



Date: February 28, 2024
To: Portland Public Schools Board of Education
From: Jey Buno, Chief of Student Support Services
Subject: Special Education Update

The purpose of this memo is to provide the Board an update on Special Education service decentralization, program shifts, and rationale for budget recommendations and the staff training processes as a result of recent public commentary, email communication, advocacy, and inquiries. Additionally I have included an appendix on the Special Education Department's progress toward strategic goals, outcomes, professional learning, achievement, graduation/engagement data, program improvement and path forward, in preparation for the upcoming board meeting presentation on March 5th 2024.

Special Education Funding and Staffing

I am providing a quick overview of how Oregon funds special education and then an update on the rationale for program shifts and budget reductions in the special education department.

Oregon provides a weighted average daily membership or ADMw = average daily membership + an additional amount of 1.0 for each student in average daily membership eligible for special education as a child with a disability under ORS 343.035 up to an 11% ceiling. Portland's current representation of eligible students is over 16% and for which we provide special education services. Our IDEA funds are approximately 8.7 million. We have submitted testimony to the legislature for the last 2 sessions in support of the elimination of the arbitrary cap. An 11% cap level does not exist in most states. If it exists at all it is typically around 15% to 16%. For students with particularly high needs, there is another source of funds, the High Cost Disabilities Fund. However, there is growing need in that fund, the amount of money per student has gone down by about 20%. The grants provide supplemental funding per student whose education costs more than \$30,000 per year (typically a few thousand). There is a bill moving forward this year to increase funding in that account which may increase reimbursement. PPS is at the top of the state in spending per student with disability in services, caseload, and pay for our educators based on the resources we have available. We spend all of the resources provided to us by the state and federal government for students with disabilities.

There is work to be done within our system to address the urgent learning needs of our students. This work is outlined in our instructional priorities and the roadmap to educational equity. This includes our students that experience disabilities. Additionally each of the strategies outlined in our special education improvement plan addressed in the appendix will add to this plan. As the leader of this department there are strategic moves I would recommend with staffing where we need to invest to lower caseloads for the support of students and staff in special education. The issue is not that we do not want to prioritize this. The issue is that we are not provided the resources or funding from the State. Any additional investment in special education at this time without additional funding from the state will result in a cut to other essential services provided to students in PPS.

Budget and Programming Recommendations

Through this budget season I am making four shifts within the central special education department and then a shift within the way PPS provides Adapted Physical Education (APE) services following the recommendations of the program evaluation discussed in the appendix.

The first significant change is the reduction of 4 administrative staff within the department. I have heard very clearly from building leaders and staff in the last two years that the current systems and structures are not responsive or supportive. Through this budget cycle I have worked to streamline the leadership structure and redefine roles and responsibilities to ensure an efficient and responsive structure focused on support and meeting district, divisional, office, and departmental goals. There will be less central office administrative staff in the special education department moving into next year in order to become more efficient and effective.

A second shift is a reduction in the number of Board Certified Behavioral Analysts. We will continue to have these necessary experts within our system. However, feedback has also been clear, these resources have not been viewed on whole, as support but instead has resulted in more paperwork than actual collaboration or student centered services. This FTE was not reduced as a budget reduction, but rather pushed into our schools in FTE for Psychologists, SLPs, Special Education Teachers, and Paraeducators. Any student that has a service or need identified for behavioral support in their IEP will continue to have it provided as these central staff are not direct student service providers. This is a central office shift.

The third shift decentralizes feeding assessment and training. A single team of 2.5 FTE (1.0 SLP, 1.0 OT, and .5 Nurse) and the liability related to the single point of decision making has become unsustainable. Our plan moving forward is to embrace and emphasize the expertise of our school based professionals to serve and support our students and staff. We will be pushing services into schools and our building service providers. We have spent time in the last 2 years providing training and support specifically on feeding and will continue to do so this spring and as we onboard new staff. This work is also part of a training and preparation program for both a Speech and Language Pathologist (SLPs) and Occupational Therapist (OT). We will continue to contract with the MESD for nursing support as we have in the past and we are bargaining with PAT to provide an extended responsibility payment to 2 (SLP) and 2 (OTs) to provide consultation, training, and assessment practice to our building based staff when there are complex situations and or medical orders received that require non-routine expertise that the nurse is unable to support. Students with feeding needs are already on the caseloads of the building staff and in our current model building staff are already responsible for the direct services. The current feeding team's focus is training and assessment. The team does not provide services to students. The training of building staff will increase the capacity of our staff and the extended responsibilities will address workload for complex cases. IEP teams will continue to determine individual student needs and ensure student services are delivered as they have in the past. This is a decentralization of resources.

The fourth shift is very similar to the decentralization of the feeding support with the assistive technology team. The plan is the same. We will provide extended responsibility pay to OTs for assistive technology consultation and to SLPs for augmentative communication consultation. Students will continue to be served and supported on building staff caseloads and we will continue to integrate professional learning into our joblike meetings for both of these groups in support of these services they are already providing. We will continue the position that manages the inventory of the assistive tech devices and continue to work in collaboration with the Ed Tech department and Teacher Professional Learning with the integration of universal digital tools. This is a decentralization of resources.

The final shift moving forward involves implementation of the recommendations outlined within the Adaptive Physical Education (APE) program evaluation and bringing this special education service into alignment with special education programming across our system as identified within the appendix. APE is a special education service. We will continue to provide APE to our students with the most significant motor/medical needs that require services as determined by their IEP teams as a service within our general physical education sections. Our data indicates inconsistent physical education experiences in our schools for students with disabilities. Currently some

students experience a fully included experience and some students experience a fully secluded experience. Moving forward, students with disabilities will have access to physical education with nondisabled peers as is required by federal law and IEP teams will provide a continuum of specially designed instruction for students that require it to access physical education. A review of student numbers with intensive motor/medical needs requiring intensive APE services identifies that we require less APE service providers moving forward. Federal law requires that students with disabilities are to receive physical education with their nondisabled peers. Some students require special education services to do that. Currently 65% of students in focus classrooms are not provided physical education with their non disabled peers according to the program audit conducted in May 2023. This is being changed moving forward. The special education department is working in partnership with OTL and Teacher Professional Learning to provide job-like learning this spring and summer for our general physical education teachers in support of students with disabilities. The shift in programming is a central reduction that impacts itinerant staff across schools.

Professional Learning

Public comment in meetings has addressed topics related to student behavior escalation and declaration response and also paraeducator onboarding and training. I have provided you with an update with our training and onboarding process. Additionally, the appendix includes additional information related to professional learning around teaching and learning and climate and culture.

School Climate, Classroom Management, Crises Deescalation

Portland Public Schools is committed to the safety of students and staff. PPS is partnering with the Crisis Prevention Institute who facilitates NCI to ensure we provide staff with the best techniques and resources available. One of our key resources to ensure that we maintain a safe and healthy educational environment is providing ongoing training and support to administration, professional educators and classified staff in crisis de escalation. Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Training (NCI), an Oregon approved intervention, is offered through the special education department in the pre-service and throughout the year to staff. Staff are required to be recertified in NCI every 2 years. We track certification of staff and provide reminders for them when their certification is coming due. Every paraeducator in our system is trained during onboarding. Professional special educators and administrators are provided training options during pre-service and then additional opportunities are available throughout the school year on Mondays.

As agreed to in our most recent collective bargaining agreement is to train all staff in classroom management, verbal intervention and de-escalation techniques. The type of training that staff receive will be differentiated based on role. The plan moving forward in action is as follows:

- **Classroom Management**: All classroom teachers during pre-service culture and climate day will receive tier one integrated practices that are not only foundational to creating a positive school climate and culture, but also will mitigate the need for de-escalation. These school climate trainings integrate Restorative Justice, Racial Equity and Social Justice, Transformative Social Emotional Learning as well as PBIS Schoolwide Classroom Routines and Procedures. The trainings are developed by staff trained in all the above as well as CPI's Classroom Culture methodology and provided on site at each school building.
- **Verbal DeEscalation**: Every building administrator, special educator, behavior specialist/analyst, school social worker, school counselor, school psychologist and other qualified mental health practitioner (QMHP) will be trained in verbal de-escalation strategies to prevent challenging behaviors and confrontations. This training also helps to recognize escalating behaviors and to respond to these behaviors in a trauma-informed way. This training is completed annually as part of the culture and climate professional learning.
- **Nonviolent Crisis Intervention**: we will continue to provide training in Nonviolent Crisis Intervention to respond to extreme confrontations and behaviors where staff are trained to restrictive interventions only as a last resort, and participants an opportunity to analyze and discuss behaviors that are a risk to a student's self or others in their proximity. Importantly, training teaches participants to "disengage" when students grab or bite in ways that are less likely to cause trauma or to damage rapport. This training has a

smaller focus on staff including building administrators, dean of students, campus safety specialists and all special educators including paraprofessionals. CPI verbal and NCI training is completed on two year cycles and staff need to be recertified.

- **Ukeru:** Finally, at our Pioneer school there is an additional level of training that we provide to all staff members that involves removing all restrictive interventions and is rooted entirely in trauma informed practice. This strategy is called Ukeru and is the primary strategy implemented there. Ukeru is recertified annually.

Classified Onboarding/Training

We have over 300 paraeducators that support students with Individualized Education Plans. These invaluable staff are essential for the success of our students with disabilities as they help students to access the general education curriculum, as well as support students with medical, feeding, behavior, hygiene and other needs.

Three years ago when I started in PPS as the Senior Director of Special Education I worked directly with Michelle Batten and John MacDuffee within PFSP leadership alongside Dr. Hollands to design and develop a PPS mandatory 2 day onboarding and professional learning process for our special education classified staff which is being implemented. In addition to all District required training, paraprofessionals attend an intensive two day learning experience in which they are prepared for their entry in their new school community. During this professional development they receive training specific to their role, which includes de-escalation and non-violent communication techniques as well as basic expectations and support to be in the school environment. These two day onboarding training occur twice a week from August to the end of October and then weekly for the remainder of the school year.

PPS has a long standing partnership with the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) and critical staff, including paraprofessionals are trained in their nationally recognized Nonviolent Crisis Intervention (NCI) techniques. This full day training is a trauma-informed de-escalation that prepares paraprofessionals to prevent and de-escalate medium to high-risk behavior using both restrictive and nonrestrictive methods.

On the second onboarding day, paraprofessionals meet with a special education teacher on special assignment for an overview of the district and their role in it. The half-day intensive includes the importance of building relationships with students, setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries as well as key skills components of teamwork and being part of a school community. Each paraprofessional leaves this training with a list of key contacts as well as their new work schedule which they take to their site for the remainder of the day. The remainder of their day is spent in experiential learning with their building administrator and other new colleagues.

In collaboration with Human Resources, OTIS and other offices, the Special Education department presents at Classified Connections which take place every school year. This is valued professional learning by our PFSP staff that I believe was pioneered by Dr. Hollands. During this time, learning includes strategies for teachers & paras to keep your team moving in the same direction; strategies staff can implement in the moment to support student communication and decrease interfering behavior; and other strategies supporting students with disabilities. Additionally, during teacher professional development/planning day's the Special Education Department hosts half day NCI refresher training and professional learning for classified staff.

As always, please let me know if you have any additional questions.

Appendix

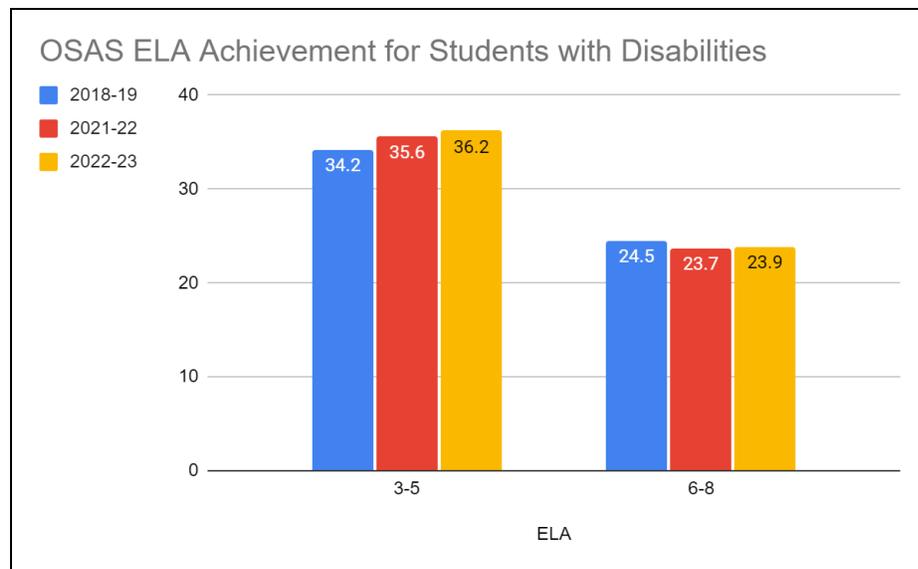
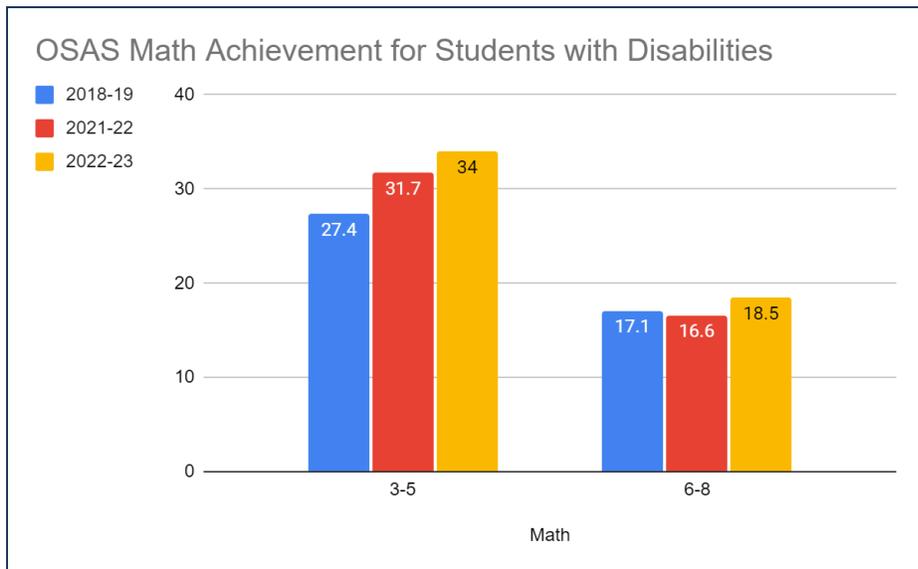
The mission of the Special Education Department is to provide instructional services in inclusive environments that will prepare students who receive special education services for life and careers. This work is in support of the PPS board goals and aligned to the [vision](#) as well as represented in the Portland Public Schools Strategic Plan, [Forward Together](#). The Special Education Department, following a program review and in collaboration with parents, community members, staff, building leaders, community members, the special education staff advisory community and the special education parent advisory community has developed a [comprehensive plan](#) integrated with Forward Together which is focused to improve services to, and outcomes for, our students. I will discuss in detail in this memo.

The table below provides our enrollment over the last four years. For each school year, the first column represents the number of students who are eligible for special education services. The second column shows the representation of students eligible for special education services in Portland Public Schools (PPS).

	2020-21		2021-22		2022-23		2023-24		2023-24 % DISTRICT Total Enrollment
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Special Education Enrollment	7268	15.3 %	7164	15.7	7420	16.3 %	7403	16.5%	16.5%
Asian	307	4.3%	284	4.1%	270	3.6%	256	3.4%	5.7%
Black/African American	822	11.5%	771	11 %	805	10.9%	851	11.4%	8.7%
Hispanic	1361	19.1%	1320	18.8%	1472	19.8%	1553	15.5%	17.3%
Two or more	864	12.1%	889	12.7%	933	12.6%	972	13.1%	5.3/6.5%
Native American	64	0.9%	58	0.8%	69	0.9%	79	1%	.5%
Pacific Islander	48	0.7%	36	0.5%	35	0.5%	37	3.5%	.7%
White	3670	51.4%	3648	52.1%	3836	51.7%	3931	47.6%	55.8%

Achievement

Academic achievement scores of our students with disabilities that receive special education services continue to see slight improvements year over year.



Graduation/Leaver Engagement with Higher Education/Training or Employment

Students with disabilities that receive special education services are eligible for those services through the school year in which they turn 21, as determined by their IEP team. The Community Transition Program, PPS’s 18-21 service program, supports 140 to 180 students each year. This year we have 144 students. Since these students stay beyond the 4th and 5th year they are not counted in the cohort rates but are counted in our engagement data. Engagement data is reflective of how students that received special education services are engaged a year after they leave our services. We gather this data by contacting the young adults. The most recent data reported to ODE from 2022 reflect that 85% of our young adults were engaged in higher education, competitive employment or other education or training programs. Portland Public Schools demonstrate significantly higher engagement rates

than students across the state and also similarly sized districts in Oregon. Additionally, we continue to focus programming through our improvement plan to prepare students within inclusive settings to successfully transition into the world beyond the K-12 setting that does not include special education.

2022-23 4-Year Cohort Grad and Completion Rates				
Cohort	Grads	PPS Special Education Grad Rate	PPS Special Education Completers	Completion Rate
498	358	71.90%	372	74.70%

	Higher Education (HE)	HE + Competitive Employment (CE)	Engagement Rate HE+CE+Other School/Work	Not Engaged
2022	38.46%	74.56%	85.80%	14.20%
Like-Size Districts	23.58%	63.55%	75.80%	24.20%
Statewide	19.14%	64.41%	75.24%	24.76%
2021	25.41%	42.62%	62.30%	37.70%

Strategic Plan Goals:

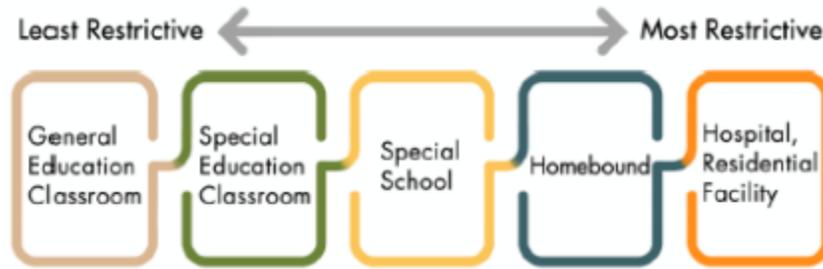
As a school system, our strategic plan, [Forward Together](#), outlines what we want to be true for students with disabilities:

- **Establish Systems and Structures for Inclusion:** All of our systems and structures support the understanding and implementation of inclusionary practices for students with disabilities. (page 31)
- **Promote an Inclusive Mindset:** We all share the mindset that students with disabilities are everyone’s students. (page 32)
- **Build the Advocacy Power of Students and Families of Students with Disabilities:** We ensure that all families and students, especially those historically underserved, have the knowledge, information, and support they need to fully engage in, and contribute to, the special education process. (page 33)
- **Reimagine Relationships and a Sense of Belonging:** Students develop a strong sense of belonging, and we foster safe, healthy, and positive learning and working environments. (page 21)

The comprehensive plan for systems and structures for Inclusive practices in PPS is centered around the four strategic goals listed above and will support the understanding and implementation of inclusionary practices for students with disabilities.

Special Education Continuum of Services:

Special education is specially designed instruction and services for students. It is identified within an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that addresses a student’s unique needs based on a disability. A term often used to describe this in special education is “free and appropriate public education (FAPE).” PPS provides eligible students with a continuum of services in the least restrictive environment (LRE), consistent with state and federal law. **The special education program for a student with a disability is their Individualized Education Plan. Special Education is a service and not a place.**



The continuum of placement options available includes, but is not limited to:

- General education classes
- General education classes with support services and/or modifications
- Combination of general education and special education service time
- Specialized special education classes
- Placements outside of a school district
- Home instruction
- Day/residential care or treatment facilities

Each individual education plan (IEP) outlines the percentage of time a student is expected to participate in the general education setting. Students in all settings are provided access to meaningful participation in the general education classrooms with effective instruction in grade-level content standards.

Portland Public Schools Special Education Programming:

- Early Childhood Special Education Services: Special education services for students, birth through age 5. This program is run outside of PPS through the Multnomah Early Childhood Program. Portland Public Schools does not currently provide early intervention (birth -3) or early childhood special education services (3-5).
- K-12 Levels of Support:
 - Learning Center: Supplemental special education services provided at every school campus in PPS. The Learning Center is staffed at a ratio of one (1) special education teacher to 28 students in K-8 and (1) special education teacher to 30 students at the high school level.
 - Focused Specialized Classrooms: Specialized classroom locations are located throughout PPS. These classrooms are staffed by a ratio of one (1) special education teacher to 11 students and 3 paraeducators with some variation for Social-Emotional Skills classrooms depending on grade. Students are assigned to focus classrooms by the district following the decision of the IEP team that includes the parents. The IEP team must implement the due process rights of the student and parent of the student eligible for special education services.
 - Locations of Focus Classrooms in PPS
 - Communication Behavior: Special education instruction with a primary focus on social communication needs.
 - Social-Emotional Skills: Special education instruction with a primary focus on social/behavioral needs, collaborative problem solving, and positive behavioral supports.
 - Intensive Skills Classrooms: Instruction to students with a primary focus on adaptive and academic skill development.
 - Therapeutic School Services: Services focused on social/behavioral needs, collaborative problem solving, and positive behavioral supports.
- Ages 18-21 Community Transition Program: Provides services to students ages 18-21 that are identified through the course of study within their IEP as needing continued special education services beyond the fourth year of high school. Services focus on the transition from school to adult services.

At PPS, more than 80% of the students eligible for special education services are in general education settings for

more than 80% of the school day. This is supported by best practices and overwhelming research in special education, and is an achievement of which we should be proud. The table below delineates the percentages of our students who participate in the general education environment and at what level:

PPS Student Placement	2020-21		2021-22		2022-23		2023-24	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
40% to 79% of the Day in Regular Class	580	8.13%	648	9.25%	706	9.51%	607	8.21%
80% or More of the Day in Regular Class	5677	79.55%	5621	80.23%	5919	79.77%	6048	81.78%
Home-Schooled	21	0.29%	9	0.13%	3	0.04%	4	0.05%
Homebound	24	0.34%	33	0.47%	28	0.38%	18	0.24%
Less Than 40% of the Day in Regular Class	516	7.23%	400	5.71%	449	6.05%	488	6.67%
Private School	74	1.04%	103	1.47%	127	1.71%	57	0.78%
Private Residential Facility	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	15	0.20%	1	.001%
Private Separate School	8	0.11%	7	0.10%	5	0.07%	7	0.16%
Public Residential Facility	8	0.11%	1	0.01%	11	0.15%	14	0.28%
Public Separate School	228	3.20%	184	2.63%	157	2.12%	133	1.84%

We fundamentally believe in providing a continuum of special education services and instruction to address the needs of our students that receive special education services. In October 2021, PPS opted to have a third-party review of special education programming at PPS and how it aligns with the PPS Strategic Plan, [Forward Together](#). The purpose of the review was to address recommendations for persistent gaps in achievement, engagement, belonging, and experiences of students and staff across buildings. We partnered with the Urban Special Education Collaborative, a nationally recognized organization based at the University of Arizona, that works with school districts to increase inclusive special education services in schools and decrease the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in classification rates, separate educational environments, and disciplinary actions. The [review](#) highlighted key shifts including the need to focus on an inclusive, community focused program model.

Adapted Physical Education is a special education service that has been led out of the Physical Education Department since prior to my arrival in PPS. However, it is funded through special education as it is a special education service. It is returning to the special education department leadership. In May 2023 the Health and Physical Education Department collaborated with the Public Consulting Group to conduct an Adapted Physical Education (APE) [program review](#). APE is a version of specially designed instruction in physical education that has been adapted or modified so that a student with a disability is able to access PE in the same manner as a student without a disability. It is a direct special education service uniquely designed and documented in a student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) to meet their needs in physical education at the time approximately 470 students across PPS received APE services. Under the Federal statute, APE is a way of providing specially designed instruction in physical education for those students with disabilities who have significant gross motor skill deficits and require specially designed instruction in order to benefit from physical education. Federal regulations also identify that each child with a disability must be afforded the opportunity to participate in the

regular physical education program available to nondisabled children unless the child is enrolled full time in a separate facility; or the child needs specially designed physical education to access physical education. The review identified inconsistent implementation of APE across schools. However, in total that 65% of students that receive APE services received them in a separate special education setting and that when these students did receive services by general PE teachers they were provided them in settings with only other students with disabilities at the K-5/K-8 level. The review highlighted key shifts included the need to focus on a continuum of services for a focus on participation with nondisabled peers within general physical education.

Community Engagement:

Following the program review the Department engaged with staff, community members, parents, students, and administrators. The special education program plan has been developed collaboratively with special education staff, and far more importantly; centers the voices of our students and their families. Here are some of the staff, community & family engagement activities engaged in:

- The Special Education Steering Committee consists of staff in the following roles: Special Education Teachers, Occupational Therapist, Paraeducators, School Psychologist, Speech Therapists, Qualified Mental Health Professional (QMHP), Building Administrators, District Office Administrators, and Special Education Administrators.
- Special Education Parent Advisory consists of parents from around the district representing many schools and classrooms all accessing special education services in Portland Public Schools.
- Hundreds of Students' voices have been gathered at each type of our Focus Classrooms through focused listening (Social Emotional Skills classroom, Communication & Behavior classroom, Intensive Skills classroom) at both the middle and high school levels, including Pioneer and the Community Transition Program.
- In Person Parent feedback and listening sessions of those that experience Focused Classrooms in English, Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Somali.
- Parent survey for every parent that experiences special education across PPS in English, Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Somali.
- Building administrator input, feedback and listening sessions.

The listening sessions conducted were intended to be foundational, and the lessons learned are to build a practice of ongoing two way communication with key stakeholders in support of our continuous improvement cycle for Special Education services and set the plan moving forward.

Parents of students that have been served in Specialized Focused Classrooms identified the following themes:

- Want to be connected to their neighborhood school and their community and do not want to be sent to other schools
- Feel that all students and staff would benefit from intentional education about neurodiversity and ableism.
- Would welcome additional learning opportunities centered around the school community and student specific needs.

Special education staff provided the following themes:

- Lower caseloads
- Want meaningful access to general education curriculum for students as well as collaborative opportunities with general education teachers.
- Feel that students, families and staff would benefit from school or district sponsored neurodivergent affinity groups or other opportunities for families & students to talk to each other
- Would welcome the opportunity to participate in more inclusive and intentional professional development.

Students voice included the following theme:

- Students want to be seen as co-learners, peers and welcome additions to their school communities and do not understand why they were sent to other schools.

Program Improvement:

Based on program reviews, stakeholder voice and input, a plan for [program improvement](#) has been finalized and is being socialized this year. This plan includes a shift toward a neighborhood school model. PPS has been investing in a model neighborhood school at Sitton Elementary for the past 2 years. We have also begun onboarding Marysville Elementary this year as an additional model site. The intention behind these models was to work collaboratively with our building principals at these schools to learn what implementation would look like in PPS and also demonstrate that we can build a culture of belonging for students with disabilities with PPS staff, PPS resources, in the PPS community simply because it is the right thing to do.

The program improvement plan for special education requires that students who receive special education services in PPS are provided access to grade level standards content. Students should be engaged in grade level and standards aligned universally designed tasks, with scaffolds that support students access without modification of the tasks themselves.

The following key shifts have are identified as a result of program reviews and stakeholder input:

- Implement a special education instructional model that is anchored in the core Instructional Framework with high leverage practices and inclusive educational environments
- Adopt and support the principles of Universal Design for Learning as a key strategy to support all students' access to the core general education curriculum.
- Provide ongoing professional development for principals in leading for students with disabilities.
- Provide ongoing engagement opportunities for parents, caregivers and students to ensure their voices are integrated in the implementation of special education programming.
- Implement a neighborhood school model of service delivery for students with disabilities in support of equity inclusion, sense of belonging.
- Establish clear and detailed guidelines to determine entry, exit, and placement criteria and expectations for services for students with disabilities.
- Clear processes for data collection, progress monitoring and reporting.
- The review recommended a revision to the current APE service model to align with district goals. Focus on Building the capacity of current service providers, PE teachers, and paraeducators with students focus on students accessing general PE in alignment with requirement a full continuum of services

Inclusionary Practices:

Central to the plan for improved Special Education programming, and student belonging, is inclusionary practices. Inclusionary practices actions that educators, schools, and districts take to create opportunities for students with diverse abilities to learn and be a part of the general education curriculum, classroom, and school community. In alignment with the prioritization of student belonging, we believe all students have the right to access academic and social opportunities in their neighborhood schools; this includes access to core content and a continuum of special education services. A neighborhood school is defined as a school assignment within the neighborhood in

which a student lives. Currently, 6111 out of 7410 students that receive special education services attend their neighborhood school.

Providing appropriate support for students in their neighborhood schools increases a sense of belonging and school engagement. As we have heard from students and families in our listening sessions, enabling students to continue their education with their neighborhood peers helps them feel part of the community. Parents have also expressed that transportation to and from school can be challenging when their child is placed at a school outside of their neighborhood.

Effective inclusionary practices facilitate student access to grade level content and core instruction for students with disabilities. These critical factors lead to improved student outcomes including academic achievement, eighth grade readiness and high school graduation rates. Ensuring that students and families feel part of their school community will also empower them to share their voice and advocate for their needs.

As we work towards a more inclusive environment and supporting students with disabilities within their neighborhood schools, the staffing model may shift. Our talented staff with expertise in supporting and teaching students with various disabilities will continue and deepen their collaboration with general education teachers and staff.

Staffing Ratios

School Psychologists (K-12)

Grade-Level	2024-25 Students Who Receive Special Education Services to School Psychologist Ratio
K-12	School Psychologists are allocated to PPS Schools at a ratio not to exceed 1:135 Students that receive special education Services
PPS Participates in the School Based Mental Health Grant Program that provides additional funds to support implementation at selected schools of the Comprehensive School Psychologist Program	Comprehensive School Psychologist Assignments 1:500 - Total enrollment

Speech and Language Pathologists (K-12)

Grade-Level	Students to Speech and Language Pathologist Ratio
K-8	1:50
HS	1:55

Specialized Programs

Staffing allocations for Specialized Education programs is as follows, ration 13:1 (teacher:student):

Program Type	Grade-Level	Teacher FTE	Para-educators	Therapeutic Intervention Coach (TIC) FTE - Student Staffing Ratio	Mental Health Service Provider FTE - Student
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					Staffing Ratio (Round to nearest .1 FTE)
Social Emotional Skills (SES)	K-5	1	3	0.039 Staffing Factor (13 Students is .5 FTE)	0.039 Staffing Factor (13 Students is .5 FTE)
	6-8	1	3	n/a	0.039 Staffing Factor (13 students is .5 FTE)
	HS	1	2	.077 Staffing Factor (13 Students is 1.0 FTE))	.077 Staffing Factor (13 Students is 1.0 FTE)
Communication Behavior (CB)	K-5	1	3		
Intensive Skills Centers	K-12	1	3		
CB Team	6-8	1	3		

Learning Center Teachers (K-12)

All Learning Center teachers are allocated in 0.5 FTE increments. The learning center ratio for K-5, K-8, 6-8 and K-12 are as follows:

K-8 Learning Center Formula Every 14 eligible students = .5 FTE

High School Learning Center and High School CB Team Formula every 15 eligible students = .5 FTE 1 paraeducator for HS CB Team

Designated Adult Support Paraeducators (1:1 Paraeducators)

- Designated paraeducators will be assigned to schools to meet the needs of a specific student as indicated by services on an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Staffing Levels/Ratios

These Averages were pulled in January 2024. Averages shift as we move through the school year.

	Avg K-8 Teacher Ratios	Avg 9-12 Teacher Ratios
Learning Center	1:26	1:31
Social Emotional Skills Classroom	1:11	1:12
Communication & Behavior Classroom	1:12	N/A
Intensive Skills Classroom	1:10	1:11
Pioneer	1:8	
Community Transition	N/A	1:21

The table below outlines our staffing over the last four years:

Staff Role	2020-21 Total FTE	2021-22 Total FTE	2022-23 Total FTE	2023-24 Total FTE
Speech Pathologist	93.2	96	95	91.2
School Psychologist	57.31	56.8	58	62
Learning Center Teacher	181.5	181.5	176.5	181
Communication Behavior Classroom Teacher	23	23	23	23
Intensive Skills Classroom Teacher	38	37	36	44.5
Social Emotional Skills Classroom Teacher	25	25	24	23
Pioneer Teacher	16	16	16	16
Community Transition Program Teacher	9	9	8.5	8
Qualified Mental Health Professional	16	16	16	16.5
Therapeutic Intervention Coach (TIC)	14	14	23	27
Para Educator FTE Communication Behavior Classroom	69	69	69	69
Para Educator FTE Intensive Skills Classroom	118	118	108	135
Para Educator FTE Social Emotional Skills classroom	64	64	64	64
Para Educator FTE -1:1 Support	172	168.5	159	152

Professional Learning

Instructional Framework - Academic Learning:

A key component of the PPS Strategic Plan, [Forward Together](#) is the [Instructional Framework and Roadmap to Educational Equity](#). The plan outlines a shared vision of what teaching and learning should look like in PPS. In partnership with teachers, school leaders, and staff from across the district, we are calibrating around this shared vision of highly effective teaching and learning, adopting new curricula to support that instruction, and offering improved professional learning experiences for all teachers. Every special educator in PPS is committed to meeting the specific learning needs of our special education students.

The Special Education department is collaborating with the MTSS department to develop tiered systems of support and streamline services to students. Through multi-tiered systems of support, students receive individual interventions to meet students' needs regardless of whether the student has a disability or not. Effective tiered interventions will address learning needs and will lower special education referrals as students' needs get met earlier in the process.

Effective implementation of the Instructional Framework with tiered interventions and scaffolded supports for

students with disabilities will improve academic achievement and graduation rates as outlined in the board goals.

Professional Learning and Curricular Materials:

As a department all professional learning is tracked and posted to this [site](#).

Key to changing our practices is to provide professional learning and updated resources. In order to support implementation of newly adopted district curriculum Special Educators have been provided training alongside their general education peers to learn the curriculum and ensure that students receiving special education services have access to the core curriculum. This has occurred during teaching and learning professional learning days and is led by the instructional leadership team at each school. Professional learning is provided to support the implementation of these instructional materials; there are job-like designated pull out days for special education staff where special educators receive supplemental training to ensure that students who require supplemental or alternative curricula to address their needs, are supported.

The Special Education department is collaborating with the Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL) and MTSS, among others, to align resources and ensure that all students have access to high level resources and supports; and all educators have the same curricular resources to center their work around. It is important for special educators to be familiar with the grade level curriculum in order to determine appropriate accommodations and scaffolds required to support students in accessing grade level content.

Special educator specific professional development has addressed training on alternative and supplemental curricula, grade level transition support as well as a mid-year student progress data review. Learning Center teachers have attended training and coaching opportunities focused on a supplemental intensive structured literacy instructional tool, the Wilson Reading System. Additionally, special educators supporting our Intensive Skills Program attended a training on the alternative curriculum, TeachTown, for students with moderate to severe disabilities. In addition to teachers, professional learning opportunities are developed and provided regularly during joblike meeting times for special education staff including school psychologists, qualified mental health professionals (QMHPs), speech language pathologists, paraeducators, occupational therapists and physical therapists. For example, monthly in-depth training has been provided to all speech and occupational therapists to build capacity in the area of feeding services protocols. For school psychologists and QMHPs, learning opportunities have focused on increasing family engagement and social emotional needs of students. Paraeducator training has focused on behavioral strategies for students with social-emotional needs and crises de-escalation.

Climate and Culture Professional Learning:

Special educators have received professional learning throughout this school year during preservice and the and monthly climate and culture professional learning provided by building leadership and each climate team of professional educators based on [integrated themes](#) that included:

- Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL)
- Restorative Justice (RJ)
- PBIS Schoolwide Classroom Routines & Procedures
- Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ)