

# Review of Specific Special Education Processes and Procedures

**Final Report Presented to the  
Montgomery County Board of Education**

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WestEd — a national nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service agency — works with education and other communities to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults. WestEd has 17 offices nationwide, from Washington and Boston to Arizona and California, with its headquarters in San Francisco. For more information about WestEd, visit [WestEd.org](http://WestEd.org); call 415.565.3000 or, toll-free, (877) 4-WestEd; or write: WestEd / 730 Harrison Street / San Francisco, CA 94107-1242.

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# Executive Summary

This report provides the final set of findings and recommendations from a review of special education processes and procedures in the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in Maryland. The Montgomery County Board of Education (the Board) contracted with WestEd to examine the experiences of parents<sup>1</sup> and students with reference to Individualized Education Program (IEP) development, IEP implementation, and IEP dispute resolution. To address each of the three areas, the Board's Committee on Special Populations developed a set of specific research questions. These research questions guided the selection of data sources, the development of instruments to collect new data, and the analyses of data. Recommendations were developed based on the findings from this study and informed by a series of benchmarking interviews with other districts of comparable size and demographics.

The goal of this study was to address specific research questions identified by the Board's Committee on Special Populations and approved by the Board of Education in the above mentioned three key areas of inquiry and not to test hypotheses to generalize to the entire district. Several limitations to this study preclude it from serving as a comprehensive description of the experiences of parents and students in MCPS. The study design does not include onsite observations of IEP meetings or evaluations of the assessments and interventions being used as part of the IEP development and implementation processes. Instead, it relies on self-reports of respondents who have volunteered to participate in various data collection activities. To mitigate these limitations, the study conducted multiple focus groups and included multiple data sources to allow for convergence of responses for consistency. However, due to the qualitative nature of the data and limited response rates, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings.

Overall, the study found that MCPS is largely compliant with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In some areas, going beyond minimum legal requirements would help ensure that the system is meeting the culturally diverse needs of parents in understanding the complexities of the special education process.

## IEP Development

**MCPS should further enhance the information available to parents related to the IEP development process and ensure that IEPs are complete.** While parents in general responded that they were provided with a great deal of information, some parents felt the process was too complicated and they did not have sufficient knowledge to fully participate in meetings and to make certain decisions about their child's education and IEP. Developing an IEP overview document, resource materials about the IEP development process, and information about the ranges of services available may help address the informational needs expressed by these parents. Also, MCPS needs to

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, the term "parents" refers to parents or guardians.

work with school staff to ensure that language needs are addressed for students with Limited English Proficiency and that transition plans contain details to explain how the team and student would accomplish the transition activities.

**MCPS should further enhance parents' understanding of their roles and rights as equal partners during the IEP development process.** Parents overall felt they were equal partners to school staff and had positive experiences in IEP meetings. Yet, parents had concerns about decisions being made in pre-meetings. MCPS should ensure that parents understand the purpose of pre-meetings and encourage them to report any violations. Additionally, MCPS should ensure that parents understand the meaning of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and the school resource allocation processes. Surveys indicated that not all parents understood if their child's IEP provided FAPE and teachers, to a lesser degree than parents, thought parents understood FAPE. Information about resource allocations could help to address parent concerns about the basis for student services decisions. In terms of resources, with one of the highest psychologist to student ratio in the state, MCPS should also consider hiring additional psychologists to test students. To ensure that parents understand their roles, MCPS should develop a cadre of knowledgeable parents who are available to support other parents independent of MCPS. Finally, it is recommended that MCPS enhance its existing professional development by providing systematic professional development to school staff on working with and supporting parents and families.

**MCPS should develop mechanisms to monitor the implementation and success of its interventions and gain insight on parental experiences of the IEP process in a more frequent and user-friendly way.** While interviews and survey results indicated that schools are implementing a tiered system of supports prior to referring students for screening and a determination of their eligibility for special education services, MCPS should strive to monitor the implementation and success of the interventions and include analyses on referrals and outcomes. This would help detect any issues of disproportionality in identifying students of particular subgroups for special education services and also determine the extent to which private testing leads to the identification of a disability. MCPS should also develop a process to assess and report parent satisfaction instead of relying on the state process that has low response rates.

## IEP Implementation

**MCPS should develop a systematic process to review and improve the special education and related services provided to students as specified in their IEPs as well as staffing models.**

Considering the achievement and graduation rate gaps between students with and without disabilities, there is a need to understand the effectiveness of the programs and services that MCPS provides to students with disabilities as well as the staffing models used to deliver services. Specifically, MCPS should collect information to assess the extent to which schools use the Guide to Planning and Assessing School-Based Special Education Programs and provide training to ensure that schools are using it to improve the implementation of IEPs. MCPS should also use its online IEP system to monitor data on student progress towards meeting IEP goals in each school and

system-wide. This basic information can be a starting point for more systemic analyses of IEP implementation.

**MCPS should provide training to parents as well as to school staff on the development and implementation of measurable IEP goals.** A review of randomly selected IEPs showed that although the goals in the IEPs were aligned to the standards, they were not always measurable. Providing training to parents and school staff on developing measurable IEP goals will allow for better assessment and understanding by all parties during the IEP implementation period of whether IEP goals are being achieved.

**MCPS should foster collaboration and discussion among general education teachers, special education teachers, and para-educators.** Parents noted that receiving updates about their child's progress toward meeting IEP goals as well as the value of such information vary by teachers and service providers. Providing opportunities for teachers to discuss strategies for parent communication regarding IEP implementation would improve the communication with parents. Also, MCPS should find ways to increase collaboration among general education teachers and special education teachers as well as general education teachers and related service providers to plan instruction.

## IEP Dispute Resolution

**MCPS should collect more comprehensive information about the dispute resolution processes and experiences of parents.** While the number of mediation and due process cases have declined steadily, over the past three years the most prevalent outcome for due process cases was for the parents to withdraw. MCPS should expand the Resolution and Compliance Unit (RACU) database to include the primary reason(s) that lead to the specific outcomes of mediations, due process complaints, and other dispute resolution processes. This data could help to explain the due process cases that are withdrawn. In addition, to understand the length of due process cases and determine efficiency, fields should be added to the database to record every event in the process, such as meeting requests, meeting dates, and any delays. Collecting information about parental perceptions of their experiences will provide insight additional on future considerations to further improve the processes.

**MCPS should issue public reports on the outcomes of its dispute resolution processes to increase the accountability of the processes.** MCPS should issue public reports, at least twice a year, on the outcomes of its dispute resolution processes. With mediation and due process, surveys indicated that there is room to improve parent perceptions of those processes. At a minimum, these reports should be distributed to the Board of Education, district staff, school staff, and parents. The reports should be designed to provide information on efficiency and collaboration.

**MCPS should provide professional development to staff and parents on collaborative dispute resolution.** MCPS should use the data from the database to determine staff needs for

professional development in collaborative dispute resolution practices and provide staff development opportunities as necessary. With the increase in informal processes, staff might be needed to assist parents. Respect among parties should be a goal in any process. The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution (<http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/>) can provide resources, such as the webinar *Playing Nicely Together: Family-Centered Practices to Help Practitioners and Families Work Together*

## Summary and Conclusions

The overall findings of this study provide evidence that MCPS is in compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) with regard to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution. At the same time, increased knowledge, training, and reporting would help ensure more meaningful participation in the IEP development and implementation process for both parents and staff, and may help in resolving disagreements and disputes more collaboratively. Strategies to improve parent understanding of special education processes and an increased level of information about services and progress can improve the experiences of parents whose children receive special education services.



# Background

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has a mission that “every student will have the academic, creative problem solving, and social emotional skills to be successful in college and career.”<sup>2</sup> MCPS serves Montgomery County, Maryland, a county of approximately 1,016,677 people. MCPS has an annual operating budget of \$2.3 billion. As Maryland’s largest school system and the seventeenth largest school district in the nation, there were approximately 153,852 students in the 202 schools in MCPS during the 2014-2015 school year. Student enrollment has grown by about 2,000 students per year since 2009.

Student demographics have become increasingly diverse over the past forty years. In 1972, 75 percent of the district’s student population was white. In 2014-15, 31 percent of students were white, 29 percent were Hispanic, 22 percent were African American, and 14 percent were Asian. Students and their families represented 157 different countries and spoke 138 different languages. Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students and students from low income families have both grown in population by over 350 percent since 1984. Approximately 20,000 students (13%) participate in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and approximately 51,842 students (33.7%) qualify for free and reduced-priced school meals (FARMS) MCPS students are served by approximately 23,000 employees.

Of the over 153,000 students enrolled in the district during the 2014-2015 school year, approximately 18,000 (11.7%) received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA (20 U.S.C. 1400 *et seq.*) and its implementing regulations (34 C.F.R. Part 300) require states to ensure the provision of a free appropriate education (FAPE) to eligible children with disabilities between the ages of three and twenty-one. There is an obligation to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities to determine which children are eligible for special education. (34 C.F.R. 300.111.) Eligibility criteria, including disability categories, are set forth in the federal regulations (34 C.F.R. 300.7.), as well as evaluation requirements (34 C.F.R. 300.301). Each eligible disabled child receiving services must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) identifying the specific special education and related services to meet his/her needs (34 C.F.R. 300.320), and the plan must be reviewed and revised as appropriate at least annually (34 C.F.R. 300.324(b)).

Parents are partners in planning and overseeing the child’s program and are members of the IEP team (34 C.F.R. 300.321). Pursuant to the IDEA’s Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) requirement, children with disabilities must be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate and should not be removed from the general education setting unless they cannot be educated satisfactorily in the general education classroom with the use of supplementary aids & services (34 C.F.R. 300.114). Parents and children with disabilities are afforded a number of

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2 Montgomery County Public Schools. (2013, July 11). Vision, Mission, Core Values. Retrieved from <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org>

procedural safeguards under IDEA for the resolution of disputes, including the right to file a state complaint (34 C.F.R. 300.151), the right to request mediation (34 C.F.R. 300.506), and the right to request a due process hearing (34 C.F.R. 300.507).

MCPS staff members who work with students with disabilities receive special education related professional development. Special education support staff includes special education teachers, paraprofessionals, related service providers, counselors, and psychologists. Special education services are delivered in all MCPS schools to “provide students with disabilities with the support they need to be academically successful in the general education environment.”<sup>3</sup> These services seek to combine the efforts of and establish relationships among school personnel, parents, and students. In doing so, MCPS works to ensure students have rigorous high-quality instruction, a broad range of intervention services, and the support necessary to develop appropriate skills for postsecondary opportunities. Services include general education instruction, supported education, small group education, self-contained environments, and five special schools which serve students with more complex needs.

In 2015-16, the budget for Special Education Programs and Services was \$346,828,470. These funds were allocated for salaries and wages, contractual services, supplies and materials, travel, equipment, and benefits.

The Office of Special Education and Student Services (OSESS) monitors the identification of students with disabilities; provides oversight of the delivery of special education services; provides a comprehensive, collaborative, and individualized support system that enables students with disabilities access to high-quality, rigorous instruction; develops, coordinates, and enhances efforts to align general and special education; develops and monitors programs; implements the Extended School Year program; and promotes and coordinates the use of technology necessary to meet the needs of every student. MCPS strives to continuously improve its processes and services to reduce disproportionality, increase inclusive opportunities, expand access to appropriate interventions, ensure supports to schools to help them achieve, and provide increased LRE options for students. As a part of this continuous improvement process, in 1998, MCPS contracted for a review of its special education services and processes.<sup>4</sup> The review included focus groups and interviews with district staff, school staff, and parents and focus groups with key stakeholders external to the district.

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<sup>3</sup> Montgomery County Public Schools. (2015). *School Age: Elementary and Secondary Services*. Retrieved from <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org>

<sup>4</sup> McLaughlin, M. J. (1998). *Classical Program Review-Special Education Programs and Services-Montgomery County Public Schools*. University of Maryland. Available at <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/specialed/resources/review/Review04.pdf>

More recently, MCPS conducted two surveys of parents of students receiving special education services to understand their experiences. The first survey was a pilot study conducted in 2012.<sup>5</sup> MCPS mailed a paper and pencil survey to the parents of pre-kindergarten students with disabilities who were enrolled in an MCPS class that served prekindergarten students with disabilities. A total of 349 (26%) surveys were available for analysis. For the second study, MCPS surveyed all parents of students who had educational disabilities, enrolled in kindergarten to grade 12, and had an IEP meeting between February 1 and May 15, 2013.<sup>6</sup> A paper and pencil survey was mailed to 4,700 parents during spring 2013. A total of 1,495 (32%) were available for analysis.

In November 2014, the Montgomery County Board of Education contracted with WestEd to conduct a review of special education processes and procedures as part of the district's commitment to continuous improvement. This review of MCPS's special education processes and services: 1) assesses the effectiveness and success of the process utilized by DSES and school-based staff for IEP development; 2) assesses the effectiveness and success of the services provided pursuant to IEP implementation; 3) examines the effectiveness and success of dispute resolution; 4) examines the consistency in provision of those services and implementation of those processes across MCPS schools; and 5) provides recommendations for enhancing those services and processes. This review also provides insight into the experiences of families and students, including the extent of their collaborative engagement in IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution. Each of these focus areas contained a series of specific questions (see Appendix A). WestEd's goal was to address the questions and provide data-based recommendations.

## Methodology

In recent years, WestEd has conducted special education reviews for other school districts including Charlotte-Mecklenburg; Beaufort, SC; Hawaii; and Cambridge, MA. All projects involved mixed-method approaches similar to this project. The mixed methods approach for this project included both quantitative and qualitative methods. At least two data collection methods addressed each research question to provide multiple perspectives. Conclusions are based on the results from the applicable methods. The methods included: parent and staff focus groups, staff interviews, parent and staff surveys, classroom observations, document reviews including IEPs, and analysis of MCPS and State data.

Prior to conducting any data collection activities, WestEd participated in a collaborative planning retreat with district staff and representatives from the Special Education Advisory Committee

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<sup>5</sup> Cooper-Martin, E. (2013). *Parent Feedback About Individualized Education Program Team Meetings: A pilot Study with Parents of Prekindergarten Students*. Montgomery County Public Schools. Available at <http://sharedaccountability.mcpsmd.org/reports/list.php?selection=921>

<sup>6</sup> Cooper-Martin, E. & Wilson, H. M. (2014). *Parent Feedback About Individualized Education Program Team Meetings for Students in Kindergarten Through Grade 12*. Montgomery County Public Schools. Available at <http://sharedaccountability.mcpsmd.org/reports/list.php?selection=935>

(SEAC) and the Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations (MCCPTA). Data collection began with parent listening sessions and concluded with benchmarking interviews with staff from other school districts. This section of the report presents the most salient details for each method and identifies some study limitations including the caution that must be exercised when interpreting the findings due to relatively low participation in focus groups and survey response rates, especially among parents. More comprehensive methodology details appear in Appendix B. All focus group, interview, observation, and review protocols are in Appendix C. All surveys are in Appendix D. WestEd provided MCPS an opportunity for feedback on the protocols and instruments for all surveys, focus groups, interviews, observations, and document reviews. In addition, the SEAC co-chairs reviewed the parent and student surveys. WestEd considered all comments and incorporated those which improved the documents. All protocols were aligned with the main areas of study focus: IEP development, IEP implement, and IEP dispute resolution.

## Parent Listening Sessions

Parents had an opportunity to discuss their experiences and concerns in two large group sessions. Arranged by MCPS in collaboration with SEAC/MCCPTA, each session included a small and a large group discussion. Approximately 55 parents attended each session. While an MCPS district representative welcomed the group, no district staff observed or participated in either of the sessions. The information from these listening sessions informed the development of protocols and surveys.

## Parent Focus Groups

With the project emphasis on the experiences of parents and families, the research team agreed to increase the number of parent focus groups to 12 which included one focus group for parents who had been through a dispute process. The goal was to conduct two focus groups in each of the six special education administrative clusters to get a broad representation of parents from across the County. An invitation was sent to all MCPS families of students with a disability. Further communication was sent encouraging principals to remind parents and encourage participation. The invitation was also posted on the main MCPS website and the Department of Special Education Services website. Approximately 200 parents responded and registered to participate in a focus group.

To arrange the focus groups, WestEd sent email notices to 15 parents with the expectation that 8 to 12 parents would accept the invitation and attend each focus group. After low attendance at the first two focus groups, WestEd increased the number of parents contacted. WestEd also began to follow each set of email notices with a verification telephone call and then a reminder telephone call prior to the focus group. A total of five focus groups had to be rescheduled due to weather-related cancellations of school activities. Attendance at the focus groups ranged from 2 to 11 parents; overall, 70 parents participated in a focus group. These totals include the three participants that participated in the focus group related to dispute resolution processes (see Table 1). Results from

each interview and focus group were coded using a list of pre-developed codes, with qualitative analysis software.

**Table 1. Parent Focus Group Participants by Child's Grade in School**

Focus Group	Child's Grade in School														Total Number of Parents
	PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
2	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	9
3	0	0	2	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8
4	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	10
5	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
6	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	4
7	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	6
8	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	3	0	2	0	11
9	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	7
10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
11*	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
12**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>70</b>

\* Dispute resolution focus group; 3 students represented by 4 parents; only three parents completed the attendance form.

\*\*Grade levels unknown.

## School Visits

The research team visited a total of 14 schools which included six elementary, three middle, three high, and two special schools. The purpose of the school visits was to interview school administrators, conduct focus groups with IEP teams and teachers, and to conduct classroom observations. The list of schools was developed collaboratively by MCPS, WestEd, and the SEAC co-chairs and MCCPTA representative who attended the collaborative planning retreat. MCPS also provided support with scheduling the visits. The primary considerations for school selection were representation throughout the district of schools at all grade level spans, special education service models, and demographic factors (see Tables B.3 and B.4 for the list of schools visited, demographics, and programs). Each school visit lasted for one day. Typically, a single researcher visited each school. On two occasions, a second researcher accompanied the primary researcher to gain experience with the protocols. During all school visits, the researcher conducted interviews with at least one school administrator, a group of teachers, and the IEP team. The researcher also conducted classroom visits. Protocols guided each interview and classroom observation. The observation protocol enabled the observers to record their observations related to the setting, type of service delivery, and instructional methods.

## Surveys

The research team surveyed parents, students, school administrators, teachers, related service providers, and paraeducators. Survey items addressed the three major areas of this study. When possible, the surveys included parallel items to obtain different perspectives on the same point. In addition, WestEd conducted small pilot tests of the parent and student surveys. Received responses led to further refinement of the surveys.

The surveys varied in length. The items used a four-point Likert scale to measure the extent of agreement: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. There was also a “Don’t Not Know/Not Applicable” option. Estimated completion times varied from 5 to 20 minutes. Parents had the option of completing an online version in English or Spanish or a paper version. Parents who spoke Chinese, French, Korean, or Vietnamese could complete a paper version in their native language. Students had the option of completing an online or paper version in English. All school staff had an option to complete an online survey only.

For the parent survey, the sample included any parent whose child had an initial, annual review, or periodic review IEP meeting from December 15, 2014 through March 13, 2015. To inform parents of the survey, WestEd sent two information flyers and MCPS sent corresponding ConnectEd calls and email notices alerting families to the surveys. Students in grades 8 through 12 whose parents were in the survey sample were eligible to complete the student survey if they received parental permission. WestEd also supplemented the parent survey sample with an additional group of parents who participated in a dispute resolution process on or after January 1, 2014. These parents received two email notices alerting them to the survey. Parents and students needed an access code for the online survey. All survey responses were confidential. The survey response rate was 10 percent for parents and three percent for students.

All MCPS instructional staff members, including general and special education teachers, related service providers, special education paraeducators, and school administrators received an individual email notice to inform them of the survey. All responses were confidential. WestEd did not collect any identifying information. Response rates ranged for nine percent for teachers to 50 percent for school administrators (see Table 2). Caution should be exercised when interpreting survey results due to the low response rates.

**Table 2. Survey Response Rates**

Survey	Distributed	Completed	Response Rate
Parent	4,585	459	10%
Student	1,812	47	3%
Administrator	452	228	50%
Teacher	9,224	787	9%
Paraeducator	2,083	519	25%
Related Service Provider	563	80	14%



## District Interviews

To gain a broader perspective on special education processes and procedures, the research team conducted interviews with district level staff. Interviewed staff included the Director, Department of Special Education Services; Supervisor, Speech and Language Services; Supervisor, Physical Disabilities Programs; Director, Division of Psychological Services; and the Supervisor, Resolution and Compliance Unit. WestEd also interviewed the Special Education Advisory Committee co-chairs.

## Document and Data Reviews

The research team reviewed available documents to help address the research questions. Most notably, WestEd reviewed 100 randomly selected IEPs to address multiple questions including ones related to IDEA compliance and IEP goals. The IEP review random sample was proportionate to the parent survey sample with reference to type of IEP meeting, primary disability and grade span. In addition, WestEd reviewed available accountability test results to describe achievement levels of students with disabilities and the gaps between test results for students with disabilities and all students tested. To help address the dispute questions, WestEd reviewed State Complaints and Administrative Law Judge Rulings. WestEd also reviewed budget documents and other documents related to special education services and processes to gain a contextual understanding of MCPS (see Appendix B). MCPS provided the records consistent with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and a Data Sharing Agreement with WestEd to safeguard the privacy of families and students.

## Benchmarking

To understand similar processes and procedures, WestEd conducted interviews with the Fairfax County (VA), Gwinnett County (GA), and Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) school districts. WestEd was unsuccessful in several attempts to complete an interview with the Baltimore County (MD) Public Schools. Similar to MCPS, these districts are relatively large and diverse, mostly suburban, high achieving school districts. These districts also have potentially promising or unique special education practices, policies, or initiatives. WestEd developed a protocol to guide the interviews. Each interview took approximately one hour to complete.

## Limitations of the Study

This review of special education processes and procedures included information from the major stakeholders in MCPS special education services, most notably the parents of students with disabilities. Multiple data sources enabled WestEd to develop some insights that can assist MCPS with its efforts to better serve students and parents. However, there are limitations to this study that need to be addressed to fully inform the readers of this report. For this project, parents volunteered to participate in focus groups. Also, the visited schools were selected on the basis of demographics

and the range of programs available for students with disabilities. There was no information to determine whether the schools were experiencing any challenges with the processes and procedures on which this study focused. The schools sites were included to understand the processes and procedures across all school types. The qualitative results based on parent discussions and school visits cannot be generalized to the entire district.

Another limitation is the low survey response rates from parents and most school staff. Although numerous strategies were attempted over an extended period of time, the parent response rate of 10 percent was very low. This could have been due to a number of reasons including busy parent schedules, or a general lack of interest in completing a survey, or confusion with a State administered parent survey. Nevertheless, caution must be exercised when interpreting survey results.

It should also be noted that this was not a comparison study. The purpose was not to compare different schools or different regions in the county to each other. The intent of the project was to address the research questions and not to test any hypotheses through a controlled study. Caution should be exercised in generalizing the results to the overall district.

While caution is necessary with the interpretation of the results, this report provides some valuable findings to inform the Board, district and school employees, parents, and other stakeholders.

## Results

This project focused on a series of research questions developed by the Montgomery County Board of Education that focused on three areas related to special education procedures and processes: IEP development, IEP implementation, and IEP dispute resolution. Results are organized according to the three main foci. In addition, subsections identify pertinent components of the main foci. The Board questions, which guided this project, are referenced in the sections which contain responses. Following the findings, WestEd also reported benchmark district results and proposed recommendations for improvement for each of the three main foci. All survey item responses appear in the surveys in Appendix D.

### IEP Development

IEP development is the result of a process to assist struggling students. Prior to a referral for a screening to determine a student's eligibility for special education services, a system of tiered supports is used to assist the student. If over time, the student does not respond to interventions, a referral for special education screening can be initiated. Once a referral is made, the student must be evaluated to determine his or her eligibility for special education services. If a student is found eligible for special education, an IEP meeting is held to develop the IEP, which must comply with all IDEA requirements.



## Initial Supports, Referrals, and Screening

Initial supports and referrals for special education screening address Board questions A.1 and A.2, which are related to appropriate referrals and disproportionality, respectively.

### Findings

MCPS provides a system of tiered supports to assist struggling students in a general education setting. Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) and the Educational Management Team (EMT) are systems used by MCPS to develop, implement, monitor, and document interventions for students.

Information gathered from interviews with school staff regarding the referral process indicated that a series of initial supports are implemented for students who are struggling academically prior to making a referral for special education services. The process begins with informal observations and can advance to a more formal discussion of student data when and if the difficulties persist over time despite intervention.

The series of strategies to assist struggling students are data driven. During school visits, IEP teams and administrators reported that they review anecdotal information, attendance, test scores, grades, writing samples, home life information, parent observations, and student self-reports. Data can also include teacher observations or classroom assessments. At some school sites, staff discussed a process that includes data review meetings to discuss student performance data as well as intervention strategies that have been applied. The frequency or structure of the data meetings varied from site to site. Data reviews could occur monthly, twice quarterly, or quarterly.

**Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS).** CPS provides a framework for school personnel to discuss and analyze all factors that may influence student learning and behavior and to determine the most effective interventions. CPS requires all staff members to work together to identify interventions that will meet an individual student's challenges. The first step in the process is to identify and resolve barriers to learning through early intervention. In subsequent problem solving meetings, teachers collaborate to monitor and adjust interventions depending on the student's responses. Part of the structure of CPS is the Documentation of Interventions (DOI).

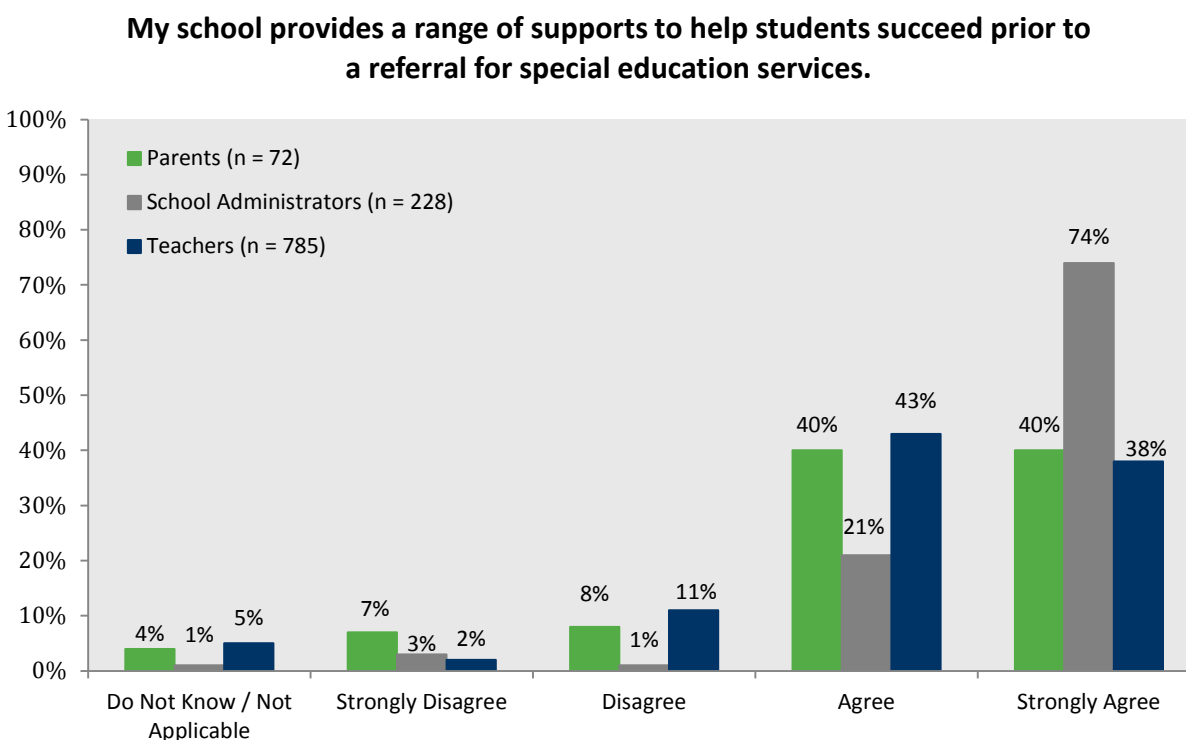
The CPS framework follows the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle of change, developed as part of MCPS's continuous improvement process and provides increasing intensities of supports and interventions to students within a three tiered-service delivery system. Students receiving interventions through the CPS process fall within Tier 1 (80%-90% of students) and Tier 2 (5%-10% of students). CPS promotes the success of all students and therefore, all schools are expected to implement a problem-solving process within the general education setting. CPS addresses the state and federal regulations related to monitoring a student's response to interventions, and assists schools in structuring the provision of early intervention services to meet student needs. One goal of early intervention through CPS in the general education setting is to prevent the disproportionate identification of African American and Hispanic students for special education services. It also promotes the shared ownership for student, school, and system success.

**Educational Management Team (EMT) Process.** Students who do not respond to intervention through the CPS process may be referred to the EMT process. The EMT is a multidisciplinary school-based team with expertise in teaching and learning, problem solving, and interventions. It is a more formal and more intense level of problem solving than what is implemented during CPS. The EMT process serves students within Tier 3 (1%-5% of students) of the tiered-service delivery system when interventions provided for a student were not successful in CPS. When a student is referred to the EMT, evidence of previous problem solving and early interventions is required. The team meets regularly and acts as a resource to all school staff members regarding students who are not meeting academic or behavior expectations based on documentation. The EMT ensures that all general education resources are utilized and that interventions are intensive, coordinated, and monitored to help students experience success in the general education setting. Team members use their expertise to analyze student performance data and recommend classroom accommodations and interventions to increase academic achievement and participation, as well as to positively impact social and behavioral growth. The EMT also may recommend a screening for consideration of special education services. The “child find” requirements of IDEA impose an obligation to identify, locate and evaluate all children with disabilities who are in need of special education and related services (34 C.F.R. 300.111).

Documentation of interventions is an on-going process and continues through the CPS process and into the EMT process, if warranted. After a period of time that may last six to eight weeks, a team reviews the results and decides whether to try another intervention or request an EMT meeting. If the student is not responding to informal and formal interventions, the EMT may refer the student for a screening meeting. The purpose of the screening meeting is to review all current data and determine if there is reason to suspect that the student has a disability.

There was broad agreement among parents and school staff about the use of supports and interventions prior to making a referral for screening. The majority of the surveyed parents (80%, n=72) who were new to the special education process, a similar rate of teachers (81%, n=785), and a higher rate of school administrators (95%, n=228), agreed that schools have provided such supports to students prior to making a referral for screening to determine eligibility for special education services (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Support Prior to Referral for Screening by Respondent Group**



The point at which parents or guardians are involved in the process varied among the visited schools. IEP teams explained that typically, parent involvement occurred when parents expressed a concern or when a teacher asked for their input. Sometimes parents were not involved until the student concern reached the EMT level. By the time the process reaches the EMT level, parents are involved. Staff at visited schools explained that parents are part of the process before a referral for screening is considered. Parents who participate in the EMT process are aware of the interventions and supports their child receives.

**Referrals for a screening.** By the time a student is referred for screening, there is a great deal of information gathered about a student’s progress. To provide their input before the eligibility meeting parents can complete the MCPS Eligibility Screening Parent Interview/Questionnaire form. Among the parents surveyed, who were new to the process, 83 percent (n=72) agreed that they completed this form in the screening process before the eligibility meeting, while the remaining parents were equally split as to whether they did not complete the form or did not know.

If a student is referred, districts are required to obtain “informed consent” from parents prior to any initial evaluation and prior to the initial provision of special education services (34 C.F.R. 300.300(a) and (b)). In preparation for evaluation planning and eligibility planning meetings, typically, school staff have gathered all prior information about types and results of interventions attempted and, in some cases, the EMT may have requested a psychological screening.

Under IDEA, as part of the screening process, if a team determines additional testing is needed, MCPS is obligated to complete testing. Parents may choose to pursue private testing and, if they do, they can be reimbursed for private testing in certain circumstances, under federal policy, and if MCPS denies funding, the parent can pursue reimbursement through mediation or a hearing. In addition, MCPS has forms that detail the MCPS review of private testing.

**Testing.** Under IDEA, as part of the screening process, if a team determines additional testing is needed, MCPS is obligated to complete testing. There was a concern among parents regarding the adequacy of testing. The IDEA requires that a child must be assessed in all areas related to a suspected disability (34 C.F.R. 300.304(c)(4)). Among participating parents who were new to the process, 70 percent (n=72) agreed that their child was tested in all areas related to any suspected disabilities but 25 percent disagreed.

However, at least one parent who participated in 7 of the 12 parent focus groups mentioned that they paid for external testing primarily because they felt the school was unresponsive. For example, a parent explained how the school wanted to track the student for six months and another explained that the school denied a problem. In four of seven focus groups, at least one parent reported that the external testing led to the identification for services. In one focus group, at least one parent stated that external testing did not help since the results were used to show a discrepancy and discrepancy models are not used to identify students for special education services. In two other focus groups, parents had testing conducted to learn about their options.

There is a safeguard under the IDEA whereby a parent, under certain circumstances, can obtain an independent education evaluation (IEE) at public expense. Pursuant to 34.C.F.R. 300.502, a parent has the right to an IEE if he/she disagrees with an evaluation obtained by the public agency. If a parent does request an IEE, the school district must either ensure that such evaluation is provided at public expense or file a due process complaint to show that its own evaluation is appropriate (34 C.F.R. 300.502(b)). Parents are informed of this safeguard through MCPS's procedural safeguards manual. According to MCPS records, this option does not appear to be used frequently. In 2013-14 there were only 10 requests by families to pay for IEEs and nine requests in 2014-15. Most of the parents in focus groups who paid for external testing could not exercise this option since they were not disagreeing with already conducted evaluations. In these cases, there seemed to be a discrepancy between what parents considered necessary and what the team considered necessary.

Another potential issue related to student testing was the availability of school psychologists to administer the tests. Discussions with district staff indicated that the number of students per psychologists is very high in MCPS compared to other Maryland school districts. Available data indicated that while MCPS had 106 FTE psychologists or 1:1,451 students in 2014-15, Baltimore City with a smaller student population had 142 FTE psychologists or 1:598 students, and Baltimore County had 85.9 FTEs or 1:1,280 students. Approximately two-thirds of the surveyed school administrators (68%, n=228) felt that there were not enough school psychologists to keep up with the need to assess all students with a suspected disability. IDEA does not require that assessments

be completed, however, if the school does not have clear evidence that there are educational concerns that would be “answered” by formal assessments, including a psychological assessment.

**Disproportionality.** The use of a tiered system of supports in MCPS schools indicates that students are being referred appropriately. Disproportionality is usually reported in terms of overrepresentation in special education. Disproportionality occurs when a group of students experiences an identification rate that exceeds their representation in the overall population. For example, if 25 percent of the student population is African American and a larger percentage of students identified for special education services is African American, then disproportionality exists. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) determines the formula that is used to identify disproportionality.

As part of the federally required state performance plan, the MSDE reports district disproportionality and periodically reviews individual district records. A state review indicated that disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education and related services that is the result of inappropriate identification is not an issue in MCPS. As mentioned, interviewed staff indicated that multiple strategies and interventions are implemented prior to a formal referral which can prevent disproportionality. In addition, some staff mentioned that culture and language of the student are considerations when providing interventions as well as during the assessment process. When students with an IEP transfer into MCPS an IEP meeting is held to determine the placement. To prevent over-identification with the quickly changing demographics of the district, a work group monitors the rate of referrals for English Language Learners and outcomes of the referral process.

Demographic statistics for the 2014-15 school year showed that the percentage of Asian students receiving special education services was nearly twice the rate of their representation in the general student population (see Table 3). However, a state review of disproportionality in which they apply a formula would determine whether disproportionality is an issue.

**Table 3. Race/Ethnicity for MCPS Students**

Race/Ethnicity	Students receiving Special Education Service		All Students	
	N	%	N	%
American Indian or Alaska Native	39	<5%		<5%
Asian	1299	7.4	21,896	14.2
Black or African America	4508	25.8	33,213	21.5
Hawaiian Native	10	<5%		<5%
White	5185	29.7	47,768	31.0
Hispanic/Latino	5767	33.0	43,888	28.3
Multiple races	664	3.8	7,218	4.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,472</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

### Determination of Eligibility

If a student is referred to special education, the IEP team holds a screening meeting. At the screening meeting, the IEP team analyzes data that include teacher reports, a parent questionnaire, an observation of the student while the student is receiving instruction in the area of concern, and an educational history. If the screening team determines that there is reason to suspect an educational disability, the team develops diagnostic questions to guide the assessors and ensure that appropriate assessments are conducted. Once the assessments are completed, the IEP team convenes in an evaluation determinations meeting where the team decides if the student meets the state and federal criteria to be identified as a student with a disability. After that, the IEP team meets to develop the IEP meeting, within the 30-day period required by law.

This section addresses Board question A.3 related to informing parents (and students) about the determination process and Board question A.4 related to seeking parent input.

### Findings

The review of the eligibility determination process found that school staff generally provided a great deal of information to parents. A few IEP teams mentioned that if the team decides to move to a referral staff members explain the steps in the process to the parents, which would indicate that parents were informed before the process began. Survey results indicated that a majority of the responding parents (83%, n=72), who were new to the process, felt that their schools informed them about the determination process. However, parents that participated in focus groups felt that they had to educate themselves about processes and support.

Parents may learn of available special education services through meetings or by conducting research online. As IEP teams and district staff indicated, there are resources available on the MCPS website including a list of supports and information sessions. Also, a Parent Guide to Special Education is provided to parents at the schools. District staff also revealed that the MCPS Office of Community Engagement and Partnerships (OCEP) conducts parent outreach and offers classes on the special education process. In addition, Parent Community Coordinators provide support to parents in the IEP process. MCPS offices, in collaboration with the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), also host an information fair in the spring, which is called the Special Education Parent Summit. The SEAC co-chairs explained that one of their purposes is to provide information to parents to inform them about services and different issues. They also get parent input to keep aware of issues. Parents learn about SEAC through a newsletter that is sent home with students and through information fairs in the fall and spring. Nevertheless, less than half of the parents surveyed, who were new to the special education process (47%, n=72), indicated that they knew about different district offices where they can get support in educating their child. Being new to the process, parents may just need more time to learn about their options.

The eligibility meeting presents a valuable opportunity for parents to actively participate in the process. Prior to the meeting, parents should receive any documents related to the process. During the meeting, parents should receive explanations if they do not understand any of the information. At the meeting, parent input should be considered. Surveyed parents who were new to the process agreed that they were informed of their child's suspected disabilities (81%, n=72), received the documents the team planned to review at least five business days in advance of the eligibility meeting (89%, n=72), and that any information they did not understand prior to the meeting was explained (88%, n=72) to them at the meeting. When staff members explained information concerning the IEP, the majority of parents believed this information was explained in a clear way (90%, n=72). More importantly, during the eligibility meeting, the majority of the parents (89%, n=72) felt that other team members considered their input.

When a student is found not eligible for services, staff at several of the schools visited mentioned that supports are still provided through guidance counselors, academic peer tutoring, school-wide behavior incentives, academic intervention classes, and outside social service agencies. In most schools, the student is referred back to the EMT. Parents continue to be informed about the process to the same extent that they were informed prior to the referral.

Results on the number of referrals to special education screening and the outcomes of the screening process, including whether or not the student is determined eligible for special education services, can be a valuable source of information for district staff, school staff, and parents. During school interviews, some administrators explained that they reviewed reports on referrals and outcomes. A district administrator also indicated that central office staff reviewed referrals and outcomes. MCPS monitors newly identified students. Schools receive a report each semester that includes the grade level, race/ethnicity, gender, primary disability, and least restrictive environment (LRE). The district does not centrally track or monitor referral data which would enable analysis.



Data in the online IEP system can be analyzed to describe the students who have been identified for special education services. An eligibility date makes it possible to identify students from any given time period. MCPS compiles an annual statistical report that includes demographic and achievement data for students with disabilities in each school. The report is available on the MCPS website.

## IEP Meetings

After a child is found eligible for services, IEP meetings are held to develop an initial IEP. IEP meetings are also held annually to review student progress and can also be held periodically at the parent's or staff member's request. The meetings are a primary opportunity for parent participation as a team member. This section addresses Board question A.4, A.5, A.6, and, A.7 regarding soliciting parent input, teacher training, assessing parent experiences, and complying with IDEA, respectively, during the IEP development process.

In parent surveys, respondents who attended an initial IEP meeting largely agreed that they felt comfortable expressing their opinions (85%, n=72) and even more agreed that their input was considered (89%, n=72). Similarly, parents agreed that they were asked if they agreed with the decisions (88%, n=72).

Prior to the annual or periodic review IEP meeting, a majority of parents (86%, n=368) agreed that they receive the documents within the appropriate timeframe. Surveys also showed that the majority of parents (88%, n=368) thought that any information not understood by parents is explained to them at the IEP meeting. And a comparable rate of parents thought that they understood the information that was explained during the meeting (89%, n=368). Similarly, parents agreed (91%, n=368) that the IEP team considered their input.

All surveyed students (n=34), in grades eight through 12, agreed that they were invited to their IEP meetings and almost all of them attended (88%, n=34). Surveyed students indicated that during the IEP meetings, they were asked for their input by staff IEP team members (100%, n=34), and team members considered their input (96%, n=34). Comparable rates of teachers indicated that students felt comfortable expressing their opinions (46%, n=785) or did not know if students felt comfortable (48%, n=785). By comparison, a higher rate of principals agreed (57%, n=228) that students felt comfortable expressing their opinions, while some did not know (38%, n=228). The moderate levels of agreement seem to be related to the opportunities to participate in meetings with students.

School staff had very positive perceptions of the IEP meeting processes. A majority of teachers (81%, n=784) agreed that parents receive the documents within the appropriate timeframe. The majority of school administrators (93%, n=227), teachers (92%, n=786), and related service providers (94%, n=80) agreed that a staff member ensures that any information previously not understood by parents is explained.

Survey respondents indicated that MCPS staff seek parent input at IEP meetings. Almost all surveyed school administrators (97%), teachers (90%), and related service providers (96%) agreed



that staff asked for parent input during IEP meetings. At least nine of every ten of the surveyed school administrators (96%), teachers (90%), and related service providers (93%) agreed that parents were comfortable expressing their opinions during IEP meetings.

Although the IDEA does not require full agreement from all IEP team members, best practice is always to work toward consensus. While interactions with parents seemed positive, some surveyed parents who attended an initial IEP meeting (20%, n=72) felt they had to bring an advocate or lawyer to the meeting as did some parents who attended an annual or periodic review IEP meeting (13%, n=367). Reasons for hiring a lawyer or advocate included assisting with understanding of the process and ensuring necessary services are specified in the IEP. District data from 2013-14 and 2014-15 indicated that 243 families, approximately 1.4 percent of the population, were represented by counsel. The data does not account for assistance provided by advocates. The higher survey response rates may indicate that advocates are used more frequently than lawyers.

Among parent focus group participants, it was difficult to separate the experiences of parents who recently participated in an initial IEP meeting and those who participated in other meetings. Nevertheless, there were valuable insights shared by the 70 parents who volunteered to participate in these focus groups that could be used to improve parental participation and input in IEP meetings.

Best practice suggests that for parents to be active participants in the process, they should have an understanding of the special education process. In some focus groups, parents indicated that the special education process is complicated. Some parents described how they spent extensive time educating themselves. These parents also expressed concern about the additional difficulty in understanding the process for parents from different cultures. One parent wondered what she would do if English was not her first language. Another parent who is a Spanish interpreter, that attends other IEP meetings, explained that most Spanish speaking parents do not understand the processes.

Some staff at the visited schools indicated that they work hard to educate their parents and indicated that they ensure that interpreters attend the meetings, when appropriate, to assist with communication and to assist with bridging cultural differences. In IEP team focus groups, teams spoke mostly about dealing with the language differences through interpreters and the use of the district language line, a telephone interpreter service available to IEP teams. Some teams recognized the challenges with other cultures such as perceptions of the parent role in education. District staff also acknowledged this point and noted that interpretation is not just about words but about concepts. Principals interviewed tended to discuss providing interpreters with few discussing culture. On surveys, a strong majority of school administrators (87%, n=228), teachers (83%, n=786), and related service providers (76%, n=80) agreed that teachers worked to understand the culture of parents from different countries.

In focus groups, parents described both positive and negative experiences with IEP meetings. In meetings where parents have felt like partners, the IEP teams have taken the time to explain the

process and allow parents to feel comfortable and ask questions. The following parent quote describes a positive meeting.

*“When they seem fair, when they seem like they genuinely understood the issues that we were discussing, understood my kid’s needs, and they really were looking out for what was best for my child even if I didn’t get everything that I asked for, I felt like we went through the process.”*

However, some of the parents who participated in the focus groups also described experiences in which their input was not solicited. In several groups, parents mentioned that the limited amount of time for the meeting did not allow for discussion or that staff rushed through the information. The following parent quote conveys the point.

*It was very structured and everybody gets to provide input. The only thing I don’t like is that it’s timed. It’s like an hour and 15 minutes and then they’re back to back. There’s really no time to discuss anything. It’s really just present all this information. It just seems like such a tiny amount of period to talk about a child’s accommodations for a year.*

Another factor that was mentioned by parents in two focus groups was limited participation by team staff members who appeared to be intimidated by the meeting chair. Yet, survey results indicated that almost all school administrators (96%, n=227) thought that IEP team members felt comfortable expressing their opinions in IEP meetings. The majority of the teachers (86%, n=787) and related service providers (88%, n=80) surveyed agreed that they felt comfortable expressing their opinions in IEP meetings. This issue may exist but probably in few schools.

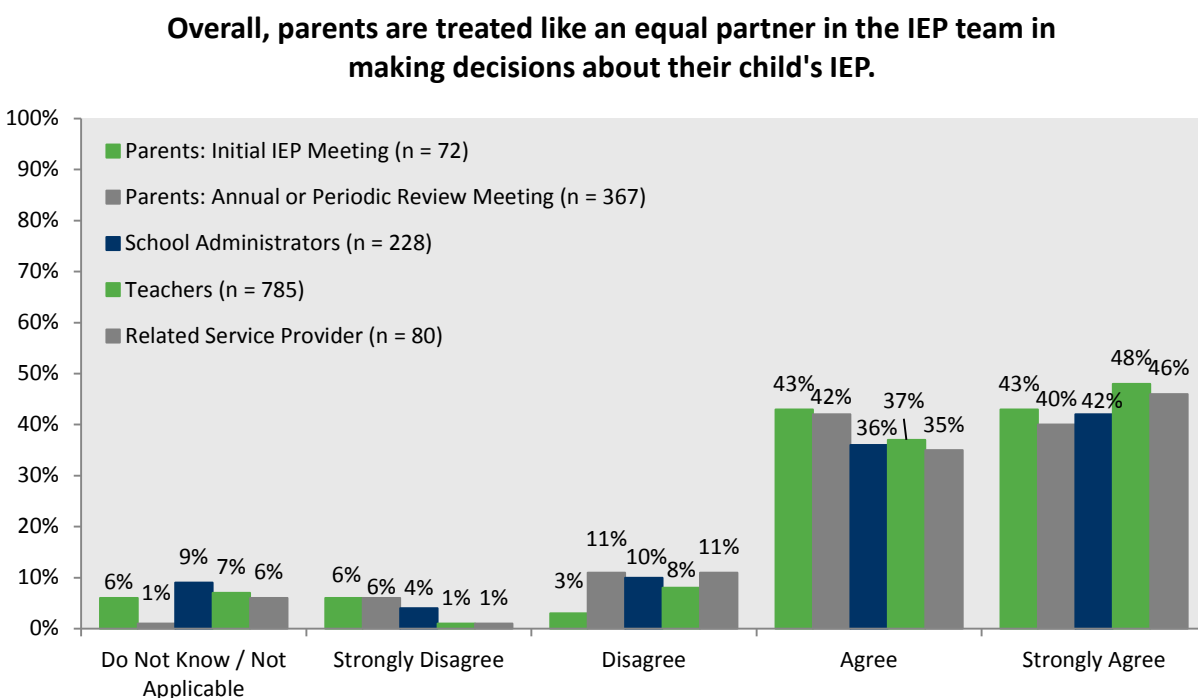
Parents and staff reported that they received information about potential placements in the IEP meeting. IEP team members explained how they are reluctant to discuss potential placements until eligibility was determined. Placement is an IEP team decision (see 34 C.F.R. 300.320,) and discussing placement options outside of the meeting can lead to claims of illegal predetermination, so IEP teams must move forward with caution. A concern expressed by parents in some of the focus groups was an inadequate amount of information about types of placements. They thought that they did not know enough to determine if the placement options meet the needs of their child. Other parents indicated that they were provided with limited information so they could not ask for other options. This may be partially explained by a point made by a staff person that with a large range of options available to meet student needs, not all options are appropriate for all students. Detailed descriptions of programs and services are available in the annual MCPS Special Education Staffing Plan and on the special education section of the MCPS website, both of which are available to parents. The MCPS Staffing Plan Guidelines, developed by a committee that includes parents and community members, contains program descriptions. Some school staff explained that they encouraged parents to visit programs in other schools to understand different placements. Some school staff would even arrange a visit for parents to observe a different program.

In addition to a need for information about program options, suggestions offered by parents in focus groups indicated a need for information to understand the special education process and the IEP. Suggestions included streamlining the IEP or providing a summary sheet to prepare for the

meeting. The summary would include issues, areas where the child is doing well, and thoughts on needs. Another suggestion was to have knowledgeable parents offer themselves as resources. If interested, parents could let other parents know of their availability to provide explanations.

The seemingly positive meeting dynamics at initial, annual, and periodic IEP meetings tended to make parents feel like equal partners. Surveyed parents who attended an initial IEP meeting (86%, n=72) or an annual/periodic meeting (82%, n=367) thought they were treated like equal partners in the IEP team in making decisions about their child. Similarly, the majority of the school staff thought parents were treated like equal partners. Comparable rates of school administrators (78%, n=228), teachers (85%, n=785), and related service providers (81%, n=80) agreed that parents are treated like equal partners in the IEP team (see Figure 2). Additionally, surveyed students thought that they had a voice in making decisions about their IEP (94%, n=33).

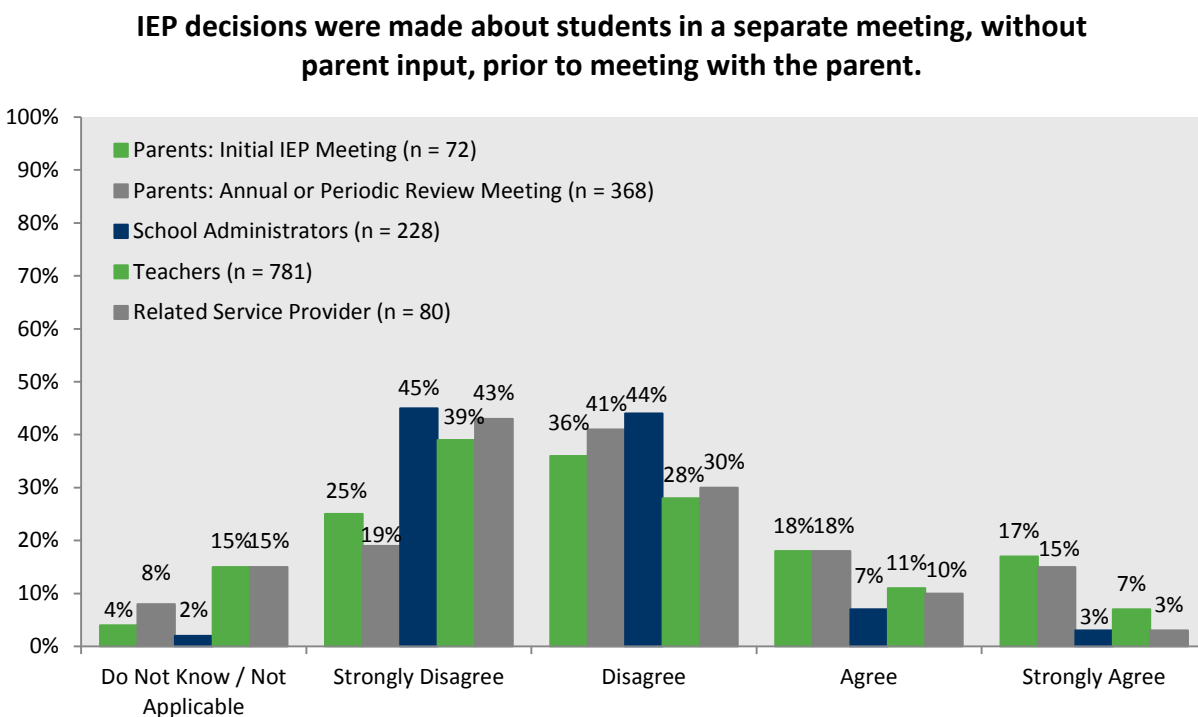
**Figure 2. Parents as Equal Partners by Survey Group**



There are some other factors that can affect a parent's experience in an IEP meeting such as perceptions of pre-meetings. Pre-meetings are not illegal if the team is discussing the IEP and parents get a chance to contribute. However, if the team is making pre-determined decisions then the meeting is illegal. MCPS procedures emphasized that IEP decisions must not be predetermined; however, staff may develop personal recommendations based on their own prior review of the data during EMT meetings. More surveyed parents who attended an initial IEP meeting (35%, n=72) or an annual or periodic review (33%, n=368) than administrators (10%, n=228), teachers (18%, n=781), and related service providers (12%, n=80) indicated that IEP decisions were made prior to the IEP team meeting without parent input. Parents thought that decisions were made in advance

during pre-meetings at approximately twice the rate of teachers and more than three times the rate of school administrators (see Figure 3). With the possibility that pre-meetings can violate IDEA, the actual purposes of these meetings need to be documented and analyzed to improve parent perceptions.

**Figure 3. Pre-meeting Decisions by Survey Group**



One other possible issue may be related to IEP meetings is a perception about changes in IEPs. Decisions made about services and accommodations during the IEP meetings should be reflected in the version that parents receive. Among parents who attended an initial IEP meeting, most thought that the accommodations and services were the same in the first and final versions of the IEP (90%, n=72) and that they were involved in any changes (78%, n=72). Similarly, most parents who participated in an annual or periodic review agreed that the accommodations and services were the same (90%, n=368) in both IEP versions. Teachers (85%, n=784) and related service providers (86%, n=80) agreed that the services and accommodations were the same in the draft and final versions of the IEPs.

Parents in almost half of the focus groups discussed how the principal had a large influence on IEP meetings and special education. On the positive side, the principal can be a great advocate if they understand and support special education. Conversely, the principal can influence the decisions that are made and in cases of disagreement, inform parents of their due process rights to invoke one of the dispute resolution processes discussed later in this report. Surveyed teachers (76%, n=785) and related service providers (76%, n=80) agreed that decisions in IEP meetings were made by the team and not a single person; 10 percent of each group did not know.

## Professional Learning and Training Opportunities for Staff

The ability of staff to work with parents needs to be considered when discussing parent experiences. The review found that MCPS has provided professional development parent involvement in the IEP meeting and strategies to solicit input. But this professional development occurred on an ad hoc basis. It was found that addressing this topic is more likely to occur informally either at the district level or the school level. In district professional development sessions, it may be discussed if someone raises a question. District level staff also explained that they have worked with schools on collaborating with parents have even provided modeling of strategies for soliciting and utilizing parent input during IEP meetings.

IEP team interview responses indicated that professional learning tended to be process oriented. In those schools where the teams discussed parent-related training, they typically addressed it informally during meetings or by providing support to new teachers. Survey results were consistent with school staff interviews regarding available professional development. Less than half of the staff surveyed indicated that professional development was available to help IEP team members collaborate with parents. More specifically, few teachers (31%, n=785) and related service providers (38%, n=80) but more administrators (52%, n=228) agreed that such professional learning opportunities were available.

## Assessing Parent Experiences

At the time of this review, MCPS relied on the annual parent survey administered by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), as required by the federal Office of Special Education Programs, as its primary tool to assess parent experiences with the IEP process. The survey, which is mailed directly to parents of all students with disabilities, includes questions on the IEP process. In previous years, MCPS also conducted its own surveys to gauge parent experiences. However, administrators expressed concern that multiple surveys could lead to “survey fatigue” that could depress response rates on the MSDE survey. Although MCPS parent response rates on the MSDE survey have exceeded the state level over the last two years, the response rates were very low. For the 2012-13 survey the MCPS response rate was 11 percent compared to the state rate of 10 percent.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, for the 2013-14 survey MCPS parent response rate exceeded the state response rate by one percentage point (9% state, 10% MCPS).<sup>8</sup> Hence, any results must be interpreted with caution.

There were different levels of understanding regarding assessing parent experiences. Parents who participated in focus groups thought that approximately three to four years ago, the central office sent cards to be completed after meetings. District staff indicated that the cards were distributed to

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<sup>7</sup> Maryland Report on Part B Indicator 8 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2012-13.  
<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/msde/divisions/earlyinterv/docs/MSDEParentSurvey110613.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Maryland Report on Part B Indicator 8 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2013-14.  
<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/msde/divisions/earlyinterv/docs/2013-14-ParentSurveyReport.pdf>

parents at the end of IEP meetings in middle schools. That process has since been discontinued. More recently, some parents mentioned receiving a card and having three months to complete it. Most likely they were referring to the state survey for Federal reporting requirements.

Although MCPS does not currently have a formal process for assessing parent experiences other than the MSDE survey, parents have informal opportunities to provide feedback. These opportunities include calling central office staff or raising a point to be addressed at a SEAC meeting. Moreover, at the school level feedback is also gathered. For instance, at two schools visited, IEP team members conduct follow-up phone calls with parents to gauge how they are doing. Another school IEP team is considering developing a parent feedback process.

### IDEA Requirements for Developing IEPs

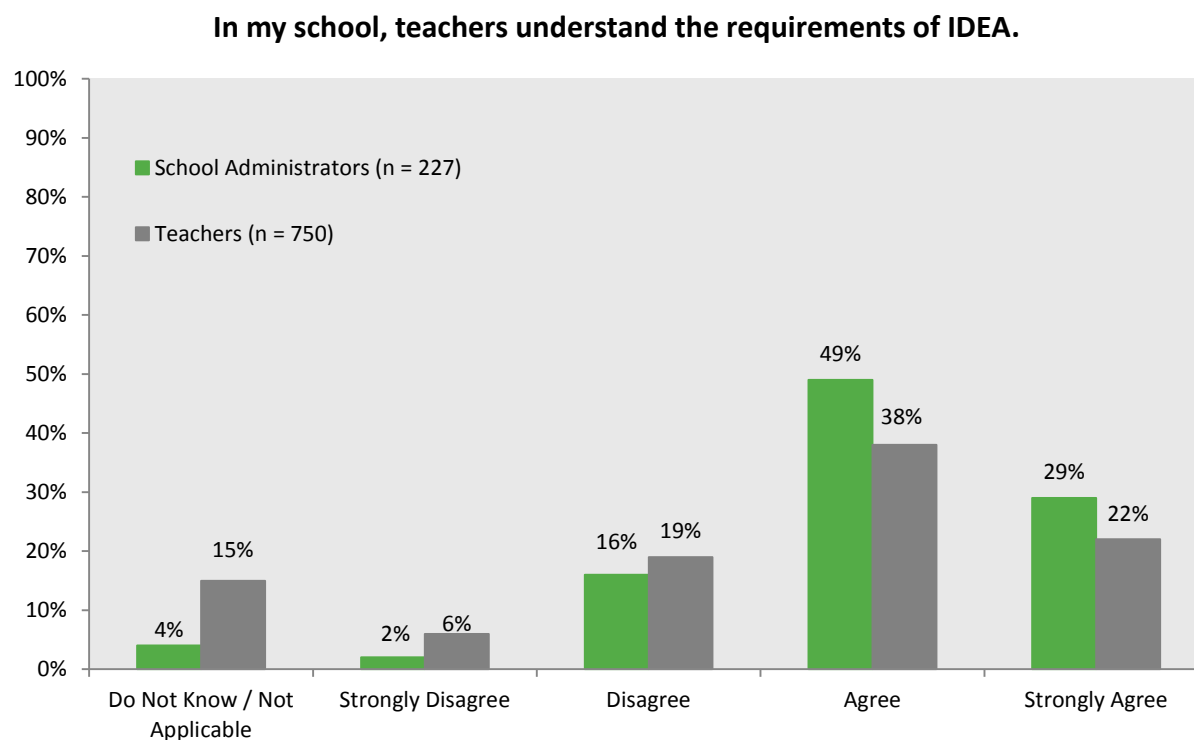
IDEA requires that the IEP contain the special education and related services that the child requires to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) (see 34 C.F.R. 300.320(a)(4)). The review found that school and district staff members shared the responsibility of ensuring that IEPs are developed in accordance with IDEA (IEP requirements are found in 34 C.F.R. 320 and 300.324). IEP team members explained how the case manager or resource teacher has primary responsibility for IEP development but it is typically a team effort. In a small number of schools, a school administrator was responsible. School staff assumed responsibility for meeting timelines and making sure the IEP is aligned.

The review found that district level staff performed checks on IEPs to ensure compliance. Cluster supervisors indicated that they frequently review IEPs and MCPS central office staff conduct detailed reviews of random IEPs to monitor compliance and identify any issues or corrective actions. Schools are notified if there is an issue. One school indicated that staff were notified that they needed to include more information in present levels of performance and the central office reviewer explained exactly what was needed to correct the information.

To support school efforts at monitoring compliance, district staff also provided staff development. Some teachers mentioned that central office provided professional development every time there was a change in legal requirements. The cluster supervisor interview revealed that when IEPs are reviewed, trends are identified which informs professional development.

Overall, a small majority of teachers (60%, n=750), which included general education teachers, surveyed and a larger majority of school administrators (78%, n=227) indicated that they understand the requirements of IDEA (see Figure 4). This is not necessarily a concern considering that at least one person at each school is responsible for and understands how to ensure that IEPs meet the requirements of IDEA.

**Figure 4. Understanding of IDEA Requirements**



Among surveyed parents who attended an initial IEP meeting, most (79%, n=72) agreed that their students' IEPs were providing FAPE. A comparable rate of surveyed parents (83%, n=368) who attended an IEP review meeting agreed. Most teachers (84%, n=785) and related service providers (93%, n=80) agreed that all of the services and accommodations students needed to receive FAPE were written into the IEP. In terms of understanding FAPE, most parents (90%, n=72) who attend an initial IEP meeting agreed that they understood FAPE, which was about the same for the parents (86%, n=368) who attended an IEP review meeting and had more experience with the special education process. Overall, fewer teachers (75%, n=785) and related service providers (77%, n=80) thought that parents understand the level of services and accommodations that the school is required to provide FAPE. Parents new to the process and those with more experience in the process thought that their child's IEP was complete and indicated they understood FAPE. Surveyed students thought that their services and accommodations were explained to them (94%, n=34) and that they understood them (88%, n=34). More than half of the teachers thought that students understood the services and accommodations (57%, n=785) but some teachers did not know (32%, n=785) since they most likely did not attend meetings with students.

Services to students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and students eligible for transition services provide additional evidence on IEP development. In the IEPs that were reviewed, only 25 of the students were clearly identified as having Limited English Proficiency. The boxes for determining if a child is LEP were often left blank on the information page. Evaluators were able to



identify students who are LEP by the data on language proficiency, even if they were not marked as LEP. For students with current language proficiency data, or marked as LEP, language needs were addressed in only 60 percent of the cases. This box was often left blank as well.

For students eligible for Transition Plans, the IEP reviews identified an interview as the assessment used to determine the student's interests and preferences. There was no evidence of other transitions assessments or interests inventories utilized. All students did have postsecondary goals identified in either education, training, or both and almost all had a course of study identified that would support them in reaching their postsecondary goals. For nearly all students, transition services were identified but were not specific in how the team and the student would accomplish the transition activity. Not all students had specific transition goals written that would support them in meeting their postsecondary goals other than academic goals which may or may not be directly associated with the postsecondary goals.

In almost every parent focus group, parents expressed concerns about limited resources. Some felt that services were being based on available resources and not student needs. Other parents noted that there was limited availability of psychologists or related service providers. Discussion in some focus groups occurred as to whether resources limited the number of students tested or identified. A perception among parents was that there was pressure to keep costs down and that the pressure came not from the schools but from higher up. In their encounters with parents, SEAC co-chairs indicated that they thought the district did not want to spend the money and that they have heard statements to the effect that: "We don't do that here." and "It (these services) will be fine." Another indicator of resources could be the ability to provide services. Approximately one third of the surveyed related service providers (32%, n=75) did not think their caseload enables them to provide the service to students as stated in their IEP, while slightly more than half (53%) thought they are able to provide these services, and 15 percent did not know.

While parents expressed concerns about limited resources, almost all surveyed school administrators (96%, n=228) indicated that financial considerations impact the provision of FAPE for students with disabilities. Whether this adversely impacted services is unknown. However, the decisions about services are not to be based on financial considerations. In contrast, principals can submit critical staff requests throughout the year and school administrator interviews indicated that they get approved. While resources can affect the provision of services, the cost of special education services are primarily driven by several factors, including the number of eligible students, the manner in which services are provided, and the quality and responsiveness of such services to meet students' needs. Understanding the cost drivers associated with resource allocation is important, but of equal importance is a focus on maintaining a high-quality, effective, and efficient special education program.

Enrollment projections are also an important cost driver for school district resource allocation. The enrollment projection included in the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2016 Budget reflects that MCPS will continue to experience enrollment growth in the total student population. Therefore, it is not unexpected that the number of students that receive special education services is also projected



to increase. It is, however, important to note that while the rate of growth in the special education population is projected to be below that of the overall population, enrollment growth requires allocating additional resources, both human and fiscal to support students' needs.

Enrollment projections serve as the starting point in the budget development process for MCPS's Office of Special Education and Student Services. Based on the projections for fiscal year (FY) 16 there are more than 58 additional positions to accommodate projected enrollment growth for students who receive special education services and maintain MCPS staffing guidelines included in the FY16 Approved Operating Budget. Additional positions include 33 teacher positions, supported by an additional 33.3 paraeducator positions, as well as a reduction of 8.3 of other support positions that include, but are not limited to, program specialists, psychologists, and speech and language therapists (SPL).

The investment in resources to support the Special Education and Student Services Program in MCPS has increased over the time period examined. For FY16 the increase is estimated to be \$346.8 million, an increase of more than 13.2 percent or \$40,583,965 since FY13. (For a financial, student and, staffing analysis, see Appendix E).

## Benchmarking

Similar to MCPS, benchmarking school districts all have multi-tiered systems of support to assist struggling students. The process could take up to 12 weeks. Parents are informed early in the process typically by letter, but their participation is optional. Of note, one district encourages schools to conduct vision and hearing screening so that if a referral is made, the evaluation process will not be delayed. It appears that two districts use their online systems to monitor referrals and outcomes.

Data monitoring, support, and a focus on improving instruction prevent or address disproportionality in benchmark districts. For a district that does not refer students disproportionately, staff monitor data on a monthly basis and provides training on misidentification as needed. Another district has a centralized team that supports schools by reviewing data and the eligibility decision making process. A district for which disproportionality is an issue focuses on improving instruction and intervention strategies. The district also conducts a thorough language assessment. District staff monitor schools with disproportionality issues. It appeared that monthly data monitoring is the main assessment process.

Similar to MCPS, benchmark districts provide the usual information sources to parents such as websites, information conferences, agency collaboration, and school staff communication with parents. In addition, the districts offer a unique information source or directly involve parents. One district distributes a basic pamphlet that addresses 12 things parents need to know about special education. Another district has two parent mentors. These mentors inform other parents about the special education process from the perspective of parents of students with disabilities. In terms of supports, another district has a cadre of 25 procedural support liaisons who assist parents and attend

meetings. MCPS also has parent community coordinators, parent educators, and liaisons who support parents.

The three benchmark districts provide training on working with parents based on the school's needs on what seemed like a more regular basis than MCPS. Most notably, one district emphasizes that the training is not just about working effectively but building relationships with parents.

Two benchmark districts described features of their processes for assessing parent experiences. In one district, each school conducts an annual parent perception survey and the results inform the principal's evaluation. Another district conducts an anonymous online parent survey. Parents receive the link after the meeting and are encouraged to complete it at a school computer before they leave. The results are for district information but there are plans to share the results with the schools.

Similar to MCPS, to ensure compliance with IDEA, district staff in all benchmark districts reviews IEPs to ensure that they are compliant. Monitoring is also conducted by specific staff at each school in one district. School staff receives related training and one district has a designated school contact to provide updates. Also similar to MCPS, one district has a district diagnostician attend IEP meetings to ensure compliance is met. It was unclear whether the diagnostician was trained in assessment administration and interpretation or was a diagnostician in a more general sense. Also, the district did not indicate how many diagnosticians are employed. In terms of diagnostics, MCPS practice is to have a special education teacher, trained in the administration and interpretation of normed educational assessments present at all IEP meetings

## Recommendations Regarding IEP Development

Based on the available evidence and the strategies being implemented in the benchmark school districts, the WestEd team proposes the following recommendations.

**Recommendation 1.1.** MCPS should improve its reporting and accountability mechanisms for the tiered interventions that it uses to problem solve around issues for struggling students. While survey results and interviews indicated that schools are implementing a tiered system of supports, MCPS should strive to enhance its monitoring of the implementation and success of these interventions. More specifically, MCPS should monitor data on referrals to more objectively determine whether referrals are being made appropriately. Currently, MCPS does not track or monitor referral data at the district level.

**Recommendation 1.2.** MCPS should review data on the outcomes of the special education screening process to determine the extent to which private testing leads to identification of a disability. This would provide more specific information on an issue that emerged in parent focus groups.

**Recommendation 1.3.** MCPS should consider hiring additional school psychologists to enhance the screening processes. Available data indicated that the ratio of students per psychologist is higher in MCPS than other large districts in Maryland. Decisions regarding school psychologist staffing

should be based on the number of students per psychologist and recommended professional standards.

**Recommendation 1.4.** MCPS should expand its ad hoc professional development and provide systematic professional development for staff on working with and supporting parents and families. MCPS provides staff development that includes modeling. However, survey results indicated that few opportunities were available. Professional development should include an understanding the broad range of different cultures in Montgomery County. Although survey data indicated that IEP teams try to understand different cultures, school staff interviews indicated that cultural differences are more related to language interpretation than behaviors and expectations. The development of any new professional development regarding this topic should include input from parents to ensure that it addresses their concerns and needs.

**Recommendation 1.5.** MCPS needs to strategically enhance the documents and other information it provides to parents about the IEP process and the continuum of special education services and ensure they are sufficiently accessible and user-friendly to enable them to more fully participate in the IEP process. Parents agreed that they are informed about documents discussed in IEP meeting and their input is considered. However, parents explained how they needed to conduct research to understand the process. The document should include questions that parents should ask to ensure that their child receives all services for FAPE. The range of services in the Special Education Staffing Plan is comprehensive, but the extent to which parents know about this information source is unknown. Also, while services information is available on the MCPS website it may not enable parents to understand which services are appropriate for their child.

**Recommendation 1.6.** MCPS should develop a cadre of knowledgeable parents who are available to inform and educate other parents regarding the processes involved in IEP development. These parents should be available to support parents independent of MCPS. This recommendation is based on a parent suggestion. The concept is similar to a benchmark district that has two parent mentors that educate other parents.

**Recommendation 1.7.** MCPS should ensure that parents understand what happens at meetings conducted prior to IEP meetings. Parent surveys and focus groups indicated that parents think that decisions are made about their child in pre-meetings without their input. IEP teams need to explain the purpose of any pre-meetings. Parents need to file complaints if any decisions are made in those pre-meetings.

**Recommendation 1.8.** MCPS should ensure that parents understand what is legally required under federal law to provide Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and how resources are allocated to schools. Surveys indicated that many, but not all, parents understand what is required to provide FAPE. Additionally, compared to parents, teachers and related service providers agreed to a lesser extent that parents understood FAPE. Understanding FAPE could also contribute to a parent understanding of resource allocation and address parent concerns about limited resources.

**Recommendation 1.9.** MCPS should ensure that IEPs are complete for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and students with transition plans. A review of IEPs indicated that language needs of LEP students were not always addressed. Also, while all transition plans had goals and a course of study, the services did not contain details on how they would be implemented.

**Recommendation 1.10.** MCPS should develop a mechanism to assess and report parent satisfaction with their experiences in the IEP process. MCPS currently relies on the MSDE survey with response rates of approximately 10 percent. Continuous information is needed to monitor parent experiences and hold schools accountable. Individual parent and family responses to the surveys should be aggregated by school and across the district on a quarterly or semi-annual basis. School results should be shared with IEP team members and with parents.

## IEP Implementation

IEP implementation is the provision of special education services to students with IEPs. Classroom observations, parent focus groups, surveys of school staff, school administrators, parents and students, and the review of IEPs informed WestEd's review of IEP implementation.

### Context

IDEA requires that the school districts must ensure that a continuum of alternative placements be available to meet the needs of children with disabilities (34 C.F.R. 300.115). MCPS provides a broad range of special education services to implement programs and ensure student growth and success. These services are provided in the public school setting; in public, separate, special education day schools; and in nonpublic special education day schools.

Special education resource services are offered in all schools, kindergarten through twelfth grade. Programs for high incidence disabilities, such as learning disabilities, are available in every cluster at the elementary and secondary levels. Available services include:

- Resource Rooms
- Learning and Academic Disabilities (LAD) classes
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing services
- Related services for occupational and physical therapy supports
- Services for the visually impaired
- Speech and language services
- Assistive technology services
- Support from paraeducators and special education teachers

- Transition services to assist students transitioning from school to postsecondary activities.

Highly specialized programs for students with more specific disabilities are provided on a countywide basis in centralized locations. These services include:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Program                       | • School/Community-based (SCB) program services            |
| • Pre-K Vision Services                                  | • Extension Program services                               |
| • Physical disabilities classes                          | • Emotional Disabilities (ED) services                     |
| • Autism Resources services                              | • Bridge Program   |
| • Learning for Independence (LFI) classes                | • Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) classes |
| • Gifted and Talented Learning Disabled Services (GT/LD) | • Preschool Education Program (PEP)                        |
| • Elementary Learning Centers                            | • Infants and Toddlers early intervention services         |
| • Elementary Home School Model                           |  |

MCPS also operates special education day schools including the Carl Sandburg Learning Center, the Rock Terrace School, the Stephen Knolls School, the Longview School, and the John L. Gildner Regional Institute for Children and Adolescents (RICA). In addition, for pre-kindergarten students, the Division of Prekindergarten, Special Programs, and Related Services and the Division of Early Childhood Programs and Services collaborate to provide pre-kindergarten special education.

### Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and Continuum of Services

IDEA requirements govern the implementation of student IEPs with reference to where students are educated and the range of services that must be available. These requirements address Board question B.1 related to the least restrictive environment and question B.2 related to assessing the continuum of services.

### Findings

IDEA requires all children with disabilities to be educated with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate (34 C.F.R. 300.114(2)(i)). Furthermore, a child should only be removed from a general education environment if the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in a general education environment with use of supplementary aids and services cannot be satisfactorily achieved (34 C.F.R. 300.114(a)(2)(ii)). This is accomplished through the provision of

special education services within the general education setting, to the extent appropriate, which is typically considered the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

IEP reviews and interviews with IEP teams indicated that LRE decisions are based on student present level of academic and functional performance and identified areas of need associated with the student's specific disability. A review of student IEPs indicated that the LRE section of the IEP was very strong in MCPS. Nearly all of the 100 IEPs reviewed had the documentation for the basis for the LRE decision (98%) and the LRE was identified in all IEPs (100%). In the vast majority of cases, multiple placement options (82%) were discussed, and most often when this was not considered, it was because the student had previously been in a full inclusion model and general education was the only option identified. All IEPs had the special education and related services identified along with an explanation about the extent to which the student would not participate with non-disabled peers in academic and non-academic settings. If a student was removed from the general education setting there was an explanation about why the services could not be provided in the general education setting with supplementary aids and services. Of the reviewed IEPs, 64 percent of the students were placed in the general education classroom for more than 80 percent of the day.

The perceptions of parents and staff supported the idea that students are placed in the least restrictive environment with general education placement as the first option reflecting a strong district-wide inclusion philosophy. The majority of surveyed parents (85%, n=445), school administrators (97%, n=227), and teachers (93%, n=748) indicated that students with disabilities were placed in an appropriate LRE where students could receive instruction in the general education curriculum to the maximum extent appropriate based on student needs with adequate supports necessary to meet their IEP goals. Generally, parents in most focus groups thought that their children were in the least restrictive environments, but a few had concerns that the general education setting did not provide enough special education supports for their students. For example, a parent explained how their child did not receive support in an honors class. Another parent discussed how one person provided support to six or seven students in middle school which was not sufficient for the child. IEP teams, teachers, and administrators discussed student needs in discussions about LRE. However, in terms of support for educating students, only 71 percent (n =227) of school administrators surveyed agreed that the district provides strong support for educating student in the least restrictive environment. Similar rates of teachers (77%, n=749) and related service providers (71%, n=75) indicated that school administrators provide strong support. So while almost all school administrators and teachers agreed that students were being placed in the least restrictive environment, lower rates of teachers and administrators felt strong support for educating those students in the least restrictive environment.

Regarding services, IDEA requires that school districts must ensure that a continuum of alternative placements be available to meet the needs of children with disabilities (34 C.F.R. 300.115). IEP reviews and classroom observations showed a continuum of placement options from co-taught classes and full inclusion with minimal consultative supports to inclusion in the general education



classroom with an additional support period to partially included students receiving direct special education supports for more than 49 percent of their day to separate classes on integrated campuses to separate school settings.

More specifically, 63 classroom observations revealed that students received supports in the classroom through various resources. Almost all classrooms (94%) had a second teacher (27%) and/or one to three paraeducators (67%). Paraeducators provided one or more forms of support by assisting students (60%), supporting instruction (41%), and/or observing instruction (21%). Special education delivery included co-teaching supports (33%), push-in supports (21%), pull-out supports (19%), as well as special education classes (19%) in special schools. Instructional delivery practices varied across classrooms. Instructional delivery promoted student interaction and included whole class teacher-led discussion (52%), teacher-led small group instruction (48%), whole class teacher modeling and student practice (27%), student led cooperative groups (24%), and whole class teacher-talk (24%). The lessons largely probed the skill/concept (60%) depth of knowledge but others involved strategic thinking (19%) or extended thinking (13%). Each of the main components of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework was practiced in at least two thirds of the classrooms: exhibited multiple means of representation (84%), multiple ways of expression (78%), and multiple ways of engagement (65%).

Surveys and classroom observations indicated that paraeducators support all students and not just students with disabilities. Only 44 percent (n=516) of the paraeducators surveyed reported that they worked only with students with disabilities while 71 percent (n=519) reported that they also work with other students who need help. School administrators agreed that paraeducators spend most of their time assisting students with disabilities (79%, n=227). Paraeducators agreed that they assist students in separate settings (40%, n=517) and the regular classroom (62%, n=516).

Parents, who participated in focus groups, reported that they did not always feel like their students were receiving the services that they needed. There were concerns that students in the most inclusive settings were not getting enough support in class to be successful. To address parent concerns about inadequate services, some parents bring advocates to IEP meetings in an effort to receive more special education services and supports for their students. From the parents' perspective, they may not feel that their student is receiving the services they need.

In terms of knowing about the services, most surveyed parents (74%, n=441), school administrators (93%, n=227), and teachers (80%, n=748) agreed that the IEP team staff members consistently explain to parents the variety of service options available for students with disabilities. Additionally, a majority of parents (76%, n=444), school administrators (96%, n=227), and teachers (85%, n=747) indicated that the IEP team staff members have consistently identified appropriate service options for students with disabilities. Nevertheless, in a few focus groups, parents raised concerns about not knowing the available options. A detailed description of the programs and services is contained in the Special Education Staffing Plan and a list is provided on the MCPS Department of Special Education Services website. The parent survey results and focus groups indicate the need for more information.

While MCPS offers a range of services, there is only one optional process to systematically evaluate the different services at the school level. Individual schools have the option of using the Guide to Planning and Assessing School-based Special Education Programs to evaluate their special education programs for continuous improvement. The guide contains 11 areas of inquiry each of which contains a series of two to 15 reflective questions. Areas include all of the basic demographic categories, program descriptions, and outcomes such as student achievement and graduation. The questions vary in scope and complexity, from simple items like identifying the services provided to complex items like determining whether the interventions are implemented with fidelity. There is no guidance on the amount of time needed to complete a self-assessment or whether a full or partial assessment is recommended. During interviews, principals did not mention the planning guide.

Student progress in the general education curriculum and progress on goals is the best measure to determine if the continuum of services is meeting the needs of the district's diverse population. An analysis of state and MCPS Maryland School Assessment (MSA) proficiency rates by grade level and subject area for regular and special education students demonstrated persistent gaps in proficiency levels between special education students and their regular education peers, both within MCPS and across the state. Within MCPS, regular education students outperformed their special education peers by wide margins. In the 2013-2014 school year, regular education students' proficiency rates were between 24 percent and 47 percent higher than special education students' proficiency rates. Of the 15 measures, 12 of the gaps equaled or exceeded 35 percent. Across the state the gaps ranged from 27 percent to 49 percent with most of the gaps equaled or exceeded 38 percent.

Gaps in proficiency at the middle school level, on average, are the largest grade span gaps at 39 percent. At the elementary and middle school levels gaps in math proficiency are larger than gaps in reading proficiency. At the high school level, gaps in algebra proficiency are larger than gaps in English and biology proficiency. MCPS regular education and special education students consistently outperformed their statewide peers, with only a few exceptions in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 (see Table 4). As noted on the MCPS website, the gaps, on average, have grown at the elementary, middle, and high school levels each year for the past three years. Proficiency gaps, on average, have grown from 23 percent in 2012 to 33 percent in 2014 in elementary schools, from 29 percent in 2012 to 39 percent in 2014 in middle schools, and from 31 percent in 2012 to 33 percent in 2014 in high schools.



**Table 4. State and MCPS MSA Proficiency by Grade Level and Subject Area for Regular and Special Education Students**

		2012-2013				2013-2014			
Subject/ Grade Level		Statewide		MCPS		Statewide		MCPS	
		Regular Education	Special Education	Regular Education	Special Education	Regular Education	Special Education	Regular Education	Special Education
Reading	3rd	85%	60%	88%	61%	80%	53%	82%	58%
	4th	91%	66%	94%	70%	90%	59%	92%	64%
	5th	92%	64%	95%	72%	92%	63%	95%	71%
	6th	89%	49%	92%	63%	88%	46%	91%	56%
	7th	89%	51%	94%	68%	84%	38%	90%	54%
	8th	86%	41%	92%	58%	82%	33%	88%	49%
Math	3rd	86%	50%	81%	44%	78%	40%	77%	40%
	4th	93%	60%	94%	61%	85%	46%	84%	45%
	5th	85%	46%	89%	52%	78%	33%	80%	33%
	6th	82%	40%	84%	46%	73%	27%	80%	39%
	7th	77%	34%	83%	46%	68%	22%	79%	40%
	8th	72%	25%	79%	36%	64%	17%	73%	31%
Algebra		89%	45%	94%	59%	89%	42%	94%	57%
Biology		86%	50%	94%	65%	89%	49%	94%	65%
English		87%	46%	92%	60%	87%	42%	91%	58%

Another indicator of student progress is graduation rates. Similar to achievement results, there have been persistent gaps in the graduation rates between special education students and their regular education peers, both within MCPS and across the state. Within MCPS, regular education students graduate at higher rates than their special education peers by wide margins. However, these margins have been decreasing over the past five years. For example, for the class of 2010, the four year adjusted cohort graduation rate for regular education students was 30 percentage points higher than the graduation rate for special education students. This gap decreased to 22 percentage points for the class of 2014. MCPS regular education and special education students have had consistently higher graduation rates than their statewide peers. Statewide gaps in graduation rates for regular education and special education students are similar to those within MCPS (see Table 5).

**Table 5. State and MCPS Graduation Rates for Regular and Special Education Students**

Graduating Class	4-Year Adjusted Cohort Rate				5-Year Adjusted Cohort Rate			
	Statewide		MCPS		Statewide		MCPS	
	Regular Education	Special Education	Regular Education	Special Education	Regular Education	Special Education	Regular Education	Special Education
2014	89%	63%	92%	70%	Not available			
2013	88%	60%	91%	68%	90%	67%	93%	75%
2012	86%	57%	90%	63%	89%	64%	93%	69%
2011	86%	57%	90%	63%	88%	63%	92%	70%

Although assessment results may not indicate high levels of achievement among students with disabilities, all teachers have high expectations for the achievement of all students. Survey responses indicated that all teachers (98%, n=750) and a majority of school administrators (81%, n=226), paraeducators (74%, n=75), related service providers (69%, n=518), and the majority of the few students (89%, n=46) surveyed thought that all teachers had high expectations. In contrast 17 percent of the school administrators disagreed that all teachers had high expectations for all students. While only 74 percent of the paraeducators felt that teachers held high expectations, almost all paraeducators (93%, n=520) thought that they themselves had high expectations for all students.

### Provision of Services and Student Progress

As a partner in their child's education, parents need information on the actual services provided and progress toward goals. The findings address Board questions B.3 and B.4 regarding information on services provision and determining progress, respectively.

### Findings

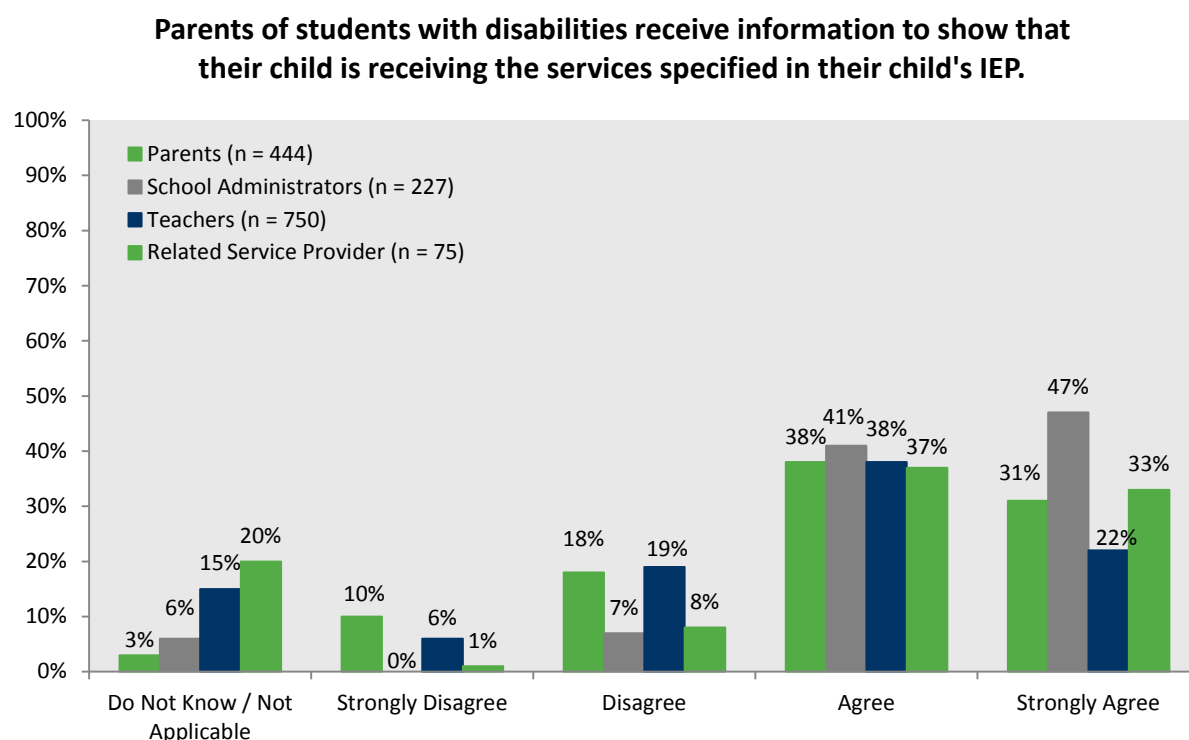
The availability of information and progress updates to parents depends largely upon the teachers and service providers with a wide variance in practice. District staff mentioned that some related service providers contact parents frequently to report on student progress through email on a weekly schedule. District staff also mentioned that there is an expectation for monthly contact with parents from some related service providers. However, this is not a requirement since some providers have large caseloads and would not be able to meet the requirement.

In six of seven parent focus groups, at least one parent mentioned that when they requested information about their child's services they received it or they received regular email updates. However, other parents in four focus groups felt that information about services and progress was not forthcoming. These parents explained how they had to take more active approaches such as requesting information through email or providing their child with a communication book in order to get regular progress updates from teachers. The range of parent experiences also included parents that relied on third parties such as a building service worker or friends of the student to provide them information on progress. Regarding the level of information, one parent explained that she

does not think that parents want a formal process, just some indication, on homework for example, that they are engaged.

Survey results indicated that almost all school administrators (88%, n=227) thought that parents received information on services, but lower rates of parents (69%, n=444), teachers (60%, n=750) and related service providers (70%, n=75) agreed. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a quarter of the parents and teachers disagreed that parents received information on services, suggesting that there is room for improvement (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Information about Receipt of Special Education Services**

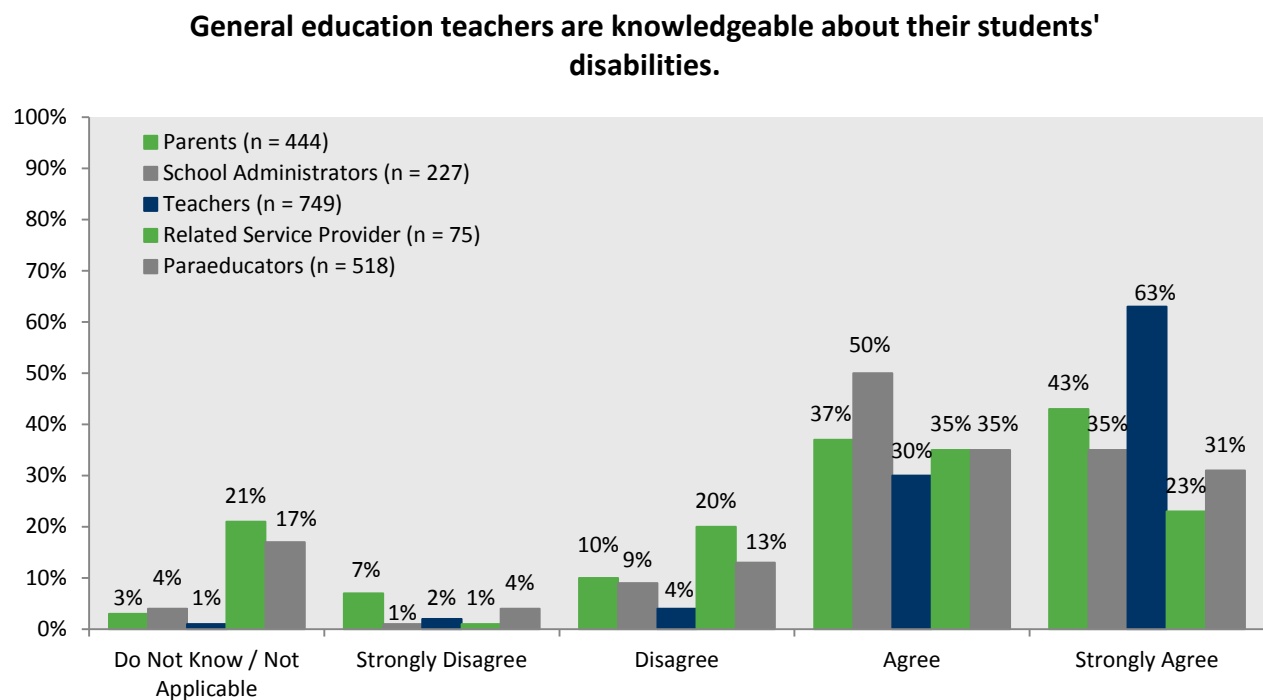


In order to best provide supports to students with disabilities, general education teachers must be knowledgeable about the specific learning needs of the students with disabilities in their classrooms. Survey results indicated that a large majority of all teachers (94%, n=749) thought that general education teachers were knowledgeable about the IEPs of their students with disabilities compared to slightly smaller majorities of school administrators (85%, n=227) and parents (80%, n=444). Small majorities of related service providers (57%, n=75) and paraeducators (66%, n=518) indicated that the teachers they worked with were knowledgeable about their student's disabilities. Conversely, one-third of the paraeducators and almost 40 percent of the related service providers did not agree that teachers were knowledgeable about student disabilities (see Figure 6).

The differences in perceptions of teacher knowledge may be related to the fact that not all general and special education teachers collaborated with each other. Similarly, not all teachers collaborated

with their paraeducators. As part of the Montgomery County Education Association contract with the Board of Education, all teachers have allocated planning time, and schools are directed to establish schedules that allow for collaborative planning between special education and general education teachers, especially in co-taught classrooms at the secondary level. However, not all teachers have been able to collaborate. A majority of the surveyed teachers (62%, n=747) indicated that they collaborated with their co-teachers to plan instruction for students with disabilities and more teachers (72%, n=747) indicated that they discussed student progress together. A higher rate of surveyed school administrators (83%, n=227) agreed that teachers collaborated to plan instruction. Paraeducators and special education teachers tend to collaborate and discuss student progress with one another to a higher degree than do paraeducators and general education teachers. Of the paraeducators surveyed, 54 percent (n=520) felt they collaborated with special education teachers to plan instruction, and 80 percent (n=519) of the paraeducators discussed student progress with special education teachers. Less than half of the paraeducators collaborated with general education teachers to plan instruction (39%) or discuss student progress (63%). Hence, higher percentages of teachers and paraeducators indicated that they collaborated to discuss student progress more than to plan instruction.

**Figure 6. General Education Teacher Knowledge of Student Disabilities**



From the perspective of the few students who completed the survey, the knowledge of the provider about the student's own specific needs could influence the services and supports that are provided. Overall, students agreed that all of their teachers understand their strengths (70%, n=46). Related to their disability, students indicated that their special education teachers and service providers were

more knowledgeable about their needs than their subject area teachers. This would enable them to provide students with more supports. While a majority of students agreed that their general subject teachers are knowledgeable about their disability (56%, n=46), greater percentages of students indicated that their special education teachers (82%, n=44) and related service providers (80%, n=45) were knowledgeable about their disability.

In accordance with IDEA, reviews of student placement and progress are conducted at least annually. (34 C.F.R. 300.324(b)(i)). Reviews of 100 IEPs revealed that a vast majority (87%) of the students had their placement and progress reviewed within the annual timeline; 13 percent were not reviewed within the annual timeline. In addition, IDEA and its implementing regulations stipulate that more frequent periodic reviews should be held as appropriate to address a lack of expected progress, reevaluation results, information from the parents, or other matters (34 C.F.R. 300.324(b)(ii)). IEP team interviews revealed that numerous data sources are used to update student progress on a quarterly basis and to determine the present level of performance for the annual review. These data sources include curriculum-based test scores, course grades, progress monitoring data, state assessment data, teacher made formative assessments, anecdotal data, and observations.

MCPS electronic IEP system collects information provided by special education teachers on the quarterly progress on IEP goals. A review of student IEPs found that most (87%) of the goals included a description of progress on goals and short term objectives. Additionally, the IEP review showed that nearly all of the goals (90%) had progress reported, with the vast majority stating that the student was making progress toward meeting the goal while only 15 percent of the IEPs reviewed showed that more than half of the goals were actually met.

The descriptions of progress statements were very broad and provided little information on actual skill development, such as:

*With supports, student is making progress on all objectives.*

*Student is making progress toward his goal.*

Parents also felt that the description of progress provided them very little detail on actual skill development or progress on the specific tasks of the goals. This was a concern in eight of the parent focus groups. They also reported that most progress reports contained broad statements such as:

*Making progress.*

*Making sufficient progress.*

Additionally, parents were concerned that the same results were reported every quarter. Parents did not feel well informed when student progress reports stated the progress was always sufficient to meet goals. Some IEP teams and teachers at the visited schools reported that progress was based on data. However, this was not always clearly communicated to parents in a specific manner so that parents could clearly understand what skills their student had attained in making progress toward the

goal. A district administrator indicated that the level of information in the progress report depended on the type of data collected at the schools. This statement is supported by the IEP reviews from which the IEP reviewers found substantial differences in the types of data sources used to measure progress.

Increased goal rigor based upon a student's attainment of prior goals would be evidence that a student was making progress. A review of student IEPs demonstrated that goals were aligned to grade level standards most of the time (84%), even for students with moderate to severe disabilities, and did increase in rigor from year to year. The IEP reviewers noted very few instances of repeated goals. This is a reflection of the high expectations held in the district. However, the IEP review also noted that the goals, though standards-aligned, were not always measurable, as required by 34 C.F.R. 300.320(a)(2). Many of the goals lacked the specificity to make them measureable. The outcome was too broad and would be very difficult to measure even using curriculum based measures or teacher observations as noted in the examples below:

*Student will use a variety of strategies to understand what they read.*

*Student will increase basic reading comprehension skills.*

*Given supplementary aids, instructional level texts, small group reading instruction, and models of fluent reading, student will read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.*

*Given a set of math problems, directions, examples, calculator, and adult support, student will apply a variety of concepts, processes, and skills to solve the problems while using a calculator.*

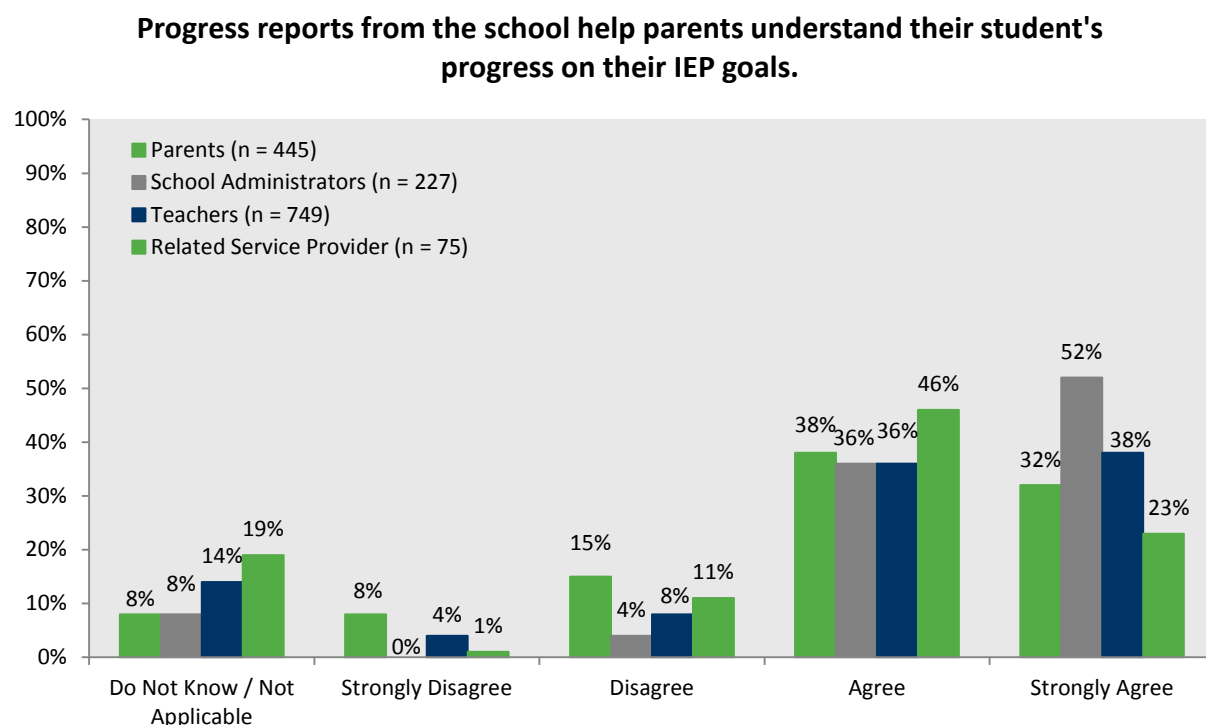
Regarding efforts to develop measurable goals, the Office of Speech and Language Services is striving to develop meaningful IEP goals. This office maintains a data base of IEP goals that the leaders review and provide to staff. However, this office did not appear to evaluate those goals with reference to any standards.

The majority of the parents surveyed agreed that the goals of their child's IEP were measurable (84%, n=445) and, to a lesser extent, challenging (74%, n=441). Students who completed a survey agreed that they contributed to the development of their IEP goals (80%, n=45) and that the goals were challenging (68%, n=47). Also, students agreed that their IEP described how progress toward their goals would be measured (76%, n=46); 20 percent did not know.

There is currently not a system in place to clearly assess the percentage of students meeting IEP goals. The data collected to determine present level of performance was often not associated with the tasks described in the goals. Goals that are written in a measureable manner with better alignment to skills would provide the data for a meaningful analysis. IEP goal data could be downloaded from the MCPS online IEP system and percentages of students meeting IEP goals could be calculated overall and by subgroups.

The primary source of evidence regarding meeting IEP goals are the quarterly progress reports issued in accordance with IDEA requirements. 34 C.F.R. 30.320(a)(3)(ii) requires that an IEP specify the frequency with which a child's progress will be reported and allows that it may be concurrent with the issuance of report cards. Among survey respondents, most parents, (81%, n=445) indicated that they received the quarterly reports and to a lesser extent, students reported that they received the reports (62%, n=47). Nevertheless, students thought that they were making progress on their goals (89%, n=46). Higher percentages of school administrators (92%, n=227), teachers (86%, n=750) and related service providers (81%, n=74) agreed that parents received quarterly updates. Most respondents also agreed that the updates provided parents an understanding of student progress. This perception was most prevalent among school administrators (88%, n=227) and to a lesser extent among parents (70%, n=445), teachers (74%, n=749), and related service providers (69%, n=79). The remaining parents disagreed about the information value of the IEP progress reports while most of the remaining school staff did not know (see figure 7). The information value of the reports is another area for potential improvement.

**Figure 7. Progress Reports and Understanding of Student Progress**



Survey results also indicated that a majority of the parents and school staffs thought that the IEP goal information is used to modify goals. Parents (69%, n=442), school administrators (85%, n=226), teachers (76%, n=748), related service providers (75%, n=75), and students (66%, n=47) agreed that the IEP team develops new goals for students once the stated goals have been met. However, 17 percent of the parents and 15 percent of the teachers disagreed about the use of IEP goal information. Students disagreed to a lesser extent (6%) but over 25 percent of the students did



not know if goal information was used to develop or modify new goals. A slight majority of student survey respondents (58%, n=45) agreed that if they did not meet a goal, school staff explained why.

The IEP reviews did not identify any substantial variance in IEPs across the schools at the elementary, middle, or high school levels. Generally, all IEPs were highly compliant, and services across the district were highly inclusive.

## Modifications and Exiting

Modifications can be made to services during IEP meetings. Students can also be exited from a specific service or all services. These areas address Board questions B.4 and B.5 related to modifications and exiting.

## Findings

Any modifications or changes to special education placements are recorded in the MCPS online IEP system. Changes in placement and services are IEP team decisions and require a meeting. IDEA and its implementing regulations allow an IEP meeting to be held without the parent in attendance if the school district has been unable to convince the parent to attend (34 C.F.R. 300.322(d)). Attempts to contact the parents and prior notices must be documented. IEPs can be amended without a meeting only if the parent and the school district agree to not convene a meeting to make changes (34 C.F.R. 300.324(a)(4)). In most instances a meeting is held, and it creates an IEP record. The IEP record is where data on changes in placement or modification of placement through amendments are recorded.

The data collected on special education modifications and services can be found in the LRE section of the MCPS online IEP reflected by a change in the percentage of time in the LRE or placement into more restrictive programs. The service delivery grids clearly identify the supplementary aids, services, programs, modifications, and supports identified in each IEP.

Some parents who participated in parent focus groups discussed a range of experiences regarding IEP changes, including minor changes that were quickly resolved. In contrast, during two focus groups, parents mentioned that the identifying disability categories were removed by the team or a district administrator after an IEP meeting and that efforts to have the IEP changed were not successful.

As previously discussed, few parent survey responses indicated that changes occurred in services and accommodations decisions between the version of the IEP developed in the meeting and the final IEP that was sent to the parents. Most, 90 percent (n=72), of the parents who participated in an initial IEP meeting thought that the IEP developed at the meeting and the final IEP that they received contained the agreed upon services and accommodations. Similarly, 90 percent (n=368) of the parents who attended annual or periodic review meetings agreed that the IEP developed at the meeting and the final one that they received contained the same services and accommodations. It is possible for changes to occur from the draft version to the final version of the IEP. IDEA

recognizes that the first version is a draft that can be enhanced by feedback. However, parents had issues when the version developed at the meeting was different from the version that they later received. Parents who participated in focus groups described how they were able to resolve discrepancies through discussions and exchanges with the schools in most cases.

Special education teachers reported that exiting students from special education services is a gradual process that is data driven. During interviews, more than half of the IEP teams mentioned that the process could begin up to two years prior to making a decision. If data reflected that the a student was making progress as indicated by grade level targets or IEP goals, and was receiving passing grades, the IEP team would begin to roll back special education supports for the student, moving to the least restrictive support of consultation for a period of time where the student did not receive direct instruction from the special educator, but received support through regular monitoring of classroom progress through grade checks or student conferencing. As one IEP team elaborated, the process is gradual to give student more opportunities to succeed on their own. IEP teams, teachers, and principals in some of the visited schools also mentioned that parents and students are involved in the team decisions about moving toward an exit from the special education services. An IEP team and a principal also noted that parents decided that they no longer wanted services for their students, at which point the services were discontinued. Since this study focused on students with IEPs, parents whose students had exited special education services were not available to address their experience with the exit process.

Once a student is exited from special education services, the student is still supported through the EMT or a by a guidance counselor through the usual general education support system. Similar to supports put into place prior to referring a student for special education services, data is collected at the school level, but no longer is monitored by the special education team.

## Staffing Models

Findings on staffing models inform Board question B.6 related to the evaluation of staffing models.

### Findings

Procedures to assess staffing models varied between central office staff and school administrators. During interviews, some district staff discussed assessing staffing models with reference to student outcomes. They also explained that staffing models are based on the hours of service which students need and not on the number of students. Administrators collect data from the schools to allocate staff. To assess staffing models, a district administrator maintained that student achievement was the real indicator of the staffing model. However, the extent to which analyses had been conducted and reviewed was not specified.

Among school administrators staffing models are evaluated in terms of providing necessary staff throughout the school year. School administrators mentioned that they received staffing allocations based on the hours of service. Principals who discussed staffing models also mentioned that

additional staff can be requested to meet student needs. MCPS has a process that permits school administrators to submit a request to their supervisors for additional staff as needs change throughout the school year. School administrators mentioned that the process was almost always successful. Staffing changes were made based upon the administrators' requests.

At a basic level, school administrators assess their staffing models to ensure that students receive their services. At a higher level, a district administrator mentioned that student progress should determine the effectiveness of staffing models. Both processes address different questions about staffing models. Yet, while school administrators implemented a process to determine the level of needed staff, it was not clear that the district assessed staffing models with reference to student progress.

## Benchmarking

MCPS was similar to the benchmark school districts in several ways regarding the continuum of services. MCPS and the three benchmark districts provided a broad range of services to students with disabilities to ensure the delivery of rigorous and high quality instruction to help support students in school and in postsecondary activities. All districts provided public, separate schools, and nonpublic schools that can serve students with disabilities. Moreover, all districts also provided services for deaf or hard of hearing students, students with emotional disabilities, students in need of occupational or physical therapy supports, students transitioning to postsecondary activities, and any available related services. In terms of differences, MCPS provided more services than one district and an equivalent number of services as the other two. Most notable, MCPS provided pre-kindergarten services, Learning for Independence classes, and Gifted and Talented Learning Disabled services, while the other districts did not mention these services. MCPS and two other districts provided autism services. It should be noted that pre-kindergarten services in Maryland are state-funded for economically disadvantaged or homeless families. Other programs may exist in the benchmark districts but could not be clearly identified.

The benchmark districts did not have any specific policies or guidelines on developing realistic and measureable goals. Manuals about IEPs or online IEP systems addressed goals. Districts provided training and also had staff to provide technical assistance if requested, as did MCPS.

Similar to MCPS, information about services was available through communication with teachers. Parents can request information. Although directly mentioned by one district, the responses from all districts indicated that there was no district requirement for teachers on communication with parents. It should be noted that one district acknowledged that they need to improve communication with parents. The same district mentioned that the implementation of services is the biggest area of complaints.

Teaching models tended to be assessed by principals in the benchmark districts through classroom observations. To ensure that co-teaching models were effective, districts provided regular staff

development and one district had a model demonstration site. While assessment was an area of interest, limited staff tended to focus on problem areas.

## Recommendations Regarding IEP Implementation

Based on the available evidence, the WestEd team proposes the following recommendations.

**Recommendation 2.1.** MCPS should collect information to assess the extent to which the schools use the Guide to Planning and Assessing School-Based Special Education Programs and provide professional development to ensure that schools are using it effectively. The guide is designed to help individual school improvement teams engage in continuous improvement of special education services delivery. It is also the only systematic process for assessing special education services.

**Recommendation 2.2.** MCPS should develop a more systematic process to monitor and improve the services provided to student with disabilities and assess the staffing models. Considering the achievement gaps between students with disabilities and the general student population, there is a need to understand the effectiveness of the programs, services, and staffing models that MCPS provides. While school staff continuously assess their staffing levels to ensure students receive services, there is no process to understand how models such as co-teaching actually work or improve outcomes for students. Implementation analysis is a key strategy for understanding how programs work and making modifications.

**Recommendation 2.3.** MCPS should provide opportunities for teachers to discuss and implement strategies for parent communication regarding the provision of services in the IEPs. Surveys indicated that not all parents receive information about services. Focus groups revealed that while most parents get information if requested, others had to develop their own process for ensuring they received information. Since information-sharing is dependent upon the teacher and practices vary, it would be most productive for good communicators to discuss best practices with their colleagues. And as one parent noted, it does not need to be a formal process.

**Recommendation 2.4.** MCPS should explore ways to increase collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers and paraeducators. Surveys indicated that while most teachers collaborated, the level of collaboration could be improved. MCPS should explore technology options to share information and resources.

**Recommendation 2.5.** MCPS should provide teachers and other IEP team members with professional development opportunities on how to develop measurable IEP goals. In addition, MCPS should provide information to parents on measurable IEP goals to enable them to determine if the goals on their child's IEP are measurable. Parents need to understand the components of a measurable goal in order to determine whether their child's goals are developed and implemented appropriately. This knowledge could improve the parent's understanding of the quarterly reports, which emerged as an area for improvement. Although not addressed in the findings, parent knowledge of measurable goals could also improve parents' ability to contribute at IEP meetings

**Recommendation 2.6.** MCPS should use its online IEP system to monitor data on student progress towards meeting goals in each school and system-wide. There is no systematic effort to assess progress toward IEP goals. Considering that goals will vary in difficulty and complexity the analysis should focus on the whether the same level of progress is reported for students each quarter. This basic information can be a starting point for more systemic analyses of IEP implementation.

## IEP Dispute Resolution

IEP dispute resolution focuses on the processes that MCPS utilizes to address concerns that parents raise regarding IEP development and/or implementation, including such issues as their child's identification, evaluation, educational placement, or provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) as required by federal law. The following section addresses the Board questions C.1-C.3 related to informing parents, encouraging collaboration, and assessing parent experiences in MCPS's dispute resolution processes.

### Context

The Montgomery County Board of Education encourages timely and collaborative resolution of disputes regarding special education. The Board has promulgated Policy BLC, *Procedures for Review and Resolution of Special Education Disputes*, which expressly states that it is the Board's "intent . . . to resolve all disputes related to special education in as efficient and cooperative a manner as possible." In accordance with Board policy, MCPS offers informal and collaborative resolution options in addition to the more formal processes required by state and federal law. These processes include:

**Informal MCPS Problem-Solving Strategies.** Even before a situation escalates to more formal processes, MCPS staff employ initial informal strategies to encourage a collaborative resolution.

**MCPS Administrative Review.** A process unique to MCPS, initiated when parents complete MCPS Form 336-43A, *Request for Administrative Review*. As Board Policy BLC states, "The process for administrative review involves reviewing all available records on the student and obtaining information required for clarification so that a decision that attempts to resolve the dispute in a way that is satisfactory to both parties can be offered; and, if FAPE is the issue, ensures that child is provided with FAPE."

**State-Provided Mediation.** As required by IDEA (34 C.F.R. 300.506), the Maryland Office of Administrative Hearings operates an independent mediation process. The Office of Administrative Hearings employs administrative law judges who conduct mediations. They are intended to be neutral third parties unaffiliated with the parents or school district staff.

**Due Process Hearings.** Also required by the IDEA (34 C.F.R. 300.507), these are more formal proceedings culminating in a hearing where both parties have the opportunity to present evidence and argument. These proceedings are also conducted by administrative law judges appointed by the

Maryland Office of Administrative Hearings. A parent may file a request for either due process, mediation, or both. Mediations are more collaborative than due process hearings, which, by their very nature, tend to be more adversarial.

**Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Complaint.** The third dispute resolution option required by IDEA (34 C.F.R. 300.151 & 300.152) is a complaint to MSDE. A MSDE investigator takes the lead in investigating the complaint and prepares a written report, which could include a letter of findings requiring corrective action by the district. There is limited opportunity for any collaboration between district staff and parents as this process proceeds, in contrast to the other dispute resolution processes.

## Findings

### *Parent Knowledge Regarding the Availability of Dispute Resolution Processes*

Federal law requires that school districts provide parents with information regarding the dispute resolution processes. Pursuant to federal regulations (34 C.F.R. 300.504(a)), MCPS must provide parents with notice regarding the procedural safeguards available once a year and also at other specific times, including when an initial referral is made by the district, a parent requests evaluations, a parent files a state complaint or files for due process, and upon request from the parent. This procedural safeguards document, which is a standard form developed by MSDE, is also available on the MCPS website. It explains parent rights and options in case of a disagreement.

According to staff interviews, school staff provides a copy of the procedural safeguards document at every IEP meeting. Parents in focus groups acknowledged that they received multiple copies of the procedural safeguards. Moreover, most of the parents surveyed (87%, n=445), agreed that they were aware of their rights as the parent of a student with a disability.

In addition to the procedural safeguards document, technical assistance regarding IEPs, including informal and formal dispute resolution options, are made available to parents by district staff in the Resolution and Compliance Unit (RACU) in the Office of Special Education and Student Services.

### *Informal MCPS Problem Solving Strategies.*

Although not all cases are documented, district staff from different offices indicated that they provided technical assistance and other services. Of the parents surveyed, 65 percent (n=442) agreed that district staff assisted them with resolving disagreements regarding their child's IEP.

For instance, staff in the Resolution and Compliance Unit (RACU) facilitated problem-solving discussions between school staff on the IEP team and the family. Available district data for the 2013-14 school year showed that there were 39 problem-solving meetings facilitated through the RACU. Only six of these cases (15%) failed to achieve a resolution resulting in the filing of a mediation or due process complaint. In the 2014-15 school year, there were 81 RACU facilitated problem-solving discussion. Just five (6%) failed to achieve a resolution resulting in the filing of a



mediation or due process complaint. The issues in the RACU facilitated problem-solving discussions during the 2014-2015 school year varied from identification of special education services to the provision of special education services. The most prominent issue was parent requests for a less restrictive environment than was proposed by the IEP team. While the number of cases more than doubled from 2013-14 to 2014-15, the rate of unresolved cases decreased by more than half.

### *MCPS Administrative Review*

From 2012-13 through 2014-15, the number of parents that requested an administrative review ranged from 6 to 15 per school year and increased over time. In 2014-2015, the issues in administrative reviews varied from independent evaluation requests to student identification with parents seeking a less restrictive placements being a more predominant issue. During 2014-2015, there was only one administrative review where parents disagreed with the results and subsequently filed for mediation or due process.

### *MSDE Complaints*

A review of 21 MSDE complaints from 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 revealed a range of allegations raised by parents, including: failure to implement the IEP, failure to follow proper procedures regarding requests to amend student records, and failure to provide prior written notice. The MSDE investigators reviewed information from both the district and the parents. Of the 21 complaints reviewed, 10 (48%) resulted in MSDE issuing findings of non-compliance and ordering corrective actions. In 8 of the 21 complaints (38%), MSDE withdrew (i.e., did not complete) its investigation because MCPS offered the relief sought by the parents or MCPS admitted non-compliance and voluntarily offered to correct the non-compliance in a manner acceptable to MSDE. Of the remaining three cases, MSDE either found that MCPS was in compliance with legal requirements, did not initiate the complaint, or ceased investigating after the parent withdrew the complaint.

### *Mediation and Due Process – Overall Summary*

MCPS data from 2007 to 2015 indicated that the number of mediation and due process applications has tended to decrease over time with the exception of a small increase in 2012. From 2007 to 2015, there was a 50 percent overall decline in the total number of applications filed for either due process, mediation, or both. Moreover, in 2015, the total number of applications dropped below 100 for the first time. It is important to note that these declines have continued even as the total number of MCPS students receiving special education services has increased (see Table 6).



**Table 6. Due Process/Mediation Filings from 2006-2007 to 2014-2015**

Application Type	Year								
	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
<b>Mediation</b>	48	36	47	51	50	60	56	48	36
<b>Hearing</b>	46	42	22	24	20	26	14	24	21
<b>Both Mediation and Hearing</b>	74	61	60	46	35	42	43	39	27
<b>TOTAL</b>	168	139	129	121	105	128	113	110	84
<b>Special Education Enrollment</b>	17,198	16,731	16,485	16,898	17,307	17,444	17,418	17,657	17,761
<b>% of Enrollment</b>	.98%	0.83%	0.78%	0.72%	0.61%	0.73%	0.65%	0.65%	0.47%

## Mediation

Of the 140 applications filed by parents seeking mediation from 2013 to 2015, MCPS settled or successfully mediated 92 (65.7%) of these cases. In contrast, 20 (14.3%) of the cases were unresolved. For another 13 cases (9.3%), MCPS declined to mediate. Additionally, parents failed to appear or they withdrew their request in 15 (10.7%) cases (see Table 7). Among parents who filed for mediation only, issues ranged from eligibility to residential placement with placement in a less restrictive environment being the most predominant.

**Table 7. Mediation Outcomes Summary, 2012-2013 through 2014-2015**

Mediation Only Outcomes	N	%
Settled Prior to Mediation/Resolved at Mediation	92	65.7%
Parent Failed to Appear/Withdrawn	15	10.7%
MCPS Declined to Mediate	13	9.3%
Unresolved at Mediation	20	14.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Data Source: MCPS Resolution and Compliance Unit.

## Due Process

The outcomes for due process applicants, which are more adversarial by nature, differed from the outcomes for mediation. As stated above, parents can file for due process only or for both due process and mediation. Among parents who filed for due process only, issues ranged from

disagreements with the related services to requests for private placements. A variety of disability categories are represented in the cases, with autism as the most common.

Of the 59 filings for due process from 2013 to 2015, 16 (27%) of the cases were settled or resolved prior to hearing. Of the 19 cases in which a decision was issued, the administrative law judge ruled in favor of MCPS or dismissed the case, whereas the parents prevailed in only one case. In addition, parents withdrew their hearing request in 24 (41%) of the cases which was the most prevalent outcome for due process cases (see Table 8).

**Table 8. Due Process Only Outcomes Summary, 2012-13 to 2014-2015**

Due Process Only Outcomes	N	%
Settled Prior to Hearing	16	27.1%
Hearing Decision - MCPS Prevailed *	18	30.5%
Hearing Decision - Parent Prevailed	1	1.7%
Withdrawn	24	40.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

\* MCPS Prevailed includes 2 cases dismissed by the ALJ.

Data Source: MCPS Resolution and Compliance Unit.

Of the 109 filings for due process and mediation (both), 52 (57%) were settled through mediation or otherwise resolved prior to a hearing; 40 (37%) cases were withdrawn by parents prior to a hearing (see Table 9). In all 7 cases in which a decision was issued after a due process hearing, the administrative law judge either ruled in favor of MCPS or dismissed the case.

**Table 9. Requests for Mediation and Due Process Outcomes Summary, 2012-13 to 2014-2015**

Mediation and Due Process Outcomes	N	%
Settled Prior to Hearing/Resolved at Mediation	62	56.9%
Hearing Decision - MCPS Prevailed *	7	6.4%
Withdrawn	40	36.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>99.9%</b>

\* MCPS Prevailed includes 2 cases dismissed by the ALJ.

Data Source: MCPS Resolution and Compliance Unit.

A review of the 23 due process cases during the 2013-2015 period for which a decision was issued by an administrative law judge provided some insight into these cases. As previously noted, the Maryland Office of Administrative Hearings, not MCPS, employs administrative law judges and assigns them on a case-by-case basis to conduct hearings. The most notable finding from those cases was the ratio of district-to-parent “wins.” While national statistics vary greatly, and generally districts

do prevail more than parents, one would expect to see a ratio more in the range of a 60 percent: 40 percent (district: parent) to 75 percent: 25 percent (district: parents) ratio. Yet, in MCPS, the judge ruled in favor of the district or dismissed all but one case during the 2012-2015 period.

There are a number of possible rationales for this trend. Under IDEA, administrative law judges are required to give deference to the educational judgments of school staff. Generally, the administrative law judge appeared to give more credibility to district witnesses than to parent witnesses and, in instances where parents were not represented, did not give as much consideration to their unrepresented status. This seems less than expected. For example, administrative law judges often tend to give unrepresented parents more leeway in admitting exhibits, questioning witnesses, etc. but that did not appear to be occurring in the MCPS decisions.

District staff noted other reasons for the district's success in contested cases. First, as a part of MCPS's collaborative problem solving processes, staff from different offices such as psychological, instructional, compliance, and legal services meet weekly to review parent complaints. Together, they decide to move forward to a hearing and litigate the case or try to resolve the parents' concerns. These reviews lead to settlement or resolution of many cases that would otherwise have resulted in due process hearings. Second, MCPS has invested substantially in training special education staff and in developing a continuum of services that meet the requirements of providing FAPE in the vast majority of circumstances, in compliance with legal requirements.

The MCPS data reviewed indicated no notable particular trends relative to the issues presented. A variety of disability categories are represented in the cases but a number of students involved in the due process decisions were described as having attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in addition to their primary disability. Although ADHD is not an IDEA disability category, ADHD is a qualifying disability under Other Health Impairment.

There was also no trend with respect to particular schools. Students attended a variety of schools and represented a range of grade levels. Parents seeking reimbursement for a unilateral placement at a non-public school was the most common issue. At issue in these cases where parents seek reimbursement for unilateral placement is always whether or not the public school placement recommended by the district provided FAPE. A number of cases addressing FAPE are expected in any grouping of due process cases. As for parent representation, the data showed that parents were represented in 16 (61%) of the 26 cases where a due process hearing occurred. Therefore, a lack of representation is not always the reason for parents' unsuccessful outcome at a hearing.

Parent perceptions collected through the parent surveys and a dispute parent focus group provided additional findings related to dispute resolutions. Of the parents surveyed, those involved in mediation were more satisfied with the process and outcomes than parents who were involved in due process proceedings. Yet, approximately half of the parents involved in due process hearings had favorable opinions of the process.

More specifically, the majority of the surveyed parents indicated that they generally had positive perceptions of their experiences with MCPS's mediation process. Parents agreed that MCPS took their mediation complaint seriously (74%, n=49) and that the mediation process was conducted as efficiently as possible (71%, n=49). Similarly, a majority of the parents agreed that the mediation process was a genuine collaboration with the district representatives (73%, n=48). Parents also indicated that as a result of the mediation, their child was provided with FAPE (71%, n=49) and they were satisfied with the outcome (70%, n=50) (see Table 10.)

**Table 10. Parent Perceptions of Dispute Resolution Mediation Processes**

Mediation Survey Items	n	Responses		
		Disagreed/ Strongly Disagreed	Strongly Agreed/ Agreed	Do not know/Not Applicable
MCPS took my complaint seriously.	49	24.5%	73.5%	2.0%
The process was conducted as efficiently as possible.	49	28.6%	71.4%	0.0%
The mediation process to resolve my dispute was a genuine collaboration between me and the district representatives.	48	27.1%	72.9%	0.0%
As a result of the mediation process my child was provided a free appropriate public education (FAPE).	49	28.6%	71.4%	0.0%
I was satisfied with the outcome of the mediation process.	50	30.0%	70.0%	0.0%

Parent perceptions of due process proceedings indicated that, for parents who participated in a process within the last three years, a small majority was satisfied. Slightly more than half of the parents involved in due process thought that MCPS took their complaints seriously (53%, n=40) and that the process was conducted as efficiently as possible (54%, n=40). For parents involved in a due process hearing, results were similar. Approximately half thought that MCPS took their complaints seriously (52%, n=40) and that the process was conducted as efficiently as possible (48%, n=40). When preparing for the hearing, half of the parents surveyed felt that they or their representative had access to available information to prepare for a due process hearing; approximately 20 percent of the parents did not know or thought it was not applicable to their case.

Although a slight majority, parents (55%, n=40) thought that MCPS staff was respectful to the parent and student through all stages of due process. The same rate of parents thought that their child received FAPE as a result of due process. However, slightly less than half of the parents were satisfied with the outcome of the process and almost one-quarter of the parents indicated that they did not know (see Table 11). While a majority of the parents had mostly favorable perceptions of due process hearings the acceptable level of favorable perceptions needs to be determined.

**Table 11. Parent Perceptions of Dispute Resolution Due Process**

Due Process Survey Items	n	Responses		
		Disagreed/ Strongly Disagreed	Strongly Agreed/ Agreed	Do not know/Not Applicable
MCPS took my complaint seriously.	40	27.5%	52.5%	20.0%
When preparing for the due process hearing, I (or my representative) was given access to all the information needed to present my side of the dispute to the hearing officer	40	27.5%	50.0%	22.5%
The process was conducted as efficiently as possible.	40	20.0%	47.5%	32.5%
MCPS staff were respectful to me and my child before, after and during the hearing	40	20.0%	55.0%	25.0%
As a result of the mediation process my child was provided a free appropriate public education (FAPE).	40	17.5%	55.0%	27.5%
I was satisfied with the outcome of the mediation process.	40	32.5%	45.0%	22.5%

The perceptions of due process were less favorable among parents who filed a complaint and participated in a dispute focus group. While few parents participated in the focus group, their experiences provided some indication of the challenges these parents encountered. For these four parents who represented three families, a lack of collaboration led them to pursue legal action. They felt that they were ignored and misinformed. Focus group participants claimed that staff did not read an external evaluation report or the child's IEP or would not consider a placement suggested by the parent. Their range of experiences included perceptions of biased mediators and an aggressive lawyer. A parent explained how, in the parent's view, a mediator was not neutral. Another explained how they skipped mediation because their lawyer advised that,

“...in her experience the mediators were not very informed nor neutral and it would be a waste of time and money to go, in her experience.”

Another parent explained that they felt worn down by the process, meetings, letters, and excuses. Parents also mentioned the tens of thousands of dollars in expenses incurred either for attorney's fees and/or sending their child to a private school. Parents expressed concern for other parents that do not have the resources to fight or may have been taken advantage by the district with misinformation.

Overall, the findings identified areas for improvement. As a step in that direction, MCPS has begun to assess parent experiences with the dispute resolution process. RACU has developed a survey which staff began distributing to parents after a dispute resolution process concludes. However,

district staff reported that response rates have been low. To provide additional information on processes, RACU has a database that they use to monitor informal and formal complaints and outcomes. Since 2015, the database has been revised to collect information on issues. This will be important in understanding how parents get to a point where they need to take action. Parents in the dispute focus group thought that if MCPS staff took them seriously and listened, they may not have had to file for a dispute.

## Benchmarking

Staff interviewed in the benchmark districts indicated that their primary goal included resolving the complaint in order to preserve the relationship with the parents, to do what is right for the student, and to not waste the time or money of the parent. MCPS' main purpose is to permit cooperative problem solving. While the goal for all districts is to provide FAPE, each district can have an orientation that includes other considerations. Districts seek to resolve complaints before they escalate to more formal processes. Similarly, MCPS seeks to resolve complaints efficiently and in a cooperative manner. Benchmark districts do not have a process to assess parent experiences with dispute resolution processes. MCPS has a process that is being expanded. In one district, the compliance office maintains a spreadsheet while another tracks the outcome and related issue of complaints. Districts did not have available results.

## Recommendations Regarding IEP Dispute Resolution

**Recommendation 3.1.** MCPS should expand the Resolution and Compliance Unit (RACU) database to include the primary reason(s) that lead to the specific outcomes of mediations, due process complaints, and other dispute resolution processes. This data could help to explain the due process cases that are withdrawn. In addition, to understand the length of due process cases and determine efficiency, fields should be added to the database to record every event in the process, such as meeting requests, meeting dates, and any delays.

**Recommendation 3.2.** MCPS should issue public reports, at least twice a year, on the outcomes of its dispute resolution processes to increase the accountability of the processes. With mediation and due process, surveys indicated that there is room to improve parent perceptions of those processes. At a minimum, these reports should be distributed to the Board of Education, district staff, school staff, and parents. The reports should be designed to provide information on efficiency and collaboration.

**Recommendation 3.3.** MCPS should use the data from the database to determine staff needs for professional development in collaborative dispute resolution practices and provide staff development opportunities as necessary. With the increase in informal processes, staff might be needed to assist parents. Respect among parties should be a goal in any process. The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution (<http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/>) can provide resources, such as the webinar *Playing Nicely Together: Family-Centered Practices to Help Practitioners and Families Work Together*

## Summary and Conclusions

Overall, MCPS is largely in compliance with IDEA with reference to IEP development, implementation, and disputes. However, MCPS needs to go beyond legal requirements to more fully serve its parents and students.

With reference to IEP development, parents have generally favorable perceptions of the process and of IEP meetings although some parents described difficult experiences. Overall, parents felt like equal partners in making decisions about their child but some still relied on advocates to navigate them through the process. Additional information should enable parents to more fully understand the complex special education process. This could present a challenge with the culturally diverse population of the school district. In addition to information, some parent perceptions need to be resolved. Parents contend that decisions are being made in meetings just prior to the IEP meetings. Also, parents thought that decisions about services are based on available resources. Systemic professional development on how to collaborate with parents may address these issues to some extent. While MCPS provides professional development that includes modeling behaviors, professional development is provided on an ad hoc basis.

With reference to IEP implementation, there is general agreement that students are being served in the least restrictive environment and that placement decisions are based on data. While MCPS provides a full continuum of services, which exceeds what benchmark districts provide, improvements can be made in explaining the variety of service options and consistently identifying appropriate service options. There is also a need to understand the extent to which programs and services are assessed. Considering the achievement gap between students with disabilities and the general population, understanding how programs and services are implemented can provide some valuable information for improvements. While the district would benefit from systemic information, parents need information about their specific child's services and meaningful information about student progress.

MCPS should be commended on reducing the number of mediation and due process filings. The number of cases has declined by 50 percent since 2007. There has also been an increase in the number of informal resolution meetings and the number of cases resolved. Yet, there are still some unanswered questions about the dispute resolution processes. A database that is being managed by the district Resolution and Compliance Unit will address questions related to the issues that led to a resolution process. Also, recommended additions to the database will help explain the reasons for outcomes such as the number of due process cases that are withdrawn. The database will also provide continuous information on efficiency and collaboration. Mediation was considered more collaborative than due process hearings but there is room for improvement for both processes.

Although compliance with IDEA is required, it does not ensure that parents and families have positive experiences or are fully informed. Some parents described some very difficult experiences. Overall, parents seem to want a better understanding of the special education process and more



accountability from their schools. Increased knowledge can help parents understand the special education process which could possibly further reduce disputes. In addition, school staff need to be held accountable for questionable practices. With increased knowledge, parents could identify, challenge, and report situations that did not seem appropriate. In these difficult economic times the most productive improvements could occur by using existing human resources. Hence, many of the recommendations focus on making basic improvements and involving parents to a high degree. Strategies to improve parent understanding of special education processes and an increased level of information about services and progress should greatly improve the experiences of parents that need additional support and their students.

# Appendix A: Research Questions

## Research Questions

In March 2013, the Montgomery County Board of Education (Board) tasked its Committee on Special Populations (Committee) with developing recommendations to guide a review of specific processes and services utilized by MCPS in three main areas of inquiry: (1) the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); (2) in the implementation of IEPs; and (3) in IEP dispute resolution. The Board called on the review to analyze data from students, parents, MCPS staff, stakeholders, comparable school districts and to: (1) assess the effectiveness and success of the processes utilized by the Department of Special Education Services (DSES) and school-based staff for IEP development; (2) assess the effectiveness and success of the services provided pursuant to IEP implementation; (3) examine the effectiveness and success of dispute resolution; (4) examine the consistency in provision of those services and implementation of those processes across MCPS schools; and (5) provide recommendations for enhancing those services and processes. Below are the series of research questions identified by the Board in each of the three main areas of inquiry:

### A. IEP Development (i.e., identifying students, parental rights, outcomes, satisfaction with process, etc.)

- 1) How do we know that students who are struggling learners are appropriately referred for special education screening?
  - a. What data is gathered/analyzed/utilized prior to the screening?
  - b. What data is collected regarding the number of referrals made for special education screening and the outcome of the screening?
  - c. What data is collected regarding next steps when a student is not eligible for special education services?
  - d. How do we analyze and share data related to the identification of students with disabilities? How is this data disaggregated (i.e., by disability category, race, ethnicity, etc.)?
- 2) How do we assess the effectiveness of our systemwide efforts to address disproportionality in special education referrals?
- 3) How do we inform parents (and secondary school students) about the IEP determination process and available support?
  - a. What information is shared with parents in advance of the referral for special education?
  - b. How do we communicate regarding support available to parents such as through the Office of Community Engagement and Partnerships?
- 4) What steps does MCPS take to actively solicit parent/student input in the special education eligibility process?

- a. How do parents get information about potential special education placements?
  - b. What training is offered to staff members who participate in IEP meetings regarding the role of parents and how to solicit/value parental input?
- 5) How do we assess the parent/guardian's experience of the IEP process?
  - a. What feedback is collected from parents? How do we assess whether the IEP process was collaborative—consistent with our core values?
  - b. How are parents informed about supports that may be available for students who are not found eligible for special education services?
  - c. How is the feedback collected from parents used?
- 6) How does MCPS assess whether IEPs are developed in accordance with IDEA?
  - a. What steps are taken to ensure that the services required by a student (such as paraeducator support or speech therapy) are not limited by currently available resources?

## B. IEP Implementation (i.e., compliance, fidelity, etc.)

- 1) What data is used to determine if students are placed in the least restrictive environment in accordance with IDEA?
- 2) What is the continuum of services that MCPS provides to meet the needs of students with disabilities? How do we assess that this continuum meets the needs of our diverse population?
- 3) What evidence is there that students are receiving the services specified on their IEPs? To what extent does the provision of IEP services vary across schools?
- 4) What measures are used to assess the academic progress of students with disabilities?
  - a. What is the policy and practice related to reviewing student placements and progress?
  - b. What evidence is collected at the system level regarding the percentage of students meeting IEP goals?
  - c. To what extent does the implementation of IEPs vary across schools?
  - d. How do we determine when a student is no longer eligible for special education services?
- 5) What data do we collect on modifications of special education placements, special education modifications of services, and on students exiting special education?
  - a. Does IDEA allow the IEP to be changed without parent participation? If yes, how often does this occur?
  - b. Do we monitor supports for students who are exiting from special education? If so, what does our data indicate about this support?
  - c. How does MCPS assess the effectiveness of our various staffing models—e.g., hours-based staffing? Home school model? Co-teaching?

## C. IEP Disputes (i.e., facilitate meeting effectiveness, legal services, etc.)

- 1) What information do parents receive about dispute resolution processes?
- 2) What steps does MCPS take to encourage collaborative dispute resolution?
- 3) How do we assess the parent/guardian's experience of the dispute resolution process?
  - a. What feedback do we collect from parents?
  - b. What do we do with the feedback collected from parents?

# Appendix: B

## Methodology

## Methodology

The objectives of this study and associated research questions identified by the Montgomery County Board of Education were intended to accomplish three broad goals: (1) examine the effectiveness and success of IEP development processes, implementation of IEP, dispute resolution, (2) examine consistency in special education processes and provisions of services, and (3) provide recommendations to enhance special education services and processes.

Our comprehensive approach to the study incorporates data from multiple sources both extant and new. New data were collected to fill in gaps in existing data available from MCPS and provide context and more-in-depth responses to research questions. They also provided insight into critical aspects of this study, including parent/guardian perceptions of their experiences with regard to IEP development, IEP implementation, and IEP dispute resolution.

The strength of our design is the use of multiple methods to collect, analyze, and synthesize information to address the research questions. Multiple methods allow us to maximize the strengths of one method while filling in gaps or weaknesses of others thus allowing for more comprehensive answers. Additionally, multiple data sources allow for the triangulation of results, producing in-depth assessment of the special education processes and procedures in MCPS and providing greater confidence in our findings and recommendations.

During a collaborative planning retreat between MCPS, WestEd staff, Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Co-Chairs, and a representative from the Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations (MCCPTA), the methodology WestEd initially proposed in its response to the Request for Proposal (RFP) was modified to better meet the information needs of MCPS. Most notably, the number of school visits decreased from 18 to 14 but IEP Team interviews were added to each visit and the amount of information to address the dispute questions increased to include Administrative Law Judge rulings and State complaint letters. A data sharing agreement was reviewed and agreed to by the MCPS Office of Shared Accountability staff and the WestEd Institutional Review Board (IRB) to safeguard student privacy.

Data collection began with the listening sessions in January 2015 and ended with school district benchmarking interviews in July 2015.

### Data Sources and Data Collection Activities

Several data sources were used to address the research questions. Table B.1 presents an overview of the data collection methods including the data sources, the data collection period and the number of participants or respondents.



**Table B.1. Data Collection Overview**

Data Sources	Data Collection Period	Participants/Respondents
<b>Listening Sessions</b>	January 2015	2 sessions with 55 Parents at each session
<b>Parent Focus Groups</b>	February to April 2015	12 focus groups with 70 total participants 2 focus groups in 5 clusters; one in a sixth cluster; one mediation focus group
<b>Classroom Observations</b>	February through March 2015	14 schools visited 56 classroom observations conducted including regular class, co-taught, separate classes
<b>Educator interviews</b>	February through March 2015	14 school visits 14 Principals and/or Assistant Principals 14 IEP Team staff 14 Teacher focus groups
<b>Central Office Special Education Interviews</b>	April to May 2015	6 interviews, 8 special education staff SEAC co-chairs
<b>Parent and Student Surveys</b>	April to June 2015	459 parents 47 students
<b>Administrator Survey (included Principal, Assistant Principals, Assistant School Administrators)</b>	June 2015	228 school administrators
<b>Teacher, Related Service Provider, and Paraeducator Surveys</b>	June 2015	787 teachers 80 related service providers 520 paraeducators
<b>IEP Review</b>	March to May 2015	Random sample of 100 records
<b>Document Review</b>	April through July 2015	See list under Extant Data Sources
<b>Data Analysis</b>	August through September 2015	Maryland State Achievement results available on MCPS MSDE websites

## Extent Data Sources

Several sources of existing data provided details about special education process and procedures. The research team reviewed documents and test score summary results. Table B.2 provides an overview of the sources and observations about the sources.

**MCPS DOCUMENTS.** The research team reviewed an array of documents to further investigate special education procedures and processes.

- Fiscal Year 2015 MCPS Program Budget
- Fiscal Year 2016 MCPS Financial, Pupil Count, and Staffing Analysis

- Fiscal Year 2016 MCPS Projected Special Education Enrollment, Services and Positions
- Fiscal Year 2016 MCPS Proposed Budget for the Department of Special Education Services and the Department of Student Services
- Fiscal Year 2016 MCPS Special Education and Related Services Budget Guidelines
- Fiscal Year 2016 MCPS Special Education Improvement and Priorities Based on Staff and Community Member Input
- Fiscal Year 2016 MCPS Special Education Staffing Plan and Operating Budget Timeline
- Fiscal Year 2016 MCPS Special Education Staffing Plan Committee
- Fiscal Year 2016 MCPS Superintendent's Recommended Program Budget
- Fiscal Year 2016 MCPS Superintendent's Approved Program Budget
- Maryland Special Education/Early Intervention Services Census Data and Related Tables for 2010-2015
- MCPS 2014-2015 Schools at a Glance
- MCPS Board of Education Procedures for Review and Resolution of Special Education Disputes
- MCPS Board of Education Policy on Parent and Family Involvement
- MCPS Classical Program Review – Special Education Programs and Services
- MCPS Collaborative Problem-solving Guidelines
- MCPS Dispute Resolution Brochure
- MCPS Documentation of Interventions
- MCPS Educational Management Team Guidelines
- MCPS Eligibility Screening Parent Interview/Questionnaire
- MCPS Guide to Planning and Assessing School-based Special Education Programs
- MCPS Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report
- MCPS School Choice Decision Form
- MCPS Special Education Parent Report
- MCPS Special Education Procedures

- MCPS Student IEPs
- Parent Feedback About Individualized Education Program Team Meetings: A pilot Study with Parents of Prekindergarten Students
- Parent Feedback About Individualized Education Program Team Meetings for Students in Kindergarten Through Grade 12
- State and MCPS MSA proficiency scores by grade level and subject area for regular and special education students for 2011-2014
- State Complaints and Administrative Law Judge Rulings

**Table B.2. Extant MCPS Documents Reviewed**

Document	Reviewers Observation
<b>Special Education Staffing Plan</b>	Provides information on services; detailed
<b>Guide to Planning and Assessing School-based Special Education Services</b>	Comprehensive Need to measure implementation levels in schools
<b>Problem Solving for Student Success and Special Education Procedures Handbook</b>	CPS, EMT, Special Education process explained  Process for Transfer Students  Process for Reviewing Outside Evaluations
<b>The Department of Special Education Services FAQ</b>	Description of Services Expalnation of process
<b>MCPS Operating and Program Budget</b>	Special Education Budget Staffing models
<b>Administrative Law Judge Hearings State Complaints</b>	IEP dispute details

**IEP RECORD REVIEWS.** The study team reviewed a random sample of 100 student IEPs to investigate questions related to the development of the IEPs and the goals. WestEd used the parent survey sample as the population from which to select the IEPs. This provided a uniform time frame for both samples. The IEP review sample was proportionate to the population with reference to the type of IEP meeting, primary disability, and grade span.

**Table B.3. Primary Disability of Reviewed IEPs**

Primary Disability	Respondents	
	N	%
Autism	12	12.0
Deaf	0	0.0
Deaf-Blindness	0	0.0
Developmental Delay	3	3.0
Emotional Disability	5	5.0
Hearing Impairment	1	1.0
Intellectual Disability	3	3.0
Multiple Disabilities	7	7.0
Orthopedic Impairment	1	1.0
Other Health Impairment	18	18.0
Specific Learning Disability	40	40.0
Speech or Language Impairment	10	10.0
Traumatic Brain Injury	0	0.0
Visual Impairment	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**BUDGETS AND STAFFING PLANS.** To provide some additional information about resources the research team reviewed and summarized MCPS budgets and staffing models.

**LEGAL DOCUMENTS.** The research team summarized State Complaints and Administrative Law Judge decisions to better understand IEP disputes. The review focused on the issues in the cases and the decisions.

**ACHIEVEMENT RESULTS.** To understand the achievement levels of students with disabilities, the research team reviewed available Maryland State Achievement accountability test results for all available grade levels and subject areas. The goal was to report the results to identify the proficiency levels as well as the gaps between all students and students with disabilities.

## New Data Sources

The research team collected data from several new sources to enhance the existing data.

**PARENT/GUARDIAN LISTENING SESSIONS.** SEAC/MCCPTA arranged two parent listening sessions, which were held in January 2015. MCPS sent a flyer to all families of students with disabilities to invite the parents/guardians. Each session was guided by a set of questions developed to capture experiences of parents/guardians and included both small group and whole group discussions. MCPS staff made opening comments but did not stay or participate in any discussions. The results contributed to the development of focus group questions and survey items. Approximately 55 parents attended each session.

**PARENT/GUARDIAN FOCUS GROUPS.** The purpose of parent/guardian focus groups was to collect their perceptions of experience with special education processes and procedures in MCPS with regard to IEP development, IEP implementation, and dispute resolution. Since the project had an emphasis on parents and families, the research team agreed to increase the number of focus groups from one to 12 – two focus groups in five and one focus group in the other of the six special education administrative clusters in MCPS - to get a broader representation of parents/guardians of students with disabilities attending MCPS schools. Also, WestEd conducted a focus group for parents/guardians who went through the dispute resolution process to capture information specific to dispute resolution process.

To recruit parents/guardians, flyers with information about the focus groups were sent to all parents/guardians of students with disabilities. Parents/guardians had the option to register for a focus group online or using a short registration form in the flyer and returning it to WestEd. The registration form – both online and hard copy – asked for the student’s name, number of years receiving special education and related services in MCPS, number of years in MCPS, current school, grade, parent/guardian name, phone number, email address, primary language spoken at home and a question about the need for an interpreter.

Approximately 200 parents registered to express their interest in participating in a focus groups. Initially, WestEd selected 15 parents to participate in a group with the expectation that approximately 8 to 12 parents/guardians would attend the focus group. The first two focus group were organized by grade span. An email invitation was sent to each parent.

Attendance at the first two focus groups was low. After discussions with MCPS and after learning from a parent that invitations could have been sent to spam folders, the study team doubled the number of invitations for the remaining focus group. The study team followed up email notices with a phone call to confirm the receipt of email invitation. For each parent who accepted the invitation, WestEd made a reminder telephone call one or two days prior to the focus group.

A total of 12 focus groups, including one dedicated to parents/guardians who went through the dispute resolution, were conducted between early February 2015 and April 1, 2015. Attendance for each focus group ranged from 3 to 11 parents/guardians. Due to the inclement weather, five focus groups were rescheduled.

- ***Parent/guardian focus group protocol*** (Appendix X) was developed to facilitate conversation among the participants in language familiar to the participants. The protocol included questions on parents/guardians’ experiences with regard to IEP development processes, IEP implementation, and dispute resolutions. MCPS staff reviewed the protocol and the study team incorporated their feedback to finalize the protocol.

**SCHOOL VISITS.** Fourteen schools - six elementary, three middle, three high, and two special schools - were selected collaboratively by MCPS, WestEd study lead, the SEAC co-chairs and MCCPTA representative at the planning retreat held in December 2015. The primary considerations for school

selection were representation throughout the district of schools at all grade level spans, special education service models, and demographic factors. MCPS also provided support with scheduling the visits.

Site visits were conducted in February and March 2015. Each school visit was conducted by one WestEd researcher. Site visits included classroom observations and other data collection activities - school administrator interview, teacher interview, and IEP team focus group – and lasted for one school day. Selected characteristics of these schools are presented in Table B.3. Special education programs available for each school are shown in Table B.4.

**CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS.** To obtain information on the implementation of IEPs, the study team observed 56 classrooms in the 14 visited schools. Typically, each school visit/classroom observation was conducted by one WestEd researcher. A Classroom Observation Protocol (Appendix C) was used to record observed activities in the classrooms. On two occasions a second researcher accompanied the primary researcher to gain more experience with the protocols. Only the observations of the primary researcher contributed to the results. Each classroom observation lasted for approximately 20 minutes.

*An Observation protocol* (Appendix X) was developed to systematically categorize and code the learning environment such as the set-up and seating arrangement of classrooms, the number of staff present, and instructional strategies used by teachers. The protocol was also used to document content areas covered at the time of observation and activities took place in the classroom (e.g., modeling contents). The observation protocol also included a field note section to document any additional relevant information. The study team provided MCPS an opportunity to review the draft observation protocol and incorporated MCPS feedback and comments to finalize the instrument prior to data collection activities.

**SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEWS.** To obtain the perspectives of the school administrators on the research questions, the study team conducted interviews with the principals, and sometimes the assistant principals at each of the 14 visited schools. An interview protocol guided the sessions which were expected to take 30 to 60 minutes. The protocol included questions related to each of the main research areas: IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolutions. The study team provided MCPS an opportunity to review the draft interview protocol and incorporated MCPS feedback and comments to finalize the instrument prior to data collection activities.

**TEACHER FOCUS GROUPS.** To gain the perspectives of general education and special education teachers the study team conducted teacher focus groups at 13 of the 14 visited schools. A protocol guided each session which was expected to take 30 to 60 minutes. The protocol included a background question, questions related to IEP development and implementation, and final general questions related to policy and practices. The study team provided MCPS an opportunity to review the draft protocol and incorporated MCPS feedback and comments to finalize the instrument prior to data collection activities.

**IEP TEAM FOCUS GROUPS.** To gain the perspectives IEP teams the study team conducted IEP team focus groups at the 14 visited schools. A protocol guided each session which was expected to take 45 minutes. The protocol included a background question, questions related IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolutions as well as final general questions related to policy and practices. They study team provided MCPS an opportunity to review the draft protocol and incorporated MCPS feedback and comments to finalize the instrument prior to data collection activities.



**Table B.4. Visited Schools Demographics**

	Enrollment	% Spec. Ed.	% Spec. Ed. Male	% Spec. Ed. Female	% Amer. Indian	% Asian	% Afr. Amer.	% Amer. Ind.	% White	% Multi-Race	% Hispanic	% Free Reduced Lunch	% ESOL
BETHESDA ES	493	11.56	7.91	3.65	0	14.2	7.9	0	59.8	6.3	11.8	6.29	12.17
DUFIEF ES	330	20.61	13.94	6.67	0	31.5	7.3	0	45.8	6.1	9.4	10.91	11.21
FAIR ES	621	8.05	6.44	1.61	0.2	9.3	58.8	0	9.2	2.6	20	57.81	18.04
KEMP MILL ES	499	8.62	6.81	1.8	0	4.2	18.8	0	3.6	2.4	70.9	77.56	53.51
MATSUNAGA ES	958	5.43	4.18	1.25	0	38.9	15.9	0	27.6	5.4	12.2	15.66	10.02
WOOD ACRES ES	789	7.1	5.32	1.77	0.1	10	3.2	0	72.5	5.8	8.4	1.9	5.58
CABIN JOHN MS	950	14.42	9.05	5.37	0	28.2	9.8	0	49.1	3.6	9.4	7.26	4.42
FARQUHAR MS	577	12.82	7.63	5.2	0	14.6	16.1	0	50.3	6.4	12.7	12.31	3.29
GAITHERS BURG MS	681	18.94	14.83	4.11	0.1	9	23.2	0	24.4	5.1	38.2	42.58	12.04
BLAIR MS	2790	6.77	4.87	1.9	0.2	15.9	27.2	0	23.3	3.7	29.6	36.81	11.08
GAITHERS BURG HS	2079	14.19	10.25	3.94	0.1	9.6	26.4	0	19.7	3.6	40.6	44.16	11.4
ROCKVILLE HS	1305	16.4	10.42	5.98	0	11.1	14.6	0.1	36.2	4.1	33.9	30.27	7.05
LONGVIEW SCHOOL	50	100	50	50	0	18	22	0	26	8	26	28	0
SANDBURG LC	106	100	88.68	11.32	0	11.3	31.1	0	29.2	5.7	22.6	40.57	17.92

Source: MCPS Schools at a Glance report accessed [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/regulatoryaccountability/glance/currentyear/SAAG2015.pdf](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/regulatoryaccountability/glance/currentyear/SAAG2015.pdf)

**Table B.5 Visited Schools Programs**

School	Type1	Type2	Type3	Type4	Type 5	Cluster
Bethesda ES	HSM	SCB				BCC
DuFief ES	LC	PKLANG				Wootton
Fairland ES	ED	ED				NE Consortium
Kemp Mill ES	HSM					Kennedy
Matsunaga ES	HSM					Northwest
Wood Acres ES	LAD					Whitman
Cabin John MS	LAD	LFI	SCB	Autism Classic	Autism Resource	Churchill
Farquhar MS	LAD	SCB				NE Consortium
Gaithersburg MS	LAD	AUT	BRDG	Autism Classic	Autism Resource	Gaithersburg
Blair HS	LAD					Blair
Gaithersburg HS	LAD	LFI	SCB	BRDG		Gaithersburg
Rockville HS	LAD	LFI	DHOH	AUT		Rockville
Carl Sandburg	Special School	Autism	Language	ID	ED	Sherwood
Longview	Special School	Medically Fragile	Language	Visual	Medical Problems	Northwest

Source: MCPS Schools at a Glance report accessed

[www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/regulatoryaccountability/glance/currentyear/SAAG2015.pdf](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/regulatoryaccountability/glance/currentyear/SAAG2015.pdf)

**SURVEYS.** The study team conducted surveys for three types of respondents – parents/guardians, students, and school staff (i.e., administrators, teachers, related service providers, and para-educators). Survey items were developed to address the three major areas of this study and to the extent possible each survey included parallel items to obtain perspectives of each group on the same point. The study team conducted pilot tests of the parent and student surveys and results were used to further refine the surveys. Participants recorded their perceptions using a 4-point Likert scale; there was also a “Do Not Know/Not Applicable” option. All surveys are in Appendix D. Table B.6 summarizes the response rate for each survey.

**Table B.6. Survey Response Rates**

Survey	Invited to Complete Survey	Surveys in Analysis	Response Rate
Parent	4,662	459	10%
Student	1,812	47	3%
School Administrator	452	228	50%
Teacher	9,244	787	9%
Related Service Provider	563	80	14%
Paraeducator	2,083	520	25%

**PARENT/GUARDIAN SURVEY.** The study team designed the parent survey to address the relevant research questions. The online parent survey was open for 10 weeks from April to July 14, 2015. The period for the return of paper surveys was the same.

- **Sample.** All parents who participated in an initial, annual, or periodic review IEP meeting for their child from December 15, 2014 through March 13, 2015 formed the survey sample. There were 4,596 parents in the sample, all of which had an opportunity to participate. While this was not a random sample, it provided an opportunity for a large number of parents to provide their opinions about special education in MCPS. To provide a larger sample for dispute related items WestEd supplemented the sample with additional parents.

To inform parents/guardians selected for the survey, WestEd contracted with a printing company to print and send two sets of flyers. The parent survey information flyer contained the URL for the parent online survey, a survey access code, and instructions. In an effort to further encourage parents/guardians to participate in the survey and obtain a high response rate, MCPS made two ConnectEd calls, and also sent an email invitation to parents/guardians. The email invitation contained the same information as the flyer.

- **Survey form.** The parent/guardian survey continued for main sections, background and one section for each of the three primary research areas. The IEP development section consisted of different sub-sections for parents who participated in an initial IEP meeting and another for parents who participated in an annual or periodic review IEP meeting. The IEP dispute resolutions section contained three sub-sections, one with general questions for all parents, another for parents who were involved in mediation, and a third sub-section for parents involved in due process. The entire survey contained 61 items. However, the total number of items that a parent needed to complete ranged from nine for parents from the supplemental sample that were involved in mediation only to 48 for parents that attended an initial IEP meeting and were involved in mediation and due process. Most of the parents had to complete 29 to 37 items. MCPS and parent representatives provided comments and suggestions many of which were incorporated to improve the survey. To pilot test the items, the study team sent the survey to 15 parents selected from those who volunteered for focus groups. Five parents provided their comments and minor edits were made to the surveys to incorporate them.

Online and paper survey options were available to parents/guardians whose primary language was English or Spanish. Parents whose primary language was French, Chinese, Korean, or Vietnamese were sent a paper survey in their native language. The expected time to complete the survey was 15 to 20 minutes.

- **Response rate.** A total of 459 parents completed the survey, a response rate of 10 percent. We analyzed demographic variables to determine whether the respondents were similar to the survey sample and whether the sample was similar to the population. Although the sample was similar to the population, the demographic characteristics of the respondents differed from the sample and population (see Tables B.6-B.8). Caution must be exercised when interpreting parent survey results.

**Table B.7 Free/Reduced Lunch Status for Parent Survey Population, Sample, and Respondents**

Free/ Reduced Lunch	Respondents		Sample		Survey Population	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>0</b>	306	66.1	1860	40.7	8199	47.0
<b>1</b>	31	6.7	390	8.5	1446	8.3
<b>2</b>	77	16.6	1882	41.2	7810	44.7
<b>Missing</b>	49	10.6	434	9.5	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4566</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>17455</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table B.8 Race/Ethnicity for Parent Survey Population, Sample, and Respondents**

Race/ Ethnicity	Respondents		Sample		Survey Population	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>American Indian or Alaska Native</b>	1	0.0	9	0.2	39	0.2
<b>Asian</b>	50	10.8	276	6.0	1299	7.4
<b>Black or African America</b>	81	17.5	1078	23.6	4501	25.8
<b>Hawaiian Native</b>	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	0.1
<b>White</b>	202	43.6	1313	28.8	5182	29.7
<b>Hispanic/Latino</b>	64	13.8	1314	28.8	5761	33.3
<b>Multiple races</b>	16	3.5	142	3.1	664	3.8
<b>Missing</b>	16	3.5	434	9.5	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4566</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>17455</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table B.9 Primary Disability for Parent Survey Population, Sample, and Respondents**

Primary Disability	Respondents		Sample		Survey Population	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Autism	95	20.5	616	13.5	2128	12.2
Deaf	2	0.4	17	0.4	74	0.4
Deaf-Blindness	3	0.0	1	0.0	0	0.0
Developmental Delay	14	3.0	107	2.3	2843	16.3
Emotional Disability	17	3.7	182	4.0	648	3.7
Hearing Impairment	6	1.3	40	0.9	159	0.9
Intellectual Disability	19	4.1	201	4.4	639	3.7
Multiple Disabilities	10	2.2	89	1.9	313	1.8
Orthopedic Impairment	1	0.2	7	0.2	34	0.2
Other Health Impairment	96	20.7	889	19.5	2972	17.0
Specific Learning Disability	116	25.1	1505	33.0	5316	30.5
Speech or Language Impairment	36	7.8	458	10.0	2253	12.9
Traumatic Brain Injury	0	0.0	6	0.1	21	0.1
Visual Impairment	2	0.4	14	0.3	51	0.3
Missing	49	10.6	434	9.5	1	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4566</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>17455</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**STUDENT SURVEY.** The parent survey information flyer also contained a request for student participation, the URL for the student online survey, a survey access code, and instructions. Since the students learned about the survey through their parents or guardians the student survey was accessible online for the same time period as the parent survey. Data were collected from April through mid-July 2015.

- **Sample.** Students in grades 8 through 12 whose parents/guardians were in the parent survey sample had an opportunity to complete a student survey. Parent permission was required to meet the FERPA requirements.
- **Survey form.** The survey contained 18 items, many of which paralleled the parent survey. The study team sent the survey to 10 students for a pilot test. Only two students returned the survey in time to consider their responses and comments and one item was revised based on the feedback. An online or paper survey option was available and the survey was available in English only.
- **Response rate.** The request for student participation appeared in the 1,814 parent survey invitations. However, on 47 students completed the survey, which was a response rate of 3 percent.

**SCHOOL STAFF SURVEYS.** Online surveys were used to collect the perceptions of school administrators, teachers, related service providers, and paraeducators. Each survey contained items related to IEP development and implementation. The surveys were open in June 2015.

- **Sample.** The survey was open to all applicable staff in MCPS schools. Teacher and principal surveys included an item to verify that they served students with disabilities. All responses were confidential.
- **Survey form.** The school administrator, teacher, and related service provider surveys each contained a background section, and Likert items related to IEP development and implementation. The expected amount of time needed to complete each survey was no more than 15 minutes. The total number of items ranged from 32 for the related service providers to 41 items for teachers. Several of the items were parallel items which appeared in all surveys. The paraeducators survey contained background items and Likert items related to IEP implementation. The expected amount of time to complete the 16 items was no more than 10 minutes.
- **Response rate.** Each school staff member received an individual email invitation in June 2015 to request their participation in the survey. School administrators received a second invitation in July. Response rates ranged from 9 percent for teachers to 50 percent for school administrators.

**DISTRICT INTERVIEWS.** To gain another perspective on special education procedures and processes, the study team conducted in-person interviews with district level staff. Interviewed staff included the Director of Special Education; four Special Education Cluster Supervisors; Directors of Related Services for Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy, Psychological Services; and the Director of Equity and Compliance. All interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately one hour. The research team conducted all interviews in May 2015.

**BENCHMARKING INTERVIEWS.** The purpose of the benchmarking interviews was to understand special education processes and procedures of school districts comparable to MCPS. WestEd identified and recommended districts to consider based on the size of the district and available demographics. WestEd and MCPS agreed on four districts – Baltimore County (MD), Fairfax County (VA), Gwinnett County (GA), and Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) school districts. The study team conducted phone interviews with three large school districts using an interview protocol that incorporated feedback from MCPS. Despite several attempts, the study team was unable to conduct an interview with Baltimore County staff.

**Table B.10. Characteristics of MCPS and Benchmark Districts**

		MCPS	Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC)	Fairfax County (VA)	Gwinnett County (GA)
Operating Budget		\$2.3 billion	\$1.3 billion	\$2.6 billion	\$1.9 billion
National Rank in Size		17 <sup>th</sup>	18 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	13 <sup>th</sup>
Number of Employees		22,932	18,143	24,612	22,000
Number of Teachers		12,698	10,798	14,832	11,000
Graduation Rate		88.3%	85.1%	92.9%	75.0%
Schools	Elementary	133	91	139	79
	Middle	38	39	23	28
	High	25	31	25	21
	Special	5	3	9	8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>136</b>
Demographics	Total Number of Students	153,852	145,363	188,545	185,419
	White	31%	32%	40%	27%
	African American	22%	42%	10%	32%
	Hispanic	29%	18%	25%	27%
	Asian	14%	5%	19%	10%
	Limited English Proficiency	14%	12%	17%	17%
	Qualifying for Free and Reduced-priced Lunch	35%	51%	28%	56%
	Special Education	11.7%	9.5%	13.8%	11.2%

## Limitations

This review of special education processes and procedures included information from the major stakeholders in MCPS special education services, most notably the parents of students with disabilities. Multiple data sources enabled WestEd to develop some insights that can assist MCPS with its efforts to better serve students and parents. However, there are limitations to this study that need to be addressed to fully inform the readers of this report. For this project, parents volunteered to participate in focus groups. Also, the visited schools were selected on the basis of demographics and the range of programs available for students with disabilities. There was no information to determine whether the schools were experiencing any challenges with the processes and procedures on which this study focused. The schools sites were included to understand the processes and



procedures across all school types. The qualitative results based on parent discussions and school visits cannot be generalized to the entire district.

Another limitation is the low survey response rates from parents/guardians and most school staff. Although numerous strategies were attempted over an extended period of time, the parent response rate of 10 percent was very low. This could have been due to a number of reasons including busy parent schedules, or a general lack of interest in completing a survey, or confusion with a State administered parent survey. Nevertheless, caution must be exercised when interpreting survey results.

It should also be noted that this was not a comparison study. The purpose was not to compare different schools or different regions in the county to each other. The intent of the project was to address the research questions and not to test any hypotheses through a controlled study. Caution should be exercised in generalizing the results to the overall district.

While caution is necessary with the interpretation of the results, this report provides some valuable findings to inform the Board, district and school employees, parents, and other stakeholders.

## Data Analysis

In this section, a description of analyses performed to address the specific research objectives is provided. The nature of the available data and the specific research questions determined the analysis techniques employed.

WestEd used SPSS, a statistical analysis software program, to analyze all survey data. Exploratory analysis was conducted on each data set to identify respondents who responded to some of the items beyond the background section. We summarized each survey item to generate frequencies and corresponding percentages. Results for each item are presented in the surveys (see Appendix D).

To analyze the interview and focus group data, WestEd developed a set of preliminary codes for use in Atlas.ti qualitative data software. Each interview recording was transcribed. We uploaded the transcriptions into the software. One researcher coded the parent, IEP team, and district administrator transcripts. Another researcher coded the teacher and school administrator transcripts. One of the same researchers then downloaded portions of transcripts with reference to the codes. These quotations were saved in Excel worksheets and formed the data tables. Each quote was reviewed to identify themes as well as positive and negative events to provide a description of the range of experiences. The researcher who identified the themes and exemplars also developed the report summaries.

# Appendix C: Protocols

Thank you for taking time this evening to participate in this focus group.

[Introduce self and colleague.] WestEd is a national research and service nonprofit organization. The Montgomery County Board of Education has contracted with our organization to conduct an independent review of MCPS special education processes. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

To get a more complete understanding of the IEP development and implementation processes we are going to spend this session discussing your experiences on those topics.

We are asking for your candid responses to our questions. It is critical that each of you participate as much as possible. During the group discussion we will follow two basic rules: 1) We need you to focus on the question being asked and 2) we need to get closure on each question.

All of your responses are confidential and will be available only to the WestEd research team. We will analyze your responses and compare them to the responses from other parent focus groups to identify themes and areas for improvement.

This session will last up to 90 minutes.

I would like your permission to record this session so that we can get a transcript for analysis and as a backup to our notes. You will be identified generically on the transcript, such as Parent 1, etc. If we quote anyone in our report the speaker of the quote will be identified simply as Parent. May we record this session?

Respondents are not required to answer any questions that they believe are an infringement upon their privacy or that they do not care to answer for any reason.

Before we begin, do you have any questions or concerns?

[Begin recording, if permitted by group. If one person objects, do not record.]

Let us begin with some basic background questions.

## **Background**

Ask each parent the following question. Pass around the background information sheet.

1. How many years has your child had an IEP?

## **IEP Development**

[Inform parents of the following notes.] For this first set of questions some are related to the referral and determination processes that occurred prior to your child's first IEP. We want to be able to tell if your responses refer to an initial IEP or a reevaluation or annual review. When speaking please mention the type of IEP and the date of your last IEP meeting.

1. Before your child was identified for special education services in MCPS what did your child's school do to help your child succeed academically?
2. When your child become old enough to have an IEP or when you first learned that your child may need special education services, to what extent did you become informed about the process? What information and support, if any, did MCPS provide to you? How did they provide it?
3. Prior to the eligibility meeting, to what extent did you prepare for the meeting? What information, if any, did MCPS provide to you to prepare for the meeting? Did you understand it? If not, was anyone available to help you understand it?
4. Describe the eligibility meeting. Who led it? Did everyone get a chance to participate? What was your role? To what extent did the IEP team actively ask for your input?
5. Do you feel that all of the services required for your child are written into your child's IEP? Why or why not?
6. Have you had any opportunities to provide MCPS school or district staff with feedback about your experiences with the IEP team? If so, what did you provide? How? To whom?
7. Do you have any suggestions to improve the IEP development process? What is MCPS doing well in terms of developing your child's IEP?

### **IEP Implementation**

Now let's discuss how your child's IEP is being implemented regardless of how long they have had an IEP.

1. What special education services does your child receive? Do you think that your child receives their instruction in the least restrictive environment? Why or why not?
2. How well do the services that MCPS provides to your child meet your child's needs? Do you think that the services are sensitive to different cultures? Why or why not?
3. What information, if any, do you receive about the implementation of your child's IEP and progress toward meeting IEP goals? To what extent can you understand it? How does the school use this information to help your child?
4. When you received your child's IEP after your most recent meeting, did it accurately reflect the decisions made during the meeting? If not, what was different? Why do you think this happened? What did you do about it?
5. Do you have any suggestions to improve special education services and the levels of information you receive about your child's progress? What is MCPS doing well in terms of implementing your child's IEP?

### **Final Thought**

1. What do you like the most about the district special education programs?

## **MCPS Special Education Review IEP Team Staff Interview Protocol**



Thank you for scheduling time to meet with me and allow WestEd to visit your school.

WestEd is a national research and service nonprofit organization. The Montgomery County Board of Education has contracted with my organization to conduct an independent review of MCPS special education processes. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

The purpose of this visit is to help us understand the IEP development and implementation and dispute resolution processes at the school level. We are not here to evaluate your school, you, or any of your staff. The information I collect today will be summarized with similar information from the other schools we visit.

Please be as candid as possible. All of your responses are confidential and will be available only to the WestEd research team. We will analyze your responses and compare them to the responses from other principals to identify themes and areas for improvement.

This interview should last approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

I would like your permission to record this session so that we can get a transcript for analysis and as a backup to our notes. You will be identified generically on the transcript, such as Speaker 1. If we quote anyone in our report the speaker of the quote will be identified simply as Principal.

Do you have any questions or concerns? May we record this session?

Respondents are not required to answer any questions that they believe are an infringement upon their privacy or that they do not care to answer for any reason.

[Begin recording, if permitted.]

Let us begin with some basic background questions.

### **Background**

1. How long have you been principal at this school?
2. How long have you been in this district and in what other positions?

### **IEP Development**

First, let's discuss student support and referrals for special education services.

1. Please describe the pre-referral process in place in your school.
2. Regarding data use in your school, what data is used prior to special education screening? Who compiles the information and who reviews it? What factors are most important in deciding whether to refer a student? What information do you share with

parents prior to the referral?

3. Do you or anyone in your school monitor the outcomes of special education referral meetings? If so, what is your process and what questions are you trying to address?

Next, let's discuss how your school informs and supports parents.

1. Briefly describe the special education referral and identification process in your school?
  - a. What role do teachers play?
  - b. What role do parents play?
2. How do parents get information about the process and their role? More specifically, how are parents (and secondary school students) informed about:
  - a. The IEP determination process?
  - b. Potential special education placements?
  - c. Available district resources?
  - d. Support for their student if found not eligible for special education services?
3. What professional development, if any, does your IEP team staff receive on working with parents? Who provides it?
4. When the referral process is complete, what information, if any, do you collect from parents about their experiences with the referral process?
5. Who in your school ensures that the IEPs meet all of the requirements of IDEA? Also, how do you ensure that the services required by a student are written into their IEP?
6. Does the level of parent involvement in the IEP development process differ among parents? For which parents?
7. Is there a point in the process of referral and identification that you think might be likely to lead to an increase in some students ( e.g. ELLs, Hispanic, African American) being referred or identified for special education services? Are behavioral or academic concerns more primary in such situations?

## **IEP Implementation**

Now let's discuss implementation.

1. How do the IEP teams determine the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities? What are the main considerations?
2. Briefly describe the range of special education services provided in your school? How do you assess whether the services are meeting the student's needs Are there certain

students for whom the continuum of services is more or less effective? Which students?  
(Probe:

e.g. linguistic, culturally, and ethnically diverse students.)

3. As the school leader, how do you verify whether students are receiving all of the services in their IEPs? What information about IEP services is shared with parents?
4. In your school, how do you assess the academic progress of student with disabilities? How often do individual teachers or the IEP team review academic achievement? How often are student placements reviewed? What role do parents have in this process?
5. How do the IEP teams decide when a student no longer needs special education services? When a student is exited from special education services what supports are provided to the student? What process, if, any, do you use to monitor those supports?
6. How do you determine whether the staff can provide the required special education services to your students? What do you do if you need more staff?

### **Dispute Resolution**

1. What information do parents of students with disabilities in your school receive about addressing concerns they may have related to adequacy, quality, and type of special education services their students need? When and how do they receive it?
2. Have any parents filed a dispute this year? What was the basis for the dispute?

### **Final Thoughts**

1. What beliefs, policies or practices help or hinder identifying students with disabilities? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
2. What beliefs, policies, or practices help or hinder ensuring students with disabilities receive all of the services specified on their IEPs? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
3. What do you think are the strengths of your school in meeting student's special education needs?



Thank you for taking time from your busy day to participate in this interview.

WestEd is a national research and service nonprofit organization. The Montgomery County Board of Education has contracted with my organization to conduct an independent review of MCPS special education processes. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

To get a more complete understanding of the IEP development and implementation processes we are going to spend this session discussing your experiences on those topics as they pertain to this school.

We are asking for your candid responses to our questions. All of your responses are confidential and will be available only to the WestEd research team. We will analyze your responses and compare them to the responses from other IEP teams to identify themes and areas for improvement.

This session will last for 45 minutes.

I would like your permission to record this session so that we can get a transcript for analysis and as a backup to our notes. You will be identified generically on the transcript, such as IEP Team member 1, etc. If we quote anyone in our report the speaker of the quote will be identified simply as IEP Team Member. Do you have any questions or concerns? May we record this session?

Respondents are not required to answer any questions that they believe are an infringement upon their privacy or that they do not care to answer for any reason.

[Begin recording, if permitted by group. If one person objects, do not record.]

### **Team Composition**

Have participants indicate IEP team experience and primary responsibility on the participant sheet.

### **IEP Development**

First, let's discuss your team processes and parent involvement.

1. Briefly describe an IEP team eligibility meeting in this school.
  - a. Who typically leads the IEP meetings?
  - b. To what extent does everyone participate?
  - c. What is the parent's role?
2. How do parents get information about the process and their role? More specifically, how are parents (and secondary school students) informed about:

- a. The IEP determination process?
  - b. Potential special education placements?
  - c. Available district resources?
  - d. Support for their student if found not eligible for special education services?
3. If a student is found not eligible for special education services, what support is provided to the student? How is a plan of action developed? What information does this school provide to the parents? How do you provide information to parents? Is there a process to ensure that parents understand the information you provide?
  4. In this school, how do you actively engage parents (and secondary students) in the special education referral and determination processes? What are your expectations for parents? What challenges, if any, do non-native English speakers present at the IEP meetings? How do you address any possible cultural or linguistic differences?
  5. Does the level of parent involvement in the IEP development process differ among parents? For which parents?
  6. What professional development, if any, do you receive on working with parents? Who provides it?
  7. When the referral process is complete, what information, if any, do you collect from parents about their experiences with the referral process?
  8. When and how do parents receive a final copy of the IEP?
  9. Who in your school ensures that the IEPs meet all of the requirements of IDEA? Also, how do you ensure that the services required by a student are written into their IEP?
  10. Is there a point in the process of referral and identification that you think might be likely to lead to an increase in some students ( e.g. ELLs, Hispanic, African American) being referred or identified for special education services? Are behavioral or academic concerns more primary in such situations?

## **IEP Implementation**

What factors do you consider when making decisions about needed services? To what extent do available resources influence your decisions about needed services?

Now let's discuss implementation.

1. How do you determine the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities? What are the main considerations?
2. How do you assess whether the continuum of services are meeting the needs of students with disabilities? Are there certain students for whom the continuum of services is more or less effective? Which students? (Probe: e.g. linguistic, culturally, and ethnically diverse students.)
3. How do you verify whether students are receiving all of the services in their IEPs?

What information about IEP services is shared with parents?

4. In your school, how do you assess the academic progress of student with disabilities? How often do individual teachers or the IEP team review academic achievement? How often are student placements reviewed? What role do parents have in this process?
5. How do you decide when a student no longer needs special education services? When a student is exited from special education services what supports are provided to the student? What process, if, any, do you use to monitor those supports?

### **Dispute Resolution**

1. What information do parents of students with disabilities in your school receive about addressing concerns they may have related to adequacy, quality, and type of special education services their students need? When and how do they receive it?
2. Have any parents filed a dispute this year? What was the basis for the dispute?

### **Final Thoughts**

1. What beliefs, policies or practices help or hinder identifying students with disabilities? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
2. What beliefs, policies, or practices help or hinder ensuring students with disabilities receive all of the services specified on their IEPs? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
3. What do you think are the strengths of your school in meeting student's special education needs

Classroom Observation Record			Montgomery County Public Schools				Record #:				
1. School		2. Date	3. Observer	4. Start Time	5. End Time	6. Total Time 5 10 15 20 minutes		7. Number of Staff 0 1 2 Teachers		8. # Students 0 1 2 Total SE	
9. School Level	10. Content Area	11. Setting		12. Special Education Service Delivery		13. Para/Other Type of Task		14. Student Engagement			
<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Pre-school <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Elementary <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Middle School <input type="checkbox"/> 4. High School <input type="checkbox"/> 5. K-8	<input type="checkbox"/> ELA <input type="checkbox"/> Math <input type="checkbox"/> SS <input type="checkbox"/> Science <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. General Education <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Special Education		<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Co-Teaching Supports <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Push-in with Para. Support <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Resource Room Pull-out Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Special Class (more than 60% of day) <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Other:		<input type="checkbox"/> Assisting student(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Observing instruction <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Instruction <input type="checkbox"/> Non-instructional <input type="checkbox"/> Not work related		<input type="checkbox"/> 0-50% <input type="checkbox"/> 51-75% <input type="checkbox"/> 76-90% <input type="checkbox"/> 91-100%			
15. Instructional Delivery		16. Depth of Knowledge		17. Evidence of grade appropriate, standards-based instruction		18. Universal Design for Learning (UDL)					
<b>Whole Class</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Teacher talk (lecture, model) <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Teacher-led (Q&A) <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Teacher modeling/students practice  <b>Small Group</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Teacher/Adult-led <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Student-led cooperative group  <b>Class Seating Arrangement</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Students sit in rows <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Students sit in clusters <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Other:		<b>Depth of Knowledge Level:</b> (predominantly) <input type="checkbox"/> Level 1 – Recall <input type="checkbox"/> Level 2- Skill/Concept <input type="checkbox"/> Level 3 – Strategic Thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Level 4 – Extended Thinking		<input type="checkbox"/> Grade level, standards-aligned instruction <input type="checkbox"/> Grade level standards posted <input type="checkbox"/> Grade level objectives posted <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher connects objectives or standards to instruction		<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple means of representation (“what” of learning) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide multiple media/formats (Interactive Smartboard)</li> <li>– Graphic Organizers</li> <li>– Visuals (pictures, video clips)</li> </ul> <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple ways of expression (“how” of learning) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Multi-media for student expression (laptop, iPad, video, audio, text, drawing)</li> <li>– Concept mapping tools/notetaking guides</li> <li>– Verbal and written scaffolds and prompts</li> <li>– Checklists/ Assessment rubrics for students</li> <li>– Checks for understanding</li> </ul> <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple ways of engagement (“why” of learning) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Age appropriate activities</li> <li>– Culturally relevant activities</li> <li>– Charts/schedules/visible timers</li> <li>– Group work/collaboration</li> </ul>					

Notes	
Teacher	Student

Thank you for scheduling time to meet with us and allow WestEd to get your perspective.

WestEd is a national research and service nonprofit organization. The Montgomery County Board of Education has contracted with my organization to conduct an independent review of MCPS special education processes. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

The purpose of this interview is to help us understand the IEP development and implementation and dispute processes at the administrative level.

Please be as candid as possible. All of your responses are confidential and will be available only to the WestEd research team. We will analyze your responses and compare them to the responses from other interviews and focus groups to identify themes and areas for improvement.

I would like your permission to record this session so that we can get a transcript for analysis and as a backup to our notes. You will be identified generically on the transcript, such as Speaker 1. If we quote you in our report you will be identified simply as Administrator. Do you have any questions or concerns? May we record this session?

Let us begin with some basic background questions.

### **Background**

1. How long have you been in your current position?
2. How long have you been in this district and in what other positions?
3. What are your primary job responsibilities?
4. What are the primary functions of your office?

### **IEP Development**

First, let's discuss student support and referrals for special education services.

1. This district has a system of tiered supports to assist student prior to making a referral for special education. What are the challenges and benefits of this system?
2. To what extent do you think that students are being appropriately referred for special education services? What is the basis for your response? Do you monitor referrals and their outcomes? If so, how?
3. Do you or any of your staff monitor the outcomes of special education referral meetings? If so, how? What reports are generated and distributed? By whom? How often?
4. Disproportionality has been identified as an issue by the School Board. What is your understanding of disproportionality in MCPS schools? How does your office

address disproportionality? How do you know whether these efforts are effective?

Next, let's discuss parents and IEP development.

1. How do parents and students learn about the special education eligibility determination process? How do they learn about any available supports? What challenges does the cultural diversity of this district pose for informing parents and students? How do you inform them?
2. Based on your experiences, what role do you think that parents and students actually have in the special education referral and IEP development process? What does your office do to ensure that IEP teams collaborate effectively with parents and students?
3. What information do you collect or review about parent experiences with the referral process?
4. How do you ensure that IEPs are developed in accordance with IDEA? Who makes the final decisions about the level of services provided to students?
5. Do you have any suggestions to improve parent and student engagement in the special education referral and IEP development processes?

### **IEP Implementation**

1. What are the challenges in this district with educating students in the least restrictive environment?
2. This school district offers a range of services to students. How do parents learn about these services? To what extent do you think the services meet the needs of all students? What challenges, if any, exist for students from a different country or culture?
3. How is the progress of students with disabilities assessed? What is the role of your office in this process?
4. How well do you think that parents are informed about the special education services their children receive and their children's progress on their IEP goals?
5. What role do you have in allocating staff? What model do you use? How do you ensure that the allocated staff can provide the services to the students?

### **Dispute Resolution**

1. How often do you interact with parents? To what extent do they contact you and for what reasons?
2. What is your role in addressing any concerns that parents have with their student's IEP or services? What is your goal when handling their concerns? What is your role if a parent requests mediation or a due process hearing?



Thank you for scheduling time to meet with us and allow WestEd to get your perspective.

WestEd is a national research and service nonprofit organization. The Montgomery County Board of Education has contracted with my organization to conduct an independent review of MCPS special education processes. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

The purpose of this interview is to help us understand the IEP development and implementation and dispute processes at the administrative level. This group interview will last for one hour.

Please be as candid as possible. All of your responses are confidential and will be available only to the WestEd research team. We will analyze your responses and compare them to the responses from other interviews and focus groups to identify themes and areas for improvement.

I would like your permission to record this session so that we can get a transcript for analysis and as a backup to our notes. You will be identified generically on the transcript, such as Speaker 1, or Administrator 1, etc. If we quote anyone in our report the speaker of the quote will be identified simply as Administrator. Do you have any questions or concerns? May we record this session?

[Begin recording, if permitted by group. If one person objects, do not record.]

Let us begin with some basic background questions.

## **Background**

1. How long have you been in your current position?
2. How long have you been in this district and in what other positions?
3. What are your primary job responsibilities?
4. What services do you provide to your schools?

## **IEP Development**

First, let's discuss student support and referrals for special education services.

1. To what extent are your schools using a system to tiered supports? What are the challenges and benefits of that system?
2. To what extent do you think that students are being appropriately referred for special education services? What is the basis for your response? Do you monitor referrals and their outcomes? If so, how?
3. Disproportionality has been identified as an issue by the School Board. What is your

understanding of disproportionality in MCPS schools? How do you monitor whether disproportionality is an issue for your schools? How do your office and your schools address disproportionality? How do you know whether these efforts are effective?

Next, let's discuss parents and IEP development.

1. How do parents and students in your schools learn about the special education eligibility determination process? How do they learn about any available supports? What challenges does the cultural diversity of this district pose for informing parents and students? How do you inform them?
2. Based on your experiences, what role do you think that parents and students in your schools actually have in the special education referral and IEP development process? What does your office do to ensure that IEP teams collaborate effectively with parents and students?
3. What information do you collect or review about parent experiences with the referral process?
4. How do you ensure that IEPs are developed in accordance with IDEA? Who makes the final decisions about the level of services provided to students? What factors are considered?
5. Do you have any suggestions to improve parent and student engagement in the special education referral and IEP development processes?

### **IEP Implementation**

1. What do you think determines the placement of students with disabilities? What challenges do your schools face with educating students in the least restrictive environment?
2. This school district offers a range of services to students. How do parents learn about these services? To what extent do you think the services meet the needs of all students with disabilities? What challenges, if any, exist for students from a different country or culture?
3. How do you or your principals know whether students are receiving the services specified on their IEPs? Do you think that the provision of services differs across schools? If so, how?
4. How is the progress of students with disabilities assessed in your schools? How often is student progress reviewed for student with disabilities? What determines when this happens?
5. What data is available to enable you to monitor IEP implementation in your schools? Where do you get the information?
  - a. Percentage of students meeting their IEP goals

- b. Modifications of placements or services including students exiting from special education services
  - c. Supports for students exiting special education services
- 6. What role do you have in allocating staff? What model do you use? How do you ensure that the allocated staff can provide the services to the students? How do you know if the model is effective?

### **Dispute Resolution**

- 1. What information do parents of students with disabilities in your schools receive about dispute resolution processes? When and how do they receive it?
- 2. How often do you interact with parents? To what extent do they contact you and for what reasons?
- 3. What is your role in addressing any concerns that parents have with their student's IEP or services? What is your goal when handling these situations? What is your role if a parent requests mediation or a due process hearing?

Thank you for scheduling time to meet with us.

We are from WestEd. WestEd is a national research and service nonprofit organization. The Montgomery County Board of Education has contracted with our organization to conduct an independent review of MCPS special education processes. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

The purpose of this interview is to help us understand IEP development and implementation and dispute resolution processes from an administrator staff perspective.

This interview will take approximately 30 minutes. You are not required to answer any questions that you believe are an infringement upon their privacy or that you do not care to answer for any reason.

Please be as candid as possible. All of your responses are confidential and will be available only to the WestEd research team. We will analyze your responses and compare them to the responses of other administrators to identify themes and areas for improvement.

I would like your permission to record this session so that we can get a transcript for analysis and as a backup to our notes. You will be identified generically on the transcript, such as Speaker 1, or Administrator 1, etc. If we quote anyone in our report the speaker of the quote will be identified simply as Administrator. Do you have any questions or concerns? May we record this session?

[Begin recording, if permitted by group. If one person objects, do not record.]

Let us begin with some basic background questions.

## **Background**

1. How long have you been in your current position?
2. How long have you been in this district and in what other positions?
3. What is the primary role of your office and staff?

## **IEP Development**

1. To what extent do you think that students are being appropriately referred for special education services? What is the basis for your response? Do you think that all students that have a suspected disability are being tested?

## **IEP Implementation**

1. How do parents learn about the services your staff provides? What information do they receive? To what extent do you think the services meet the needs of all students

- with disabilities? What challenges, if any, exist for students from a different country or culture?
2. Based on your experiences, how would you describe actual parent and student participation in the special education referral and IEP development process? Does your office have any structures or systems in place to ensure that IEP teams collaborate effectively with parents and students? If so, please describe.
  3. How do you ensure that students are receiving the services specified on their IEPs? Do the IEPs provide adequate details to guide staff in providing the services, e.g. individually or in a group? How specific are the IEPs in terms of formats for providing the services? What information is provided to parents about the provision of services? Do you think that the provision of services differs across schools? If so, how?
  4. How is the progress of students with disabilities assessed? For your staff, how would you rate the quality of the IEP goals in terms of being meaningful and measurable? How well do you think the progress reports help parents understand their child's progress?
  5. What documentation is available from your staff or a database to enable you to monitor IEP implementation among your staff? Where do you get the information?
  6. What is the average caseload for your staff? What role do you have in allocating staff? What model do you use? How do you ensure that the allocated staff can provide the appropriate services to the students?

### **Parent Interaction/Dispute Resolution**

1. How often do you interact with parents? To what extent do they contact you and for what reasons?
2. Have any parents filed a dispute this year regarding the services your staff provides? If so, why did those parents file disputes?
3. What is your role in addressing any concerns that parents have with their student's IEP or services? What is your goal when handling these situations? What is your role if a parent requests mediation or a due process hearing?

Thank you for scheduling time to meet with us.

As you know WestEd is a national research and service nonprofit organization. The Montgomery County Board of Education has contracted with my organization to conduct an independent review of MCPS special education processes. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

The purpose of this interview is to help us understand dispute resolution processes at the administrative level.

This interview will take approximately 30 minutes. You are not required to answer any questions that they believe are an infringement upon your privacy or that you do not care to answer for any reason.

Please be as candid as possible. All of your responses are confidential and will be available only to the WestEd research team. We will analyze your responses and compare them to the responses of other administrators to identify themes and areas for improvement.

I would like your permission to record this session so that we can get a transcript for analysis and as a backup to our notes. You will be identified generically on the transcript, such as Speaker 1, or Administrator 1, etc.. If we quote anyone in our report the speaker of the quote will be identified simply as Administrator. Do you have any questions or concerns? May we record this session?

[Begin recording, if permitted.]

Let us begin with some basic background questions.

### **Background**

1. How long have you been in your current position?
2. How long have you been in this district and in what other positions?
3. What are your primary job responsibilities?
4. What are the main functions of your office?
5. How many staff do you oversee? How does the current staff level of your office compare to prior years?
6. How does your office collaborate with other district offices and staff?

### **Parent Interaction/Dispute Resolution**

1. To what extent do parents contact your office? For what reasons do they contact your office?
2. What information do parents of students with disabilities receive from MCPS

- about dispute resolution processes? When and how do they receive it?
3. How many parents filed a request for mediation or due process this school year?  
Have any parents filed an administrative complaint? Why do parents typically file for dispute resolution? In your experience what is common or different about the dispute resolution cases filed this year? What do you think the parents hope to accomplish?
  4. What is your role and the role of your staff in resolving any disputes that parents have with the school, district, or their student's IEP or services? What is your goal when handling a dispute? What do you try to accomplish?
  5. To what extent does the district monitor disputes and the outcomes?
  6. To what extent do you think that the Board policy on *Procedures for Review and Resolution of Special Education Disputes* is followed?
  7. Do you think the Board policy on dispute resolution is effective? If so, how?
  8. How do you think parents view the Board policy?



Thank you for scheduling time to meet with us and allow WestEd to get your perspective.

WestEd is a national research and service nonprofit organization. The Montgomery County Board of Education has contracted with my organization to conduct an independent review of MCPS special education processes. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

The purpose of this interview is to help us understand the IEP development and implementation and dispute processes from an advisory committee perspective.

This group interview will last for one hour. You are not required to answer any questions that they believe are an infringement upon your privacy or that you do not care to answer for any reason.

Please be as candid as possible. All of your responses are confidential and will be available only to the WestEd research team. We will analyze your responses and compare them to the responses from other interviews and focus groups to identify themes and areas for improvement.

I would like your permission to record this session so that we can get a transcript for analysis and as a backup to our notes. You will be identified generically on the transcript, such as Speaker 1, etc. If we quote anyone in our report the speaker of the quote will be identified simply as Advisory Committee. Do you have any questions or concerns? May we record this session?

[Begin recording, if permitted by group. If one person objects, do not record.]

Let us begin with some basic background questions.

## **Background**

1. How long have you been a SEAC co-chair?
2. What level of involvement in the SEAC have you had prior to being a co-chair?
3. How long has the SEAC existed? How did it get started?
4. What are the primary functions of the SEAC? What do you provide to parents?

## **IEP Development**

We would like you to address the remaining questions with reference to the functions of SEAC and your roles as co-chairs.

1. To what extent do you think that students are being appropriately referred for special education services? What is the basis for your response?

2. Does the SEAC have a role in informing parents about the special education eligibility determination process and supports? If so, describe that role.
3. To what extent do you think that parents understand special education eligibility and the IEP? What challenges does the cultural diversity of this district pose for informing parents and students about special education eligibility and the IEP? How do you inform them?
4. Based on your experiences, how would you describe actual parent and student participation in the special education referral and IEP development process?
5. Do you have any suggestions to improve parent and student involvement in the special education referral and IEP development processes?

### **IEP Implementation**

1. What challenges do the schools face with educating students in the least restrictive environment?
2. This school district offers a range of services to students with disabilities. Does SEAC help parents learn about these services? If so, how? To what extent do you think the services meet the needs of all students with disabilities?
3. Generally, do you think that the provision of special education services differs across schools? If so, how?

### **Dispute Resolution**

1. What information do parents of students with disabilities in MCPS receive about dispute resolution processes? When and how do they receive it?
2. How do you think parents view the Board policy on *Procedures for Review and Resolution of Special Education Disputes*?
3. To what extent do you think that the Board policy is followed?

**Montgomery County Public Schools**  
**Special Education Program Review IEP**  
**Review Protocol**

<b>WestEd Reviewer</b>	<b>School</b>		<b>WE Protocol #:</b>		<b>Grade:</b>
<b>LRE %</b>	<b>LEP</b>	<b>YES</b> <b>NO</b>	<b>Race:</b> American Indian or Alaskan Asian or Pacific Islander Black or African American (not Hispanic)	Native Hispanic or Latino White (not Hispanic)	<b>M</b> <b>F</b>
<b>Disability</b>	<b>AU</b> <b>Deaf</b> <b>Deaf-Blind</b> <b>DD</b> <b>ED</b> <b>HI</b> <b>MR</b> <b>OI</b> <b>OHI</b> <b>SLD</b> <b>SLI</b> <b>TBI</b> <b>VI</b>	<b>MD- Cognitive</b> <b>MD-Sensory</b> <b>MD- Physical</b>	<b>IEP Date:</b> Current: <b>YES</b> <b>NO</b>		

<b>MCPS Question/Description of Practice</b>		<b>Reviewer Notes</b>
<b>1. Are IEPs developed in accordance with IDEA?</b>  a. Are the IEP dates correct (annual review date, next annual, most recent evaluation, projected evaluation date)? YES NO b. Does the IEP clearly specify the child's disability? YES NO c. Is there a statement that describes the disability and its impact? YES NO d. Does the IEP identify the IEP Team participants? YES NO Page 11-12		
<b>2. Are the student's strengths, preferences, and interests clearly identified in the Present Level of Functional Performance?</b>  a. Is there parental input regarding the student's educational program? YES NO b. Are student's strengths, interest areas, significant personal attributes, and personal accomplishments included in the present levels of performance? YES NO c. Does the PLP identify how the student's disability affects his/her involvement in the general education curriculum? YES NO d. Do the Present Levels of Functional Performance reflect a variety of data sources and include academic and/or functional performance? YES NO e. Is there a summary of assessment findings? YES NO f. Is there a determination that the findings impact the student academic achievement and/or functional performance? YES NO Page 15-17		

<p><b>3. What data is used to determine if students are placed in the least restrictive environment in accordance with IDEA?</b> <b>Is the continuum of services available to students to meet their needs?</b></p> <p>a. Were multiple placement options considered? YES NO</p> <p>b. If student is removed from the general education environment, there is an explanation provided as to why services cannot be provided in the general education environment with the use of supplementary aids and services YES NO</p> <p>c. There is documentation for the basis of the LRE decision YES NO</p> <p>d. LRE placement is identified with an average percentage for the day YES NO</p> <p>e. An explanation is provided if the student will not participate with non-disabled peers in academic, non-academic and extracurricular activities YES NO</p> <p>f. Are all special education and related services identified with location, service description, begin date, end date, providers and summary of services recorded for each service recommended? YES NO</p> <p>Page 33- 34</p>	
<p><b>4. How does MCPS assess whether IEPs are developed in accordance with IDEA?</b></p> <p>a. Are the goals measurable and standards-aligned? YES NO</p> <p>b. Are there goals aligned to academic needs identified in the Present Level of Academic and Functional Performance? YES NO</p> <p>c. Are evaluation methods identified? YES NO</p> <p>d. Are the objectives/benchmarks aligned with the goals? YES NO</p> <p>e. Is progress toward goals updated on a quarterly basis? YES NO</p> <p>f. Does each progress report have a description of progress for each reporting period? YES NO</p> <p>g. Is the frequency of notification to parents on progress on goals identified? YES NO</p> <p>Page 34</p>	
<p><b>5. How are the needs of English Learners addressed?</b></p> <p>a. If the student is an English Learner, is there data on current language proficiency? YES NO</p> <p>b. Are the language needs of the student addressed in the IEP? YES NO</p> <p>Pages 7, 9, 18</p>	

<p><b>6. How are student individualized Transition needs addressed?</b></p> <p>a. Are student's interests, preferences and transition assessment information identified?</p> <p>b. Are postsecondary goal(s) identified, including at least one goal for training and/or education?</p> <p>c. Has a course of study been identified?</p> <p>d. Have transition services been identified?</p> <p>e. Have transition goals been developed?</p> <p>page 28-29</p>	<p>YES NO</p> <p>YES NO</p> <p>YES NO</p> <p>YES NO</p> <p>YES NO</p>
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<p><b>7. What percentage of annual IEP goals are met by the student?</b></p>	<p>0 0-25% of academic goals were met</p> <p>1 26-49% of academic goals were met</p> <p>2 50-85% of academic goals were met</p> <p>3 86-100% of academic goals were met</p> <p>NA</p>
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WestEd a national research and service nonprofit organization is completing a review of special education processes and procedures for the Montgomery County Public Schools Board of Education in Maryland. As part of our review MCPS is interested in learning about the special education processes and procedures in comparable school districts. Your school district was selected as a comparable school district.

The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution. To assist MCPS with understanding the approaches being implemented we are going to ask you some questions related to the study foci of IEP development, implementation and disputes.

This interview will take approximately one hour. You are not required to answer any questions that you believe are an infringement upon your privacy or that you do not care to answer for any reason.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

### **IEP Development**

1. What support do your schools offer to struggling students? How long would it take to exhaust all approaches prior to referring a student for screening? Are parents informed of these supports? How and when are parents informed?
2. How do you monitor special education referrals and outcomes?
3. If disproportionality is an issue in your district what efforts do you have in place to address disproportionality? How do you evaluate those efforts?
4. What information and resources are available for a parent to become informed about the special education referral process and IEP development? How do parents become informed?
5. Describe any process you have for assessing parents' experiences with the IEP process. Who collects the information? How is the information used?
6. Describe any training you provide to IEP team members on how to work effectively with parents.

### **IEP Implementation**

7. How do you ensure that the IEPs meet the requirements of IDEA?
8. How do parents know if their child is receiving the services in their IEP?
9. What policies or guidelines exist to guide staff in the development of realistic and measureable IEP goals? Do you provide any professional development on developing IEP goals?
10. To what extent do you assess the effectiveness of your teaching models, such as co-teaching? Who assesses your teaching models? What is the process?
11. Who develops your staffing models? How do you assess your staffing models?

**IEP Disputes**

12. What are the primary goals of your dispute resolution policy and process?
13. To what extent does your policy and process encourage collaborative resolutions?
14. To what extent do you assess the parent experience after mediation or a due process hearing? Who collects the information? How is the information used?
15. What data do you monitor related to mediation and due process hearings? How many disputes were filed in the most recently completed school year? What were the outcomes? (Note to interviewers. Ask for a summary or a data set for the two most recent school years.)

Thank you. We greatly appreciate the information and your time.



Thank you for taking time from your busy day to participate in this focus group.

WestEd is a national research and service nonprofit organization. The Montgomery County Board of Education has contracted with my organization to conduct an independent review of MCPS special education processes. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

To get a more complete understanding of the IEP development and implementation processes we are going to spend this session discussing your experiences on those topics as they pertain to this school.

Please be as candid as possible. All of your responses are confidential and will be available only to the WestEd research team. We will analyze your responses and compare them to the responses from other IEP teams to identify themes and areas for improvement.

This interview will last for 30 to 60 minutes.

I would like your permission to record this session so that we can get a transcript for analysis and as a backup to our notes. You will be identified generically on the transcript, such as Teacher 1, etc. If we quote anyone in our report the speaker of the quote will be identified simply as Teacher. Do you have any questions or concerns? May we record this session?

Respondents are not required to answer any questions that they believe are an infringement upon their privacy or that they do not care to answer for any reason.

[Begin recording, if permitted by group. If one person objects, do not record.]

## **Background**

Have participants indicate IEP team experience and primary responsibility on the participant sheet.

## **IEP Development**

1. Describe how the pre-referral process works in your school. Is it required? What are the steps that occur prior to the referral of a student for special education? For each unique case, how are decisions made on what steps to make?
2. What data does your school use prior to referring a student for special education screening? Who compiles the information and who reviews it?  
At what point do/would you decide that the needs of a student require a referral for special education services? Describe that.
3. Do parents participate in the pre-referral process? How are they involved? When do

- they get involved?
4. When referred students are assessed and it is determined that they do not have a disability, what information is used to determine the next steps for the students? Who is involved in that process? What information is provided to parents? How is it provided? Is there a process to ensure that parents understand the information?
  5. Who in your school ensures that the IEPs meet all of the requirements of IDEA? Also, how do you ensure that the services required by a student are written into their IEP?
  6. Is there a point in the process of referral and identification that you think might be likely to lead to an increase in some students ( e.g. ELLs, Hispanic, African American) being referred or identified for special education services? Are behavioral or academic concerns more primary in such situations?

### **IEP Implementation**

1. To what extent do teachers in this school think that students with disabilities are placed in the least restrictive environment?
2. What inclusive practices, if any, are commonly used in this school so that students with disabilities learn grade level curriculum in the general education classroom?
3. To what extent is co-teaching implemented in this school? What co-teaching models are you using? Which model is used most frequently by teachers in this school?
4. What data is used to monitor the progress of students with disabilities? Who is involved in monitoring their progress? What information do parents receive? How do they receive it?
5. When a student no longer needs special education services, what supports are provided to those students? How are the supports monitored? What information is provided to parents? How is it provided? Is there a process to ensure that parents understand the information?

### **Final Thoughts**

1. What beliefs, policies or practices help or hinder identifying students with disabilities? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
2. What beliefs, policies, or practices help or hinder ensuring students with disabilities receive all of the services specified on their IEPs? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
3. What do you think are the strengths of your school in meeting student's special education needs?

## Appendix D: Surveys

## MCPS Special Education Review Parent Survey

**Enter your Survey Access Code (see the flyer “Instructions for Parent Online Survey”):**

If you want to continue in Spanish, click the Spanish button.

Welcome to the Special Education Parent Survey being conducted by WestEd. It should take you 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Your responses will be kept confidential. You will not be identified in any report.

You are not required to answer any questions that you believe are an infringement upon your privacy or that you do not care to answer for any reason.

On pages with many items, you will need to scroll down the page to see the remaining items.

You must respond to all items to continue to the next page. You can return to any page at any time. Use the arrow keys at the bottom of the page to go to the next page or to return to a previous page.

You can begin the survey and return at a later time to complete it.

### Background

1. I attended an IEP meeting for my child between December 15, 2014 and March 13, 2015 in person, by telephone, or electronically.
 

☐ Yes  
☐ No (SKIP to Item 37)
  
2. The meeting was an:
 

16.2% Initial IEP meeting (GO to Item 3)  
83.8% Annual/Periodic Review (SKIP to Item 24) (n = 427)

### Eligibility and Initial IEP Development

Please respond to the following items with reference to the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) meeting that took place between December 15, 2014 and March 13, 2015 for the student whose name appears on the flyer labeled “Online Survey Instructions.”

<b>Eligibility and Initial IEP Development</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know/Not Applicable (✓)</b>
3. My child's school informed me about the process to determine if my child needed special education services. (n = 72)	9.7%	4.2%	29.2%	54.2%	2.8%
4. Before my child was referred for special education the school tried different approaches to help my child succeed. (n = 72)	6.9%	8.3%	40.3%	40.3%	4.2%
5. Before the eligibility meeting, I received from the school the documents the team planned to review at least 5 business days before the meeting. (n = 72)	4.2%	6.9%	34.7%	54.2%	0.0%
6. Any information I did not understand was explained to me at the meeting. (n = 72)	1.4%	5.6%	31.9%	55.6%	5.6%
7. After the explanation, I understood the information. (n = 72)	4.2%	1.4%	36.1%	54.2%	4.2%
8. Before the eligibility meeting, I was informed of what were my child's suspected disability(ies). (n = 72)	9.7%	5.6%	27.8%	52.8%	4.2%
9. My child was tested by MCPS in all areas related to the suspected disability(ies). (n = 72)	16.7%	8.3%	25.0%	45.8%	4.2%
10. Before the eligibility meeting, I completed the MCPS Eligibility Screening Parent Interview/ Questionnaire form. (n = 72)	1.4%	5.6%	37.5%	47.2%	8.3%
11. During the eligibility meeting, the other IEP team members considered my input. (n = 72)	6.9%	4.2%	37.5%	51.4%	0.0%
12. During the initial IEP meeting, I felt comfortable expressing my opinion. (n = 72)	4.2%	9.7%	31.9%	52.8%	1.4%
13. During the initial IEP meeting, the other IEP team members considered my input. (n = 72)	4.2%	5.6%	34.7%	55.6%	0.0%
14. During the initial IEP meeting, other IEP team members asked me if I agreed with the decisions. (n = 72)	5.6%	4.2%	34.7%	52.8%	2.8%

<b>Eligibility and Initial IEP Development</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know/Not Applicable (✓)</b>
15. All of the services and accommodations my child needed to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) were written into my child's IEP. (n = 72)	4.2%	12.5%	29.2%	50.0%	4.2%
16. I understand the level of services and accommodations that the school is required to provide for my child based on a free appropriate public education (FAPE). (n = 72)	1.4%	6.9%	44.4%	45.8%	1.4%
17. I received information about the different placement options where the special education services my child needed can be provided. (n = 72)	8.3%	11.1%	26.4%	45.8%	8.3%
18. The IEP that I received after the meeting contained the same services and accommodations that were agreed upon in the IEP meeting. (n = 72)	4.2%	4.2%	34.7%	55.6%	1.4%
19. I was involved in or knew about any changes made to my child's IEP after the IEP meeting. (n = 72)	4.2%	6.9%	34.7%	43.1%	11.1%
20. I think that decisions were made about my child's IEP without my input, prior to the IEP meeting. (n = 72)	25.0%	36.1%	18.1%	16.7%	4.2%
21. I know about the different district offices where I can get support with educating my child. (n = 72)	6.9%	34.7%	30.6%	16.7%	11.1%
22. Overall, I felt like an equal partner in the IEP team in making decisions about my child's IEP. (n = 72)	5.6%	2.8%	43.1%	43.1%	5.6%
23. I had to bring an advocate or lawyer to assist me with the IEP meeting. (n = 72)	33.3%	31.9%	2.8%	16.7%	15.3%

If you completed Items 3-23, skip to Item 37.

### **Annual or Periodic Review IEP Meeting**

Please respond to the following items with reference to the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) meeting that took place between December 15, 2014 and March 13, 2015 for the student whose name appears on the flyer labeled "Online Survey Instructions."

<b>Annual or Periodic Review IEP Meeting</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know/Not Applicable (✓)</b>
24. Before the IEP meeting, I received from the school the documents the team planned to review at least 5 business days before the meeting. (n = 367)	4.4%	8.2%	28.9%	57.5%	1.1%
25. Any information I did not understand was explained to me at the meeting. (n = 368)	2.7%	3.0%	34.5%	53.8%	6.0%
26. After the explanation, I understood the information. (n = 368)	1.4%	4.1%	37.0%	50.8%	6.8%
27. During the IEP meeting, I felt comfortable expressing my opinion. (n = 368)	2.4%	4.9%	30.7%	61.7%	0.3%
28. During the IEP meeting, the other IEP team members considered my input. (n = 368)	2.4%	5.2%	34.5 %	56.8%	1.1%
29. During the IEP meeting, other IEP team members asked me if I agreed with the decisions. (n = 368)	2.7%	9.8%	36.7%	48.9%	1.9%
30. All of the services and accommodations my child needed to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) were written into my child's IEP. (n = 368)	4.6%	9.2%	38.0%	45.1%	3.0%
31. I understand the level of services and accommodations that the school is required to provide for my child based on a free appropriate public education (FAPE). (n = 368)	2.2%	9.0%	41.3%	44.3%	3.3%
32. The IEP that I received after the meeting contained the same services and accommodations that the IEP team recommended in the meeting. (n = 368)	1.6%	4.9%	36.4%	53.3%	3.8%
33. I think that decisions were made about my child's IEP without my input, prior to the IEP meeting. (n = 368)	18.5%	40.5%	17.9%	14.9%	8.2%
34. I know about the different district offices where I can get support with educating my child. (n = 366)	10.9%	33.9%	30.9%	14.2%	10.1%



<b>Annual or Periodic Review IEP Meeting</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know/Not Applicable (✓)</b>
35. Overall, I felt like an equal partner in the IEP team in making decisions about my child's IEP. (n = 367)	6.0%	10.9%	42.4%	39.8%	1.1%
36. I had to bring an advocate or lawyer to assist me with the IEP meeting. (n = 367)	39.5%	28.9%	4.4%	8.4%	18.8%

## IEP Implementation

Please respond to the following items based on your current perceptions of the current school year.

<b>IEP Implementation</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know/Not Applicable (✓)</b>
37. The IEP team staff members have consistently explained the variety of service options available for students with disabilities. (n = 441)	5.0%	19.5%	40.4%	31.3%	4.1%
38. The IEP team staff members have consistently identified the service options that are appropriate for my child. (n = 444)	6.1%	15.1%	42.6%	33.1%	3.2%
39. My child is taught the general education curriculum to the maximum extent appropriate based on my child's needs and goals. (n = 445)	6.5%	6.3%	39.6%	45.2%	2.5%
40. My child's school sends me information to show that my child is receiving all the services specified in my child's IEP. (n = 444)	10.4%	17.8%	38.1%	30.9%	2.9%
41. Overall, my child's general education teacher(s) is(are) knowledgeable with regard to my child's disability. (n = 444)	7.4%	9.7%	36.5%	43.2%	3.2%
42. My child's IEP goals are measurable. (n = 445)	4.7%	9.2%	49.7%	33.7%	2.7%
43. My child's IEP goals are challenging. (n = 441)	4.8%	15.9%	48.1%	25.6%	5.7%
44. I receive regular updates, at least quarterly, on my child's progress on IEP goals and objectives. (n = 445)	5.8%	10.3%	44.0%	36.9%	2.9%
45. The updates help me to understand my child's progress on their IEP goals. (n = 445)	7.6%	15.1%	37.8%	31.9%	7.6%

<b>IEP Implementation</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know/Not Applicable (✓)</b>
46. The IEP team develops new goals for my child once the stated goals have been met. (n = 442)	5.9%	10.6%	39.4%	29.6%	14.5%

## IEP Disputes

Please respond to the following items based on your current perceptions of the current school year.

<b>Parent Rights and Assistance</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know/Not Applicable (✓)</b>
47. I am aware of my rights as a parent of a student with a disability. (n = 445)	2.0%	8.8%	51.9%	35.5%	1.8%
48. When I had a disagreement about my child's IEP, district staff has assisted me with resolving those differences. (n = 442)	7.5%	7.2%	19.7%	12.7%	52.9 %

49. I have filed for mediation related to the IEP or special education services for the student whose name appears on the survey instructions.

\_\_\_ Yes (GO to Item 50)

\_\_\_ No (SKIP to Item 55)

<b>Mediation</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know/Not Applicable (✓)</b>
50. During the mediation process, MCPS took my complaint seriously. (n = 60)	11.7%	8.3%	35.0%	21.7%	23.3%
51. The mediation process was conducted as efficiently as possible. (n = 60)	11.7%	11.7%	38.3%	16.7%	21.7%
52. The mediation process to resolve my dispute was a genuine collaboration between me and the district representatives. (n = 59)	16.9%	5.1%	33.9%	22.0%	22.0%
53. As a result of the mediation process my child was provided a free appropriate public education (FAPE). (n = 59)	16.9%	6.8%	27.1%	28.8%	20.3%
54. I was satisfied with the outcome of the mediation process. (n = 59)	20.3%	5.1%	25.4%	30.5%	18.6%

55. I have filed for due process related to the IEP or special education services for the student whose name appears on the survey instructions.

\_\_\_ Yes (GO to Item 56)

\_\_\_ No (SKIP to the end of the survey)

<b>Due Process</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know/Not Applicable (✓)</b>
56. During due process, MCPS took my complaint seriously. (n = 40)	17.5%	10.0%	37.5%	15.0%	20.0%
57. When preparing for the due process hearing, I (or my representative) was given access to all the information needed to present my side of the dispute to the hearing officer. (n = 40)	17.5%	10.0%	42.5%	7.5%	22.5%
58. The due process hearing was conducted as efficiently as possible. (n = 40)	15.0%	5.0%	32.5%	15.0%	32.5%
59. MCPS staff were respectful to me and my child before, after and during the hearing. (n = 40)	10.0%	10.0%	37.5%	17.5%	25.0%
60. As a result of the due process hearing my child was provided a free appropriate public education (FAPE). (n = 40)	15.0%	2.5%	37.5%	17.5%	27.5%
61. I was satisfied with the outcome of the due process hearing. (n = 40)	22.5%	10.0%	35.0%	10.0%	22.5%

**Thank you for completing the parent survey! Your opinion matters!**

## Revisión de Educación Especial MCPS Encuesta Para los Padres

**Ingrese su código de acceso para la encuesta (ver “Instrucciones para la encuesta en línea para padres”): \_\_\_\_\_**

Si usted quiere continuar en español, haga clic en el botón en español

Bienvenidos a la Encuesta de Educación Especial de Padres que está siendo llevada a cabo por WestEd. Debe tomar de 15 a 20 minutos para completarla.

Sus respuestas serán confidenciales. Usted no será identificado en ningún informe.

Usted no está obligado a responder a cualquier pregunta que usted perciba que es una violación a su privacidad o la que usted no quiera contestar por cualquier razón.

En páginas con muchos artículos, usted tendrá que desplazarse por la página para ver los artículos restantes.

Usted debe responder a todos los elementos para continuar con la siguiente página. Puede regresar a cualquier página en cualquier momento. Utilice las teclas de flecha en la parte inferior de la página para continuar a la siguiente página o volver a la página anterior.

Puede iniciar la encuesta y regresar posteriormente para completarla.

### Antecedentes

1. Asistí a una reunión de IEP para mi hijo entre el 15 de Diciembre de 2014 y el 13 de Marzo de 2015, en persona, por teléfono o vía electrónica: ☐ Sí  
☐ No (pasar al punto 37)
2. La reunión fue:  
☐ Una reunión inicial de IEP (ir a la opción 3)  
☐ Una revisión anual/periódica (pasar al punto 24)

### Elegibilidad y Desarrollo IEP Inicial

Por favor responda a los siguientes elementos con respecto a la reunión del Programa de Educación Individualizado (IEP) que tuvo lugar entre el 15 de diciembre de 2014 y el 13 de marzo de 2015, y por el estudiante cuyo nombre aparece en el folleto denominado “Instrucciones para la encuesta en línea”.

<b>Elegibilidad y Desarrollo IEP Inicial</b>	<b>Muy en desacuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>En desacuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>De acuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>Muy de acuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>No sé / No aplica (✓)</b>
3. La escuela de mi hijo me informó sobre el proceso para determinar si mi hijo necesita servicios de educación especial.					
4. Antes de que mi hijo fuera referido a educación especial, la escuela intentó varios enfoques para ayudar que mi hijo fuera exitoso.					
5. Antes de la reunión de elegibilidad, recibí de la escuela los documentos que el equipo planeaba revisar con al menos 5 días de antelación antes de la					
6. Toda la información que no entendía fue explicada en la reunión					
7. Después de la explicación, entendí la información.					
8. Antes de la reunión de elegibilidad, se me informó sobre la(s) sospecha(s) de discapacidad(es) de mi hijo.					
9. Mi hijo fue evaluado por MCPS en todas las áreas con respecto a la(s) discapacidad(es) sospechada(s).					
10. Antes de la reunión de elegibilidad, completé la Entrevista de Selección para Padres / Formulario de preguntas.					
11. Durante la reunión de elegibilidad, los otros miembros del equipo IEP tomaron en cuenta mis opiniones.					
12. Durante la reunión IEP inicial, sentí comodidad al expresar mi opinión.					
13. la reunión IEP inicial, los demás miembros tomaron en cuenta mi opinión.					
14. Durante la reunión IEP, otros miembros IEP me preguntaron si estaba de acuerdo con las decisiones.					
15. Todos los servicios y el alojamiento que mi hijo necesita para recibir una educación pública gratuita (FAPE) fueron escritos en el IEP de mi hijo.					

<b>Elegibilidad y Desarrollo IEP Inicial</b>	<b>Muy en desacuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>En desacuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>De acuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>Muy de acuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>No sé / No aplica (✓)</b>
16. Entiendo el nivel de servicios y alojamiento que se requiere que tenga la escuela para mi hijo basado en una educación pública, gratuita y apropiada (FAPE).					
17. Recibí información sobre las diferentes opciones de ubicación donde se pueden ofrecer los servicios de educación especial que mi hijo necesita.					
18. El IEP que recibí después de la reunión contenía los mismos servicios y el alojamiento que se acordó en la reunión IEP.					
19. Estaba involucrado/a o sabía sobre los cambios efectuados al IEP de mi hijo después de la reunión IEP.					
20. Opino que se efectuaron decisiones sobre el IEP de mi hijo sin consultárseme, antes de la reunión IEP.					
21. Conozco sobre las diferentes oficinas distritales donde puedo tener apoyo con la educación de mi hijo.					
22. En general, me sentí como un compañero equivalente en el equipo IEP al hacer decisiones sobre el IEP de mi hijo.					
23. Tuve que involucrar un defensor o un abogado para ayudarme en la reunión IEP.					

Si usted completó los ítems del 3 al 23, pase al numeral 37.

### **Reunión de Revisión Anual o Periódica IEP**

Por favor responda a los siguientes ítems con referencia a la reunión del Programa Educacional Individualizado (IEP) que tuvo lugar entre el 15 de diciembre de 2014 y el 13 de marzo de 2015 para el estudiante cuyo nombre aparece en el volante rotulado “Instrucciones de la Encuesta en Línea”

<b>Reunión de Revisión Anual o Periódica IEP</b>	<b>Muy en desacuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>En desacuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>De acuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>Muy de acuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>No sé / No aplica (✓)</b>
24. Antes de la reunión IEP, recibí de la escuela los documentos que el equipo planeaba revisar al menos 5 días antes de la reunión.					
25. Cualquier información que no entendía fue explicada en esta reunión.					
26. Después de la explicación, comprendí la información.					
27. Durante la reunión IEP, me sentí cómodo/a expresando mi opinión.					
28. Durante la reunión IEP, los otros miembros del equipo IEP tomaron en cuenta mi opinión.					
29. Durante la reunión IEP, otros miembros IEP me preguntaron si estaba de acuerdo con las decisiones.					
30. Todos los servicios y el alojamiento que necesitaba mi hijo para recibir educación pública apropiada (FAPE) estaba descrito en el IEP de mi hijo.					
31. Entiendo el nivel de servicios y alojamiento que se requiere que tenga la escuela para mi hijo basado en una educación pública, gratuita y apropiada (FAPE).					
32. El IEP que recibí después de la reunión contenía los mismos servicios y el alojamiento que se acordó en la reunión IEP.					
33. Opino que se efectuaron decisiones sobre el IEP de mi hijo sin consultárseme, antes de la reunión IEP.					
34. Conozco sobre las diferentes oficinas distritales donde puedo tener apoyo con la educación de mi hijo.					
35. En general, me sentí como un compañero equivalente en el equipo IEP al hacer decisiones sobre el IEP de mi hijo.					
36. Tuve que involucrar un defensor o un abogado para ayudarme en la reunión IEP.					



## Implementación del IEP

Por favor responda a las siguientes cuestiones en base a su percepción actual del año escolar actual.

Implementación del IEP	Muy en desacuerdo (✓)	En desacuerdo (✓)	De acuerdo (✓)	Muy de acuerdo (✓)	No sé / No aplica (✓)
37. El personal a cargo del IEP han explicado de forma consistente la variedad de opciones de servicio disponibles para estudiantes con discapacidades.					
38. El personal a cargo del IEP han identificado opciones de servicios que son apropiadas para mi hijo de forma consistente.					
39. A mi hijo se le enseña el currículo de educación general al nivel máximo apropiado basado en las necesidades y objetivos de mi hijo.					
40. La escuela de mi hijo me envía información para mostrar de que mi hijo está recibiendo todos los servicios específicos en el IEP de mi hijo.					
41. En general, los profesores de educación general de mi hijo son conocedores de la discapacidad de mi hijo.					
42. Los objetivos del IEP de mi hijo son medibles.					
43. Los objetivos del IEP de mi hijo son retadores.					
44. Recibo actualizaciones constantes, al menos trimestral, sobre el progreso de mi hijo con respecto a los objetivos y metas de su IEP.					
45. Las actualizaciones me ayudan a entender el progreso de mi hijo en sus metas de su IEP.					
46. El equipo de IEP desarrolla nuevos objetivos para mi hijo una vez que las metas definidas han sido alcanzadas.					

## Disputas en el IEP

Por favor responda a las siguientes cuestiones en base a su percepción actual del año escolar actual.

<b>Derechos de los Padres y Asistencia</b>	<b>Muy en desacuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>En desacuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>De acuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>Muy de acuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>No sé / No aplica (✓)</b>
47. Soy conocedor/a de mis derechos como padre/madre de un estudiante con discapacidad.					
48. Cuando tuve un desacuerdo sobre el IEP de mi hijo, el personal distrital me asistido a resolver esas diferencias.					

49. He solicitado la mediación relacionada con el IEP o los servicios de educación especial para el estudiante cuyo nombre aparece en las instrucciones de la encuesta.

\_\_\_ Sí (IR al ítem 50)

\_\_\_ No (PASAR al ítem 55)

<b>Mediación</b>	<b>Muy en desacuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>En desacuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>De acuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>Muy de acuerdo (✓)</b>	<b>No sé / No aplica (✓)</b>
50. Durante el proceso de medicación, MCPS tomó mi queja seriamente.					
51. El proceso de mediación fue conducido lo eficientemente posible.					
52. El proceso de mediación para resolver mi disputa fue una colaboración genuina entre los representantes distritales y yo.					
53. Como resultado del proceso de medicación, a mi hijo se le proveyó educación gratuita, apropiada y pública (FAPE).					
54. Estoy satisfecho/a con el resultado del proceso de mediación.					

55. He solicitado un proceso debido relacionado con el IEP o los servicios de educación especial para el estudiante cuyo nombre aparece en las instrucciones de la encuesta.

\_\_\_ Sí (IR al ítem 55)

\_\_\_ No (PASAR al final de la encuesta)

Proceso Debido	Muy en desacuerdo (✓)	En desacuerdo (✓)	De acuerdo (✓)	Muy de acuerdo (✓)	No sé / No aplica (✓)
56. Durante el proceso debido, MCPS tomó mi queja seriamente.					
57. Mientras me preparaba para la audiencia del proceso debido, yo (o mi representante) tuve acceso a toda la información necesaria para presentar mi parte de la disputa al oficial de audiencia.					
58. La audiencia del proceso debido fue conducida lo eficientemente posible.					
59. El personal de MCPS fue respetuoso a mi hijo antes, después y durante la audiencia.					
60. Como resultado de la audiencia del proceso, a mi hijo se le proveyó una educación gratuita, apropiada y pública (FAPE).					
61. El resultado de la audiencia del proceso fue satisfactorio.					

**¡Gracias por completar su encuesta de padres! ¡Su opinión es muy importante!**

## MCPS Special Education Review Student Survey

**Enter your Survey Access Code (see “Instructions for Parent and Student Online Survey”): \_\_\_\_\_**

Welcome to the Special Education Parent Survey being conducted by WestEd. It should take you 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Your responses will be kept confidential. You will not be identified in any report.

You are not required to answer any questions that you believe are an infringement upon your privacy or that you do not care to answer for any reason.

### Background

1. I attended my IEP meeting between December 15, 2014 and March 13, 2015 in person, by telephone, or electronically. 72.3% Yes  
27.7% No (SKIP to Item 9)

### IEP Meeting

Please respond to the following items with reference to your most recent IEP meeting.

IEP Meeting	Strongly Disagree (✓)	Disagree (✓)	Agree (✓)	Strongly Agree (✓)	Do Not Know/ Not Applicable
2. I am invited to attend my Individual Educational Program (IEP) meetings. (n = 34)	0.0%	0.0%	23.5%	76.5%	0.0%
3. I usually attend my IEP meetings. (n = 34)	0.0%	11.8%	29.4%	58.8%	0.0%
4. During the IEP meeting, the IEP staff team members asked for my input. (n = 34)	0.0%	0.0%	44.1%	55.9%	0.0%
5. During the IEP meeting, staff member on the team considered my input. (n = 34)	0.0%	2.9%	44.1%	50.0%	2.9%
6. During the IEP meeting, staff members on the team <u>explained</u> the services and accommodations that are on my IEP to me. (n = 34)	0.0%	2.9%	29.4%	64.7%	2.9%
7. I understand the services and accommodations that are on my IEP. (n = 34)	0.0%	5.9%	44.1%	44.1%	5.9%
8. I feel like I have a voice in making decisions about my IEP at the meeting. (n = 33)	0.0%	3.0%	42.4%	51.5%	3.0%

## IEP Implementation

Please respond to the following items based on your current perceptions of the current school year.

IEP Implementation	Strongly Disagree (✓)	Disagree (✓)	Agree (✓)	Strongly Agree (✓)	Do Not Know/ Not Applicable
9. I contributed to the development of my IEP goals. (n = 45)	4.4%	8.9%	51.1%	28.9%	6.7%
10. My IEP goals are challenging. (n = 47)	0.0%	19.1%	51.1%	17.0%	12.8%
11. My IEP describes how progress toward my goals will be measured. (n = 46)	0.0%	4.3%	47.8%	28.3%	19.6%
12. I receive regular updates, at least quarterly, on my progress on IEP goals and objectives. (n = 47)	6.4%	21.3%	36.2%	25.5%	10.6%
13. I am making progress on the goals and objectives on my IEP. (n = 46)	0.0%	2.2%	63.0%	26.1%	8.7%
14. The staff on the IEP team develops new goals for me once the current goals have been met. (n = 47)	0.0%	6.4%	44.7%	21.3%	27.7%
15. If my goals are not met, the staff members on the IEP team explain why. (n = 45)	4.4%	13.3%	42.2%	15.6%	24.4%
16. If I didn't meet a goal, staff members on the IEP team make changes to my IEP. (n = 45)	2.2%	20.0%	28.9%	15.6%	33.3%
17. All of my teachers understand my strengths. (n = 46)	2.2%	19.6%	45.7%	23.9%	8.7%
18. All of my teachers have high expectations for my achievement. (n = 46)	0.0%	8.7%	54.3%	34.8%	2.2%
19. My special education teachers are knowledgeable about my disability. (n = 44)	4.5%	6.8%	43.2%	38.6%	6.8%
20. My special education service provider(s) is(are) knowledgeable about my disability. (n = 45)	0.0%	6.7%	48.9%	31.1%	13.3%
21. My regular subject teachers are knowledgeable about my disability. (n = 46)	4.3%	23.9%	34.8%	21.7%	15.2%

**Thank you for completing the survey! Your opinion matters!**

## MCPS Special Education Review School Administrator Survey

Welcome to the Special Education Review School Administrator Survey.

WestEd needs your opinion to help us understand MCPS special education processes and practices. It should take you approximately 15 minutes to complete this survey.

This survey is part of a review of MCPS special education processes and practices. The Board of Education has contracted with WestEd an independent research company. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

Your responses will be kept confidential. You will not be identified in any report. The results will help us to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

You are not required to answer any questions that you believe are an infringement upon your privacy or that you do not care to answer for any reason.

Please begin by providing some background information.

1. I am a 54.8% Principal 45.2% Assistant Principal (n = 228)
2. I have been at my current school for
  - a. New this year: 4.5%
  - b. 1 – 3 years: 32.5%
  - c. 4 – 5 years: 12.3%
  - d. More than 5 ears: 40.8% (n = 228)
3. I have been an administrator in MCPS for
  - a. New this year: 1.3%
  - b. 1 – 3 years: 13.2%
  - c. 4 – 5 years: 12.3%
  - d. More than 5 years: 71.5% (n = 228)
4. My current school is a(n)
  - a. Elementary school: 64.0%
  - b. Middle school: 18.4%
  - c. High school: 15.4%
  - d. Special school: 2.2% (n = 228)

5. Students with disabilities are enrolled in my school. 100.0% Yes 0.0% No (n = 228)

### IEP Development

Please respond to the following items based on your perceptions of your school for the current school year.

IEP Development	Strongly Disagree (✓)	Disagree (✓)	Agree (✓)	Strongly Agree (✓)	Do Not Know/ Not Applicable
6. My school provides a variety of supports to try to assist struggling students prior to a referral for special education services. (n = 228)	2.6%	1.3%	20.6%	74.1%	1.3%
7. I feel that there are not enough school psychologists to keep up with the need to test all students with a suspected disability. (n = 228)	4.4%	24.1%	37.1%	30.7%	3.1%
8. Someone at my school ensures that parents understand the information they receive in preparation for an IEP meeting. (n = 227)	0.9%	4.8%	26.0%	67.0%	1.3%
9. At my school, during the IEP meetings, the IEP staff team members ask for parent input. (n = 228)	0.9%	0.9%	13.6%	82.9%	1.8%
10. At my school, during the IEP meetings, the IEP staff team members consider parent input. (n = 228)	0.9%	0.9%	16.2%	80.3%	1.8%
11. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP team asks the parent if they agreed with the decisions. (n = 228)	0.9%	0.0%	21.5%	76.3%	1.3%
12. At my school, parents feel comfortable expressing their opinions. (n = 228)	0.9%	2.2%	37.7%	57.5%	1.8%
13. At my school, staff on the IEP teams feel comfortable expressing their opinions. (n = 227)	0.9%	1.8%	36.6%	59.5%	1.3%
14. Professional development is available to help IEP team members collaborate with parents. (n = 228)	4.4%	36.0%	34.6%	17.5%	34.6%
15. At my school, students who attend feel comfortable expressing their opinions. (n = 228)	0.0%	2.6%	32.0%	25.4%	39.9%
16. At my school, staff on the IEP team asks for student input. (n = 228)	1.3%	18.4%	28.1%	17.5%	34.6%
17. At my school, staff on the IEP team considers student input. (n = 228)	1.3%	16.2%	31.6%	18.9%	32.0%

<b>IEP Development</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know/ Not Applicable</b>
18. At my school the IEP teams work to understand the culture of parents from different countries. (n = 228)	1.3%	8.3%	47.8%	39.0%	3.5%
19. At my school, IEP decisions are made about students in a separate meeting, without parent input, prior to meeting with the parent. (n = 228)	44.7%	43.9%	7.0%	2.6%	1.8%
20. Financial considerations impact the provision of a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with disabilities at my school. (n = 228)	0.4%	0.9%	15.4%	80.7%	2.6%
21. The IEP that parents at my school receive after the meeting contains the same services and accommodations that were agreed upon in the IEP meeting. (n = 228)	0.4%	3.9%	28.9%	64.5%	2.2%
22. Overall, at my school parents are treated like an equal partner in the IEP team in making decisions about their child's IEP. (n = 228)	3.5%	10.1%	35.5%	42.1%	8.8%
23. My special education cluster supervisor provides valuable assistance at IEP meetings which he/she attends. (n = 227)	38.8%	26.4%	11.9%	5.7%	17.2%

## IEP Implementation

Please respond to the following items based on your perceptions of your school for the current school year.

<b>IEP Implementation</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know/ Not Applicable</b>
24. At my school, the IEP team staff members have consistently explained to parents the variety of service options available for students with disabilities. (n = 227)	0.0%	4.8%	31.3%	62.1%	1.8%
25. At my school, the IEP team staff members have consistently identified appropriate service options for students with disabilities. (n = 227)	0.0%	2.2%	31.3%	64.3%	2.2%



<b>IEP Implementation</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know/ Not Applicable</b>
26. Students with disabilities in my school are taught the general education curriculum to the maximum extent appropriate based on their needs and goals. (n = 227)	0.4%	2.6%	20.7%	75.8%	0.4%
27. Overall, general education teachers in my school are knowledgeable about the disabilities of students they teach. (n = 227)	1.3%	9.3%	50.2%	34.8%	4.4%
28. In my school, general education and special education teachers collaborate to plan instruction for students with disabilities. (n = 227)	1.3%	11.0%	41.0%	42.3%	4.4%
29. At my school, paraeducators spend most of their time supporting students with special needs. (n = 227)	2.2%	18.1%	33.9%	45.4%	0.4%
30. At my school, parents receive updates to show that their child is receiving all the services specified in their child's IEP. (n = 227)	0.4%	6.6%	40.5%	46.7%	5.7%
31. At my school, parents receive regular updates, at least quarterly, on their child's progress on IEP goals and objectives. (n = 227)	0.0%	5.3%	32.2%	59.5%	3.1%
32. Progress reports from my school help parents understand their student's progress on their IEP goals. (n = 227)	0.4%	7.0%	39.2%	46.7%	6.6%
33. At my school, teachers use student progress on IEP goals to modify the goals. (n = 226)	0.9%	8.4%	39.8%	45.1%	5.8%
34. In my school teachers understand the requirements of IDEA. (n = 227)	2.2%	15.9%	48.9%	29.1%	4.0%
35. All teachers in my school have high achievement expectations for all students. (n = 226)	0.9%	15.9%	46.0%	35.0%	2.2%
36. The district provides strong support for educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. (n = 227)	5.3%	22.0%	43.6%	27.8%	1.3%

**Thank you! Your opinion matters!**

## MCPS Special Education Review Related Service Provider Survey

Welcome to the Special Education Review Related Service Provider Survey.

WestEd needs your opinion to help us understand MCPS special education processes and practices. It should take you approximately 15 minutes to complete this survey.

This survey is part of a review of MCPS special education processes and practices. The Board of Education has contracted with WestEd an independent research company. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

Your responses will be kept confidential. You will not be identified in any report. The results will help us to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

You are not required to answer any questions that you believe are an infringement upon your privacy or that you do not care to answer for any reason.

Please begin by providing some background information.

1. I am a  
0.0% Psychologist      0.0% Counselor      62.5%  
 Speech/Language Pathologist  
16.3% Physical Therapist    21.3% Occupational Therapist (n = 80)
2. I work for MCPS    75.0% Full-time      25.0% Part-time (n = 80)
3. I have been at my current school(s) for (an average of) (n = 80)
  - a. New this year: 12.5%
  - b. 1 – 3 years: 21.3%
  - c. 4 – 5 years: 11.3%
  - d. More than 5 years: 55.0%
4. I have been a related service provider in MCPS for
  - a. New this year: 7.5%
  - b. 1 – 3 years: 12.5%
  - c. 4 – 5 years: 10.0%
  - d. More than 5 years: 70.0% (n = 80)

5. Based on my current assignment(s), I provide services for students with disabilities in the following number of schools at each level: (n = 80)

School Type	# Schools
Elementary	51
Middle	40
High	19
Special	20

### IEP Development

Please respond to the following items based on your perceptions of the IEP meetings you have attended in the school(s) where you have been providing services during the current school year.

IEP Development	Strongly Disagree (✓)	Disagree (✓)	Agree (✓)	Strongly Agree (✓)	Do Not Know/ Not Applicable
6. In IEP meetings I attend, a staff member ensures that the parent understands any information which they did not initially understand.	0.0%	3.8%	35.0%	58.8%	2.5%
7. In IEP meetings that I attend, parents feel comfortable expressing their opinions.	0.0%	2.5%	52.5%	40.0%	5.0%
8. In IEP meetings I feel comfortable expressing my opinions.	2.5%	7.5%	46.3%	41.3%	2.5%
9. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP team asks for parent input.	0.0%	1.3%	25.0%	71.3%	2.5%
10. Professional development is available to help IEP team members collaborate with parents.	7.5%	30.0%	18.8%	18.8%	25.0%
11. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP teams tries to understand the culture of parents from different countries.	1.3%	15.0%	42.5%	33.8%	7.5%
12. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP team considers parent input.	0.0%	2.5%	37.5%	56.3%	3.8%
13. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP team asks the parent if they agreed with the decisions.	1.3%	2.5%	40.0%	53.8%	2.5%
14. In IEP meetings that I attend, students who attend feel comfortable expressing their opinions.	0.0%	1.3%	13.8%	13.8%	71.3%

IEP Development	Strongly Disagree (✓)	Disagree (✓)	Agree (✓)	Strongly Agree (✓)	Do Not Know/ Not Applicable
15. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP team asks for student input.	2.5%	5.0%	12.5%	10.0%	70.0%
16. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP team considers student input.	2.5%	1.3%	15.0%	11.3%	70.0%
17. In IEP meetings I attend, all of the services and accommodations a child needs to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) were written into the child's IEP.	0.0%	1.3%	32.5%	60.0%	6.3%
18. In IEP meetings I attend, parents understand the level of services and accommodations that the school is required to provide for their child based on a free appropriate public education (FAPE).	1.3%	16.3%	56.3%	21.3%	5.0%
19. In IEP meetings I attend, students understand their services and accommodations.	0.0%	10.0%	22.5%	7.5%	60.0%
20. At the school(s) where I provide services, the IEP that parents receive after the meeting contains the same services and accommodations that were agreed upon in the IEP meeting.	0.0%	0.0%	22.5%	63.8%	13.8%
21. At the school(s) where I provide services, IEP decisions are made about students in a separate meeting, without parent input, prior to meeting with the parent.	42.5%	30.0%	10.0%	2.5%	15.0%
22. At the school(s) where I provide services, the IEP teams make the decisions about special education services and accommodations, not the principal or any other single staff member.	2.5%	11.3%	31.3%	45.0%	10.0%
23. Overall, at the school(s) where I provide services parents are treated like an equal partner in the IEP team in making decisions about their child's IEP.	1.3%	11.3%	35.0%	46.3%	6.3%

Note: n = 80

## IEP Implementation

Please respond to the following items based on your perceptions of the school(s) where you have been providing services during the current school year.

IEP Implementation	Strongly Disagree ( <input type="checkbox"/> )	Disagree ( <input type="checkbox"/> )	Agree ( <input type="checkbox"/> )	Strongly Agree ( <input type="checkbox"/> )	Do Not Know/ Not Applicable
24. I send information to the parents of the students I serve to show that their child is receiving all the services specified in their child's IEP. (n = 75)	1.3%	8.0%	37.3%	33.3%	22.0%
25. I only provide information to parents about their child's services if they request it. (n = 75)	26.7%	44.0%	14.7%	1.3%	13.3%
26. Overall, general education teachers in the school(s) where I provide services are knowledgeable about their students' disabilities. (n = 75)	1.3%	20.0%	34.7%	22.7%	21.3%
27. Progress reports for the services I provide help parents understand their student's progress on their IEP goals. (n= 75)	1.3%	10.7%	46.7%	22.7%	18.3%
28. My caseload enables me to provide the services to the students as stated in their IEPs. (n = 75)	8.0%	24.0%	32.0%	21.3%	14.7%
29. Parents receive regular updates, at least quarterly, on their child's progress on IEP goals and objectives related to the services I provide. (n = 74)	0.0%	0.0%	28.4%	52.7%	18.9%
30. I adjust student IEP goals based on the progress reports. (n = 75)	0.0%	8.0%	38.7%	36.0%	17.3%
31. All teachers in the school(s) where I provide services have high achievement expectations for all students. (n = 75)	2.7%	12.0%	32.0%	37.3%	16.0%
32. In the schools where I provide services, administrators provide strong support for educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. (n = 75)	4.0%	10.7%	33.3%	37.3%	14.0%

**Thank you! Your opinion matters!**

## MCPS Special Education Review Paraeducator Survey

Welcome to the Special Education Review Paraeducator Survey.

WestEd needs your opinion to help us understand MCPS special education processes and practices. It should take you approximately 10 minutes to complete this survey.

This survey is part of a review of MCPS special education processes and practices. The Board of Education has contracted with WestEd an independent research company. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

Your responses will be kept confidential. You will not be identified in any report. The results will help us to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

You are not required to answer any questions that you believe are an infringement upon your privacy or that you do not care to answer for any reason.

Please begin by providing some background information.

1. I work as a paraeducator for MCPS      78.5% Full-time 21.5% Part-time (n = 520)
2. I have been at my current school(s) for (an average of)
  - a. New this year: 12.1%
  - b. 1 – 3 years: 24.4%
  - c. 4 – 5 years: 13.1%
  - d. More than 5 years: 50.4% (n = 520)
3. I have been a paraeducator in MCPS for
  - a. New this year: 5.6%
  - b. 1 – 3 years: 15.0%
  - c. 4 – 5 years: 11.7%
  - d. More than 5 years: 67.7% (n = 520)
4. Based on my current assignment(s), I provide services for students with disabilities in the following number of schools at each level: (n = 520)

School Type	# Schools
Elementary	15
Middle	60
High	27
Special	60

## IEP Implementation

Please respond to the following items based on your perceptions of the school(s) where you have been providing services during the current school year.

IEP Implementation	Strongly Disagree (✓)	Disagree (✓)	Agree (✓)	Strongly Agree (✓)	Do Not Know/ Not Applicable
5. I only work with students with disabilities. (n = 516)	20.0%	33.5%	13.4%	31.0%	2.1%
6. I work with students with disabilities as well as students who need additional support. (n = 519)	13.7%	9.8%	24.1%	46.8%	5.6%
7. I work with students primarily in a separate classroom setting. (n = 517)	22.1%	30.4%	16.2%	24.2%	7.2%
8. I work with students primarily in a regular classroom setting. (n = 516)	15.3%	14.3%	29.8%	32.4%	8.1%
9. The general education teachers with whom I work understand the IEPs of their students with disabilities. (n = 518)	4.2%	12.7%	34.6%	31.3%	17.2%
10. I understand the IEPs of the students with disabilities with whom I work. (n = 518)	3.3%	7.9%	34.2%	51.4%	3.3%
11. I collaborate with the general education teachers to plan instruction. (n = 518)	18.9%	25.5%	21.4%	17.6%	16.6%
12. I discuss student progress with the general education teachers. (n = 519)	8.3%	12.3%	37.6%	25.4%	16.4%
13. I collaborate with the special education teachers to plan instruction. (n = 520)	15.0%	25.2%	30.8%	23.5%	5.6%
14. I discuss student progress with the special education teachers. (n = 519)	6.6%	11.0%	41.0%	38.7%	2.7%
15. have high achievement expectations for all the students with whom I work. (n = 520)	3.1%	3.5%	29.8%	62.5%	1.2%
16. All teachers in my school(s) have high achievement expectations for all students. (n = 518)	4.8%	15.8%	40.9%	33.2%	5.2%

**Thank you! Your opinion matters!**

## MCPS Special Education Review Teacher Survey

Welcome to the Special Education Review Teacher Survey.

WestEd needs your opinion to help us understand MCPS special education processes and practices. It should take you approximately 15 minutes to complete this survey.

This survey is part of a review of MCPS special education processes and practices. The Board of Education has contracted with WestEd an independent research company. The goal of our study is to better understand the experiences of students and their families related to IEP development, implementation, and dispute resolution.

Your responses will be kept confidential. You will not be identified in any report. The results will help us to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

You are not required to answer any questions that you believe are an infringement upon your privacy or that you do not care to answer for any reason.

Please begin by providing some background information.

1. I am a 56.8% General/Regular education teacher 41.0% Special education teacher  
2.2% Secondary special education resource teacher (RTSE) (n = 785)
2. I have been at my current school for
  - a. New this year: 13.0%
  - b. 1 – 3 years: 22.1%
  - c. 4 – 5 years: 13.4%
  - d. More than 5 years: 51.5% (n = 786)
3. I have been a teacher in MCPS for
  - a. New this year: 8.3%
  - b. 1 – 3 years: 14.6%
  - c. 4 – 5 years: 7.9%
  - d. More than 5 years: 69.3% (n = 787)
4. My current school is a
  - a. Elementary school: 45.0%
  - b. Middle school: 23.8%
  - c. High school: 29.0%
  - d. Special school: 2.2% (n = 786)
5. I teach one or more students with disabilities. 94.6% Yes 5.4% No (n = 832)



## IEP Development

Please respond to the following items based on your perceptions of the IEP meetings you have attended in your current school.

IEP Development	Strongly Disagree (✓)	Disagree (✓)	Agree (✓)	Strongly Agree (✓)	Do Not Know / Not Applicable (✓)
6. My school provides a range of supports to help students succeed prior to a referral for special education services. (n = 786)	2.3%	11.3%	43.3%	38.3%	4.8%
7. Parents at my school receive the documents the team planned to review at the IEP meeting at least 5 business days before the meeting. (n = 786)	1.3%	3.1%	24.8%	55.6%	15.3%
8. In IEP meetings I attend, a staff member ensures that the parent understands any information which they did not initially understand. (n = 786)	1.3%	2.4%	27.4%	64.8%	4.3%
9. In IEP meetings that I attend, parents feel comfortable expressing their opinions. (n = 787)	0.9%	3.8%	31.6%	57.8%	5.8%
10. In IEP meetings I feel comfortable expressing my opinions. (n = 787)	2.5%	9.0%	37.1%	48.4%	2.9%
11. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP team asks for parent input. (n = 786)	0.8%	2.5%	30.0%	63.6%	3.1%
12. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP teams tries to understand the culture of parents from different countries. (n = 786)	2.0%	6.2%	34.6%	48.6%	8.5%
13. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP team considers parent input. (n = 785)	0.8%	2.3%	33.5%	59.0%	4.5%
14. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP team asks the parent if they agreed with the decisions. (n = 785)	1.1%	4.2%	30.6%	58.9%	5.2%
15. Professional development is available to help IEP team members collaborate with parents. (n = 783)	12.6%	32.6%	16.9%	13.7%	24.3%
16. In IEP meetings that I attend, students who attend feel comfortable expressing their opinions. (n = 785)	1.3%	5.0%	26.1%	20.0%	47.6%
17. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP team asks for student input. (n = 784)	3.8%	8.3%	20.2%	26.9%	40.8%
18. In IEP meetings I attend, staff on the IEP team considers student input. (n = 785)	3.1%	7.8%	21.0%	26.8%	41.4%

<b>IEP Development</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know / Not Applicable (✓)</b>
19. In IEP meetings I attend, all of the services and accommodations a child needs to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) were written into the child's IEP. (n = 785)	1.7%	3.8%	26.6%	57.1%	10.8%
20. In IEP meetings I attend, parents understand the level of services and accommodations that the school is required to provide for their child based on a free appropriate public education (FAPE). (n = 785)	1.8%	10.2%	40.8%	34.4%	12.9%
21. In IEP meetings I attend, students understand their services and accommodations. (n = 785)	1.3%	9.9%	32.2%	24.7%	31.8%
22. The IEP that parents at my school receive after the meeting contains the same services and accommodations that were agreed upon in the IEP meeting. (n = 784)	1.0%	1.5%	24.0%	61.4%	12.1%
23. At my school, IEP decisions are made about students in a separate meeting, without parent input, prior to meeting with the parent. (n = 781)	39.2%	27.9%	10.9%	7.2%	14.9%
24. At my school, the IEP teams make the decisions about special education services, not the principal or any other single staff member. (n = 785)	5.0%	8.9%	30.4%	46.0%	9.7%
25. Overall, at my school parents are treated like an equal partner in the IEP team in making decisions about their child's IEP. (n = 785)	1.3%	7.5%	37.2%	47.5%	6.5%

## IEP Implementation

Please respond to the following items based on your experiences in your school during the current school year.

<b>IEP Implementation</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Disagree (✓)</b>	<b>Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (✓)</b>	<b>Do Not Know / Not Applicable (✓)</b>
26. At my school, the IEP team staff members consistently explain to parents the variety of service options available for students with disabilities. (n = 748)	1.9%	10.2%	40.2%	39.4%	8.3%
27. At my school, the IEP team staff members consistently identify appropriate service	1.3%	8.0%	39.5%	45.9%	5.2%

IEP Implementation	Strongly Disagree (✓)	Disagree (✓)	Agree (✓)	Strongly Agree (✓)	Do Not Know / Not Applicable (✓)
options for students with disabilities. (n = 747)					
28. Students with disabilities in my school are taught the general education curriculum to the maximum extent appropriate based on their needs and goals. (n = 748)	1.2%	3.6%	30.1%	63.1%	2.0%
29. I am knowledgeable about the IEPs of the students with disabilities whom I teach. (n = 749)	1.6%	4.0%	30.2%	63.4%	0.8%
30. I collaborate with my co-teacher(s) to plan instruction for students with disabilities. (n = 747)	6.3%	12.9%	27.3%	34.3%	19.3%
31. I discuss the progress of students with disabilities with my co-teacher(s). (n = 747)	4.1%	6.2%	27.3%	45.1%	17.3%
32. The paraeducator(s) I work with understand their students' disabilities. (n = 747)	4.7%	10.7%	37.9%	33.2%	13.5%
33. The paraeducator(s) I work with and I collaborate to plan instruction. (n = 747)	11.5%	26.4%	27.2%	20.2%	14.7%
34. The paraeducator(s) I work with and I discuss student progress. (n = 749)	6.1%	10.4%	38.9%	31.1%	13.5%
35. I send information to the parents of my students with disabilities to show that their child is receiving the services specified in their child's IEP for which I am responsible. (n = 745)	5.6%	18.7%	32.3%	35.4%	7.9%
36. Parents receive regular updates, at least quarterly, on their child's progress on IEP goals and objectives. (n = 750)	2.0%	2.3%	27.5%	58.7%	9.6%
37. Progress reports from my school help parents understand their student's progress on their IEP goals. (n = 749)	3.2%	8.0%	36.0%	39.1%	13.6
38. I use student progress on IEP goals to modify the goals. (n = 748)	3.6%	11.8%	40.8%	34.8%	9.1
39. At my school, teachers understand the requirements of IDEA. (n = 750)	5.7%	19.3%	37.5%	22.3%	15.2
40. I have high achievement expectations for all of my students. (n = 750)	0.5%	0.4%	18.1%	80.3%	0.7
41. In my school, administrators provide strong support for educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. (n = 749)	6.7%	13.9%	36.2%	40.7%	2.5%

**Thank you! Your opinion matters!**

# Appendix E: Financial, Pupil Count, And Staffing Analysis

# Montgomery County Public School

## Financial, Pupil Count, and Staffing Analysis

### Program Expenses

Spending to provide special education services in the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) for fiscal year (FY) 2016 is estimated to be \$346.8 million, an increase of more than 13.2 percent since FY 2013. Table 1 provides a breakdown of program expense changes over time and by type.

**Table 1: Special Education and Students Services Program Expense Change over Time**  
FY 2013 Actual, FY 2014 Actual, FY 2015 Current, and FY 2016 Approved

Object of Expense	FY 2013	FY 2014	% change over prior year	FY 2015 current.	% change over prior year	FY 2016 approved	% change over prior year
Salaries and Wages	\$256,600,788	\$263,427,041	2.7%	\$281,559,966	6.9%	\$290,058,679	3.0%
Contractual Services	\$2,713,400	\$2,882,577	6.2%	\$2,767,654	-4.0%	\$3,342,964	20.8%
Supplies and Materials	\$2,358,003	\$2,049,814	-13.1%	\$2,424,506	18.3%	\$2,221,738	-8.4%
Other	\$44,252,444	\$51,171,742	15.6%	\$49,266,892	-3.7%	\$50,919,494	3.3%
Equipment	\$319,870	\$621,872	94.4%	\$331,171	-46.7%	\$285,595	-13.8%
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$306,244,505</b>	<b>\$320,153,046</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>\$336,350,189</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>\$346,828,470</b>	<b>3.1%</b>

Source: Agency provided data, Special Education and Student Services Program Expenditures, FY 2013 Actual, FY 2014 Actual, FY 2015 current, FY 2016 Approved Operating Budget

Table 2 reflects the percentage of program expenditures by object. As is the case with most programs operated within a school district, compensation for staff accounts for the vast majority of expenses. Approximately 83.6 percent of the approved budget for FY 2016 is related to staff salaries and wages. When considering the growth in the cost of staff compensation, it is important to note that there are costs that increase naturally each year, e.g., annual increases for salary costs due to step/column and/or improvements included in collective bargaining agreements. The summary of negotiations included in the FY2016 Approved Operating Budget reflects that FY 2016 budgets include increases for general wage adjustments, 1.5 percent for FY 2014 and 2.0 percent for FY 2015 as well as increases for salary step and longevity. Additionally, the FY 2016 Approved Operating Budget includes staffing increases to accommodate projected enrollment growth for students with disabilities; therefore, it is not unexpected that staff compensation expenditures for FY 2016 are estimated at a higher level than the prior year.

The next largest expense area is other expenditures, which has increased by nearly 15 percent since FY 2013. This object includes expenses such as employee benefits, Non Public Schools (NPS), and travel accounts. Approximately 52 percent, or \$859,723 of the increase noted in FY 2016, is for increased costs for insurance and employee benefits. This is also not an unexpected increase as

employee benefits are generally linked to staff members' compensation and growth in positions and as noted above, MCPS has increased their costs in FY 2016. The Placement and Assessment Services Unit budget for other expenditures has an increase of \$835,849 in FY 2016, which is slightly more than a two percent increase compared to the prior year for this object of expenditure. These funds support students enrolled in nonpublic special education schools.

There is an increase of more than 20 percent in contractual services in FY 2016 compared to FY 2015. The FY 2016 budget for contractual services for Individuals with Disability Education Act and the Department of Student Services reflect 63.5 and 72.6 percent increases respectively. The increase is partially offset by a decrease of 100 percent of contractual services expenditures in the Infants, Toddlers, Prekindergarten and InterACT Programs.

The amount requested for supplies and materials has decreased by 8.4 percent in FY 2016 compared to FY 2015, and it appears to be based on a realignment of the FY 2016 budget to reflect actual expenditure levels. The equipment budget also is reduced when compared to prior year levels, however this is not unexpected as equipment purchases are generally one time expenditures and can vary based on actual student needs.

**Table 2: Percentage of Program Expenditures by Object FY 2013 Actual, FY 2014 Actual, FY 2015 Current, and FY 2016 Approved**

Object of Expense	FY 2013	% Of Expense	FY 2014	% Of Expense	FY 2015 current	% Of Expense	FY 2016 approved	% Of Expense
Salaries and Wages	\$256,600,788	83.8%	\$263,427,041	82.3%	\$281,559,966	83.7%	\$290,058,679	83.6%
Contractual Services	\$2,713,400	0.9%	\$2,882,577	0.9%	\$2,767,654	0.8%	\$3,342,964	1.0%
Supplies and Materials	\$2,358,003	0.8%	\$2,049,814	0.6%	\$2,424,506	0.7%	\$2,221,738	0.6%
Other	\$44,252,444	14.4%	\$51,171,742	16.0%	\$49,266,892	14.7%	\$50,919,494	14.7%
Equipment	\$319,870	0.1%	\$621,872	0.2%	\$331,171	0.1%	\$285,595	0.1%
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$306,244,505</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$320,153,046</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>\$336,350,189</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>\$346,828,470</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Agency provided data, Special Education and Student Services Program Expenditures, FY 2013 Actual, FY 2014 Actual, FY 2015 current and FY 2016 Approved-Operating Budget

Table 3 reflects projected expenditure changes by office/department/division/program for the FY 2016 approved budget compared to FY 2015 current year expenditures. Changes range from -17.0 percent for the Office of Special Education and Student Services to an increase of 6.1 percent for Special School and Centers. It is important to note that the 17 percent decrease in expenditures in the Office of Special Education and Student Services (OSESS) reflects a system level realignment rather than a reduction in positions, i.e., positions were moved from OSESS to other offices outside of OSESS.

**Table 3: Special Education and Student Services Program Expense Change by Office/Division/Department/Program FY 2015 current, FY 2016 Approved**

Department/Program	% change FY 2015 current -FY 2016 approved
Individuals with Disabilities Education	-5.6%
Division of Business, Fiscal and Information Systems	0.1%
Office of Special Education and Student Services	-17.0%
Department of Special Education Services	3.7%
Infant, Toddlers, Prek, InterACT	1.9%
Medical Assistance Program	4.5%
Placement and Assessment Services Unit	2.1%
Division of Prek and Related Services	4.5%
Special Schools and Centers	6.1%
School Based Services	5.9%
Department of Student Services	4.7%

Source: Agency provided data, Special Education and Student Services Program Expenditures, FY 2013 Actual, FY 2014 Actual, FY 2015 current and FY 2016 Approved Operating Budget

## Pupil Count Analysis

As shown in Table 4, the enrollment projections included in the FY 2016 Approved Operating Budget reflects that MCPS will continue to experience enrollment growth in the total student population in FY 2016, with a projected increase of 1.6 percent. Information available from the Maryland Special Education/Early Intervention Services Census Data and Related Tables reflects that MCPS cumulative total enrollment growth was 6.74 percent from FY 2011 to FY 2015. During the same period of time, the cumulative change in the number of students with disabilities ages 3-21 has increased by 2.56 percent. It is fairly common to find that the growth rate in the population of students with disabilities in school districts often exceeds the rate of growth of the overall student population, but this does not appear to be the case for MCPS.

**Table 4: Enrollment Comparison FY 2011 through FY 2015**

Year	Total Enrollment	SWD ages 3-21	% SWD	% Change in enrollment	% Change in SWD
FY 2011	144,023	17,307	12.02%		
FY 2012	146,459	17,444	11.91%	1.69%	0.79%
FY 2013	148,780	17,418	11.71%	1.58%	-0.15%
FY 2014	151,295	17,657	11.67%	1.69%	1.37%
FY 2015	154,434	17,761	11.50%	2.07%	0.59%
<b>Cumulative Change</b>				<b>6.74%</b>	<b>2.56%</b>

Source: State of Maryland Special Education/Early Intervention Census Data and Related Tables FY 2011 to FY 2015

Considering the incidence of disabilities by type over time is important for program planning purposes. Such an analysis can point to areas where MCPS may need to consider creating, expanding, or phasing out programs. Table 5 provides a breakdown of the incidence of disabilities by type and a comparison to the statewide percentages for FY 2015.

From FY 2011 to FY 2015, the MCPS data shows an overall decrease in incidence of disabilities, largely driven by reductions in students with a primary disability of Speech and Language Impairment and Specific Learning Disabled. However, during this same period, the incidence of Developmental Delay has increased by more than 54 percent. Additionally, the incidence of Autism has increased by 20 percent, from 1.14 percent to 1.37 percent of the total population. While a relatively small portion of the total population, students with a primary disability of Autism accounts for nearly 12 percent of the special education population, and a greater percentage of the program costs.

The incidence of disabilities by type for MCPS as compared to the statewide averages shows that MCPS's overall identification rate is below the statewide rate. The incidence of both Intellectual Disability and Emotional Disability are far below the statewide rates by approximately 35 and 40 percent, respectively. However, as noted above, MCPS's rate of Developmental Delay and Autism identification has increased significantly over time and both rates are above the statewide rates.

**Table 5: Incidence of Disabilities by Type FY 2011 and FY 2015 as a Percentage of Total Enrollment**

Age 3-21 Incidence of Disability by Type	Intellectual Disability	Speech and Language Impairment	Emotionally Disturbed	Other Health Impairment	Specific Learning Disabled	Autism	Developmental Delay	Other*	TOTAL
FY 2015 Statewide	0.61%	2.00%	0.74%	1.99%	3.50%	1.20%	0.99%	0.88%	<b>11.9%</b>
FY 2015 MCPS	0.40%	1.58%	0.44%	1.92%	3.44%	1.37%	1.85%	0.50%	<b>11.5%</b>
FY 2011 MCPS	0.45%	2.32%	0.46%	1.97%	3.92%	1.14%	1.20%	0.61%	<b>12.0%</b>

\* Includes Hearing Impaired, Deaf, Visual Impairment, Orthopedically Impaired, Deaf/Blind, Traumatic Brain Injury, Developmentally Delayed Extended IFSP and Multiple Disabilities

Source: State of Maryland Special Education/Early Intervention Census Data and Related Tables FY 2011 to FY 2015

## Staffing

As noted above, MCPS is continuing to experience growth in its total student population so it is not unexpected that the number of students with disabilities is also projected to increase. It is however important to note that while the rate of growth in the students with disabilities population is below that of the overall population, any type of enrollment growth will likely call for allocating additional resources. Approximately 58 additional positions are included in the FY 2016 Approved Budget to support Special Education and Student Services Program. The majority of changes is noted in the Division of Prekindergarten, Special Programs and Related Services and School Based Services and are distributed across a wide range of programs (see Table 6).



**Table 6: Staffing Changes for FY 2016 Approved Operating Budget-Special Education and Student Services Program**

Division/Department	Program	Staffing Changes		
		Type of Staff		
		Teacher FTE	Paraeducator Positions	Other
Division of Business, Fiscal and Information Systems				
Office of Special Education and Student Services				-4.0
Department of Special Education Services		-1.0	5.2	
Infant, Toddlers, Prekindergarten, InterACT and Individuals with Disabilities Education(IDEA)	Infant, Toddlers Prekindergarten, InterACT	-1.7	-5.2	-10.9
	IDEA	-7.3	-6.6	-4.5
Medical Assistance Program		1.0	-2.0	-0.6
Placement and Assessment Services Unit				
Division of Prekindergarten, Special Programs and Related Services	Bridge Program	1.1	1.3	
	Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services	0.8	-0.4	0.2
	Speech and language programs	2.3	6.1	12.9
	Visual Impairments	0.2		
	Physical Disability Services			0.2
	Transitions		-0.5	-0.5
	Emotional Disability Program-net	1.5	6.8	-1.0
	Autism Spectrum Services	4.2	4.4	-0.2
Special Schools and Centers		0.6		
School Based Services	School/Community –based programs	-49.13	-27.6	
	Elementary Learning Centers	5.5	6.1	0.5
	Gifted and Talented/LD Program	0.6	0.5	
	Extension	2.5	5.25	
	Resource Only	57.0	21.5	
	LRES	13.0	21.5	
	Learning and Academic Disabilities Model	5.7	6.9	4.5
Department of Student Services(DSS)	DSS			-1.4
	Bilingual			1.0
Total		33.0	33.3	-8.3

Source: Agency provided data, Special Education and Student Services Program Expenditures FY 2016 Approved-Operating Budget, Chapter 5

## Findings

MCPS's overarching budget development process provided on-going opportunities for stakeholders to offer input to inform the development of the FY16 Operating Budget. Additionally, MCPS Special Education and Student Services Division utilized a complementary set of budget guidelines, and budget development calendar that outlines the budget development process for the Division. The budget development process included the opportunity for stakeholders to participate and share their voice as members of the Special Education Staffing Planning Committee (Committee). The role of the Committee included providing input that identifies and prioritizes potential areas of staffing needed to help inform MCPS as they develop the Special Education and Student Services Division annual budget. Agency-wide staffing guidelines are in place for special education programs. Other criteria such as distribution of classes, the nature of disabilities served, delivery models and case management are considered as MCPS develops each fiscal year's staffing levels. Additionally, if staffing concerns occur during the school year, requests for additional staff or staffing reviews can be initiated by schools and a protocol is in place to review this type of request. Criteria for staff resources were included in the budget narrative information for the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2016 Operating Budget which supported increased transparency for stakeholders.

While it is not unexpected that the overall cost to run the Special Education and Student Services Program has increased over time due to the overall growth of MCPS, it is reassuring that the growth rate in the population of students with disabilities is below the rate of growth of the total student population. In addition to enrollment growth, there are other cost drivers that are likely to be contributing to increased program costs, including:

- Increases in salary, benefits, hourly staffing models, and other personnel costs at a rate exceeding revenue growth
- Growth in the number of higher-cost, low-incidence disabilities, such as autism
- Additional programs/classes, and services to accommodate enrollment growth and Strategic Priority Enhancements

CPS's percentage of incidence of disabilities reflected that from FY 2011 to FY 2015, the percentage of students with disabilities has decreased from 12 to 11.5 percent. However, it is important to note that while the percentage of identification has decreased, the overall number of students with disabilities has increased over time because MCPS's total student population has continued to grow. Most of the observed differences were found in the district's identification of students with Developmental Delay and Autism, which increased by 54 percent and more than 20 percent, respectively, while Speech and Language Impairment (SLI) decreased by 31 percent. There has been a change in how the state defines and applies the disability code for Developmental Delay that might be a factor in the changes in the identification rate experienced by MCPS.

MCPS does not appear to be experiencing the same trends in high growth disabilities compared to the statewide averages. The statewide high growth disabilities include Specific Learning Disabilities,

Emotional Disabilities, Multiple Disabilities, and Autism. While MCPS is experiencing high growth in the identification of Autism and a slight increase in Multiple Disabilities, it has experienced a decrease in both Specific Learning Disabled and Emotional Disabilities identification rates.

As a result of enrollment growth there are slightly more than 58 additional positions approved for FY2016 which include 33.0 FTE teacher positions, supported by an additional 33.3 FTE paraeducator positions to support student and programmatic needs. There is a reduction of 8.3 FTE of other support positions that include, but are not limited to, program specialist, psychologists, and speech and language therapists (SPL). The majority of changes are noted in the Division of Prekindergarten, Special Programs and Related Services and School Based Services and are distributed across a wide range of programs.

### Sources

- Montgomery County Public Schools, Superintendent's Recommended FY 2016 Budget, Chapter 5 and Approved FY 2016 Budget, Chapter 5
- Appendix E, 2016 Special Education Staffing Plan from the Superintendent's Approved FY 2016 Budget
- Montgomery County Public Schools FY 2015 Adopted Program Budget
- Maryland Special Education/Early Intervention Services Census Data and Related Tables, October 1, 2014, October 1, 2013, October 1, 2012, October 1, 2011 and October 1, 2010.



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