
trained coaches as possible into full-time classroom teaching positions to have direct connections with students.

3. We recommend that the Reading Recovery component of the model be modified to increase its cost-effectiveness and affect larger numbers of low performing students.
4. Finally, we recommend that the LCM be supplemented or replaced at the K–1 level by a strong, structured program of phonemic awareness and phonics. This approach may take the form of a pilot at several schools and could be evaluated in terms of student performance.

Relative to elementary math instruction we have two recommendations:

1. Current practices in math instruction at Prospect and Newman elementary schools should be benchmarked for possible implementation at other elementary schools.
2. The District should assess its current math program against skills measured by the Ohio Assessment Program. The District should identify a variety of materials and programs that align with the new content standards in math and field test their implementation in the lowest performing schools.

We also recommend that the District take steps for the next school year to reorganize the structure and improve the collaborative culture of its elementary schools. In our view, this involves moving from strong individual efforts to teach effectively toward a more collective and collaborative realm of competence, and from teaching students 1 year at a time toward developing expert knowledge of the needs of learners, deeper relationships, and greater accountability over several years.

1. Elementary school teachers should be organized into teams, either horizontally by grade level or in vertical teams that conform to the grade clusters of the Ohio content standards. Training in “teaming” should be a component of the District’s Professional Development Plan. Each team should have a teacher designated as team leader with a stipend for leader responsibilities. Teams should function for the purpose of analyzing data, making formative changes in grouping and instructional practices, determining the allocation of time and use of materials, handling parent communications and routine discipline matters, and developing standards-based lessons.
2. The District should encourage and provide incentives for multiyear teaching at the elementary level including 2- and 3-year looping arrangements and vertical, nongraded teams in which students stay with a team of teachers for multiple years. Research suggests that these multiyear arrangements produce more time in instruction and that achievement improves relative to teachers’ increased knowledge of student needs and sustained relationships between teachers and students and their parents.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Although not included in the original scope of work, a brief review of special education programs and services was initiated once the reviewers became aware of the large number of students

with disabilities served by the District. The number of students involved and their lack of annual yearly progress (AYP) constitute a major student achievement issues and leverage point for the District as it strives to ascend from Academic Emergency status.

On December 1, 2004, Dr. Stephanie Jackson and Ms. Christina Diamond of AIR conducted a 1-day review of special education programs and services in the Mansfield City School District. This visit consisted of an orientation with the Director of Pupil Services and a site visit to Sherman Elementary School. This school was selected because it houses a large number of special education classes across a variety of disability categories.

The reviewers received an overview of the school system's programs and service options for students who have disabilities. Specific discussions centered on the staffing and duties of program supervisors, the number and placement of students with disabilities, processes for making placement decisions, and historical information about the special education system. In addition, discipline data were examined for in-school and out-of-school suspensions for the first 9 weeks of the 2004–2005 school year. Ohio Department of Education manuals and forms used for placement and planning for students with disabilities were also reviewed.

The reviewers visited Sherman Elementary School's special education classes. This elementary school serves children from kindergarten through fifth grade and has an enrollment of approximately 570 students. Included in that number are eight self-contained classes for students who have disabilities. This includes services for students with learning disabilities (LD); emotional disturbance (ED); cognitive delay (CD), which is referred to as mental retardation under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) guidelines; and orthopedically impaired/other health impaired (OI/OHI).

Children with disabilities represent nearly 18 percent of Mansfield's student enrollment, which is significantly higher than the national prevalence rate. Although a continuum of services from itinerant/tutoring through self-contained classes exists, most children are served in self-contained classrooms. As these self-contained classes are housed in regular schools, it would appear that students would have access to opportunities in general education classes. However, we found little evidence that such practices exist in the Mansfield City School District. In fact, it appears that special education is viewed by schools (both administrators and teachers) as the place where students with disabilities are placed, rather than as the place for services needed for students to learn and to make adequate yearly progress.

Data revealed that students who have disabilities are suspended more often than their nondisabled peers. For example, in a school in which the special education population makes up 17.4 percent of the total school enrollment, 27 percent of the in-school suspensions and 40 percent of the out-of-school suspensions were for students with disabilities. Disciplinary referrals for students with disabilities also far exceed those for students not identified with disabilities. It is unclear whether any schools are using any schoolwide programs based on current research that emphasize consistent approaches to behavior, discipline, and school climate.

We found the Director of Pupil Services to be extremely knowledgeable about the IDEA and the requirements to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment, and committed to providing access to the general education curriculum for children with disabilities, as required by IDEA. In addition, the interim Superintendent is supportive of adopting changes that may be required to meet the mandates of IDEA to address and meet the needs

of students who have disabilities. We noted that under this Superintendent's leadership, the Director of Pupil Services is now included (for the first time) on the central office leadership team. The Director should also seek opportunities for greater interaction and collaborations with the principals of the District.

Recommendations

1. Research indicates that most students who have learning disabilities can achieve in the general education curriculum with appropriate support and accommodations. To do this effectively, schools must be prepared to implement a range of inclusive practices that sustain specialized instruction for students with disabilities. This means that schools must use accommodations and modifications that help students fully access the subject matter and instruction and statewide assessment measures in the general education setting.

We recommend that the district immediately begin the process of implementing a documented continuum of services that meets the requirements of IDEA. It is suggested that the district focus on students who have learning disabilities; this population is most likely to have the ability and skills needed to benefit academically and socially if they are given access to the general education curriculum.

Individual Education Plan (IEP) planning should begin with the assumption that students who have learning disabilities will be taught in the general education setting, with supports provide by special education and related services personnel. This will require strong support systems by key district- and school-level administrative personnel; it will also require adequate resources to support the training and planning time that will be needed to make the changes necessary to provide appropriate services for children with disabilities in the general education curriculum. In addition, it is suggested that all students with disabilities be included on a general education teacher's roster so that even if the nature of their disability requires them to be educated in a self-contained classroom, they still have a general education classroom and teacher with whom they are associated.

2. It is recommended that a comprehensive training program that is a key element of the professional development plan for the district be developed to build the capacity for change described in the first recommendation. The training should focus on inclusive practices, behavior management, and discipline. It is imperative the general and special educators receive this training to facilitate confidence and competence in delivering appropriate instructional and behavioral strategies for students with disabilities. Professional development should be ongoing and participatory and should include school and district administrators to ensure that all personnel are trained on appropriate strategies and practices. It is suggested that training address team building and collaboration to foster the attitudes and approaches that will be required if the district is to have positive learning environments where students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum.
3. Successful implementation of a continuum of services that meets the requirements of IDEA should be adopted as a district goal and should be linked to both teacher and administrator evaluation systems.