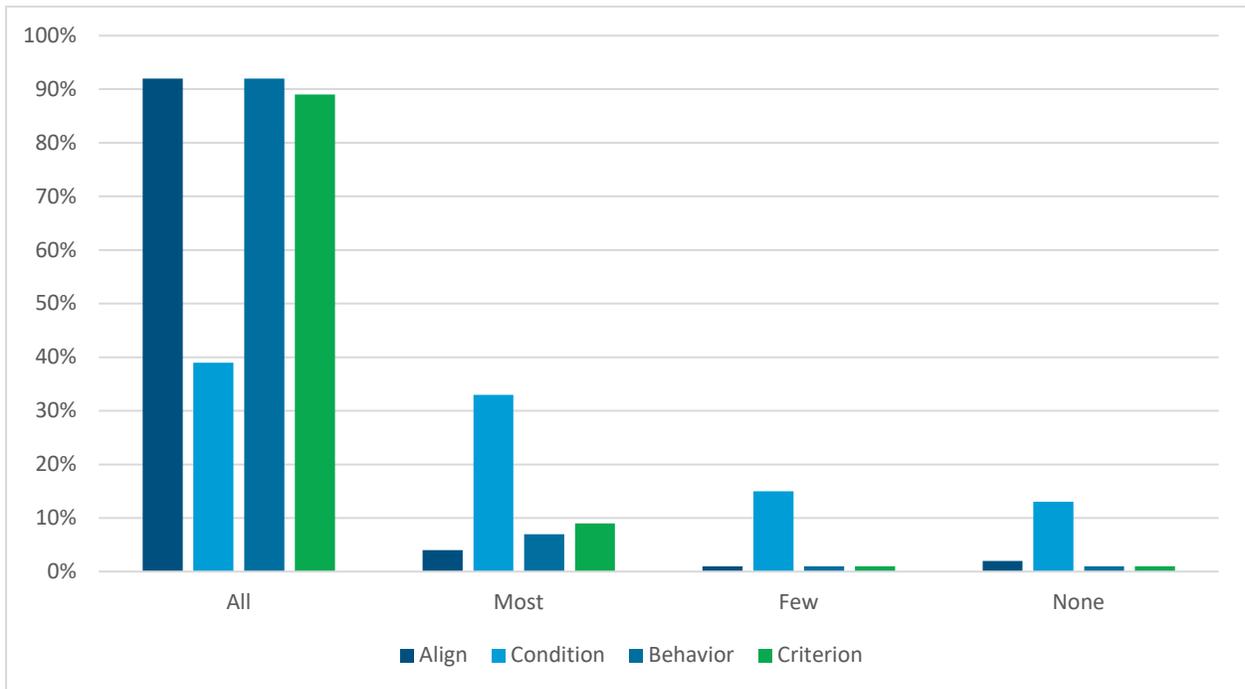
Short-Term Objectives (STOs)

Descriptive Summary

- Average number of STOs per IEP: 3 (range 0–39)

- Of the IEPs that include STOs (*n* = 138):

  – Average number per IEP: 6.4 (range: 1–39)

  – Average number of goals that have an associated STO: 3 (range: 1–16)

- Of the IEPs where a student was taking an alternate assessment (*n* = 23):

  – 78% (*n* = 18) included STOs for at least one goal

  – Average number of STOs per IEP: 7.5 (range: 0–39)

  – Average number of goals that have an associated STO: 3.7 (range: 0–16)

Exhibit C13. Quality of STOs

STOs	All Percentage (n)	Most Percentage (n)	Few Percentage (n)	None Percentage (n)
STOs include **alignment** between the behaviors stated in the objectives and their corresponding annual goals.	94% (130)	4% (6)	1% (1)	1% (1)
STOs include the **condition** under which the behavior will occur.	33% (46)	33% (45)	13% (18)	21% (29)
STOs include an observable and measurable target **behavior**.	94% (130)	4% (6)	0% (0)	1% (2)
STOs include a **criterion** for acceptable performance.	82% (115)	9% (13)	1% (2)	6% (8)

Note. Most = at least half but less than all IEPs. Few = more than none but less than half.

Exhibit C14. Summary of STOs
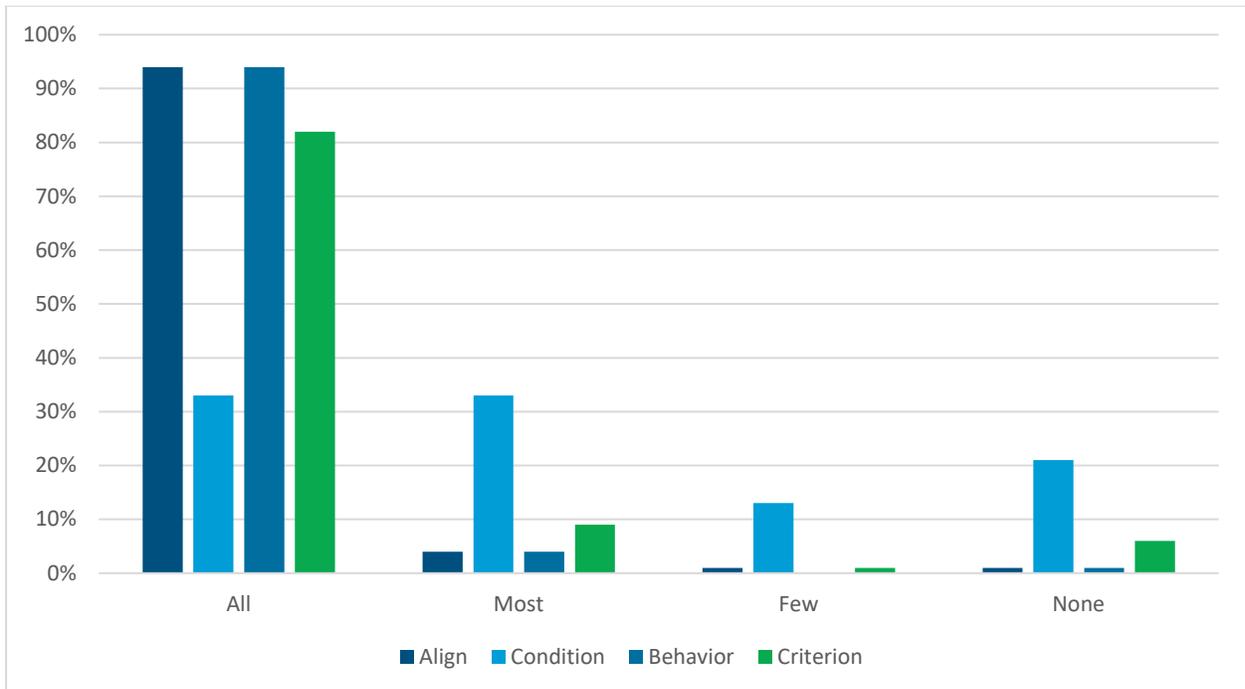
Classroom and Assessment Accommodations

Descriptive Summary

- IEPs with at least one classroom accommodation: 81% (*n* = 244)

- IEPs with at least one assessment accommodation: 73% (*n* = 219)

Exhibit C15. Frequency of Classroom Accommodations

Classroom accommodations	*n*	Percentage
Accessible text	11	4%
Alternate means of response	46	15%
Alternate written response	42	14%
Amplification equipment	3	1%
Augmentative communication device	5	2%
Bilingual dictionary	3	1%
Calculator	68	23%
Communication board/choice board	8	3%
Dictation	8	3%
English dictionary	13	4%
Flexible schedule	195	65%
Increase size of answer document	0	0%
Math aids	45	15%
Presentation of materials/assignment	68	23%
Read aloud	133	44%
Setting	40	13%
Spelling aids	31	10%
S accommodations	105	35%
Use of recording device: Prewriting	0	0%
Visual aids	104	35%
Other	212	71%
None	56	19%

Exhibit C16. Classroom Accommodation Alignment With Areas of Need

	All Percentage (*n*)	Most Percentage (*n*)	Few Percentage (*n*)	None Percentage (*n*)	NA Percentage (*n*)
The individual classroom accommodations for instructional access to the general curriculum are based on the needs outlined in PLOP/goals. The present level of performance shall directly relate to the other components of the IEP (8VAC20-81-110G.1b).	65% (195)	10% (30)	4% (11)	3% (8)	19% (56)

Note. NA indicates the student was not receiving any classroom accommodations, so AIR did not rate this item. Most = at least half but less than all IEPs. Few = more than none but less than half.

Exhibit C17. Frequency of Assessment Accommodations

Code	Assessment accommodation description	*n*	Percentage
1	Multiple test sessions over multiple days	18	6%
2	Dry erase board	3	1%
3	Additional writing implements	7	2%
4	Visual aids	104	35%
5	Amplification equipment	6	2%
6	Large-print test	0	0%
7	Test directions delivery	3	1%
8	Enlarged copy of answer document	0	0%
9	Braille test/Braille answer document	1	0%
10	Read-aloud: entire test (except on the *English: Reading* test)	80	27%
10B	Read-aloud: on demand (except on the *English: Reading* test)	61	20%
11A	Audio for paper-formatted tests (except on the *English: Reading* test)	0	0%
11O	Online audio (except on the *English: Reading* test)	100	33%
12	Interpreting/transliterating (except on the *English: Reading* Test)	1	0%
13	Communication board or choice cards	8	3%
14	Read-aloud on the *English: Reading* test: entire test	81	27%
14B	Read-aloud on the *English: Reading* test: on demand	62	21%
15A	Audio for paper-formatted tests (on the *English: Reading* test)	0	0%

Code	Assessment accommodation description	*n*	Percentage
15O	Online audio on the *English: Reading* test	98	33%
16	Interpreting/transliterating on the *English: Reading* test	1	0%
17	Bilingual dictionary	3	1%
18	Examiner records response	39	13%
19	Math aids (math tests only)	45	15%
20	Specific verbal prompts	8	3%
21	Response devices: access to Brailler	3	1%
21A	Response devices: access to word processor (short paper only)	32	11%
21B	Response devices: access to word processor with speech-to-text (short paper only)	11	4%
22	Augmentative communication device	4	1%
23	Spelling aids (short paper only)	28	9%
24	Dictation to a recording device (short paper only)	0	0%
25	Dictation to a scribe (short paper only)	9	3%
26	Calculators and arithmetic tables (when not allowed by test; Grade 3–7 math tests only)	67	22%
27	Virginia Department of Education-approved special accommodation request (documented description required)	1	<1%
28	Calculator with additional functions (Grades 4–8 and end-of-chapter [EOC] math tests and Grades 5 and 8 and EOC science tests only)	3	1%
29	English dictionary	13	4%
30	Read back student response (short paper only)	12	4%
31	Flexible schedule: time of day	4	1%
31A	Flexible schedule: order of the tests	1	<1%
31B	Flexible schedule: breaks	117	39%
32	Setting: location (documented description required)	35	12%
32A	Setting: adaptive or special furniture	5	2%
32B	Setting: special lighting	0	0%
A	Plain English mathematics test	59	20%
B	Nonstandard accommodation	0	0%
None		81	27%

Exhibit C18. Assessment Accommodation Alignment With Classroom Accommodations

Assessment Accommodations	Yes Percentage (*n*)	No Percentage (*n*)
Accommodations during assessment are consistent with the classroom accommodations that the student receives during instruction (VDOE Guidelines for Special Test Accommodations for Students with Disabilities, November 2019)	100% (219)	0% (0)

Note. Percentages are based on IEPs that included at least one assessment accommodation (*n* = 219).

Considerations for Assessment Accommodations

Our evaluation of assessment accommodations did not evaluate the extent to which the assessment accommodations aligned with the PLOP statements or goals. Therefore, there may have been a match between assessment and classroom accommodations, but the assessment accommodations may not align with the areas of need outlined in the IEP. For example, an IEP for a student with areas of need and goals associated with reading may have a classroom and assessment accommodation for calculator use. They would be coded as "aligned," even though they do not match the needs outlined in the IEP. This scenario occurred on three IEPs that we coded.

Special Education Services and Placement

Exhibit C19. Frequency of Primary Services

Primary special education service area	*n*	Percentage
APE: Adapted physical education	14	4.7%
AUT: Autism	38	12.7%
ED: Emotional disability	19	6.3%
HI: Hearing impairment	4	1.3%
ID: Intellectual disability	8	2.7%
IDS: Intellectual disability severe	3	1.0%
LD: Learning disability	151	50.3%
NCE: Noncategorical elementary	22	7.3%
PAC: Preschool autism class	7	2.3%
PD: Physical disability	3	1.0%
RP: Preschool resource program	16	5.3%
PSCB: Preschool class-based program	13	4.3%
SL: Speech language	37	12.3%
VI: Vision impairment	1	0.3%
Academy support	3	1.0%

Primary special education service area	n	Percentage
EFEO: Education for employment for the office	0	0.0%
ETR: Employment and transition representative	8	2.7%
Special education career center	9	3.0%
WAT: Work awareness and transition	5	1.7%

Exhibit C20. Frequency of Related Services

Related service areas	n	Percentage
Audiol: Audiology	2	0.7%
Coun: Counseling	8	2.7%
ETR: Employment transition representative	23	7.7%
Nurs: Nursing	0	0.0%
M: Orientation and mobility	0	0.0%
OT: Occupational therapy	26	8.7%
PT: Physical therapy	5	1.7%
SL: Speech language	87	29.0%
VIC: Vision impairment (concurrent)	2	0.7%
Additional service	25	8.3%
None	181	60.3%

Exhibit C21. IEPs Including a Rationale for Placement Selected

	Yes Percentage (n)
The IEP documents all alternatives considered and the rationale for choosing the selected placement (8VAC20-81-130.B.4).	36% (109)

Full History Review

Sample Demographics

Descriptive Summary

- We requested 50 full history files.

- Documents with information on the initial eligibility meeting: 82% (*n* = 41); often, when the information was not present, it was because the student transferred into the district. We did not code the transfer documentation.

- Documents with information on the reevaluation meetings: 98% (*n* = 49); at reevaluation, 12% (*n* = 6) of students were found to be ineligible for services.

Exhibit C22. Student Grade Level for Initial Meeting

Grade	Percentage (*n*)
PK	46% (19)
K	5% (2)
1	10% (4)
2	5% (2)
3	10% (4)
4	7% (3)
5	7% (3)
6	2% (1)
7	2% (1)
8	5% (2)

Note. Percentages are based on a sample of documents containing initial eligibility meeting information (*n* = 41).

Multidisciplinary Team

Exhibit C23. Teams Members Present During Each Meeting

Team member	Initial Percentage (*n*)	Reevaluation Percentage (*n*)
Adapted physical education teacher	2% (1)	6% (3)
Counselor	17% (7)	12% (6)
Teaching English to speakers of other languages teacher	5% (2)	2% (1)
General education teacher	56% (23)	86% (42)
Interpreter/translator	20% (8)	14% (7)
Parent	85% (35)	84% (41)
Principal/designee	100% (41)	92% (45)
Physical therapist	0% (0)	0% (0)
Occupational therapist	0% (0)	6% (3)
Social worker	71% (29)	35% (17)
Special education teacher	98% (40)	100% (49)
Psychologist	83% (34)	55% (27)
Speech-language pathologist	15% (6)	41% (20)
Student	0% (0)	16% (8)
Other	15% (6)	6% (3)

Note. Percentages are based on a sample of documents containing initial eligibility meeting information (*n* = 41) or reevaluation information (*n* = 49).

Initial Eligibility Assessments and Information Gathered

Exhibit C24. Educational Information Used During the Initial Eligibility Process

Educational information	Percentage (*n*)
Educational evaluation	27% (11)
Achievement/Standards of Learning/standardized test scores	15% (6)
Response to intervention/screening/progress monitoring data	0% (0)
Grades/transcript	7% (3)
Classroom-based assessments	5% (2)
Work samples	10% (4)
Social history	10% (4)
Teacher narrative/Teacher input	29% (12)
Direct observation	73% (30)
File review	12% (5)
Parent report of education	29% (12)
Other	32% (13)
None listed	12% (5)

Exhibit C25. Medical/Developmental/Speech Information Gathered During the Initial Eligibility Process

Medical/developmental/speech information	Percentage (*n*)
Vision	12% (5)
Audiological/hearing	37% (15)
Speech/language assessment/evaluation	29% (12)
Communication	2% (1)
Motor ability	2% (1)
Adaptive behavior	2% (1)
General medical report	12% (5)
Other	10% (4)
None listed	34% (14)

Exhibit C26. Sociocultural Information Gathered During the Initial Eligibility Process

Sociocultural information	Percentage (*n*)
Sociocultural evaluation	34% (14)
English language assessment/evaluation	24% (10)
Parent interview	15% (6)
Other	7% (3)
None listed	37% (15)

Exhibit C27. Psychological Information Gathered During the Initial Eligibility Process

Psychological information	Percentage (*n*)
Psychological evaluation	34% (14)
Cognitive	5% (2)
Developmental	17% (7)
Social history	0% (0)
Behavior/social-emotional learning/mental health	12% (5)
Parent report/parent input	2% (1)
Private psychological evaluation provided by parents	0% (0)
Other	7% (3)
None listed	37% (15)

Reevaluation Assessments and Information Gathered

Exhibit C28. Assessments Used During the Reevaluation Eligibility Process

Assessment	Percentage (*n*)
IEP progress reports/service provider reports	20% (10)
Grades/transcript	35% (17)
Record review	10% 5)
Standards of Learning/standardized/achievement test scores	51% (25)
Observational data	65% (32)
Classroom-based assessments	16% (8)
Response to intervention/screening/progress monitoring data	4% (2)
Work samples	12% (6)
Prior eligibility evaluation packet	16% (8)
Prior educational evaluation	41% (20)
Prior speech-language evaluation	12% (6)
Prior psychological evaluation	43% (21)
New speech-language evaluation	24% (12)
New educational evaluation	14% 7)
New psychological evaluation	20% (10)
Teacher narrative	59% (29)
Parent input	20% (10)
Medical documentation	22% (11)
Sociocultural evaluation/report/interview	47% (23)
Social history	4% (2)
Student input	4% (2)
Other	12% (6)

Note. Percentages are based on a sample of documents containing reevaluation information (*n* = 49).

Evaluation Outcomes: Eligibility Categories

Descriptive Summary

- At reevaluation, 12% (*n* = 6) of students were found to be ineligible for services.

Exhibit C29. Eligibility Categories

Category	Initial Percentage (*n*)	Reevaluation Percentage (*n*)
Autism spectrum disorder	12% (5)	16% (8)
Deaf-blindness	0% (0)	0% (0)
Deafness	0% (0)	0% (0)
Developmental delay	39% (16)	6% (3)
Emotional disability	5% (2)	8% (4)
Hearing impairment	2% (1)	0% (0)
Intellectual disability	2% (1)	6% (3)
Multiple disabilities	2% (1)	2% (1)
Orthopedic impairment	5% (2)	4% (2)
Other health impairment	10% (4)	16% (8)
Specific learning disability	22% (9)	43% (21)
Speech or language impairment	12% (5)	4% (2)
Traumatic brain injury	0% (0)	0% (0)
Visual impairment	0% (0)	0% (0)

Note. Percentages are based on a sample of documents containing initial eligibility meeting information (*n* = 41) or reevaluation information. At reevaluation, we included only those students who were found eligible for special education services (*n* = 43).

Exhibit C30. Dispersion of Initial Eligibility Categories Across Grade Level

Student	Grade	Autism	Developmental delay	Emotional disability	Hearing impairment	Intellectual disability	Multiple disabilities	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Learning disability	Speech or language
1	PK										X
2	PK	X	X								
3	PK		X								
4	PK		X								
5	PK		X								
6	PK	X	X								
7	PK		X								
8	PK							X			
9	PK		X								
10	PK	X									
11	PK		X								
12	PK		X								
13	PK		X								
14	PK		X								
15	PK		X								
16	PK		X								
17	PK		X								
18	PK		X								
19	PK		X								
20	K										X
21	K	X									

Student	Grade	Autism	Developmental delay	Emotional disability	Hearing impairment	Intellectual disability	Multiple disabilities	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Learning disability	Speech or language
22	1								X		
23	1										X
24	1	X									
25	1								X		
26	2									X	
27	2										
28	3									X	
29	3									X	
30	3								X		
31	3			X							
32	4									X	
33	4									X	
34	4										X
35	5									X	
36	5									X	
37	5					X	X	X	X		
38	6									X	
39	7									X	
40	8			X							
41	8				X						

Exhibit C31. Dispersion of Revaluation Eligibility Categories Across Grade Level

Student	Grade	Autism	Developmental delay	Emotional disability	Intellectual disability	Multiple disabilities	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Learning disability	Speech or language
1	PK		X							
2	K		X							
3	K	X								
4	1		X						X	
5	2	X								
6	2			X						
7	2			X					X	
8	3							X		
9	3							X		
10	3									X
11	4				X					
12	4								X	
13	4	X						X		
14	5	X								
15	5						X			
16	5									X
17	5								X	
18	6							X		
19	6			X						
20	7								X	
21	7								X	

Student	Grade	Autism	Developmental delay	Emotional disability	Intellectual disability	Multiple disabilities	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Learning disability	Speech or language
22	7						X		X	
23	8								X	
24	8	X								
25	8							X	X	
26	8								X	
27	9								X	
28	9								X	
29	9	X			X					
30	10	X								
31	10			X						
32	10								X	
33	10				X	X		X		
34	10								X	
35	11	X								
36	11								X	
37	11								X	
38	11							X		
39	12								X	
40	12								X	
41	12								X	
42	12							X	X	
43	12								X	

Appendix D. Staff Survey

About You

Exhibit D1. What was your position in FCPS during the 2018–19 school year? (Select the answer that is most accurate.)

Position	Percentage	N
a) Principal	1.28%	66
b) Assistant principal or dean of students	2.69%	139
c) General education classroom teacher	36.88%	1,905
d) Special education self-contained teacher	11.89%	614
e) Special education resource room teacher	3.14%	162
f) Special education inclusion teacher	7.22%	373
g) Instructional assistant	14.83%	766
h) Public health training assistant	1.57%	81
i) Public health attendant	0.77%	40
j) School psychologist	1.41%	73
k) Guidance counselor	2.81%	145
l) Social worker	0%	0
m) Speech-language pathologist	1.36%	70
n) Physical therapist or occupational therapist	0.72%	37
o) Hearing and vision itinerant	0.45%	23
p) Adapted physical education itinerant	0.43%	22
q) Audiologist	0%	0
r) Other	12.45%	643

Exhibit D2. What grade levels were included at the school in which you taught/worked in 2018–19? (Check all that apply.)

Grade	Percentage	N
a) Early childhood (PK)	15.02%	776
b) Elementary school (Grades K–6)	53.71%	2,774
c) Middle school (Grades 7 and 8)	16.73%	864
d) High school (Grades 9–12)	30.69%	1,585

Exhibit D3. In which region is your school located?

Region	Percentage	N
a) Region 1	18.64%	963
b) Region 2	20.21%	1,044
c) Region 3	21.70%	1,121
d) Region 4	20.02%	1,034
e) Region 5	17.81%	920
f) Nonregion	1.61%	83

Exhibit D4. Did you work at one of the following schools during the 2018–19 school year?

School	Percentage	N
a) Burke School	.56%	29
b) Cedar Lane School	.25%	13
c) Davis Career Center	.31%	16
d) Key Center	.64%	33
e) Kilmer Center	.37%	19
f) Pulley Career Center	.35%	18
g) Quander Road School	.37%	19
h) No, I did not work at one of these schools.	97.15%	5,018

Referral and Eligibility Process

Exhibit D5. Based on your experience during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent do you agree with the following statements about the referral and eligibility process for students with disabilities?

Statement	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	NA or not sure (%)	N
a) I am knowledgeable about FCPS policies regarding the referral and eligibility of students for special education services.	1,846 (37.51%)	2,516 (51.12%)	260 (5.28%)	73 (1.48%)	227 (4.61%)	4,922
b) FCPS has effective processes for identifying students with disabilities.	1,149 (23.37%)	2,834 (57.64%)	479 (9.74%)	102 2.07%)	353 (7.18%)	4,917
c) Processes for identifying students with disabilities happen in a timely manner.	1,114 (22.63%)	2,390 48.55%)	762 (15.48%)	205 (4.16%)	452 (9.18%)	4,923

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Development

Exhibit D6. During the 2018–19 school year, did you participate in at least one IEP meeting?

IEP meeting participation	Percentage	N
a) Yes	76.91%	3,794
b) No	23.09%	1,139

Exhibit D7. Based on your experience with IEP development during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a) I am knowledgeable about FCPS policies regarding IEP development.	1,683 (44.86%)	1,826 (48.67%)	161 (4.29%)	16 (0.43%)	66 (1.76%)	3,752
b) IEPs are developed with adequate input from the teachers and related services providers who work with the student.	1,532 (40.83%)	1,920 51.17%)	201 (5.36%)	48 (1.28%)	51 (1.36%)	3,752
c) IEPs are developed with adequate input from the student's parent(s)/guardian(s).	1,284 (34.21%)	2,070 (55.16%)	245 (6.53%)	38 (1.01%)	116 (3.09%)	3,753
d) IEPs include measurable goals aligned to grade-level standards (or alternative standards, as appropriate).	1,307 (35.44%)	2,117 (57.40%)	172 (4.66%)	29 (0.79%)	63 (1.71%)	3,688
e) IEPs are developed in alignment with each student's present level of academic and functional performance.	1,421 (38.55%)	2,055 (55.75%)	134 (3.64%)	21 (0.57%)	55 (1.49%)	3,686
f) Present levels of academic and functional performance are based on data, including comprehensive evaluation results.	1,381 (37.47%)	2,015 (54.67%)	172 (4.67%)	24 (0.65%)	94 (2.55%)	3,686
g) IEPs include service hours that are appropriate to the needs of the student.	1,203 (32.96%)	1,880 (51.51%)	256 (7.01%)	33 (0.90%)	278 (7.62%)	3,650
h) IEPs include accommodations that are appropriate to the needs of the student.	1,357 (37.20%)	2,044 (56.03%)	166 (4.55%)	28 (0.77%)	53 (1.45%)	3,648

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
i) IEPs include documentation that the student received the appropriate services and accommodations.	1,221 (33.53%)	1,873 (51.43%)	253 (6.95%)	44 (1.21%)	251 (6.89%)	3,642
j) Teachers and related services providers do a good job tracking progress towards IEP goals.	959 (26.62%)	2,059 (57.15%)	340 (9.44%)	44 (1.22%)	201 (5.58%)	3,603
k) Progress on IEP goals is effectively communicated to the student's parent(s)/guardian(s).	1,134 (31.48%)	1,816 (50.42%)	231 (6.41%)	31 (0.86%)	390 (10.83%)	3,602
l) For students transitioning from other schools, the IEP process incorporates adequate communication with staff from the feeder or receiving schools.	706 (19.61%)	1,458 (40.50%)	537 (14.92%)	130 (3.61%)	769 (21.36%)	3,600

Transition Planning

Exhibit D8. During the 2018–19 school year, did you work with students with postsecondary transition plans?

	Percentage	N
a) Yes	21.70%	1,030
b) No	78.30%	3,716

Exhibit D9. Based on your experience with postsecondary transition planning during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	*N*
a)	Students are given adequate supports to transition to postsecondary education, employment, or independent living.	327 (32.15%)	504 (49.56%)	74 (7.28%)	10 (0.98%)	102 (10.03%)	1,017
b)	Postsecondary transition planning includes input from the student.	478 (47.28%)	473 (46.79%)	26 (2.57%)	2 (20%)	32 (3.17%)	1,011
c)	Postsecondary transition planning involves community-based organizations.	291 (28.90%)	404 (40.12%)	98 (9.73%)	11 (1.09%)	203 (20.16%)	1,007

Inclusionary Practices

Exhibit D10. Based on your experience with inclusionary practices for students with disabilities during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	*N*
a)	I am knowledgeable about FCPS policies for placement for students with disabilities.	1,448 (31.34%)	2,368 (51.26%)	373 (8.07%)	44 (0.95%)	387 (8.38%)	4,620
b)	Students with disabilities in FCPS are placed in settings with their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible.	1,879 (40.66%)	2,300 (49.77%)	151 (3.27%)	41 (0.89%)	250 (5.41%)	4,621
c)	Students with disabilities in FCPS have adequate access to core curriculum and instruction.	1,718 (37.16%)	2,380 (51.48%)	209 (4.52%)	40 (0.87%)	276 (5.97%)	4,623
d)	Students with disabilities in FCPS have adequate opportunities for social inclusion.	1,672 (36.42%)	2,404 52.36%)	245 (5.34%)	43 (0.94%)	227 (4.94%)	4,591
e)	Students with disabilities in FCPS have adequate opportunities for academic inclusion.	1,598 (34.81%)	2,454 (53.45%)	264 (5.75%)	39 (0.85%)	236 (5.14%)	4,591

Professional Development

Exhibit D11. Based on your experience with professional development opportunities during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a)	I received adequate opportunities for professional development related to the needs of students with disabilities.	1,086 (23.90%)	2,095 (46.10%)	865 (19.04%)	213 (4.69%)	285 (6.27%)	4,544
b)	My professional development plan was individualized based on my specific needs related to students with disabilities.	755 (16.66%)	1,651 (36.42%)	1,220 (26.91%)	302 (6.66%)	605 (13.35%)	4,533
c)	Professional development on topics related to students with disabilities was of high quality.	803 (17.72%)	1,982 (43.73%)	680 (15.00%)	169 (3.73%)	898 (19.81%)	4,532
d)	Teachers new to the profession or new to teaching students with disabilities received additional, specialized support.	616 (13.61%)	1,364 (30.13%)	752 (16.61%)	390 (8.61%)	1,405 (31.04%)	4,527

Exhibit D12. Based on your experience during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent was the professional development you received through the district helpful for improving your instruction, service provision, or other responsibilities related to students with disabilities?

		Very helpful	Moderately helpful	Minimally helpful	Not helpful	Did not receive PD on this topic	N
a)	Making appropriate referrals for at-risk students	689 (15.61%)	1,316 (29.82%)	714 (16.18%)	178 (4.03%)	1,516 (34.35%)	4,413
b)	MTSS process	592 (13.82%)	1,230 (28.72%)	730 (17.04%)	243 (5.67%)	1,488 (34.74%)	4,283
c)	Selecting and implementing appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities	788 (17.91%)	1,381 (31.39%)	615 (13.98%)	145 (3.30%)	1,471 (33.43%)	4,400
d)	Developing or contributing to IEPs for students with disabilities	884 (20.03%)	1,278 (28.95%)	553 (12.53%)	144 (3.26%)	1,555 (35.23%)	4,414

		Very helpful	Moderately helpful	Minimally helpful	Not helpful	Did not receive PD on this topic	*N*
e)	Assessments for students with disabilities	822 (18.65%)	1,211 (27.48%)	615 (13.96%)	163 (3.70%)	1,596 (36.22%)	4,407
f)	Using formative assessments	743 (17.15%)	1,342 (30.97%)	658 (15.19%)	161 (3.72%)	1,429 (32.98%)	4,333
g)	Differentiating instruction	954 (22.06%)	1,481 (34.24%)	710 (16.42%)	164 (3.79%)	1,016 (23.49%)	4,325
h)	Co-teaching	749 (17.50%)	954 (22.29%)	551 (12.88%)	227 (5.30%)	1,798 (42.02%)	4,279
i)	Inclusionary and Universal Design for Learning practices	614 (14.24%)	1,062 (24.62%)	602 (13.96%)	182 (4.22%)	1,853 (42.96%)	4,313
j)	Using technology for instruction and learning	1,017 (23.42%)	1,418 (32.66%)	646 (14.88%)	161 (3.71%)	1,100 (25.33%)	4,342
k)	English learners with disabilities	624 (14.44%)	1,030 23.84%)	669 (15.48%)	209 (4.84%)	1,789 (41.40%)	4,321
l)	Dyslexia training	724 (16.77%)	1,288 (29.84%)	1,067 (24.72%)	292 (6.76%)	946 (21.91%)	4,317
m)	Teaching students who are several years below grade level	509 (11.79%)	812 18.81%)	629 (14.57%)	295 (6.84%)	2,071 (47.98%)	4,316

School Staffing

Exhibit D13. Based on your experience with school staffing during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	*N*
a)	Special education and related services staff are allocated across the district in an efficient manner.	459 (10.76%)	1,598 (37.45%)	804 (18.84%)	372 (8.72%)	1,034 (24.23%)	4,267
b)	Special education and related services staff are allocated within my school in an efficient manner.	795 (18.63%)	2,097 (49.14%)	709 (16.62%)	275 (6.44%)	391 (9.16%)	4,267
c)	FCPS is effective at recruiting high-quality personnel to serve students with disabilities.	652 (15.27%)	2,010 (47.08%)	694 (16.26%)	319 (7.47%)	594 (13.91%)	4,269

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
d)	FCPS is effective at retaining high-quality personnel serving students with disabilities.	470 (11.01%)	1,598 (37.45%)	1,061 (24.87%)	533 (12.49%)	605 (14.18%)	4,267
e)	When a school needs new staff to support students with disabilities, FCPS is able to quickly respond to and fill the staff need.	354 (8.30%)	1,165 (27.31%)	1,148 (26.91%)	673 (15.78%)	926 (21.71%)	4,266

Staff Supports

Exhibit D14. Based on your experience during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent was the support you received from the following entities helpful for matters related to students with disabilities?

		Very helpful	Moderately helpful	Minimally helpful	Not helpful	Did not receive PD on this topic	N
a)	Office of Special Education Instruction	675 (16.09%)	1,001 (23.86%)	529 (12.61%)	182 (4.34%)	1,808 (43.10%)	4,195
b)	Office of Procedural Support	821 (19.61%)	881 (21.05%)	389 (9.29%)	142 (3.39%)	1,953 (46.66%)	4,186
c)	Office of Intervention and Prevention Services	499 (11.94%)	672 (16.08%)	371 (8.88%)	151 (3.61%)	2,486 (59.49%)	4,179
d)	Office of Counseling and College and Career Readiness	409 (9.78%)	551 (13.17%)	274 (6.55%)	110 (2.63%)	2,839 (67.87%)	4,183
e)	Other FCPS central office staff	523 (12.61%)	789 (19.02%)	435 (10.49%)	176 (4.24%)	2,225 (53.64%)	4,148

Evidence-Based Practices

Exhibit D15. Based on your experience during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent do you agree that there are sufficient resources, interventions, and specialized programs at your school to meet the needs of students with:

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a)	Autism spectrum disorder	820 (19.81%)	1,973 (47.66%)	557 (13.45%)	166 (4.01%)	624 (15.07%)	4,140
b)	Developmental delays	734 (17.70%)	1,971 (47.53%)	444 (10.71%)	116 (2.80%)	882 (21.27%)	4,147

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
c) Dyslexia	508 (12.25%)	1,665 (40.16%)	692 (16.69%)	262 (6.32%)	1,019 (24.58%)	4,146
d) Emotional/behavioral disabilities	646 (15.46%)	1,664 (39.82%)	952 (22.78%)	407 (9.74%)	510 (12.20%)	4,179
e) English learners with disabilities	641 (15.28%)	1,826 (43.54%)	815 (19.43%)	281 (6.70%)	631 (15.05%)	4,194
f) Intellectual disabilities	750 (17.95%)	1,900 (45.48%)	497 (11.90%)	166 (3.97%)	865 (20.70%)	4,178
g) Learning disabilities	996 (23.80%)	2,312 (55.24%)	341 (8.15%)	92 (2.20%)	444 (10.61%)	4,185

Instruction

Exhibit D16. Based on your experience and knowledge of your colleagues' instructional practices during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent do most teachers at your school do the following when providing instruction in classes that include students with disabilities and struggling students?

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	To a minimal extent	Not at all	NA or not sure	N
a) Differentiate their instruction (e.g., modify content, process, or product)	1,584 (38.10%)	1,732 (41.65%)	561 (13.49%)	38 (0.91%)	243 (5.84%)	4,158
b) Select and provide appropriate accommodations outlined in the IEP (e.g., small setting, extra time)	2,105 (50.60%)	1,500 (36.06%)	274 (6.59%)	29 (0.70%)	252 (6.06%)	4,160
c) Use technology that enhances learning and access for students with disabilities (e.g., screen readers, calculator)	1,534 (36.88%)	1,688 (40.59%)	502 (12.07%)	54 1.30%)	381 (9.16%)	4,159
d) Implement principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (e.g., multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression)	971 (23.45%)	1,516 (36.62%)	552 (13.33%)	100 (2.42%)	1,001 (24.18%)	4,140

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Exhibit D17. Based on your experience with MTSS during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	*N*
a)	I am knowledgeable about MTSS.	900 (21.82%)	1,766 (42.81%)	495 (12.00%)	207 (5.02%)	757 (18.35%)	4,125
b)	My school uses screening data to identify struggling learners.	1,074 (25.99%)	2,037 (49.30%)	227 (5.49%)	90 (2.18%)	704 (17.04%)	4,132
c)	My school provides high-quality core instruction at Tier 1 to all students, including students with disabilities.	1,130 (27.33%)	1,976 (47.80%)	311 (7.52%)	77 (1.86%)	640 (15.48%)	4,134
d)	My school provides small group targeted intervention at Tier 2 to some students, in addition to high-quality core instruction.	918 (22.53%)	1,920 (47.13%)	301 (7.39%)	75 1.84%)	860 (2.11%)	4,074
e)	My school provides intensive intervention at Tier 3 to a few students, in addition to high-quality core instruction.	909 (22.37%)	1,680 (41.34%)	345 (8.49%)	106 (2.61%)	1,024 (25.20%)	4,064
f)	My school has effective processes in place for progress monitoring at Tier 2 and Tier 3.	744 (18.35%)	1,575 (38.84%)	496 (12.23%)	148 (3.65%)	1,092 (26.93%)	4,055
g)	My school has teams and processes in place to regularly review student data related to MTSS.	926 (22.86%)	1,675 (41.36%)	300 (7.41%)	133 (3.28%)	1,016 (25.09%)	4,050

Data-Driven Decision Making

Exhibit D18. Based on your experience with using data to make decisions during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a) Teachers use data to identify students in need of academic intervention.	1,356 (33.50%)	2,300 (56.82%)	161 (3.98%)	42 (1.04%)	189 (4.67%)	4,048
b) Teachers use data to identify students in need of behavioral intervention.	1,078 (26.68%)	2,169 (53.67%)	422 (10.44%)	81 (2.00%)	291 (7.20%)	4,041
c) Teachers use data to design and modify instruction for students struggling academically.	1,181 (29.25%)	2,305 (57.10%)	277 (6.86%)	48 (1.19%)	226 (5.60%)	4,037
d) Teachers use data to design and modify instruction for students struggling behaviorally.	981 (24.27%)	2,090 (51.71%)	527 (13.04%)	99 (2.45%)	345 (8.54%)	4,042
e) Staff use data to make decisions about improvements to special education practices and processes in their school.	989 (24.52%)	1,933 (47.92%)	429 (10.63%)	112 (2.78%)	571 (14.15%)	4,034

Communication

Exhibit D19. Based on your experience with FCPS communication practices during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a) Staff at my school effectively involve families in decisions about how to address individual student needs.	1,218 (30.20%)	2,235 (55.42%)	238 (5.90%)	47 (1.17%)	295 (7.31%)	4,033
b) Staff at my school provide information to families on how to support their child's learning.	1,207 (29.94%)	2,211 (54.84%)	255 (6.32%)	44 (1.09%)	315 (7.81%)	4,032
c) FCPS keep its staff informed about services for students with disabilities.	883 (21.93%)	1,995 (49.55%)	609 (15.13%)	139 (3.45%)	400 (9.94%)	4,026

Conclusion

Exhibit D20. Based on your overall knowledge of FCPS during the 2018–19 school year, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	*N*
a) Students with disabilities in FCPS receive an excellent education.	983 (24.50%)	2,264 (56.42%)	365 (9.10%)	60 (1.50%)	341 (8.50%)	4,013
b) FCPS has appropriate organizational structures to support students with disabilities.	917 (22.85%)	2,168 (54.01%)	475 (11.83%)	100 (2.49%)	354 (8.82%)	4,014
c) FCPS offers a continuum of services that meets the needs of students with disabilities.	1,073 (26.74%)	2,171 (54.10%)	353 (8.80%)	71 (1.77%)	345 (8.60%)	4,013
d) FCPS ensures that students with disabilities are included when planning new programs and services.	802 (20.07%)	1,761 (44.06%)	461 (11.53%)	91 (2.28%)	882 (22.07%)	3,997
e) FCPS leaders make it clear that educating students with disabilities to high standards is a priority.	1,089 (27.24%)	1,925 (48.15%)	490 (12.26%)	128 (3.20%)	366 (9.15%)	3,998
f) FCPS schools implement services for students with disabilities with fidelity.	883 (22.14%)	1,953 (48.96%)	513 (12.86%)	129 (3.23%)	511 (12.81%)	3,989

Appendix E. Parent Survey

Individualized Education Program

Demographics

Exhibit E1. What is the primary disability category for which your child receives/received special education services? (Check one.)

		Percentage	*N*
a)	Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)	22.08%	2,423
b)	Deaf-blindness (DB)	0.13%	14
c)	Deafness (D)	0.36%	40
d)	Developmental delay (DD)	10.82%	1,187
e)	Emotional disturbance (ED)	4.34%	476
f)	Hearing impairment (HI)	0.79%	87
g)	Intellectual disability (ID) (formerly called mental retardation)	3.79%	416
h)	Orthopedic impairment (OI)	0.46%	51
i)	Other health impairment (OHI)	9.50%	1,043
j)	Specific learning disability (SLD)	21.08%	2,313
k)	Speech or language impairment (SI)	14.48%	1,589
l)	Traumatic brain injury (TBI)	0.42%	46
m)	Visual impairment, including blindness (VI)	0.51%	56
n)	I do not know.	11.24%	1,233

Exhibit E2. Does your child qualify for special education services under more than one disability category?

		Percentage	*N*
a)	Yes	41.63%	4,569
b)	No	58.37%	6,405

Exhibit E3. What are the other disability categories for which your child receives/received special education services? (Check all that apply.)

		Percentage	*N*
a)	Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)	23.26%	1,037
b)	Deaf-blindness (DB)	0.31%	14
c)	Deafness (D)	0.74%	33
d)	Developmental delay (DD)	22.01%	981
e)	Emotional disturbance (ED)	8.34%	372

		Percentage	N
f)	Hearing impairment (HI)	2.06%	92
g)	Intellectual disability (ID) (formerly called mental retardation)	8.55%	381
h)	Orthopedic impairment (OI)	2.71%	121
i)	Other health impairment (OHI)	16.04%	715
j)	Specific learning disability (SLD)	22.48%	1,002
k)	Speech or language impairment (SI)	26.81%	1,195
l)	Traumatic brain injury (TBI)	1.10%	49
m)	Visual impairment, including blindness (VI)	2.06%	92
n)	I do not know.	15.05%	671

Exhibit E4. What grade is your child currently in?

		Percentage	N
a)	Prekindergarten	7.76%	799
b)	Kindergarten	5.42%	558
c)	1	5.71%	588
d)	2	6.15%	633
e)	3	7.49%	771
f)	4	8.27%	852
g)	5	7.69%	792
h)	6	7.53%	775
i)	7	7.59%	782
j)	8	7.54%	776
k)	9	6.81%	701
l)	10	6.57%	677
m)	11	9.07%	934
n)	12	8.18%	842

Exhibit E5. In which region is your child's school located? (Please check one.)

		Percentage	N
a)	Region 1	6.03%	621
b)	Region 2	4.19%	431
c)	Region 3	4.45%	458
d)	Region 4	6.89%	710
e)	Region 5	4.80%	494
f)	I do not know.	73.65%	7,584

Exhibit E6. Does your child attend one of the following schools?

		Percentage	N
a)	Burke School	.61%	61
b)	Cedar Lane School	.43%	43
c)	Davis Career Center	.63%	63
d)	Key Center	.42%	42
e)	Kilmer Center	.37%	37
f)	Pulley Career Center	.38%	38
g)	Quander Road School	.18%	18
h)	No, my child does not attend any of these schools.	97.00%	9,765

Exhibit E7. Which group does your child most identify with?

		Percentage	N
a)	American Indian/Alaska Native	.35%	36
b)	Asian	12.14%	1,241
c)	Black or African American	11.40%	1,165
d)	Hispanic or Latino	14.01%	1,432
e)	Multi-racial	8.16%	834
f)	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	.27%	28
g)	White	44.25%	4,523
h)	Do not want to specify.	9.42%	963

Exhibit E8. What is the primary language spoken in your home?

		Percentage	N
a)	English	78.97%	8,053
b)	Amharic	.95%	97
c)	Arabic	1.34%	137
d)	Chinese	.61%	62
e)	Farsi	.44%	45
f)	Korean	.76%	78
g)	Spanish	11.14%	1136
h)	Urdu	.58%	59
i)	Vietnamese	1.24%	126
j)	Other	3.96%	404

Exhibit E9. What type of diploma will your child receive?

		Percentage	*N*
a)	Advanced studies diploma	26.19%	2679
b)	Standard diploma	23.64%	2418
c)	Applied studies diploma	2.02%	207
d)	Other diploma	3.87%	396
e)	Other certificate	.56%	57
f)	I don't know.	43.72%	4473

Referral and Eligibility Process

Exhibit E10. Did your child go through the special education eligibility and referral process in an FCPS school?

		Percentage	*N*
a)	Yes	89.95%	9,194
b)	No	10.05%	1,027

Exhibit E11. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the referral and eligibility process for students with disabilities based on your experience?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	*N*
a)	The process for having my child referred and evaluated for special education services was easy.	2,374 (26.58%)	4,489 (50.27%)	1,045 (11.70%)	773 (8.66%)	249 (2.79%)	8,930
b)	My child was identified for special education services in a timely manner.	2,572 (28.98%)	4,325 (48.73%)	987 (11.12%)	720 (8.11%)	272 (3.06%)	8,876

Individualized Education Program Development

Exhibit E12. Did you participate in at least one IEP meeting before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020?

		Percentage	*N*
a)	Yes	89.88%	8,928
b)	No	10.12%	1,005

Exhibit E13. Based on your experience with IEP meetings that took place before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	*N*
a) I had adequate opportunities for input into the development of my child's IEP.	3,991 (45.53%)	4,124 (47.05%)	347 (3.96%)	177 (2.02%)	126 (1.44%)	8,765
b) School staff listened to my concerns and recommendations about my child.	4,216 (48.13%)	3,770 (43.04%)	427 (4.87%)	250 (2.85%)	96 (1.10%)	8,759
c) School staff treated me as an equal partner in developing my child's IEP.	4,159 (47.54%)	3,712 (42.43%)	491 (5.61%)	261 (2.98%)	125 (1.43%)	8,748
d) School staff took time to explain the IEP process and evaluation results.	4,317 (49.32%)	3,868 (44.19%)	303 (3.46%)	160 (1.83%)	105 (1.20%)	8,753
e) My child's IEP was developed using multiple sources of data, including results from evaluations.	3,555 (41.21%)	4,225 (48.97%)	406 (4.71%)	165 (1.91%)	276 (3.20%)	8,627
f) My child's IEP included measurable goals that were appropriate for their needs.	3,457 (40.11%)	4,207 (48.81%)	545 (6.32%)	220 (2.55%)	190 (2.20%)	8,619
g) My child's IEP included service hours that were appropriate for their needs.	3,088 (35.83%)	3,995 (46.36%)	772 (8.96%)	314 (3.64%)	449 (5.21%)	8,618
h) My child's IEP included accommodations that were appropriate for their needs (e.g., extended time on tests).	3,286 (38.13%)	4,142 (48.07%)	438 (5.08%)	191 (2.22%)	560 (6.50%)	8,617
i) The school provided my child with all the services and accommodations written on their IEP.	3,326 (39.07%)	3,865 (45.40%)	667 (7.84%)	298 (3.50%7)	357 (4.19%)	8,513
j) The school did a good job communicating my child's progress on their IEP goals.	3,385 (39.81%)	3,841 (45.17%)	753 (8.86%)	306 (3.60%)	218 (2.56%)	8,503
k) The school supported my child with transitions between grade levels and schools.	3,031 (35.70%)	3,498 (41.20%)	700 (8.24%)	339 (3.99%)	923 (10.87%)	8,491

Transition Planning

Exhibit E14. Did your child have a postsecondary transition plan in their IEP before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020? [Note: This is applicable for students ages 14 and up].

	Percentage	N
a) Yes	27.68%	2,359
b) No	72.32%	6,162

Exhibit E15. Based on your experience with postsecondary transition planning before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a) The school provided supports and services to help my child achieve their goals related to postsecondary education, employment, and/or independent living.	823 (35.50%)	965 (41.63%)	174 (7.51%)	79 (3.41%)	277 (11.95%)	2,318
b) My child had adequate opportunities for input into the development of their postsecondary transition plan.	822 (35.74%)	997 (43.35%)	134 (5.83%)	51 (2.22%)	296 (12.87%)	2,300
c) The school provided information on agencies or organizations in the community that can assist my child in planning for life after high school.	714 (31.18%)	824 (35.98%)	248 (10.83%)	98 (4.28%)	406 (17.73%)	2,290

Inclusionary Practices

Exhibit E16. Based on your experience with inclusionary practices before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a) The amount of time my child spent in the general education classroom was appropriate for their needs.	3,021 (36.31%)	3,782 (45.46%)	541 (6.50%)	244 (2.93%)	732 (8.80%)	8,320
b) My child had adequate opportunities for social inclusion.	3,106 (37.38%)	3,631 (43.70%)	575 (6.92%)	295 (3.55%)	702 (8.45%)	8,309
c) My child had adequate opportunities for academic inclusion.	3,086 (37.19%)	3,714 (44.75%)	551 (6.64%)	245 (2.95%)	703 (8.47%)	8,299

School Staffing

Exhibit E17. Based on your experience with school staff before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a)	My child's school had sufficient teaching staff to meet their needs.	2,836 (34.60%)	3,710 (45.27%)	791 (9.65%)	385 (4.70%)	474 (5.78%)	8,196
b)	My child's school had sufficient related services staff to meet their needs (e.g., behavior intervention teachers, social workers, speech language pathologists, etc.).	2,664 (32.54%)	3,462 (42.29%)	880 (10.75%)	431 (5.27%)	749 (9.15%)	8,186
c)	I was satisfied with the quality of the teaching staff in my child's school.	3,159 (38.64%)	3,697 (45.22%)	670 (8.20%)	345 (4.22%)	304 (3.72%)	8,175
d)	I was satisfied with the quality of the related services staff in my child's school.	2,998 (36.68%)	3,582 (43.82%)	759 (9.29%)	335 (4.10%)	500 (6.12%)	8,174
e)	School staff did a good job delivering the services written in my child's IEP.	3,113 (38.08%)	3,653 (44.69%)	716 (8.76%)	328 (4.01%)	364 (4.45%)	8,174

Parent Supports

Exhibit E18. Based on your experience before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent was the support you received from the following entities helpful for you on matters related to your child's IEP?

		Very helpful	Moderately helpful	Minimally helpful	Not helpful	Didn't receive support from this entity	N
a)	Office of Special Education Instruction (e.g., Applied Behavior Analysis [ABA] coach, behavior intervention teacher)	2,107 (26.50%)	1,204 (15.14%)	559 (7.03%)	284 (3.57%)	3,796 (47.75%)	7,950
b)	Office of Procedural Support (e.g., Procedural Support Liaison [PSL])	1,709 (21.61%)	1,171 (14.81%)	514 (6.50%)	333 (4.21%)	4,182 (52.88%)	7,909

		Very helpful	Moderately helpful	Minimally helpful	Not helpful	Didn't receive support from this entity	N
c)	Office of Intervention and Prevention Services (e.g., school social worker, school psychologist)	2,371 (29.83%)	1,525 (19.19%)	804 (10.12%)	387 (4.87%)	2,861 (36.00%)	7,948
d)	Office of Counseling and College and Career Readiness (e.g., career and transition services)	1,499 (18.95%)	965 (12.20%)	403 (5.09%)	236 (2.98%)	4,807 (60.77%)	7,910
e)	Other FCPS Central Office staff	2,217 (28.91%)	1,413 (18.42%)	564 (7.35%)	270 (3.52%)	3,205 (41.79%)	7,669
f)	Parental advisory groups (e.g., Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities [ACSD], Special Education Parent Teacher Association [SEPTA], Parents of Autism Children [POAC])	1,382 (17.75%)	972 (12.48%)	374 (4.80%)	214 (2.75%)	4,844 (62.21%)	7,786

Instruction

Exhibit E19. Based on your experience with instruction in your child's school before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a)	My child's teachers were knowledgeable about instruction.	3,453 (44.01%)	3,506 (44.69%)	399 (5.09%)	219 (2.79%)	269 (3.43%)	7,846
b)	My child's teachers were able to differentiate their instruction to meet my child's needs.	2,903 (37.04%)	3,186 (40.65%)	805 (10.27%)	366 (4.67%)	578 (7.37%)	7,838
c)	My child's teachers selected and provided appropriate classroom accommodations (e.g., small setting, extra time).	3,140 (40.05%)	3,273 (41.75%)	590 (7.53%)	267 (3.41%)	570 (7.27%)	7,840
d)	I was satisfied with the quality of instruction that my child received in the special education setting.	3,063 (39.09%)	3,118 (39.80%)	708 (9.04%)	374 (4.77%)	572 (7.30%)	7,835
e)	I was satisfied with the quality of instruction that my child received in the general education setting.	2,919 (37.29%)	3,251 (41.53%)	695 (8.88%)	319 (4.08%)	644 (8.23%)	7,828

Communication

Exhibit E20. Based on your experience with FCPS communication practices before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a)	School staff regularly updated me about how my child was doing in school.	2,698 (34.73%)	3,351 (43.13%)	1,063 13.68%)	396 (5.10%)	261 (3.36%)	7,769
b)	Staff at my child's school effectively involved me in decisions about how to address my child's needs.	2,807 (36.18%)	3,421 (44.10%)	837 (10.79%)	332 (4.28%)	351 (4.52%)	7,758
c)	I was satisfied with the amount of communication I received from my child's school.	2,693 (34.72%)	3,315 (42.74%)	1,104 (14.23%)	383 (4.94%)	261 (3.37%)	7,756
d)	My child's school had an effective system for communicating with families.	2,710 (35.02%)	3,358 (43.39%)	942 (12.17%)	368 (4.76%)	361 (4.66%)	7,739
e)	I received helpful information from the school and district about services for students with disabilities.	2,121 (27.67%)	3,384 (44.14%)	970 (12.65%)	396 (5.17%)	795 (10.37%)	7,666
f)	I was provided with information about my child in a way or form (e.g., in large print or braille, through an interpreter, etc.) that I could read and understand, including at meetings and events.	2,627 (34.26%)	2,905 (37.89%)	204 (2.66%)	106 (1.38%)	1,825 (23.80%)	7,667
g)	I was provided with information about my child in my primary language (e.g., English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, etc.), including at meetings and events.	3,692 (48.18%)	2,878 (37.56%)	109 (1.42%)	56 (0.73%)	928 (12.11%)	7,663

Conclusion

Exhibit E21. Based on your overall knowledge of FCPS before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	*N*
a) Students with disabilities in FCPS receive an excellent education.	2,315 (30.30%)	3,247 (42.50%)	911 (11.92%)	503 (6.58%)	664 (8.69%)	7,640
b) FCPS has appropriate organizational structures to support students with disabilities.	2,353 (30.85%)	3,287 (43.10%)	857 (11.24%)	530 (6.95%)	600 (7.87%)	7,627
c) FCPS offers a continuum of services that meets the needs of students with disabilities.	2,333 (30.63%)	3,226 (42.35%)	800 (10.50%)	484 (6.35%)	774 (10.16%)	7,617
d) FCPS ensures that students with disabilities are included when planning new programs and services.	2,038 (26.92%)	2,803 (37.03%)	702 (9.27%)	418 (5.52%)	1,609 (21.25%)	7,570
e) FCPS leaders make it clear that educating students with disabilities to high standards is a priority.	2,180 (28.83%)	2,929 (38.74%)	898 (11.88%)	592 (7.83%)	962 (12.72%)	7,561
f) FCPS schools implement services for students with disabilities with fidelity.	2,088 (27.73%)	2,905 38.57%)	767 (10.18%)	496 (6.59%)	1,275 (16.93%)	7,531

Section 504 Plans

Demographics

Exhibit E22. What grade is your child currently in?

	Percentage	*N*
a) Pre-kindergarten	0.44%	16
b) Kindergarten	0.91%	33
c) 1	1.73%	63
d) 2	3.55%	129
e) 3	4.59%	167
f) 4	6.69%	243
g) 5	7.81%	284
h) 6	8.31%	302
i) 7	10.04%	365

	Percentage	N
j) 8	9.49%	345
k) 9	10.07%	366
l) 10	12.30%	447
m) 11	13.09%	476
n) 12	10.98%	399

Exhibit E23. In which region is your child's school located? (Please check one.)

		Percentage	N
a)	Region 1	8.97%	326
b)	Region 2	4.76%	173
c)	Region 3	5.14%	187
d)	Region 4	8.56%	311
e)	Region 5	6.05%	220
f)	I do not know.	66.52%	2,418

Exhibit E24. Which group does your child most identify with?

		Percentage	N
a)	American Indian/Alaska Native	0.17%	6
b)	Asian	7.79%	281
c)	Black or African American	5.71%	206
d)	Hispanic or Latino	10.87%	392
e)	Multi-racial	8.85%	319
f)	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.31%	11
g)	White	57.64%	2,078
h)	Do not want to specify.	8.65%	312

Exhibit E25. What is the primary language spoken in your home?

		Percentage	N
a)	English	87.57%	3,169
b)	Amharic	0.33%	12
c)	Arabic	0.77%	28
d)	Chinese	0.25%	9
e)	Farsi	0.19%	7
f)	Korean	0.47%	17
g)	Spanish	8.23%	298
h)	Urdu	0.14%	5
i)	Vietnamese	0.33%	12
j)	Other	1.71%	62

Referral and Eligibility Process

Exhibit E26. Did your child go through the 504 eligibility process in an FCPS school?

	Percentage	N
a) Yes	93.92%	3,381
b) No	6.08%	219

Exhibit E27. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the 504 eligibility process based on your experience?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a) The process for having my child referred and evaluated for 504 eligibility was easy.	964 (29.53%)	1,701 (52.10%)	316 (9.68%)	237 (7.26%)	64 (1.96%)	3,282
b) The 504 eligibility process for my child happened in a timely manner.	1,111 (34.03%)	1,687 (51.67%)	259 (7.93%)	140 (4.29%)	68 (2.08%)	3,265

504 Plan Development

Exhibit E28. Did your child have a 504 plan in place before start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020?

	Percentage	N
a) Yes	85.51%	2,980
b) No	14.49%	505

Exhibit E29. Based on your experience with 504 plan development meetings that took place before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a) I had adequate opportunities for input into the development of my child's 504 plan.	1,266 (43.48%)	1,421 48.80%)	113 (3.88%)	53 (1.82%)	59 (2.03%)	2,912
b) School staff listened to my concerns and recommendations about my child.	1,327 (45.62%)	1,305 (44.86%)	162 (5.57%)	76 (2.61%)	39 (1.34%)	2,909
c) School staff treated me as an equal partner in developing my child's 504 plan.	1,332 (45.99%)	1,273 (43.96%)	168 (5.80%)	68 (2.35%)	55 (1.90%)	2,896

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
d)	School staff took time to explain the 504 plan process.	1,304 (44.89%)	1,335 (45.96%)	144 (4.96%)	52 (1.79%)	70 (2.41%)	2,905
e)	My child's 504 plan was developed using appropriate sources of data, including evaluation results.	1,082 (37.63%)	1,403 (48.80%)	188 (6.54%)	64 (2.23%)	138 (4.80%)	2,875
f)	My child's 504 plan included accommodations that were appropriate for their needs (e.g., extended time on tests).	1,217 (42.33%)	1,383 (48.10%)	151 (5.25%)	47 (1.63%)	77 (2.68%)	2,875
g)	The school provided my child with all the accommodations written on their 504 plan.	904 (31.48%)	1,263 (43.98%)	418 (14.55%)	121 (4.21%)	166 (5.78%)	2,872

School Staffing

Exhibit E30. Based on your experience with school staff before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a)	My child's school had sufficient teaching staff to meet their needs.	851 (30.19%)	1,354 (48.03%)	294 (10.43%)	85 (3.02%)	235 (8.34%)	2,819
b)	My child's school had sufficient related services staff to meet their needs (e.g., social workers, speech language pathologists, etc.).	716 (25.42%)	1,126 (39.97%)	268 (9.51%)	97 (3.44%)	610 (21.65%)	2,817
c)	I was satisfied with the quality of the teaching staff in my child's school.	939 (33.40%)	1,424 (50.66%)	278 (9.89%)	80 (2.85%)	90 (3.20%)	2,811
d)	I was satisfied with the quality of the related services staff in my child's school (e.g., school psychologists, social workers, speech language pathologists, etc.).	828 (29.46%)	1,103 (39.24%)	258 (9.18%)	96 (3.42%)	526 (18.71%)	2,811
e)	School staff did a good job delivering the accommodations written in my child's 504 plan.	817 (29.02%)	1,284 (45.61%)	413 (14.67%)	149 (5.29%)	152 (5.40%)	2,815

Parent Supports

Exhibit E31. Based on your experience before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent was the support you received from the following entities helpful for you on matters related to your child's 504 plan?

	Very helpful	Moderately helpful	Minimally helpful	Not helpful	Didn't receive support from this entity	N
a) 504 school-based coordinator	1,336 (48.46%)	716 (25.97%)	287 (10.41%)	74 (2.68%)	344 (12.48%)	2,757
b) 504 case managers	1,177 (42.83%)	672 (24.45%)	263 (9.57%)	72 (2.62%)	564 (20.52%)	2,748
c) Principal or school administrators	1,094 (39.77%)	678 (24.65%)	315 (11.45%)	156 (5.67%)	508 (18.47%)	2,751
d) Related services staff (e.g., school psychologist, social worker, counselor, etc.).	1,349 (48.88%)	639 (23.15%)	281 (10.18%)	102 (3.70%)	389 (14.09%)	2,760
e) Office of Procedural Support (e.g., Procedural Support Liaison [PSL])	598 (21.93%)	338 (12.39%)	146 (5.35%)	89 (3.26%)	1,556 (57.06%)	2,727
f) Other FCPS Central Office staff	586 (21.53%)	341 (12.53%)	161 (5.91%)	88 (3.23%)	1,546 (56.80%)	2,722

Instruction

Exhibit E32. Based on your experience with instruction in your child's school before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a) My child's teachers were knowledgeable about instruction.	991 (36.34%)	1,366 (50.09%)	197 (7.22%)	65 (2.38%)	108 (3.96%)	2,727
b) My child's teachers were able to differentiate their instruction to meet my child's needs.	714 (26.18%)	1,130 (41.44%)	448 (16.43%)	131 (4.80%)	304 (11.15%)	2,727
c) My child's teachers selected and provided appropriate classroom accommodations (e.g., small setting, extra time).	804 (29.50%)	1,197 (43.93%)	387 (14.20%)	106 (3.89%)	231 (8.48%)	2,725
d) I was satisfied with the quality of instruction that my child received.	845 (31.04%)	1,295 (47.58%)	344 (12.64%)	101 (3.71%)	137 (5.03%)	2,722

Communication

Exhibit E33. Based on your experience with school communication before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	*N*
a)	School staff regularly updated me about how my child was doing in school.	562 (20.87%)	1,103 40.96%)	642 (23.84%)	237 (8.80%)	149 (5.53%)	2,693
b)	Staff at my child's school effectively involved me in decisions about how to address my child's needs.	666 (24.77%)	1,167 (43.40%)	488 (18.15%)	173 (6.43%)	195 (7.25%)	2,689
c)	I was satisfied with the amount of communication I received from my child's school.	631 (23.46%)	1,174 (43.64%)	592 (22.01%)	186 (6.91%)	107 (3.98%)	2,690
d)	My child's school had an effective system for communicating with families.	680 (25.30%)	1,239 (46.09%)	443 (16.48%)	175 (6.51%)	151 (5.62%)	2,688
e)	I received helpful information from the school and district about services for students with disabilities.	554 (20.92%)	1,163 (43.92%)	401 (15.14%)	158 (5.97%)	372 (14.05%)	2,648
f)	I was provided with information about my child in a way or form (e.g., in large print or braille, through an interpreter, etc.) that I could read and understand, including at meetings and events.	808 (30.54%)	960 (36.28%)	97 (3.67%)	45 (1.70%)	736 (27.82%)	2,646
g)	I was provided with information about my child in my primary language (e.g., English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, etc.), including at meetings and events.	1,256 (47.41%)	1,006 (37.98%)	40 (1.51%)	24 (0.91%)	323 (12.19%)	2,649

Conclusion

Exhibit E34. Based on your overall knowledge of FCPS before the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NA or not sure	N
a) Students with disabilities in FCPS receive an excellent education.	568 (21.57%)	1,111 (42.20%)	323 (12.27%)	130 (4.94%)	501 (19.03%)	2,633
b) FCPS has appropriate organizational structures to support students with disabilities.	562 (21.40%)	1,133 (43.15%)	343 (13.06%)	150 (5.71%)	438 (16.68%	2,626
c) FCPS offers a continuum of services that meets the needs of students with disabilities.	552 (21.04%)	1,102 (42.00%)	315 (12.00%)	144 (5.49%)	511 (19.47%)	2,624
d) FCPS ensures that students with disabilities are included when planning new programs and services.	497 (19.07%)	940 (36.07%)	254 (9.75%)	106 (4.07%)	809 (31.04%)	2,606
e) FCPS leaders make it clear that educating students with disabilities to high standards is a priority.	582 (22.35%)	996 (38.25%)	325 (12.48%)	155 (5.95%)	546 (20.97%)	2,604
f) FCPS schools implement services for students with disabilities with fidelity.	516 (19.85%)	933 (35.90%)	286 (11.00%)	149 (5.73%)	715 (27.51%)	2,599

Appendix F. Classroom Observations Data

**Exhibit F1. Average RESET Scores by Item: All Schools**
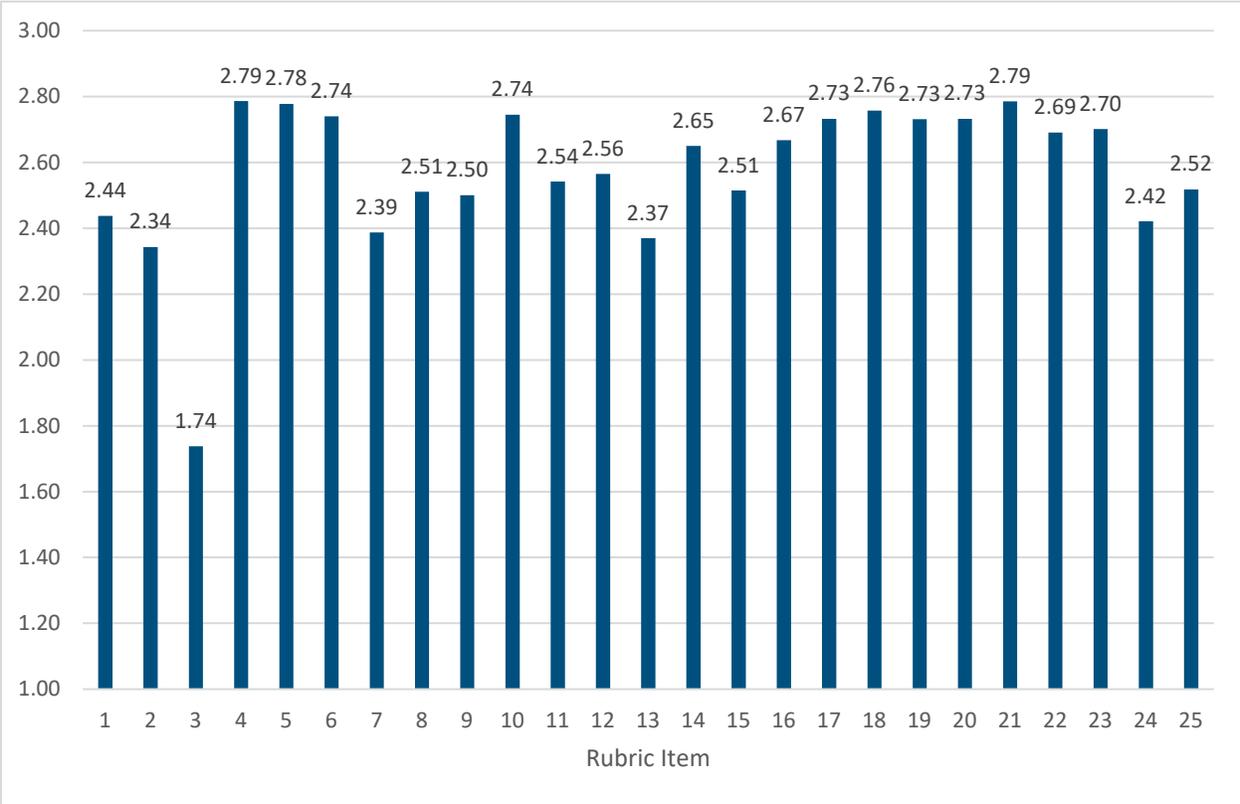
Exhibit F2. RESET Scores by Component—Identifying and Communicating Goals

Bar chart showing RESET scores:
- Item 1 Clearly communicating goals: 2.44
- Item 2 Goals are specific: 2.34
- Item 3 Explains goal relevance: 1.74
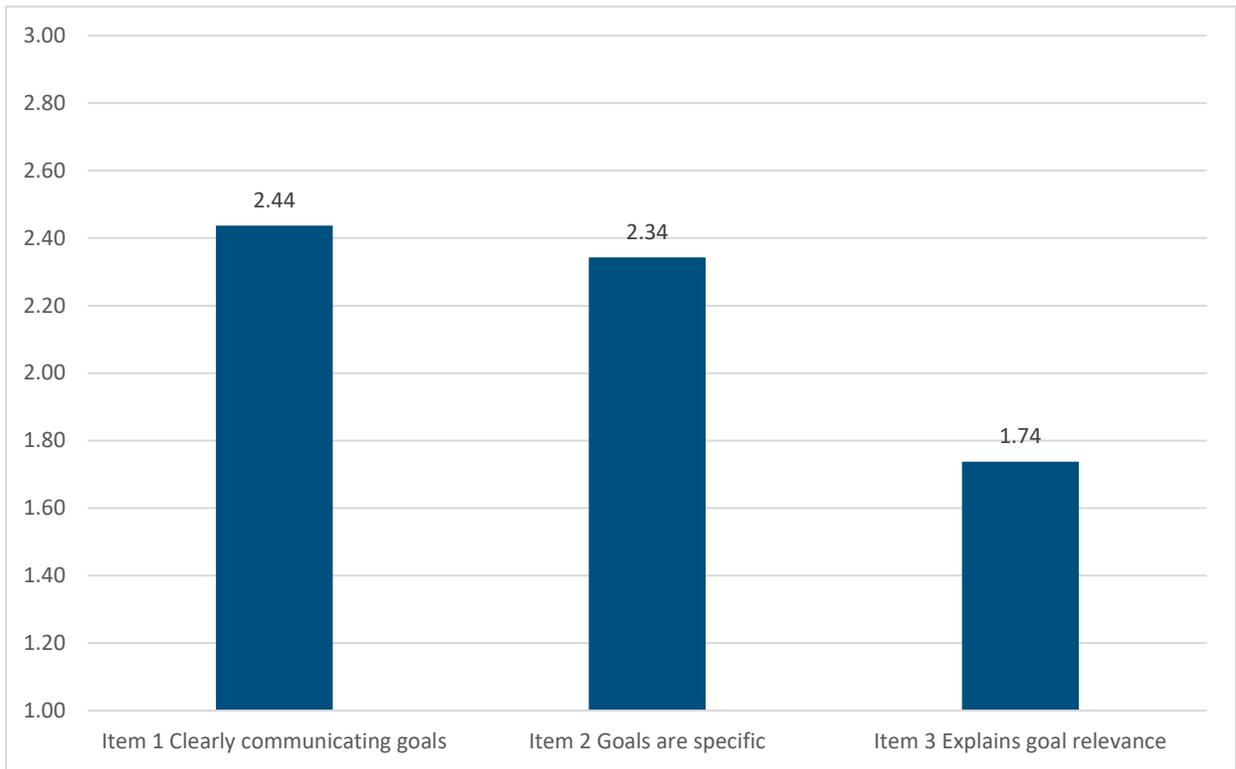
Exhibit F3. RESET Scores by Component—Alignment

Bar chart showing RESET scores:
- Item 4 Instr. aligned to goal: 2.79
- Item 5 Examples/materials - goal: 2.78
- Item 6 Examples/materials - students: 2.74
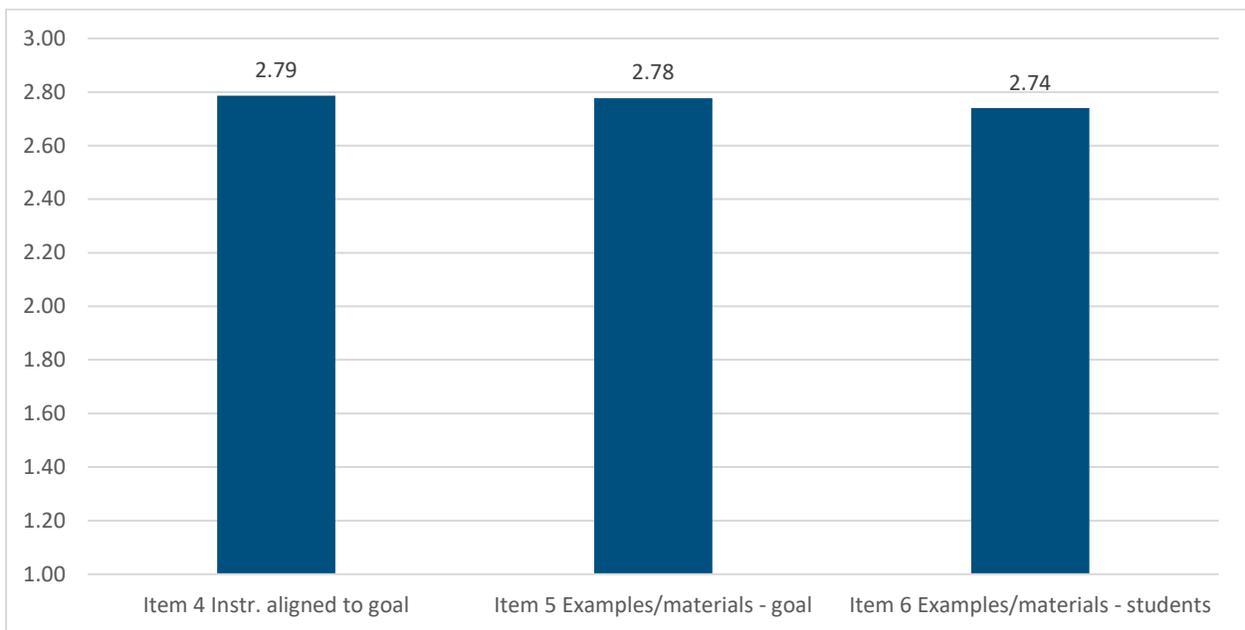
Exhibit F4. RESET Scores by Component—Teaching Procedures

Bar chart showing RESET scores by component:
- Item 7 Reviews prior skills: 2.39
- Item 8 Clear demonstrations: 2.51
- Item 9 Adequate number of demonstrations: 2.50
- Item 10 Clear, precise, accurate language: 2.74
- Item 11 Scaffolding: 2.54
- Item 12 Tasks broken down: 2.56
- Item 13 Systematically withdraws support: 2.37
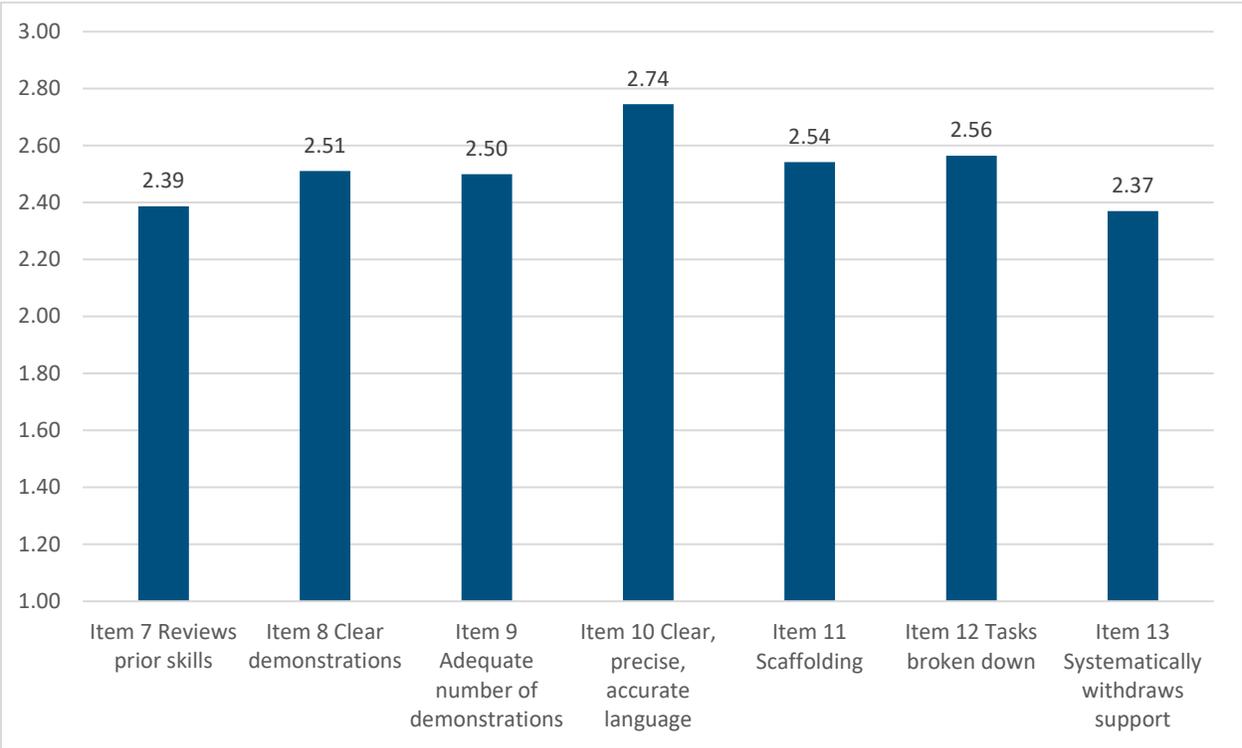
Exhibit F5. RESET Scores by Component—Guided Practice
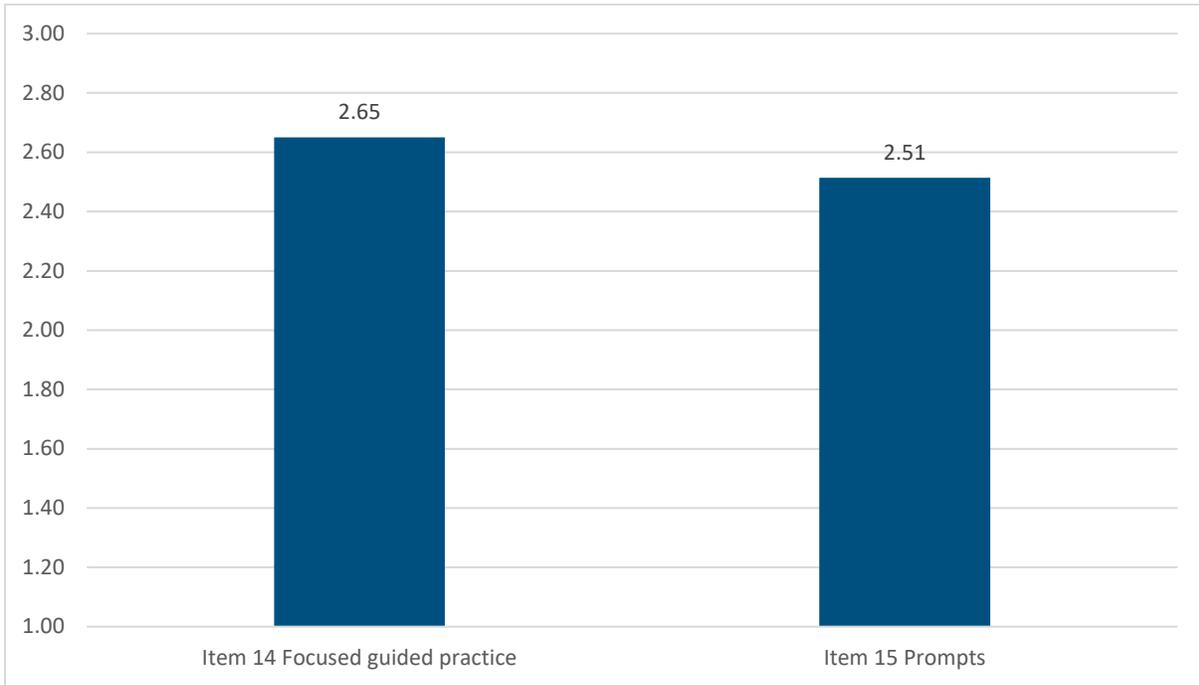
Exhibit F6. RESET Scores by Component—Pacing
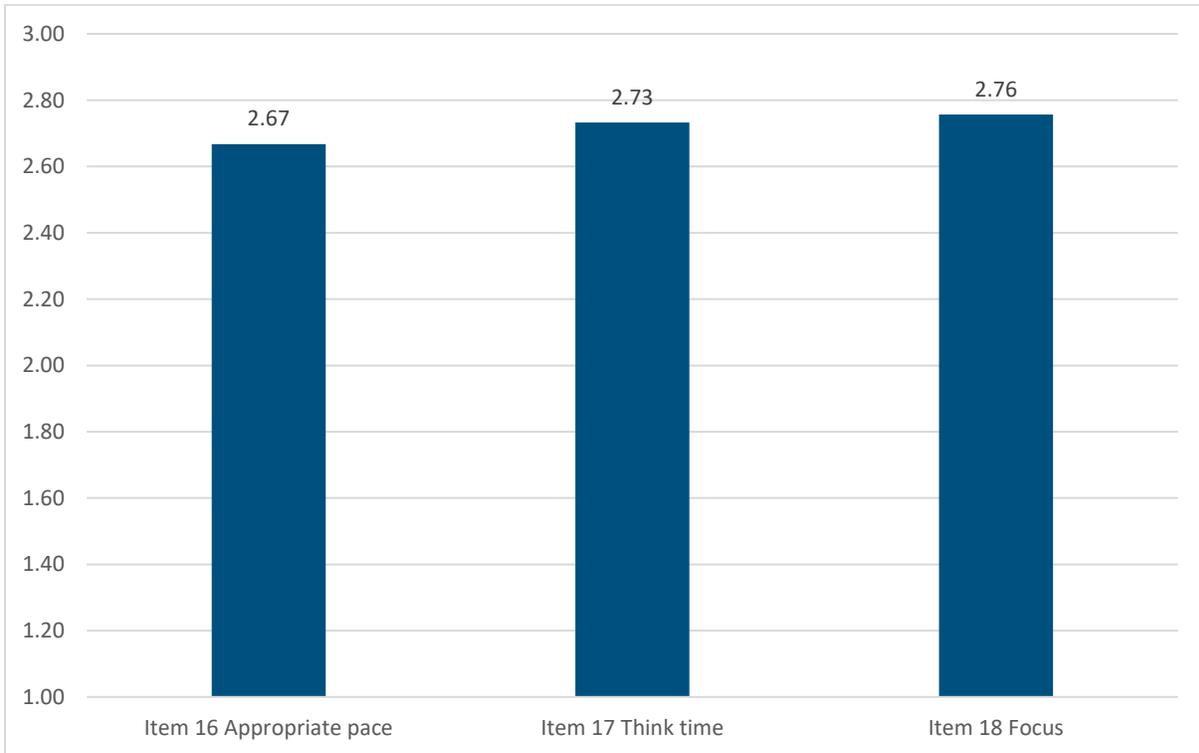
Exhibit F7. RESET Scores by Component—Engagement

Bar chart showing RESET scores for Engagement items:
- Item 19 Freq. opp. to engage: 2.73
- Item 20 Predictable routines: 2.73
- Item 21 Monitors engagement: 2.79
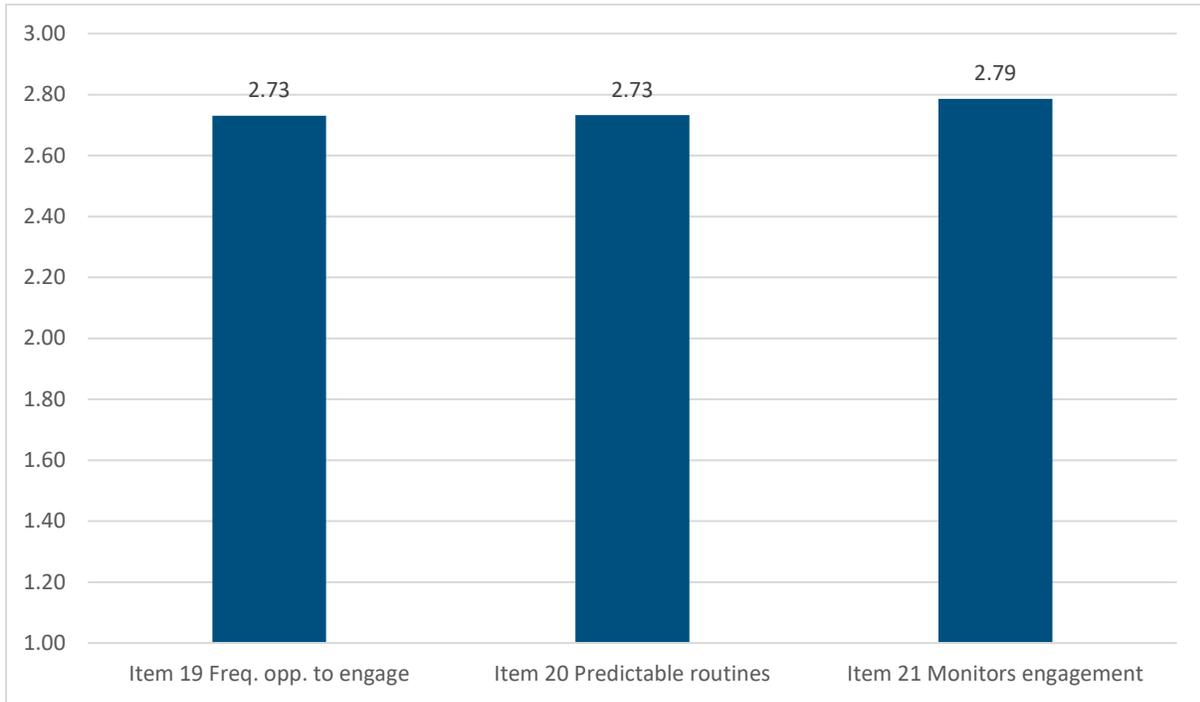
Exhibit F8. RESET Scores by Component—Monitoring and Feedback

Bar chart showing RESET scores for Monitoring and Feedback items:
- Item 22 Checks for understanding: 2.69
- Item 23 Timely feedback: 2.70
- Item 24 Specific feedback: 2.42
- Item 25 Makes adjustments: 2.52
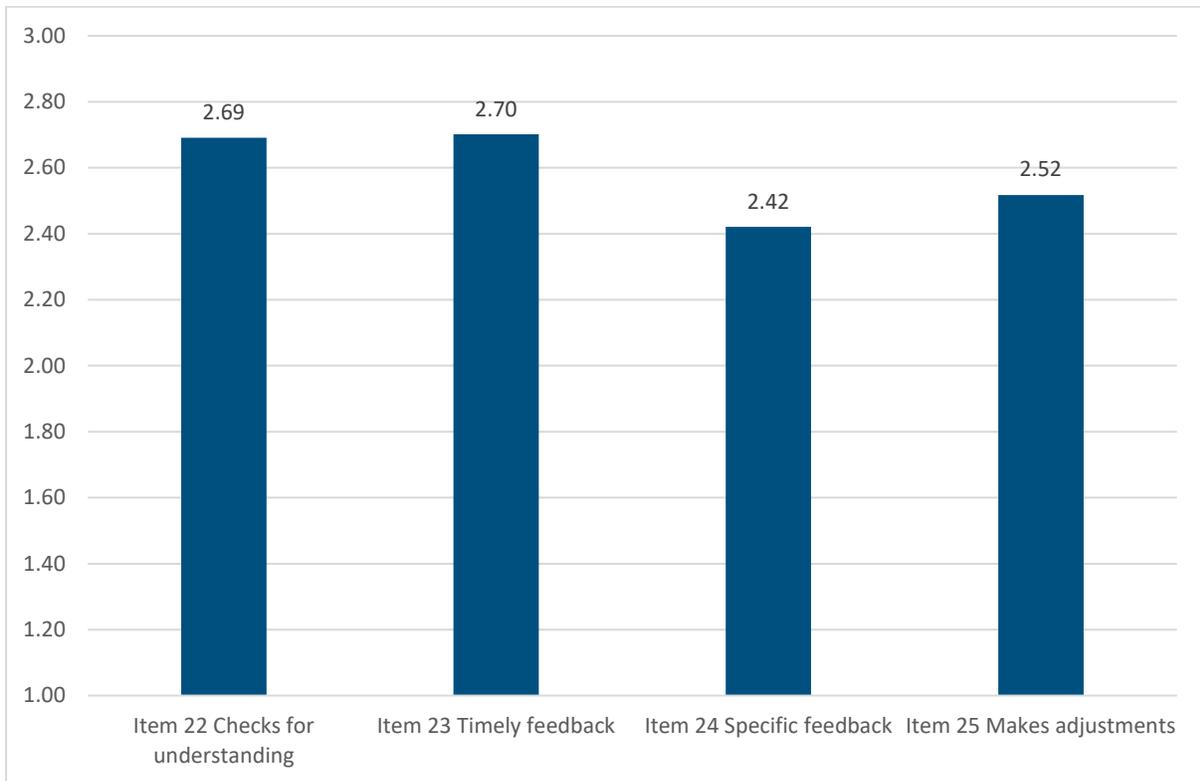
Exhibit F9. Average RESET Scores by Item—Elementary Schools
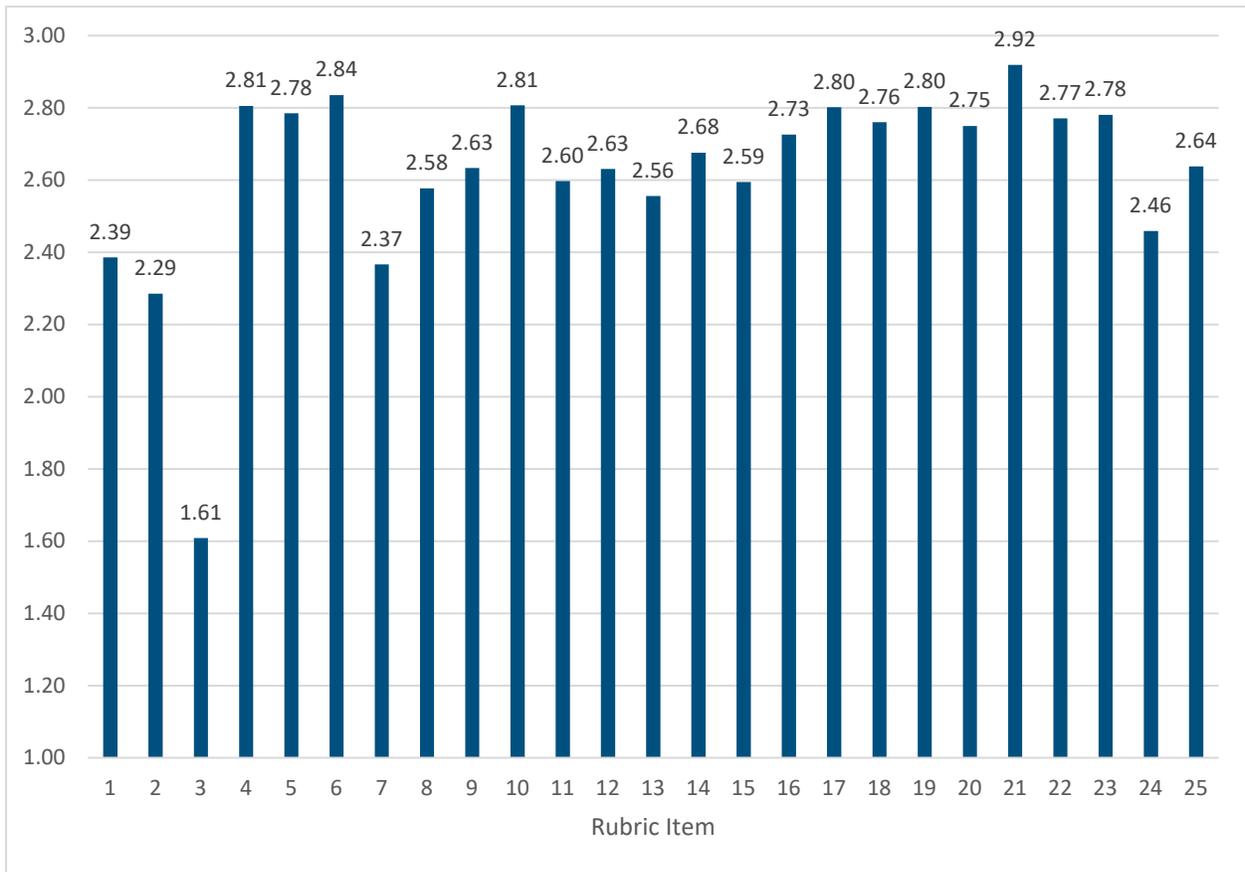
Exhibit F10. Average RESET Scores by Item—Middle Schools
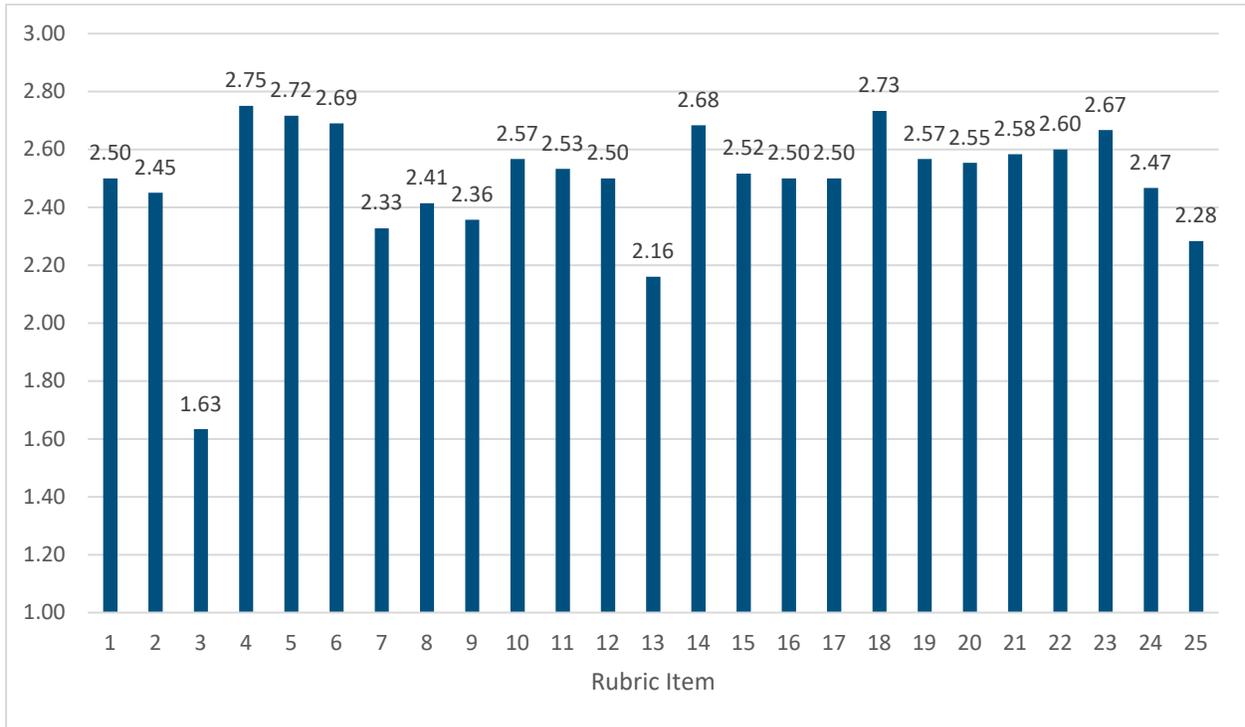
Exhibit F11. Average RESET Scores by Item—High Schools
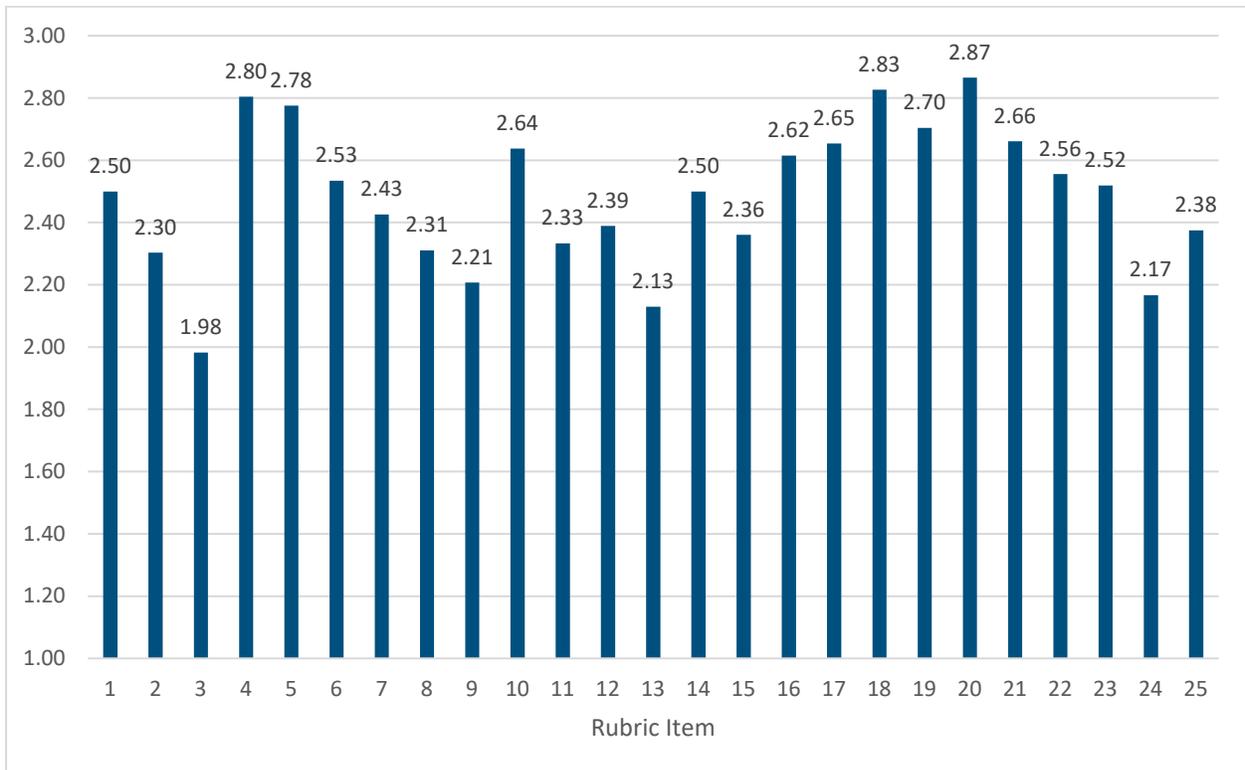
**Exhibit F12. Average RESET Scores by Item—Public Day Schools**
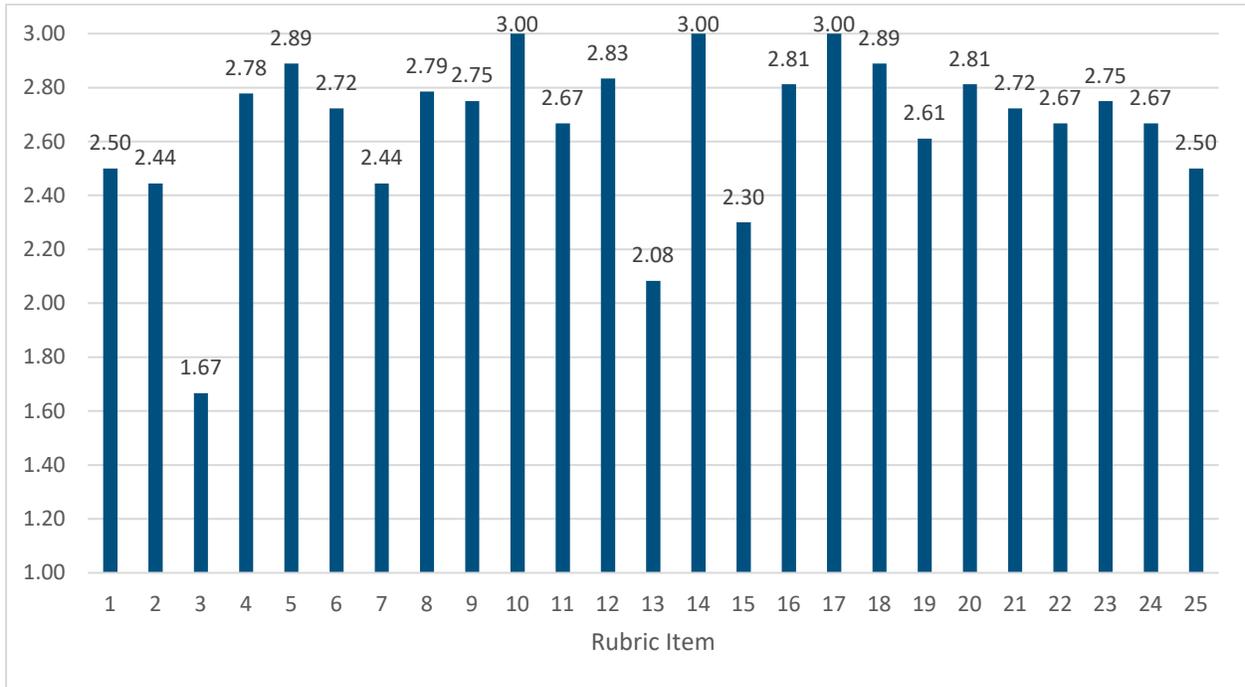
**Exhibit F13. Average RESET Scores by Item—Alternative Learning Center**
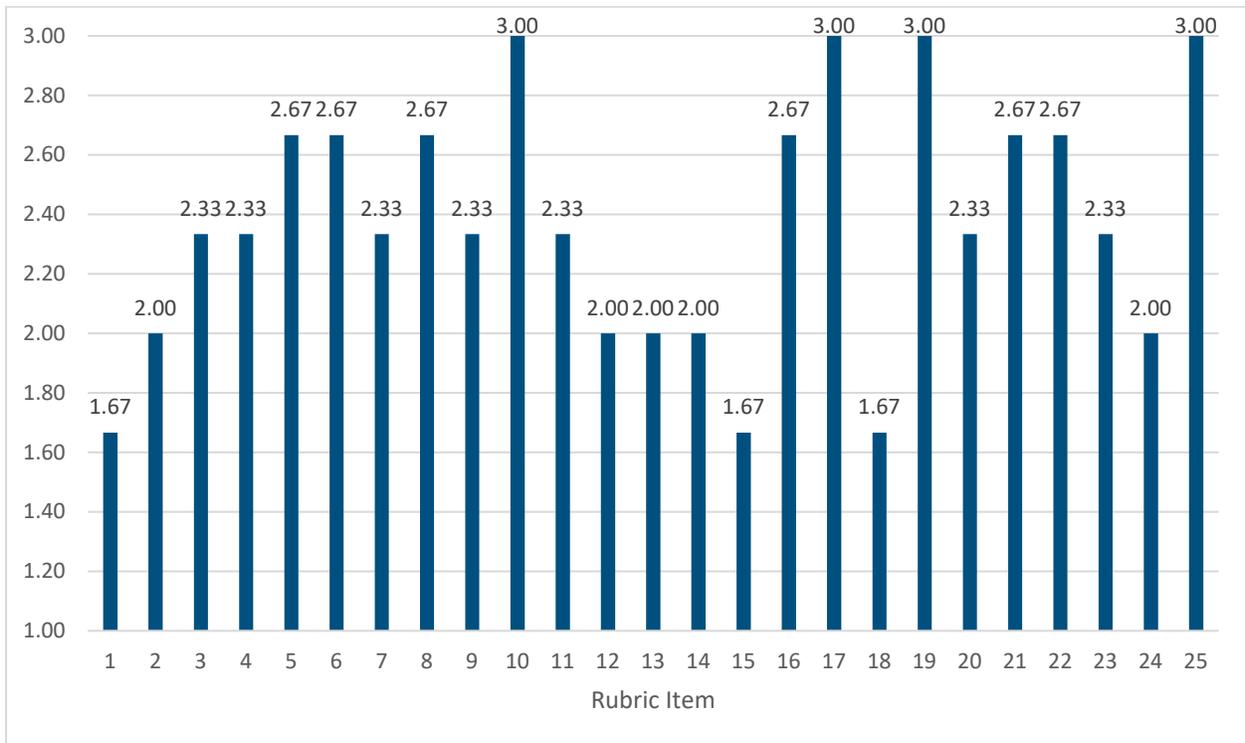
Exhibit F14. Average RESET Scores by Item—Career Center
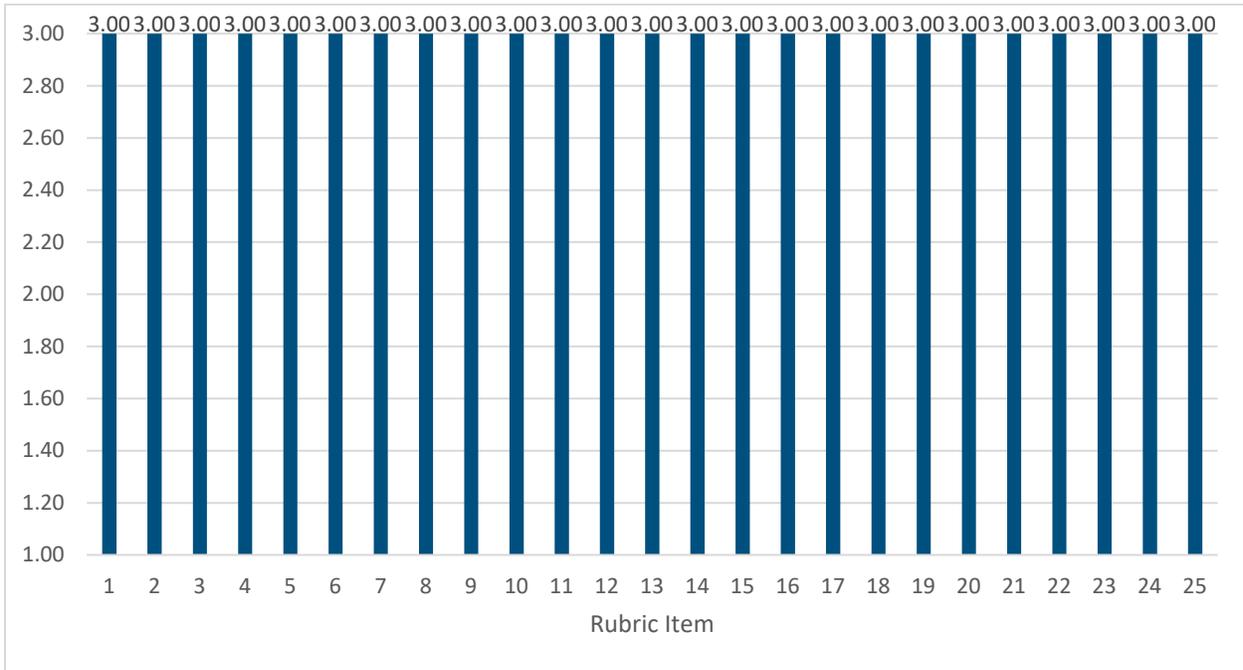
**Exhibit F15. Average RESET Scores by Item—General Education**
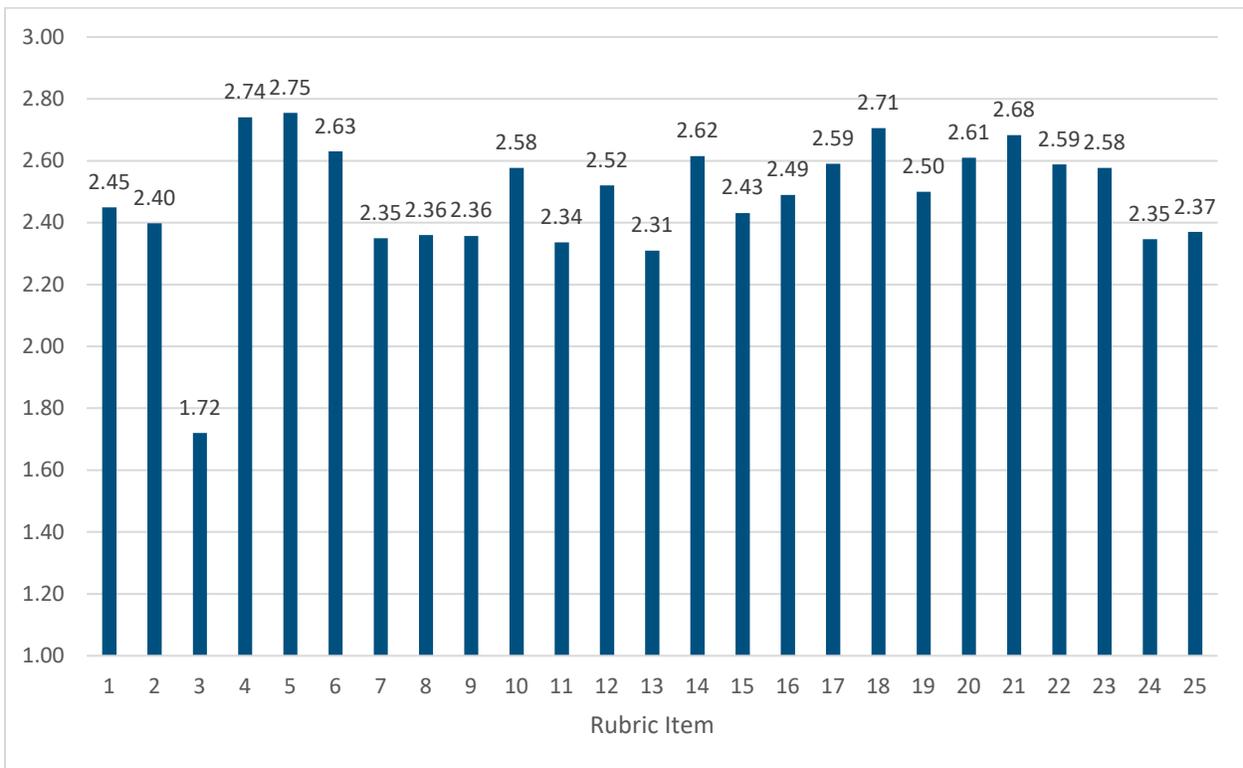
Exhibit F16. Average RESET Scores by Item—Self-Contained
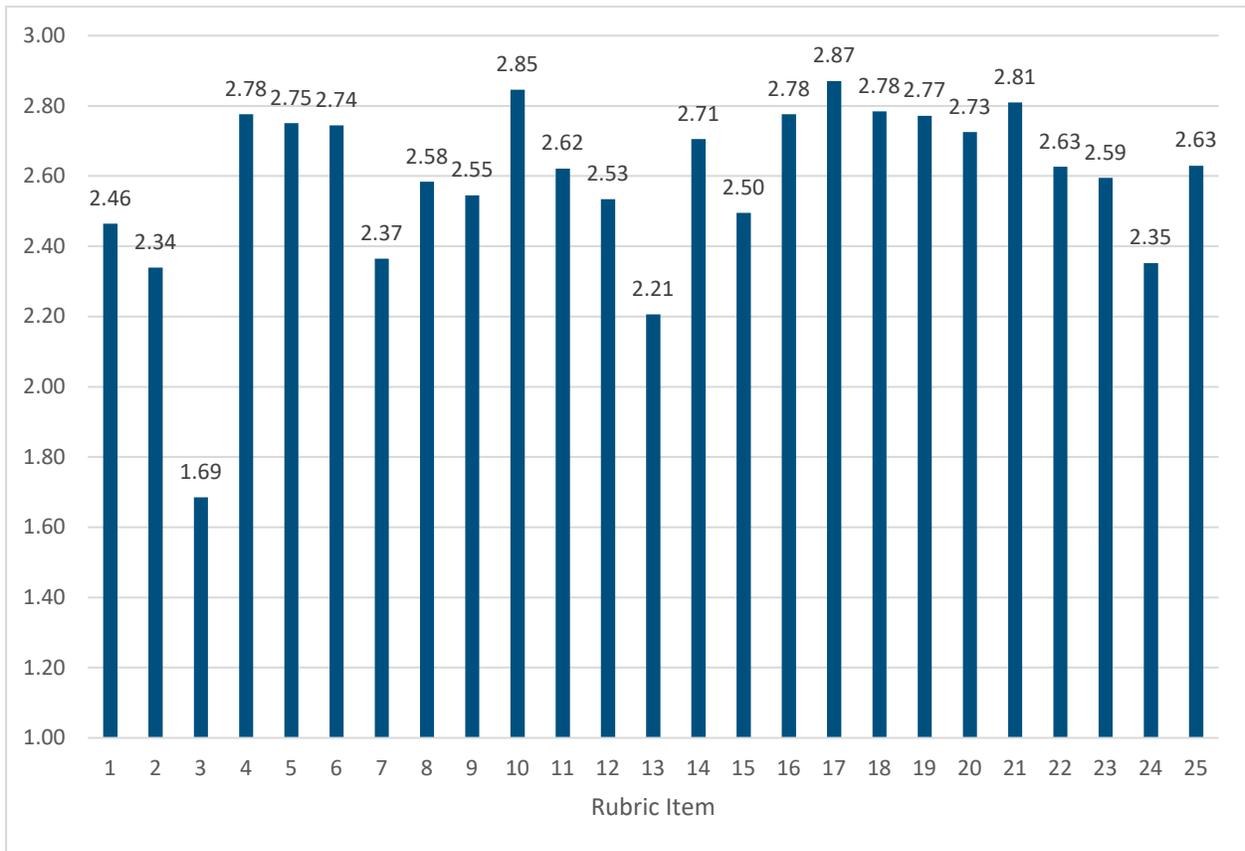
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