



Program Review Report for Ipswich Public Schools

Topic of Review: Programming for Students with Dyslexia

Submitted to: Dr. Beverly Hegedus, Director of Pupil Personnel Services
Ipswich Public Schools
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Executive Summary

Academic Discoveries, LLC was contracted to conduct a program review of the Ipswich Public Schools' programming for students diagnosed with dyslexia. The town of Ipswich supports its local school system and is a member of the Whittier Regional Vocational Technical School catchment area. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website, Ipswich Public Schools is a Title 1 District, offers school choice, provides inter-district school choice, and does not accept METCO students. The school system serves students from preschool to age 22, and has 1,594 students enrolled, 18% (approximately 307 students ages 6-21) receiving special education services; comparable to the Massachusetts' population of 18.7%. Approximately 88 students in the school system are diagnosed with dyslexia. This calculation is nearly 29% of the student population of those identified as special needs within the Ipswich Public Schools.

The program review focused on the process of identifying students with dyslexia, services provided to these students, and the outcomes of student performance. The program review was multidimensional, emphasized the participation of multiple stakeholders, and included data collection.

Components of the analysis included:

- A review of district documents relating to the focus of the review
- A review of statewide reporting
- Classroom observations
- Interviews from all related service providers, a sample of educators, administrators, parents, and students.
- Literature that supports the focus of the review

This review was undertaken by the request of Dr. Beverly Hegedus, Pupil Personnel Services Director, in order to provide the district with an unbiased perspective regarding the district's efforts to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to students diagnosed with dyslexia.

A critical element of this review was to determine how Ipswich Public Schools provides an educational learning environment that is conducive to the learning abilities of students who have been diagnosed with dyslexia. Given that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has recently provided school districts with guidance pertaining to students with dyslexia, Dr. Hegedus asked for an objective party to review the current elements of the district's programming with the hope that minimal revisions would be necessary.

Dr. Hegedus provided Academic Discoveries with a rationale for this inquiry, referencing that the goal of Ipswich Public Schools was to provide students with appropriate supports in order to access curriculum while ensuring a least restrictive environment. Furthermore, she expressed an interest of how the new Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines document, provided by DESE, may impact IPS's current practices. Dr. Hegedus was hoping the program review would outline potential gaps and district strengths in accordance with DESE's expectations. Her goal was to ensure Ipswich Public Schools was meeting the needs of their students.

Highlighted Review Findings

According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, IPS has a higher percentage of students who receive full inclusion than that of the state average. This percentage reflects IPS' commitment to providing special education services in the least restrictive environment and supporting the district's efforts in implementing child find, multi-tiered systems of support, and co-taught classrooms. In addition, IPS financially invests in ensuring staff are highly trained to support all students in an inclusive setting. According to those interviewed, IPS is dedicated to ensuring students diagnosed with dyslexia are provided with interventions and support at early stages of learning. Parents and students who participated in the interviews for this program review expressed their appreciation towards the district for their commitment in creating language-based programming for all students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

IPS presents as having comprehensive programming that supports students who are diagnosed with dyslexia. In fact, administration, staff, and parents shared reflections on the strength of their staff, multi-tiered systems of supports, screening tools, and student success. IPS would be considered a model public school that serves students diagnosed with dyslexia, according to parent reflections. Ipswich Public Schools has a list of screening tools provided throughout the district as well as multiple research-based literacy programs that support students with reading challenges. Recommendations were provided at the conclusion of this report in the areas of professional development and systemic approaches.

The district is encouraged to determine ways of recognizing the success of their special education programming, specifically as it relates to students who have dyslexia. The district has strong intervention strategies and highly trained staff within their school system. Although the district encourages professional development in literacy, some concerns were noted about the limited mandated professional development provided by the district. Many of the training opportunities regarding reading are voluntary and occur over the summer. IPS has many screening tools and tiered systems of support within their district. They have invested heavily into supporting a co-teaching model that is considered one of the strengths within the district.

Ipswich Public Schools Programming for Students with Dyslexia: Final Review Report

Under the leadership of Nadine G. Ekstrom, Ph.D., Academic Discoveries, LLC reviewed the Ipswich Public Schools' (IPS) special education programming as it relates to serving students diagnosed with dyslexia. According to Dr. Beverly Hegedus, Ipswich Pupil Personnel Services Director, "Parents or advocates sometimes question why students cannot attend Landmark, a private school that provides special education services to students with this profile. Based on our analysis of student needs, we currently do not have self-contained programs specifically for children with specific learning disabilities. Some students are provided additional supports within co-taught classrooms. All students have access to special education teachers trained in Orton-Gillingham, Wilson, LIPS, or Seeing Stars, as based on student need. We have a fairly robust screening and intervention program."

Participants in this program review were asked what they hoped this study would accomplish. Staff began their responses by stating that IPS has many robust strategies in place. The following is a list of their responses:

- Continuum of services for students from elementary to middle school;
- That special education Teams develop consistency regarding assignment of DESE disability categories that connote dyslexia since there is currently no DESE category with that name. In many school districts, students with dyslexia can be found eligible under the disability categories of Specific Learning Disability, Communication, or Neurological;
- That it would be helpful to have an additional reading specialist at the lower level; who is not part of special education

- Provide a space where families would know more about the great strategies and pedagogical practices that are occurring currently;
- More mandated training about dyslexia for general education teachers, beyond summer and elective opportunities;
- More systemic approach of documenting delivery of services to allow for continuity across the district as a student transitions from year to year;
- A better understanding of dyslexia at the elementary level by educators and parents;
- Exploration of expanding the flexibility in providing language-based interventions that supplement the learning in the inclusion classroom. Additionally, providing language-based intervention while supporting other content areas such as, but not limited to, science and social studies; and
- Screening would result in more streamlined practices.

Framework of Program Review

The program review followed an improvement-based review model in which the primary goal was for the reviewers to assist IPS outlining best practices and potential improvement in identifying answers to the following questions:

1. Are the current practices provided by Ipswich Public Schools aligned with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines document?
2. What are the strengths and challenges within Ipswich Public Schools programming that best support students who have been diagnosed with dyslexia?

Meetings and Interviews

Dr. Ekstrom and Dr. Hegedus met on four different occasions, beginning in November 2020 to discuss the program review expectations, questions, next steps and process of the work to be completed. In addition, Dr. Ekstrom conducted interviews with the Ipswich School Committee liaison to special education, administration, staff, the president of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC), parents of special education students, and students themselves

Observations

As part of the program review, observations were completed on May 18, 2021, May 26, 2021, and June 15, 2021. The observations were scheduled to occur in seven settings: high school American Literature, middle school grade 6 classroom, two elementary classrooms, and three one-to-one tutorial settings.

Records Review

Dr. Hegedus provided the evaluator documentation, such as but not limited to; her responses to questions posed by the special education parent advisory council, a copy of a previous program review, The Employee Action Form (which requires data to document the need for paraprofessional support), The Flowchart for Paraprofessional Requests, two student IEP samples, Progress Monitoring Methods, IPS dyslexia screening tools, and interview and observation schedules. Additionally, Academic Discoveries reviewed the Ipswich Public School profile on the DESE website, online Massachusetts census information, the Pupil Personnel Services homepage on the IPS website, notes from interview sessions, and peer-reviewed literature articles as they relate to educating students with dyslexia in a least restrictive setting.

Process

Data were analyzed to identify the strengths within the IPS special education department

related to the focus of the program review. Data validated effective approaches within the current special education department that best serve students, specifically those with dyslexia. In addition, the data were used to determine areas for potential improvement within this domain. In order to provide recommendations, it was important to best understand the perspective of the administration, staff, parents, and students who are educationally involved with this programming. Thus, this report first provides an overview of IPS, with a focus on the special education population. Next, we provide results from the qualitative data collected from interviews and document review. In addition, the report provides a literature review that supports the topics of this report. The document concludes with an assessment of the programming for students with dyslexia provided by IPS based on all data outlined, followed by recommendations for potential improvements in IPS specialized programming.

Overview of Ipswich Public Schools

Ipswich Public School District is in the coastal town of Ipswich, Massachusetts, located in Essex County. The town is known for its clamming and fishing industry. The community's adjacent towns consist of Rowley, Boxford, Topsfield, Hamilton, Essex, and Gloucester. According to the 2019 United States Census Bureau, the population includes 13,963 people with an average median value of owner-occupied housing of \$485,600. Approximately 20.6% of the population include people under 18 years of age. In addition, 92% of the community's population is recognized as white, with approximately 1% associated as having two or more races. While English is predominately the most common first language in the homes, approximately 6.1% of individuals between the ages of five and seventeen consider another language as their primary form of communication. Of residents at the age of 25 years and older 97.6% have graduated from high school.

The school district consists of four schools, with an enrollment of 1,594. The four schools include: Winthrop Elementary (354 students), grades preschool to grade five; Paul F. Doyon Memorial (332 students), grades kindergarten to grade five; Ipswich Middle School (371 students), grades six through eight; and Ipswich High School (537 students), grades nine through twelve. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website, 86.5% of the student population is white, while 7.1% are Hispanic, 1.3% Asian, 3.9% Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic, 1.1% African American, 0.1% Native-American, and 0% Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander. In addition, 79.2% of students with IEPs met the graduation target rate as compared to the State's rate of 74.7%. According to the 2019-2020 reporting, IPS had 286 students on IEPs from ages 6-21. According to Table 1, Ipswich's programs have a higher

percentage of students on IEPs attending full inclusion programs and separate schools than that of the state's average rate.

Table 1: Ages 6 – 21 Students on IEPs

	Enrollment	District Rate	State Rate
Full Inclusion (Inside the general education classroom 80% or more of the day)	227	79.4%	66.2%
Partial Inclusion (inside the general education classroom 40%-79% of the day)	27	9.4%	13.9%
Substantially Separate (inside the general education classroom less than 40% of the day)	8	2.8%	13.4%
Separate Schools, Residential Facilities, or Homebound/Hospital placements (does not include parentally placed private school students with disabilities)	24	8.4%	6.5%

In addition, according to the FY2020 to FY2021 report on DESE's website, Ipswich is below the State's average in all selected population categories, listed in Table 2.

Title	% of District	% of State
First Language not English	5.5	23.4
English Language Learner	2.3	10.5
Students With Disabilities	18.0	18.7
High Needs	30.0	51.0
Economically Disadvantaged	16.5	36.6

Overview of Interviewees

Over the course of the program review, Academic Discoveries, LLC interviewed administrators, educators, parents, and students. All individuals interviewed were respectful and thoughtful when providing responses to the questions asked. The initial interviews began with the District's Administrative Leadership Team on March 31, 2021. This included the superintendent, principals, assistant principals, director of teaching and learning, and the technology head as well

as Dr. Hegedus. Next, a focus group of stakeholders was interviewed on April 2, 2021. This focus group included program managers, school psychologists, special education teachers, general education teachers, and the PPS Director. There were three separate interviews; a school committee liaison, the president of the Ipswich SEPAC, a parent of a student diagnosed with dyslexia, and a student diagnosed with dyslexia.

According to the evaluator, everyone provided fair responses that supported the questions asked in the spirit of supporting the needs of students in the district.

Results Supporting Program Review Questions

IPS was interested in learning answers to three questions as they referenced the programming for students with dyslexia within the school system. In addition to these questions, the program review explored systemic approaches that could potentially enhance the special education services provided to students attending IPS. Below are the responses to the two questions researched in this program review, as a result of data collection, interviews, and classroom observations.

1. Are the current practices provided by Ipswich Public Schools aligned with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines document?

In order to respond to this question, the evaluators reviewed the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines provided by DESE and outlined five significant areas for review:

- Screening at early stages of learning
- Screening tools
- Multi-tiered systems of support
- Progress monitoring
- Referral for special education

According to the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines, there has been increased attention and awareness focused on meeting the needs of public-school students with dyslexia. Nationwide, legislation, policies and guidelines have been developed and/or revised to provide effective interventions and improved services for dyslexic students. Over the past eight years, over two-thirds of all U.S. states have passed dyslexia specific legislation (Dyslexia, 2021). In January 2019, the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines, co-developed by the Departments of Elementary

and Secondary Education (DESE) and Early Education and Care (EEC), were enacted to implement certain requirements of An Act Relative to Students with Dyslexia, Chapter 272 of the Acts of 2018 (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019). This addendum was added to assist districts in screening procedures and protocols for students that demonstrate at least one potential indicator of a neurological learning disability including, but not limited to, dyslexia. These guidelines address the characteristics of dyslexia and other learning disabilities that have a neurobiological basis, provide evidence-supported screening procedures, and include special considerations related to student age and special populations (DESE, 2019). Along with screening, the guidelines also provide a framework for interventions for students at-risk, and act as a comprehensive resource of evidence-based practices for all educators to best support dyslexic students.

The Guidelines clarify that, in Massachusetts, an Individualized Education Plan team must determine the child eligible for specialized instruction, and dyslexia is understood as one type of Specific Learning Disability (SLD). The Guidelines offer insight into the three subtypes of dyslexia (Phonological, Naming Speed and Double Deficit) and highlight the many misconceptions surrounding the disability such as visual impairment, presence of letter reversals, immature readers, lack of intelligence and improvement without support for motivated students. For the sake of this review, the evaluators are referencing the revised Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines that were provided to school districts in the Spring of 2021.

Screening at early stages of learning

The Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines clarifies that screening is critical for efficient intervention, but this does not determine eligibility. Screening should be seen as the first step in a multi-tiered support system that identifies and prevents struggles with reading and should be coupled with targeted Tier 2 interventions and progress monitoring. Early Literacy Screening guidelines involve the administration of a valid normed assessment, and it is encouraged for districts to look at their current screening tools to ensure they meet criteria for assessing individual risk of dyslexia. DESE has approved literacy screening assessments for districts unsure if their assessment is adequate in assessing these areas and provided screening timeframes to aid districts in efficiently identifying at-risk students. Preschool screening should occur when developmental “red flags” arise and should cover multiple tools and sources of information to assess phonological awareness, verbal working memory, name recognition and letter knowledge. The Guidelines recommend screening students from kindergarten to second grade multiple times a year to ensure proper identification of needs.

According to administration, IPS began implementing the Heggerty program in the preschool this year. during the 2020-21 school year Therefore, they do not yet have complete evidence of its impact at the preschool level. The Heggerty program provides daily phonological and phonemic awareness lessons. This program is meant to supplement existing literacy curriculum. The lessons are designed for whole group instruction and the duration is approximately 10 minutes per day. Both elementary schools have implemented the Heggerty program for two years and starting using Foundations several years prior. Doyon staff reported that they do see differences specifically in decoding as well as the ability to identify those who need more

supports, based upon the use of this program. Winthrop has been using Foundations for more than ten years. Foundations is a multi-sensory, structured language program offered through Wilson Reading. This program emphasizes phonemic awareness, phonics-word study, reading fluency, high frequency word study, vocabulary, comprehension strategies, handwriting, and spelling. This program is used for tier one and tier two general education instructional practices. The typical lesson runs 30 minutes daily. One administrator stated that one of the strengths of IPS is its ability to identify students early in their educational careers. Additionally, staff acknowledged that their district was geared toward supporting students from preschool to grade 3 who are struggling in their reading abilities. Staff expressed concern around having enough reading specialists to support students who move into district in fourth and fifth grade and have yet to be identified. Given student needs fluctuate from year to year, this concern should be evaluated annually among school and central office administration and teaching staff. According to staff, IPS offers general education summer school to all students who may require additional reading instruction and support.

Ipswich takes pride in their ability to identify students with dyslexia at an early age. In fact, it was reported that only one student in approximately 10 years transitioned to the middle school with concerns regarding dyslexia that had not been previously noted and addressed. The staff provided clarification and explained that concerns had been addressed for many of the students at earlier stages in their learning environments. Another individual noted that last year IPS was the first district to tell parents who moved into the district that their child had dyslexia, although the previous school district never provided them with any recognition of their child's diagnosis. On rare occasions at the high school, parents bring up the concern of dyslexia during their child's

sophomore year due to SATs and high-stakes testing. In most cases, testing is completed by the school district, but the result rarely includes a dyslexia diagnosis.

According to school psychologists, requests for interventions occur early in the students' learning. Although some requests occur as young as preschool, the most common requests received for evaluations are in grade one due to concerns identified at the beginning of that year. Typically, by the third trimester, students usually receive a formal evaluation. In some instances, evaluations for students with reading concerns that occur in the second and third grade are typically solidified at the beginning of the year. The school psychologists do believe the screening process could be streamlined so that evaluators could focus further on evaluating a specific area within the reading needs, such as decoding, phonological awareness, semantics, fluency, etc.

The educators are proud of their interventions they can provide to students at IPS . They did explain, however, that Title One, which is not a special education support service, is based on the number of students that can get serviced in one year. Therefore, students may qualify one year and not qualify the next. Some educators expressed that this was an area of potential concern regarding continuity of general education services. This is not the case with students found eligible for special education services since both service delivery and progress data are regularly maintained.

Parents were also interviewed and asked about their experience regarding early intervention strategies for their children with dyslexia. Two parents reported that they were very pleased with

the early intervention IPS provided involving reading and literacy for their child. In fact, one parent stated that although dyslexia is a common disability in the family, they never reported that to IPS. She was pleased with the kindergarten teacher who had picked up on the fact that their child was struggling with reading within the first month of school. Her child was demonstrating letter reversals and reading challenges, thus already falling behind the reading expectations of the classroom. Early intervention strategies were immediately implemented by the teacher. By March, the child had been tested for special education and was provided with intensive pull out reading services by the time the student reached the 1st grade year. The parent felt supported and part of the team when developing the IEP for her child. The immediate response and reading instruction by the reading specialist has provided positive outcomes for this student. In fact, the parent stated her child is doing very well in school, requiring less supports than when she was younger. The parent further explained that placement in a co-taught classroom with a reading specialist has enhanced her child's success.

Another parent reported her appreciation towards IPS in providing supports and successful interventions for her child. However, she discussed her challenges in understanding what interventions were occurring to her child with reading. She would like to know if there was a universal screening process and, if so, she asked if parents could be provided with this information. She was hoping that IPS could provide data illustrating where their child fell within the classroom grade as well as the district level expectations.

Screening tools

Rather than endorsing a single tool for screening, the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines have suggested evidence-based tools validated by research that have displayed classification accuracy be used and stress the importance of using such assessments rather than district level creations. According to DESE's Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines, the following is a list of recommendations for early literacy screening assessments and screening for risk of dyslexia:

- Amplify mCLASS
- Curriculum Associates iReady
- Illuminate FastBridge (package includes: Adaptive Reading [aReading], AUTOreading, CBMreading, earlyReading)
- Istation Indicators of Progress (ISIP)
- iSTEEP
- Lexia RAPID
- NWEA MAP Growth
- Renaissance STAR Reading (package includes: STAR Early Literacy, STAR Reading and STAR CBMs)
- University of Oregon DIBELS 8th Edition
- Voyager Sopris Learning Acadience Reading

Screening teams should consist of various practitioners at the kindergarten to second grade level. These educators should include general educators committed to targeted instruction and tiered support, an administrator or leader responsible for resources (i.e., finances, personnel and professional development), instructional experts (i.e., reading specialists trained in evidence-based reading instructions), and specialists (psychologist, English Language Learner instructors, etc.) whose expertise is relevant. Teams should create formal timeframes to monitor students' performance and adjust practice as needed. Bi-monthly team meetings to analyze data should be conducted to determine appropriate tiers of instruction for each student, instructional focus areas, student groupings and support delivery considerations. This ensures students between

kindergarten and third grade will receive high quality reading instruction at the level most appropriate for that individual.

IPS provided a list of dyslexia screening tools and support for general education. (See Appendix A). When comparing the two documents (Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines and Ipswich Dyslexia Screening and Support in General Education), it appears that Lexia and DIBELS are the only common assessment tools. However, IPS provides an extensive list of screening tools and assessments that are also research-based. Therefore, it is important to understand that DESE's document is a "guideline", meaning that districts are not required to use only those tools approved by the organization. Rather, it is critical for districts to have a multitude of screening tools that can identify all facets of literacy challenges, which IPS clearly provides.

In some instances, staff were asked about their screening tools and screening teams. Many educators reported they do not have specific screening tools that focus on the areas of dyslexia but use the Early Screening Inventory (ESI) in preschool. The staff administer a phonological awareness screener in kindergarten that examines word discrimination, rhyme recognition, rhyme production, syllable blending, syllable segmentation, syllable deletion, phoneme recognition, phoneme blending, phoneme segmentation, and phoneme deletion. They also administer DIBELS three times per year in kindergarten and Title One. IPS provides phonological awareness groups in kindergarten that are facilitated by a speech language pathologist. Staff recognized DIBELS, Title One, and Lexia as their main screening tools.

Ipswich has a strong screening team that includes general education teachers, special education teachers, school psychologists, speech language pathologists, adjustment counselors, and reading specialists. They meet regularly to discuss student progress and ideas for intervention strategies.

Multi-tiered systems of support

Multi-tiered systems of support rely on Tier 1 effectiveness for all students, in order to avoid large populations of students falling into the at-risk range. Tiers 2 and 3 supplement the core curriculum for struggling students by providing a double dose of reading instruction (in the classroom and with intervention support). This targeted intervention allows students to gain all the benefits of the general education classroom (subject matter, vocabulary, conversation, rich literature) while also receiving the necessary reading support. The Guidelines promote the effectiveness of a co-taught classroom and recommend this model versus the “pull out” model based on feedback from students regarding feelings of connectedness and greater social satisfaction, as well as evidence of larger reading improvements than those not in a co-taught classroom.

Parents reported how pleased they were with the new administration’s philosophy of opening the district’s doors in creating more opportunities for a partnership and communication between parents and the school system in understanding disabilities. However, a common factor among school districts, not unique to IPS, is the disconnect between parent and educator in having a common understanding of teaching approaches and strategies that are occurring in the classroom to support students. Therefore, parents suggested more opportunities of bringing a team together to assist in educating the parents as to the various interventions provided to children. The parents and educators of IPS further explained that if there was a common understanding of these

approaches in place, then parents may provide better support to their child at home, resulting in more success in school.

The district offers a variety of avenues in supporting multi-tiered systems of support. For instance, the IPS provide Title One support and English Language Learner (ELL) supports as well as summer programming for all students who require support, including those who do not have special education services. Title One is a robust intervention at the early grades. There are reading specialists in both elementary and middle school buildings. The district has implemented co-teaching classrooms throughout the district, although it is acknowledged that there are not enough resources for all classrooms to be co-taught. A co-taught classroom consists of a general education teacher and a special education teacher instructing a classroom together by using a multi-faceted approach of facilitating pedagogy that supports all learners.

Throughout the interviews, recommendations varied, with some educators requesting more general education support, such as Title One in grades four and five, but with a small number of others believing that any degree of specialized instruction should be owned by special education. Additionally, a special education program manager stated that many educators believe that if a student requires additional support, then that child should automatically qualify for special education services. The program manager further explained that this philosophy results in a lack of ownership on the part of general education. According to a participant, scheduling sometimes is a constraint in grouping students which results in heterogenous small groups, rather than instructional support based solely upon the student's ability. In some cases, isolated general educators may demonstrate resistance to tiered levels of support. Those interviewed ,however,

strongly felt that as students learn effective coping strategies earlier in their school careers there is a potential reduction in the need for special education referrals.

IPS provides whole classroom language-based literacy instruction through multiple research-based programs, such as but not limited to, Heggerty, Foundations, Just Words, and RAVE-O, Read Naturally, and Lively Letters. These programs are also considered as tiered intervention approaches and are implemented in small learning groups as appropriate, based upon student needs.

Progress Monitoring

The final step of screening for students at risk for dyslexia is progress monitoring. Progress monitoring is essential for students receiving tiered instruction but is also beneficial to all students. Without progress monitoring, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of interventions and supports to determine next steps for students. Although recommendations vary, a progress monitoring assessment should be administered every one to three weeks (as cited in Fuchs and Kern, 2014). As previously stated, the DESE Guidelines advocate for the use of valid and reliable progress monitoring tools.

Regarding progress monitoring, the district utilizes the Heggerty program and Foundations. Both programs allow for data collection on student progress. The individual student performance from daily activities and benchmarking assessments determines the level of progress monitoring required. Monitoring student growth as young as preschool is not new this year, however, the district has enhanced their capacity in identifying student growth by implementing the Heggerty

program. For instance, staff reported that they can determine a student's ability to decode more readily as comparison to previous years. Therefore, staff stated that recognizing who might need more intervention based upon the baseline information is easier to do than in previous years due to the Heggerty program. Not only do they measure each child's growth relative to their own individual success, but they also determine the growth relative to the district expectations.

These daily lessons, specifically around phonemic awareness, have also granted staff clarity on recognizing student growth in the preschool classrooms in earlier stages of the school year. In addition to the Heggerty program, IPS provides Foundations, a Wilson Reading program.

Through the implementation of both programs, staff reported a positive difference in their students' ability to decode, recognize letter sounds, isolation of sounds, and reading fluency.

Referral for special education

If a child is referred for a special education evaluation through either Child Find, Early Intervention or a referral by parents, guardians or educational personnel, a comprehensive evaluation is administered. If a child is found to have dyslexia, accommodations and modifications should be considered and selected to ensure the child is in the Least Restrictive Environment and their unique needs are being met. The five essential components of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) provide a framework to develop individual annual IEP goals. The integration of these skills is essential to reading development and the IEP team formulates goals that comprehensively address each area of need. The IEP team works with the student and their family to create a partnership that provides insight into the cultural and familial background. In fact, the ESL teacher consults with

the IEP team to determine family members understand the process. Through interviews, it was suggested that the district continue to explore ways of enhancing the communication regarding the special education process. When speaking to the district about the partnership between the school and parents, the administration expressed their interest in receiving suggestions from parents on how to enrich opportunities. This will positively contribute to identifying culturally/linguistically appropriate goals, supports, and services.

Participants were asked whether a student with dyslexia should automatically be placed on an IEP. The responses varied in this regard. For instance, some stated that if a student is diagnosed with dyslexia requiring specially designed instruction, then they should qualify. Some further expressed uncertainty as to whether a child with dyslexia may be able to read without specially designed instruction. Other participants, however, reported that certain students with dyslexia may only require accommodations and regular education supports in order to be successful since there is a continuum of needs. Therefore, the student would not necessarily require an IEP.

Parents and educators should note that when the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines document was provided to districts in the Spring of 2021, DESE explicitly stated that recognition and training of such guidelines to support students with dyslexia should not be coming from a special education lens. Rather, they primarily should be introduced and implemented as a regular education approach and pedagogical practice. In support of DESE's charge, one participant reported that, "Dyslexia is not so much a disability: rather a different way of learning". This individual elaborated by stating that educators should view this perspective when adjusting their curriculum or pedagogy.

When asked about the referral process, a participant suggested an approach that would benefit the current practices in IPS. She suggested referral packets to provide more clarity and specificity relating to the purpose of the evaluations being requested. She further reported that requests for referral are often initiated with vague explanations, such as “reading.” This then requires a more in-depth process for the evaluator to “weed out” the specific areas of concern regarding this child. This individual does include the Dyslexia index if completing a full battery on a child whose referral concern is reading. It’s simply a composite of word reading and phonemic proficiency. If the assessment comes out low, then the evaluator also administers the CTOPP. Sometimes the evaluator gives a CTOPP as well despite an “average” dyslexia index score. This action is provided because other areas within the testing may result in low scores and the student’s DRA at end of kindergarten may be considered below expected grade level.

Whereas, if the referrals provided more specificity and focus on the specific aspects of reading; comprehension, fluency, decoding, etc. the evaluator would have more information to reference when completing the evaluations. Another suggestion involves the screening process. Educators suggested the district identify a more streamlined approach. Educators took pride in IPS’ child study teams and their inclusive intervention strategies, including their capacity for providing Title One services for students who require interventions in general educational settings.

Referrals are typically initiated by educators and parents. Sometimes, the district receives requests from medical professionals. Educators reported that referrals requested by medical professionals often cause concern because they rarely talk to the educators prior to writing their reports and/or requests. Therefore, although medical professionals are knowledgeable about diagnoses, they rarely understand the work completed by educators. Thus, they lack knowledge

of general education interventions already in place, which have the potential to result in contentious meetings between staff and parents rather than a collaborative partnership between the parties.

1. What are the strengths and challenges within Ipswich Public Schools programming that best support students who have been diagnosed with dyslexia?

This section of the report focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of the programming provided by IPS as it relates to serving students with dyslexia. This section of the report is based upon staff and parent input and their perceptions.

Strengths:

IPS demonstrates strength in its education, staff, administration, professional development, inclusive practices, and interventions. This section will outline some of those findings based upon the interview process. As the evaluator asked questions to the administration and staff about the continuum of literacy support and how effective they believe the approach of this programming, many strengths were identified, including a continuum of diverse supports.

Participants acknowledged that IPS provides not only a variety of programming, but models inclusivity and access to curriculum for all students. These various supports range from one-to-one tutorials, Title One, explicit direct instruction, and co-taught classrooms to name a few.

Overwhelmingly parents, teachers, and administration reported the strength of education provided by IPS as well as the staff's dedication to supporting students. According to participants, all educators and administrators are invested in seeing all students succeed. This

perspective was clearly reinforced throughout the interview process. Across their buildings, administrators feel that they have strong reading teachers who are trained in understanding reading strategies and approaches to best support students. In fact, they reported that veteran teachers will often help newly hired teachers to ensure continuity of reading approaches or strategies are provided to students. Parents are confident that IPS hires well trained teachers. Like most districts, IPS experiences changes in staffing from year to year. They invest in training new staff to align them with district's mission and vision of supporting all students. Additionally, IPS attempts to hire educators with dual certification in general education and special education along with Wilson training experience. Otherwise, the district dedicates funding sources to ensure new special education staff are offered training in a variety of reaching supports including Wilson, Orton Gillingham, Seeing Stars, LIPS, and other evidence-based methodologies.

Professional development and highly trained staff are valued at IPS. When asked about training for special education teachers, the participants shared that all special education teachers have at least their first level of Wilson training. Special educators and new hires are offered at least the first round of a three-day training in Wilson as well as training in Foundations. One program manager referenced new teachers and stated they all receive Foundations training. Some staff have been trained in Lively Letters and Seeing Stars. Special educators and paraprofessionals have also received training on executive functioning. The district has financially invested in training for co-teaching throughout the school system.

When asked what the services look like at the elementary school for literacy instruction, an elementary administrator reported that all students receive 90 minutes of language arts and reading instruction at the elementary schools. Additionally, students receive 30 minutes of Foundations. To ensure this amount of time is dedicated to reading, educators stated that science and social studies look like a reading class. One resource brought into the school system is Lexia Reading program. This is a research-based online program that focus' specifically on aspects of reading that supports all students, including those who are identified as English Learners. The program is personalized to meet the needs of individual students through a structured and systemic approach. Educators believe this was a great screening tool for dip sticking or progress monitoring. Lexia has been implemented in some buildings longer than others. Both elementary and middle schools administer Lexia as a rapid screening tool for their students, administering the Rapid three times a year.

Most students are identified as having dyslexia at the early stages of learning to read. Educators proudly stated that 95% or greater of those students who have been diagnosed with dyslexia participate in inclusion classes. In fact, some students may only require accommodations by the time they reach middle or high school. An administrator reported that they feel that IPS is great with providing tier 3 interventions but may require additional staff for next year in tier 2 interventions (which are general education interventions) based upon student need.

One parent reported how impressed she was with the co-teaching model and the positive impact it has had on their child. For example, the parent stated that their son has gone from remediation to enrichment practices in just one school year. According to the parent, the IEP was constantly

reviewed to ensure the right interventions and methodologies were provided to their child. The family is very pleased with their child's progress this school year.

A parent reported that the supports helped her child in reading. She stated the interventions made her child a stronger reader. However, the parent suggested that her child's writing is still a struggle. This family is pleased with IPS' approach and philosophy of the reading support. Their child has reduced the needs for intensive reading instruction from five days a week to two days a week. The student is also provided with one-to-one intervention at approximately 45 minutes per session. When the student was at the elementary school, she used to require one-to-one reading instruction for an hour prior to the start of the school day as well as fluency and writing as pull out services during the school day. Although this student experienced some challenges this year due to the COVID pandemic, supports were reduced and the child has been successful.

IPS has created a partnership with parents in the community to support students with dyslexia. One parent elaborated by stating that the family worked closely with the school in understanding the availability of teachers and detailed how the school district developed a language-rich program for her child. She believes IPS to be one of the strongest school systems for students with dyslexia. Furthermore, the parent believed the school district was amenable in working with the parents' schedules. Another parent appreciated the district's awareness that parents become very nervous that their children may fall behind. Some parents are fearful their child may end up in an out of district school placement. Due to the partnership between IPS and

parents, there is a perception that the school system works with parents to reduce some of these fears.

Challenges:

Challenges were also considered as part of this review. Overall, the challenges identified by participants included time, systemic tracking system, uncertainty of tier two strategies, screening tools at the high school, understanding related to dyslexia, data analysis, and parental understanding. Many educators suggest that communication between elementary to middle school and middle to high school could be improved to ensure students are receiving the adequate supports as they transition from one school to the next. They further expressed that the primary challenge in communicating between schools is the lack of allotted time to ensure the transition takes place effectively or efficiently. Educators would like to identify a systemic approach to track student intervention and be provided with a systemwide documentation system. Because of the absence of a systemic approach of documentation, educators are challenged in knowing the explicit instruction students received in previous settings if it has not taken place within special education. If a student is on an IEP, they know the services and the exact program, but they do not know the individualized support or strategies used in the general education classroom, beyond those iterated in the IEP accommodations section.

Although IPS has financially invested in many tiered programs, there remains some uncertainty around appropriate action steps when students are not making effective progress, according to educators. For instance, one participant suggested increased support for tier two interventions. The individual further expressed that although the district has been working on this and the

school system is looking into strengthening their response to intervention programming, there remains some means for improvement. IPS provides reading services at all grade levels.

Administration identified a lack of clarity for teachers regarding what they should do when a child is not making benchmark. They also stressed that educators would like to have consistency in this regard.

In addition, teaching staff emphasized concern for young teachers who do not believe they have enough background knowledge on supporting students with dyslexia. Although veteran teachers may help with this concern, not all new teachers feel comfortable in asking for assistance. When asked what types of training has occurred for general education teachers, it was reported that training has been optional and not mandated. Training has been offered and occurred over the summer and is, therefore, voluntary. Thus, not all general education teachers have received professional development on topics pertaining to dyslexia. Keeping in mind that IPS hires highly qualified staff and provides significant professional development, administrators remain concerned that staff may not have a deep enough understanding around disabilities. More specifically, that general education teachers do not understand whether a specific learning disability is considered dyslexia or not. On more than one occasion, participants noted the challenge of some professional development, specifically as it pertains to literacy. In the past, the district has contracted with Landmark to facilitate Language-based strategies, but due to it being offered in the summer, not everyone attended the training. Staff would like to see the district develop a universal mandated training as it relates to literacy and understanding of dyslexia. If the training occurs in the summer, it cannot be mandated for educators to attend.

IPS implements a variety of research-based language-rich programs, but participants expressed a concern about the general educators' understanding of how to implement these programs with fidelity within the mainstream classroom setting. Although regression is not evident and not recognized, there is concern that the lack of training and understanding of literacy instruction by general educators may impact the performance of students. It was suggested that the district develop ongoing training to teachers or create a training academy, to support educators in teaching all aspects of literacy, including a focus on reading and writing challenges and dyslexia.

Additionally, educators advocated for aligned benchmarks across the district to ensure that all elementary schools and all teachers at each elementary grade level have consistency with districtwide benchmark expectations. Participants were hopeful that the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines document would be a helpful tool in identifying approved benchmarks for IPS.

According to an administrator, there is currently no screening tool considered at the high school, and the dyslexia is typically identified at the elementary level. Lexia has been purchased at each school individually and is not considered a unified system or approach. Some participants recommended the STAR program as the universal literacy screening tool.

Another challenge for IPS staff is the universal understanding of how to analyze data. According to administration, the district is challenged in ensuring continuity of implementing data across grade levels, which causes some concern among the leadership team. One data tool used in the district is Lexia Rapid Assessment. Rapid is a screening tool within Lexia and the results provide specific information about the student's performance. Staff would like further opportunities to explore data results with one another, to enrich their ability in providing

consistency and continuity of analyzing and implementing these results into their instruction and pedagogical practices.

The district has spent an enormous amount of time and money on creating co-taught classrooms. One parent expressed her appreciation for this work and believes it to be a great approach. However, she also acknowledged her concern that this approach might become the sole model and fears that IPS would reduce some of the intense methods administered at an earlier stage of reading development that are already in place. There have been great strides in supporting parents in the recent years. However, anxiety from parents and fear of being challenged by asking for support for their child is still lingering from past experiences. Parents reported that they worry their child may fail before being identified with the needs for additional supports and/or specialized instruction. They feel hopeful that the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines document may prevent this.

Parents expressed appreciation towards IPS staff along with their dedication and commitment in completing screening assessments and report writing. However, when attending an IEP meeting, or having conversations with educators, the information parents receive within reports sometimes includes technical terms. Often, parents do not know what terms mean or the impact of the results being reported. In some cases, this increases parent anxiety and disconnect with understanding their child's abilities. Parents further explained that an educator may report that their child is at a level "F" in reading performance. A parent often has minimal idea as to what level "F" means. Rather, parents would like to know, "Does this mean a prereading ability? A

grade level ability? How does this relate to other students in their classroom?" These are the questions that parents have when provided with reports regarding their child's performance.

Although co-teaching has overwhelmingly been supported by the faculty, staff, and community there remains some concern from a few participants regarding the level of stigmatization a student may experience when in a classroom and not reading with their peers. The goal of co-teaching is to support inclusive practices and has been viewed as a best practice. IPS is cognizant that some students may be overwhelmed when removed from a classroom. Therefore, when the team deems pull-out services as the least restrictive environment, that approach is provided.

A challenge, not unique to IPS, includes student schedules when removed from classrooms. Students want to participate in physical education, art, music, or support blocks rather than receive direct reading instruction. Therefore, student schedules can be problematic when determining an appropriate time for pull-out services. According to participants, general educators need awareness of the profile of a student with dyslexia. They may require support in understanding how this student may present and how to encourage student strengths through pedagogical practices. When asking students with dyslexia about their challenges in education they stated that when assignments were timed their anxiety increases. The students know they cannot complete their work right away and often need to reread assignments in order to comprehend their schoolwork. Students also report that as the rigor of reading and writing demands increase, the more challenging it becomes for them to access the curriculum. Students

with dyslexia reported that they sometimes become overwhelmed with demands of the schoolwork at the secondary level.

Another challenge reported is the mindset of some parents and educators who believe that all students with dyslexia are required to receive special education services. The district provides rich, tiered systems of support, which are regular education services. More training to staff and parents with this regard would benefit the staff and community at large.

Observations:

Classroom observations were conducted on May 18, 2021, May 26, 2021, and June 15, 2021.

During this time, the evaluator observed a high school American Literature classroom, a middle school grade 6 classroom, two elementary classrooms, and three one-to-one tutorials. All the observations lasted between 20 to 35 minutes in duration. The integrated classrooms included general education and special education students of various abilities.

May 18, 2021:

The observer arrived in the tutorial space, but the student to be observed was absent. However, this provided the observer time to talk with the special service provider about the anticipated lesson. The instructor outlined the anticipated lesson, stating that Seeing Stars was the recommended intervention for this student, because Orton Gillingham (a reading program) was too challenging for this individual. During the lesson, the instructor would utilize a sensory approach by having the student trace letters. This student is working towards understanding

CVC, blends, and silent “e”. While this student’s strength is recognizing sight words, spelling remains challenging.

In the next classroom observation, the reporter joined a co-taught sixth grade humanities class, consisting of 18 students, of which five are on IEPs and two are on 504s. Within this class, one student has been diagnosed with dyslexia. This class was a cross between English Language Arts and social studies. Students were working with partners on packets. The student diagnosed with dyslexia remained in the classroom, working on her packet independently, along with two other students. The remainder of the class had moved themselves either into another classroom or into the open common space outside of the classroom. The assignment was an extension of the work the students had completed regarding Asia. The name of this assignment was called, “Walking through Asia.” The directions and classroom expectations were clearly stated on the board in the front of the room (go over instruction, choose a station, complete a station, correct a station, repeat). According to the classroom teacher, books were selected for individual reading, based upon the student’s interests and reading levels. All students were provided with laptops to complete their work and research. While observing this class, it was noted that one teacher sat with two students with special education needs. They were given a modified worksheet and the teacher encouraged engagement by stating, “Okay, we are having an issue resolving this, right? So, you need to go into Jr. Scholastic.” The teacher then provided step by step details on how to sign into the resource. There were multiple modalities of instruction provided throughout this lesson. They included: google forms, videos, Jr. Scholastic, complete packets (hard copies, google docs, etc.). An additional modification was provided within the google form and separated by *** next to each modified version. Throughout the observation, all students were

on-task and working through their packets. One teacher reported that a student in the classroom had previously struggled with his writing, and after receiving additional supports, is above average in performance.

May 26, 2021:

On May 26, 2021, the evaluator observed three classrooms and two tutorials. In both tutorials, the professionals provided direct, explicit Wilson instruction. The students responded appropriately and respectfully with the professional. In the first tutorial observed, the student was learning reading skills through a multi-sensory approach. The student was tapping out syllables and learning three syllable words. The educator also worked on vocabulary and understanding the meaning of the words created when blending sounds together. The second tutorial focused on diphthongs and digraphs. Using digraphs, the student blended two sounds together to create a word.

The classrooms observed included general education and special education students. The first class was a language-based whole classroom instruction. The teacher modeled the expectations on the board. The strategy was an “I do, we do, you do” model. The students were asked to write responses on their individual white boards and students held them up for the teacher to see when completed. Students were learning about the short sound “a”. The students were asked to write the word “laptop” on their white boards. The teacher reinforced the students by stating, “This is one word.” She asked the students how to syllabize the word. This modeling and reinforcement occurred throughout the lesson.

In the next class observation, students were finishing individual conferencing with the teacher. The students had drafted their personal writing piece and were in the process of completing their final drafts. While some students worked independently, others were with partners. The teacher was observed providing engagement strategies to students and asking in-depth questions about the students' writing so they would dive deeper into their work.

Overall, the classroom observations provided a triangulated confirmation of what was reported during the interviews. IPS provides rich language-based instruction to their students. The humanities class embedded literacy instruction, as outlined in the students' research. The elementary classroom teachers observed provided Wilson instruction in their classrooms. Some classes were co-taught. Paraprofessionals and other supports were present in the classrooms as well.

Ipswich Public Schools Literature Review

This section provides IPS with a peer-reviewed literature review that supports the concerns, challenges, and strengths embedded within the school system. This literature review specifically focuses on the aspects of screening for dyslexia, interventions, and the impact of progress monitoring. The purpose of this section of the report is not to assume IPS is not effectively implementing these approaches, but rather, to support the current best practices IPS does provide to meet the needs of its students. The following articles adhere to the suggestions, strategies and methods proposed by the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines.

Screening, Intervention and Progress Monitoring

Ozernov-Palchil et al. (2017) examined the heterogeneity of dyslexia risk profiles in pre-reading and early-reading children and discussed the difficulty in determining which pre-reading strategies can aid in predicting dyslexia as well as the necessity for identification of at-risk students to receive effective intervention as early as possible to prevent reading failure. Ozernov-Palchil et al. (2017) provided data that several pre-reading measures (letter name and letter sound knowledge, phonological awareness (PA), verbal or verbal short-term memory, and rapid automatized naming (RAN)) can show an association with later reading abilities, but there was limited success in truly identifying dyslexia in kindergarten age students. This has prompted movement to delay identification until first grade, when additional reading specific measures are utilized. The authors proposed demonstrating a deficit is present prior to reading instruction, rather than as a result of differential influences of reading development, reading instruction, or a phonological awareness deficit and warned against using group classification methods with older children who are already reading. The results supported

the practicality of early identification of dyslexia and suggest the existence of heterogeneity in risk profiles.

Al Otaiba & Fuchs (2006) sought to uncover if children at risk for reading difficulties positively respond to generally effective early literacy interventions as proposed by scientifically based reading research. Federally sponsored reviews (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; NRP, 2000, as cited in Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2009) recommended more intensive interventions to help all children read by the end of third grade and have influenced policy with documentation of explicit and systematic early literacy intervention effectiveness. Al Otaiba & Fuchs (2006) suggested that 30 percent of students at risk for reading difficulties do not respond to treatment (therefore labeled non-responders) and the percentage of non-responders with learning disabilities may be as high as 50 percent.

The authors examined 23 studies and found seven characteristics of non-responsiveness to scientifically based reading practice and encouraged multilevel models of instruction and assessment for early literacy programs to accommodate all students' needs. The authors advised that many students with reading disabilities require an intense and systemic level of instruction.

Al Otaiba & Fuchs (2006) recommended that a well-implemented, systematic and explicit intervention can reduce the number of students at risk for reading problems. They also proposed that emphasis on phonological and alphabetic awareness, as well as teacher-directed phonological awareness training, can aid in effective intervention. Finally, the authors stated that due to the heterogeneity of the non-responders, it is necessary for the secondary level of

intervention instruction to be more intensive and tailored to children's individual strengths and weaknesses.

The Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity by Fuchs, Fuchs and Malone (2017) provided an in-depth analysis of best practice for Tier 2 interventions in a multi-tiered interventions system (MTSS) through the presentation of a case study. As previously described, research shows that not all students respond to standard, evidence-based Tier 2 intervention programs and often, the general population of students will benefit from intensive intervention provided in the classroom. Interventions guided by the seven principles described by Fuchs, Fuchs & Malone (2017), provided best practice for evaluating and building intervention intensity based on research. The authors propose strategies, suggestions, and resources to increase the quality of intensive intervention, improve student outcomes, and aid schools in designing interventions superior to their predecessors. The seven dimensions include strength, dosage, alignment, attention to transfer, comprehensiveness, behavioral support and individualization.

The "strength" of the intervention is defined as how well the program works for students in need of intensive intervention. The "dosage," or instructional features of the treatment is defined as the number of opportunities a student must respond and receive corrective feedback. The third dimension is a "focus on alignment" as to not restrict the set of skills being addressed. The intervention must address the individual's full set of academic deficits, incorporate a meaningful focus on grade appropriate curricular standards, but omit skills the student has already mastered and are now considered extraneous. The special educator should connect interventions on foundational-skill deficits to align with the general education standards. "Attention to transfer,"

is derived from how the intervention is systematically designed to help students transfer the skills they learn to other formats and contexts. This dimension also aims to produce meaningful generalization by helping students realize connections between mastered and related skills. “Comprehensiveness,” reflects the number of explicit instructional principles present in the intervention. This list consists of practices beneficial to all students but promotes best results for students who require intensive intervention. The following are the six instructional principles promoted by Fuchs, Fuchs & Malone (2017):

- (a) providing explanations in simple, direct language
- (b) modeling efficient strategies (e.g., for operating on text or solving mathematic problems) instead of expecting students to discover strategies on their own
- (c) ensuring students have the necessary background knowledge and skills to succeed with those strategies
- (d) gradually fading support for students’ correct execution of those strategies
- (e) providing practice so students use the strategies to generate many correct responses
- (f) incorporating systematic cumulative review

The final dimension that is combined with implementation is behavioral support. The goal of interventions is to teach perseverance and encourage students to be resilient and work through academic struggle. Some students may require systematic encouragement and support and when faced with non-compliant individuals, it is important to incorporate behavioral principles to minimize nonproductive behavior. Behavioral support should be considered when planning an intervention platform. “Individualization,” is incorporated into the implementation stage of the intervention and occurs through progress monitoring while the treatment is administered. Data

must be collected frequently, and treatment must be adjusted regularly based on indications that the students are or are not on track.

Fuchs, Fuchs and Malone (2017) proposed specific attention be paid to “the accuracy with which data were collected and scored, the faithfulness and timeliness with which decision rules were applied to the progress-monitoring data, and the integrity with which the platform and all previous adjustments to the intensive intervention platform were implemented” (p.42). This evidenced-based systematic process aims to increase quality intensive interventions, improve student outcomes, and help schools successfully distinguish between levels of intensity in their intervention services.

Assessment of Programming for Students with Dyslexia

IPS contacted Academic Discoveries, LLC to conduct a program review of the programming the district offers for students who are diagnosed with dyslexia to ensure students are receiving an educational learning experience in the least restrictive environment. The program review focused on two main questions that were outlined in the findings section of the report. These questions were researched using a multi-dimensional program review model utilizing data collected by the district and evaluator, peer-reviewed research, observations, and interviews. This section of the report explains some of the findings from the review.

IPS employs highly qualified professional educators in the general education and special education staff. Their staff, overall, have proven longevity and commitment to the district, community, and students at large. In addition, administration, staff, parents, and students expressed their appreciation for the dedication and commitment IPS demonstrates in supporting all students.

Participants of this review acknowledged that providing pedagogical practices that support a student's strengths encourages them in learning. IPS values a student's ability in observing their success. Some participants expressed their belief that not all students with dyslexia should require an IEP. This did not mean they did not require structured intervention, but rather, than it might not need to be under the aegis of special education but could be provided as a general education support. The participants provided examples pertaining to accommodating written work expectations, reading requirements, and extending time on assignments may be the only supports required for student to access the curriculum. Providing learning centers in classrooms and co-teaching models are viewed as effective strategies in place at IPS. Parents are given

surveys for feedback. Parent participants were supportive of the district's philosophy of co-teaching and expressed their appreciation for the supports in place.

When answering the first review question; *Are the current practices provided by Ipswich Public Schools aligned with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines document?* the evaluator considered a variety of elements. The district evidences many strengths and qualities that align with DESE's expectations. For example, IPS takes pride in identifying students with dyslexia at early stages of their learning. The staff and parents believe the district has positioned their classrooms from preschool to grade three with appropriate staffing, curriculum, and interventions to support the needs of their students. Staff, however, expressed challenges in staffing to provide these supports in grades four and five, specifically when new students move into the district and were not previously identified. The Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines document provides a link for the reader to review the approved screening tools. IPS currently uses two of the tools identified by DESE. However, it is important for the reader to note that IPS has invested in many other research-based tools beyond the list provided by DESE. They also have many resources within the district that provide progress monitoring and multi-tiered systems of support, utilizing assessment tools, and curriculum programs. In addition, parents have reported their support in the shifts of instruction, referral procedures, and partnership with the parent community in identifying students with disabilities. Educators of IPS take pride in their district's child study teams and the inclusive practices they have established to support all students in the general education classroom setting.

When referencing the second review question; *What are the strengths and challenges within Ipswich Public Schools programming that best support students who have been diagnosed with dyslexia?* it is noted that IPS demonstrates strength in its education, providing researched-based and language-rich instructional programming to its students. Staff are highly trained in many aspects of literacy. Administration attempts to hire staff with dual certification in general and special education, and with Wilson certification, if possible. The district provides professional development in the areas of pedagogical practices in literacy. IPS has philosophically and financially invested in inclusive practices, as evidenced in their co-teaching classrooms. Finally, IPS has many interventions they provide to their students, beginning at the preschool level of instruction. Challenges were identified by participants. Some of these challenges included sufficient time for staff to talk with one another between schools more regularly. The participants requested a systemic tracking system to assist with the transferring of student data. Finally, there was concern regarding the staff and parents' understanding of dyslexia and data analysis.

Recommendations

The program review for the IPS consisted of interviewing administration, teaching staff, special educators, parents, and students, as well as a representative of both the School Committee and the Special Education Parent Advisory (SEPAC). The evaluators also reviewed statewide and districtwide data, sample IEPs, and classroom observations. This program review was completed over a span of approximately three months. As a result of this program review, it is important to recognize the quantity of highly qualified staff throughout the district, and their dedication and commitment to the students whom they serve. Furthermore, the review identified many positive attributes of the district's programming for students with dyslexia. The review included a focused literature review which supports many practices provided by the district currently. As a result of this review, Academic Discoveries, LLC is including the following recommendations for consideration. The recommendations have been broken down into three categories; communication, professional development, and systemic approaches.

Communication

Parent Understanding:

It was reported through interviews that some parents, although very appreciative of the assessments, screening tools, interventions, and supports, may not always understand the educational language or jargon used through parent teacher discussions. One specific example is the language educators use to identify the reading level of one's child in the general education classroom. Parents would like to know where their child ranks in comparison to their peers. It is a recommendation to have IPS develop graphs and or charts to not only illustrate the individual growth of a student's reading abilities but also in comparison to that of their classroom or grade level peers. Additionally, IPS may want to provide more training opportunities to increase parents' awareness around the tiered system of supports provided within a classroom for students on a regularly basis. Another topic that would be beneficial for parents is how to partner with medical professionals, parents, and the district when completing outside evaluations to ensure appropriate analyses and recommendations are provided within reports.

Professional Development

New Staff

New staff who begin working at IPS may not share the same background understanding or knowledge as it pertains to the district's philosophy of supporting students with dyslexia. Therefore, as recommended by the staff of IPS, the district would benefit from providing mandated professional development for new staff. This training would support consistency and cohesiveness of pedagogical practices as it relates to implementation of literacy instruction, specifically in the earlier grades from preschool to grade three.

Enhancing Understanding of Dyslexia

It was reported that some administrators believe educators may not always feel confident in diagnosing a student with dyslexia. Therefore, a recommendation to provide professional development relating to the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines document. A valuable note, however, these guidelines are designed as a general education process, which may result in special education. The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure districts have appropriate screening, multi-tiered systems of support, progress monitoring, and referral processes in place. The district is best served if all educators are familiarized with these guidelines.

Data Collection and Analysis

IPS has recently initiated new screening tools, such as Lexia, into the school system. It was reported that staff appreciated this new resource, however, there was concern expressing the staff's awareness of what to do with the data collected from screening and benchmarking results. Therefore, it is a recommendation the district provide professional development around data collection, analysis, and how to create data-driven decision making within their classrooms to ensure appropriate interventions and strategies are effectively utilized to enhance student outcomes.

Parent Training

SEPAC reported that IPS previously provided parents with training relating to various disabilities. According to parents, training that pertained to dyslexia was provided several years ago. There has been an expressed interest to receive training for parents new to dyslexia in order to better understand this diagnosis. To better understand educational jargon that is used in reports, parents expressed an interest in training on terminology. Parents would like to know more about progress monitoring, screening tools implemented, and diagnostic assessments. Parents are interested in understanding how a child may be diagnosed with dyslexia, and yet not necessarily require an IEP in order to be successful in school.

Systemic Approaches

Annual Training:

Administration and educators collectively reported it would be in the best interest for IPS to establish professional development on an annual basis that is required for all educators, including general and special educators. The purpose of this recommendation is to ensure a cohesive and consistent approach to pedagogical practices as it relates to understanding dyslexia. The training should focus on providing various strategies and approaches towards literacy instruction and

development. It may be in the best interest of IPS to review their professional development schedules and to require, or mandate, a training around the need and expectation of rich language-based instruction to serve all students, including those with language-based disabilities. The recommendation is not to eliminate summer programming, but to provide professional development during the school year as well, or at least during the teachers' contractual timeline.

Transferring of Student Data

Given the responses from the participants from this program review it is a recommendation that IPS develop protocols that support transition of student data between schools, specifically for those who have been diagnosed with dyslexia. Staff members reported they were uncertain as to the specific supports that were in place for the child prior to their entering the middle or high. Staff reported they would like to better understand what specific programming and strategies were successful for students. Educators reported an inconsistency of transferring student data specifically around pedagogical interventions and student response to classroom instruction from one year to the next. It may be in the best interest of IPS to identify a systemic approach of transferring student data from one building to the next, or from one grade level to the next.

In conclusion, it has been a pleasure working with Ipswich Public Schools. We thank you for the opportunity and respect all the work your District does each day to provide the best education for your students.

Respectfully Submitted,



Dr. Nadine G. Ekstrom



Dr. Leah M. Ferullo

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Appendix A

Ipswich Public Schools Dyslexia Screening and Support in General Education Elementary Level

Grade	Instrument or Intervention	Focus
Pre-Kindergarten	Kindergarten Screening – <i>ESI (Early Screening Inventory)</i>	Visual discrimination, attention, language readiness
Kindergarten	Fall screening <i>PASS</i> (Phonological Awareness Screener), <i>DIBELS</i>	<p><i>PASS</i> examines:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Word Discrimination 2. Rhyme Recognition 3. Rhyme Production 4. Syllable Blending 5. Syllable Segmentation 6. Syllable Deletion 7. Phoneme Recognition 8. Phoneme Blending 9. Phoneme Segmentation 10. Phoneme Deletion <p>* <i>DIBELS</i> is an individually - administered measure of student skills in each of the key basic early literacy skills. <u>D</u>ynamic <u>I</u>ndicators of <u>B</u>asic <u>E</u>arly <u>L</u>iteracy <u>S</u>kills (<i>DIBELS</i>) assesses the acquisition of early literacy skills. It is used three times a year in kindergarten, and in Title 1.</p>
Grades K-3	Shaywitz Dyslexia Screener	School psychologists can now use the Shaywitz Dyslexia Screener, which is part of our Pearson Digital Assessment Library. The Shaywitz screener examines phonological, linguistic, and academic performance based on teacher observations.
Grades K-3	<i>Foundations</i> - 30 minutes daily as part of classroom instruction. <i>Hegarty, Lively Letter, RAVE-O</i>	<i>Foundations</i> is a Wilson Reading program offering both prevention and classroom intervention. The comprehensive program materials allow K-3 teachers to present a carefully structured phonics and spelling curriculum using engaging,

		<p>multisensory techniques. Hegarty is used in grades K-1 for phonological awareness. In Title I, we use a variety of resources based on student profiles, but we may use LLI or RAVE-O.</p>
Grades 4-5	<i>Words their Way</i>	<p><i>Words their Way</i> provides literacy instruction in phonics, spelling, and vocabulary.</p>
Grades 4-5 At - Risk	<i>Just Words, Read Naturally, Great Leaps</i>	<p><i>Just Words</i> is a Wilson program which provides highly explicit, multisensory decoding and spelling instruction for students in grades 4–12 who have mild to moderate gaps in their decoding and spelling proficiency but do not require intensive intervention. The program is used with students with below-average decoding and spelling scores and is combined with literature-rich classroom instruction. <i>Read Naturally</i> is an evidence-based program that targets fluency and phonics needs. <i>Great Leaps</i> is an additional research-based program which supports fluency development with comprehension by emphasizing phonics, phrases, stories, and depth of knowledge.</p>
All grades – This is now being offered not only to the At- Risk students, but to all students	<i>Lexia</i>	<p><i>Lexia</i> Reading is a computerized reading program that provides phonics instruction and gives students independent practice in basic reading skills. <i>Lexia</i> supplements regular classroom instruction and supports skill development in the five areas of reading instruction identified by the National Reading Panel.</p>

All grades	Differentiated Supports and screenings	<p>*Title I students work with <i>RAVE-O</i>, an evidence- based literacy program using interactive, multisensory activities that enhance students’ abilities to decode, read fluently, comprehend, and analyze what they read. The purpose of this instruction is to build confidence and motivate students to accelerate toward their reading goals.</p> <p>*Individual Title I supports also take place with teaching fellows</p> <p>*Classroom running records are used on a regular basis to chart student progress and identify those students in need of a higher level of support</p> <p>*Monthly data team meetings examine student progress in a formal framework</p> <p>*General education reading teachers and the Speech and Language Therapist (SLP)double-dose at-risk students with individualized <i>Foundations</i> and other phonological work in small groups</p> <p>*RTI efforts include <i>Read Naturally</i>, a fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension program used with grades 1-5 and <i>Lively Letters</i>, a program providing embedded memory techniques; music supports; mnemonics, and mouth, hand and body cues.</p> <p>*For special education reading, we use Wilson, Orton Gillingham, LIPS, Visualizing and Verbalizing, Just Words, and Lively Letters.</p>
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