

FORT BEND ISD

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

REVIEW



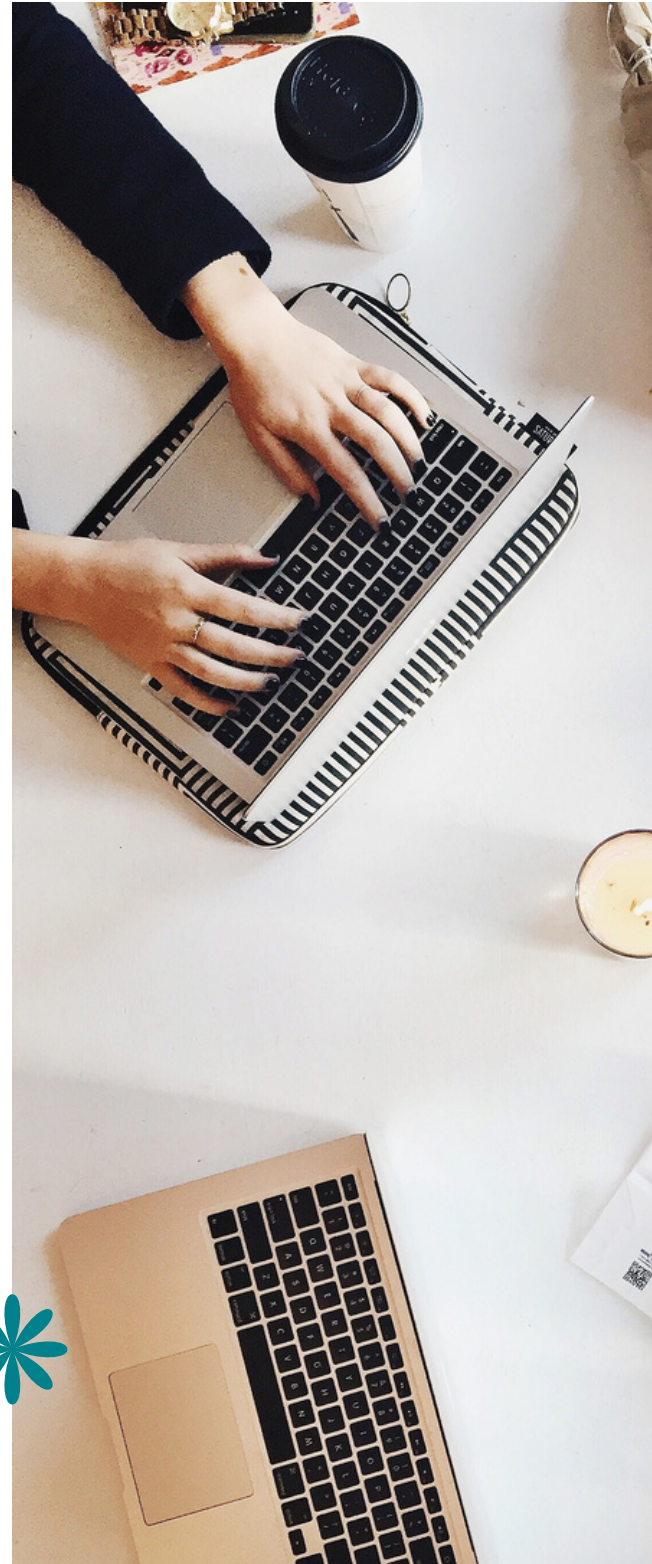
TCASE
SERVICES BY DESIGN



FALL 2023

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INTRODUCTION



Fort Bend ISD (FBISD) contracted with TCASE Services by Design through a competitive bid process to conduct a third-party, independent Special Education Program Review. TCASE Services conducted the review over two months, between September 2023 and October 2023, expediting the process at the district's request.

The project began with an in-person planning meeting with key district special education department personnel. The review included information from 30 school site visits, 20 student special education folders, internal documents, publicly available information, interviews, focus groups, and staff and parent surveys. This report summarizes our findings and recommendations for FBISD to consider in their endeavor to continuously improve special education programs and services for students with disabilities. The site visits, interviews, Individual Education Program (IEP) folder review, focus groups and analysis of data was performed by a team of eight consultants, all of whom have a background as special education directors in Texas.

Specific areas of study included:

- Does FBISD leverage its financial resources to effectively implement high quality services to students with disabilities?
- Does FBISD utilize effective staffing procedures to ensure students' needs are met and appropriate caseloads are assigned to staff?
- Is FBISD's organizational structure sufficient to address and meet the needs of campuses and the district as a whole?
- Does FBISD have a full continuum of supports and services with students consistently served in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)?
- Are FBISD's IEPs compliant with state and federal regulations?
- Does FBISD have consistent referral and placement processes within each campus, including pre-referral intervention for academics and behavior through Response to Intervention (RtI) or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)?
- Does FBISD provide high quality instructional supports for all students, regardless of instructional arrangement?
- Does FBISD provide adequate onboarding and training to all educators who serve students with disabilities?
- Does FBISD have systems in place to effectively monitor and support special education services?



The findings are organized into the following sections:

- Leadership, collaboration, and communication
- Equitable resource allocation
- Effective staffing practices
- Inclusive systems and structures
- Quality instruction
- Family and community engagement

The recommendations provided as part of this review are grounded in best practices and intended to guide continuous improvement activities.

The TCASE Services by Design team thanks the many educators and parents who contributed to this review of FBISD's special education services, as their efforts were necessary to our ability to gain a deep understanding of the services provided so that we could prepare recommendations for improvement. It is clear that FBISD is a learning organization with a shared vision for success.

*BACKGROUND

Fort Bend ISD is located in Fort Bend County, southwest of Houston, Texas. It covers a diverse and rapidly growing suburban area that includes parts of Sugar Land, Missouri City, and other communities. FBISD is the sixth largest school district in Texas, reaching an enrollment of more than 80,000 students during the 2022-2023 school year. FBISD is known for its diverse student population, with a significant number of students coming from various racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. The district operates a large number of schools, including 51 elementary schools, 15 middle schools, 12 high schools, and 6 specialized schools.

The district's commitment to serving students with disabilities is evident in the language used on the district's department website. In summary, FBISD's vision and belief statements for special education serve as foundational and guiding documents that shape the direction and priorities of their special education programs. They provide a sense of purpose, direction, and a commitment to equity, inclusivity, and quality in special education services.

FBISD Vision/Beliefs

FBISD Special Education Department Vision: Collaborative Leaders Advocating for the Equity of ALL Learners.

FBISD Special Education Department Guiding Principles:

- We believe that Leaders:
 - Empower others through development and opportunity
 - Value growth mindset through embracing failures and successes
 - Champion a shared vision through reflection and forward-thinking ideas
 - Challenge the process through purposeful and innovative action
- We believe that Collaborators:
 - Foster trust through relationship building by demonstrating compassion and respect
 - Hold sacred purposeful time and space for planning
 - Cultivate authenticity by participating in crucial conversations
 - Provide clarity resulting in actionable behaviors
 - Practice intentional listening and reciprocal feedback and perspective

- We believe that Students and Families:
 - Establish student ownership of learning and behavior through identified high standards
 - Build independence and self-advocacy skills
 - Practice a growth mindset
 - Achieve their highest aspirations for the future

Board Policy

FBISD has a total of nine prominent board policies concerning the realm of special education services. These policies are categorized into two primary types: "Legal" policies, which encapsulate amalgamations of federal law, state law, and legal precedents, serving as the foundational contextual framework within which all other policies are to be interpreted. Complementing these, FBISD has "Local" policies, which are reflective of the policies officially adopted by the FBISD Board.

Locally established board policies, that pertain specifically to special education services or students, are denoted below underneath the relevant LEGAL policy. It is essential to note that all pertinent board policies, including those addressing special education services, are readily accessible within the online Board Policy Manual, which is accessible on the district's official website.

- **EHBA (Legal)** - Outlines the delivery of services to individuals in special education and encompasses various aspects, including nondiscrimination, the provision of Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE), the principle of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), disciplinary measures, instructional configurations and settings, alternative program options, shared service arrangements, definitions pertaining to related services, and the provision of extended school year services.
 - EEH (LOCAL) addresses students who require homebound instruction.
- **EHBAA (Legal)** - Delineates the district's prerequisites concerning the identification, assessment, and eligibility determination of all children domiciled within the district, regardless of the extent of their disabilities, who require special education and associated services.
- **EHBAB (Legal)** - Mandates the establishment of the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Committee, as well as the formulation of individualized education programs.
- **EBBAC (Legal)** - Addresses the provision of services to special education students in non-district placements.

- **EHBAD (Legal)** - Defines transition services and the requirements for individualized transition planning
- **EHBAE (Legal)** - Requires the district to institute and uphold procedures designed to guarantee that children with disabilities and their parents are afforded procedural safeguards concerning the provision of Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).
- **EHBAF (Legal)** - Outlines the policy governing the video and audio monitoring of special education students. It explicitly stipulates that parental consent is not a prerequisite when employing video recordings or voice recordings for purposes directly linked to the advancement of student safety.
 - EHBAF (LOCAL) describes district specific implementation of EHBH (LEGAL)
- **EHBH (Legal)** - Outlines the requirements under TEC 29.303 for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- **FOF (Legal)** - Pertains to matters concerning disciplinary actions and placement in a Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement (DAEP) specifically for students with disabilities.

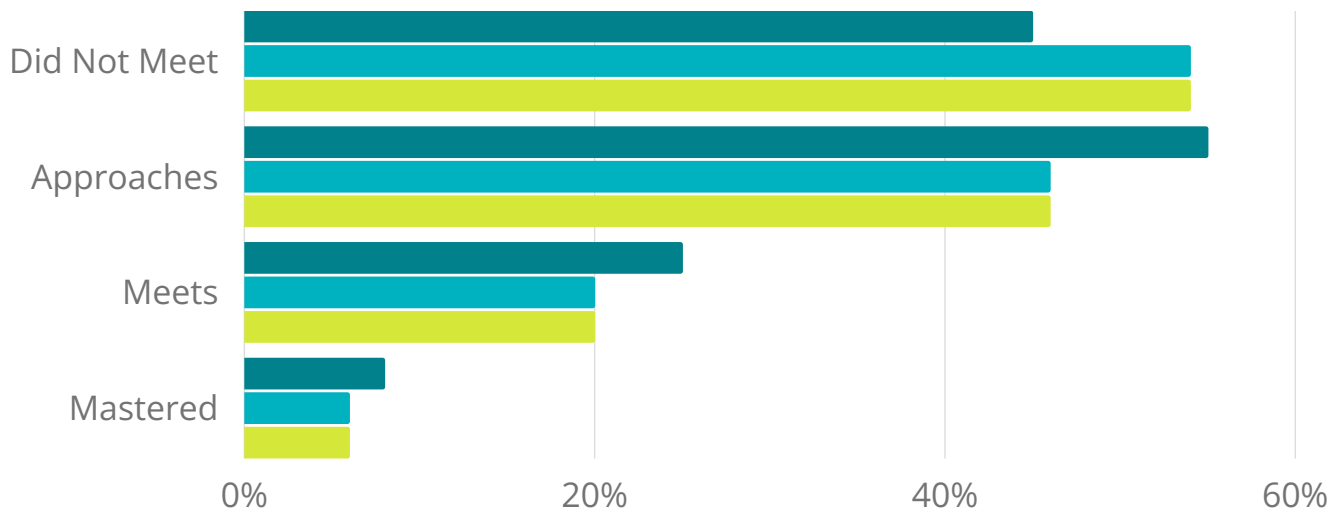
Special Education 2022-2023 State Assessment Data

Fort Bend ISD has historically performed well academically. It is known for its high-achieving students and a commitment to providing quality education. The district often earns high marks on state and national assessments.

The following pages compare 2023 State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) performance results of FBISD, ESC Region 4, and the state in grades 3-8 reading language arts and math, and End of Course (EOC) results in English I and II, and Algebra I. Students in special education outperformed students in the region and state on the 2023 STAAR in all areas except 8th grade math and Algebra I.

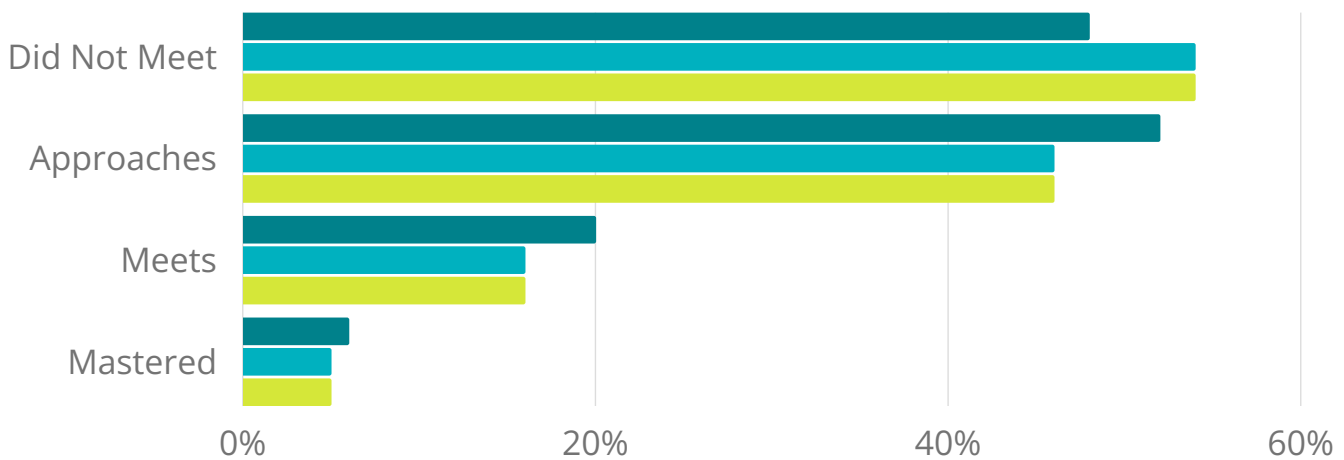
STAAR RLA Grade 3 Special Education Spring 2023

■ Fort Bend ■ Region 4 ■ State



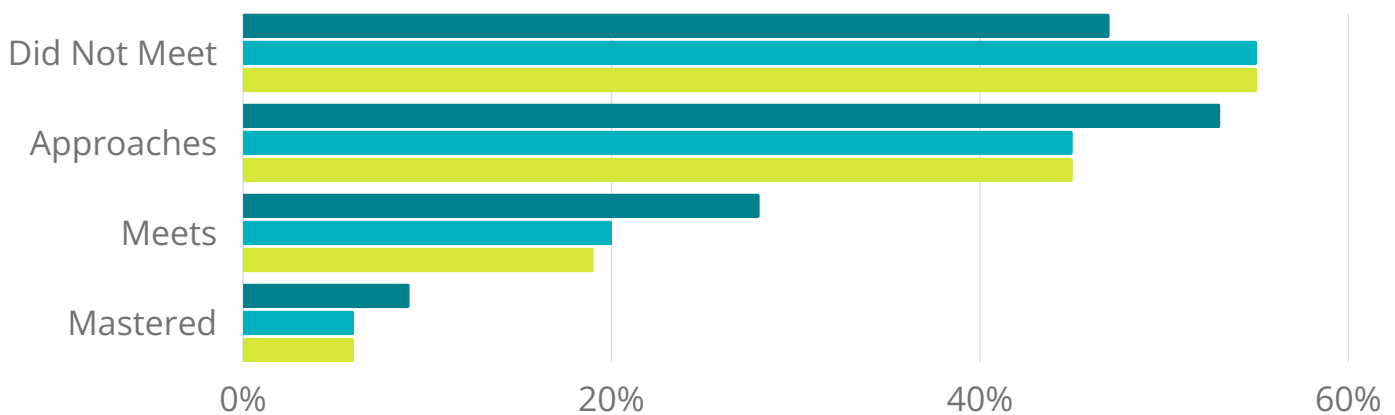
STAAR RLA Grade 4 Special Education Spring 2023

■ Fort Bend ■ Region 4 ■ State



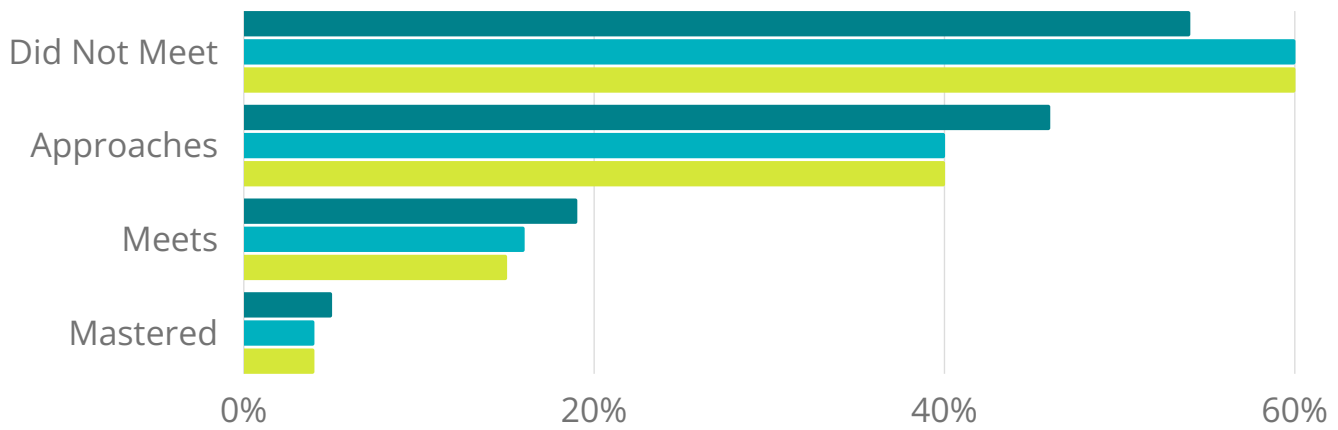
STAAR RLA Grade 5 Special Education Spring 2023

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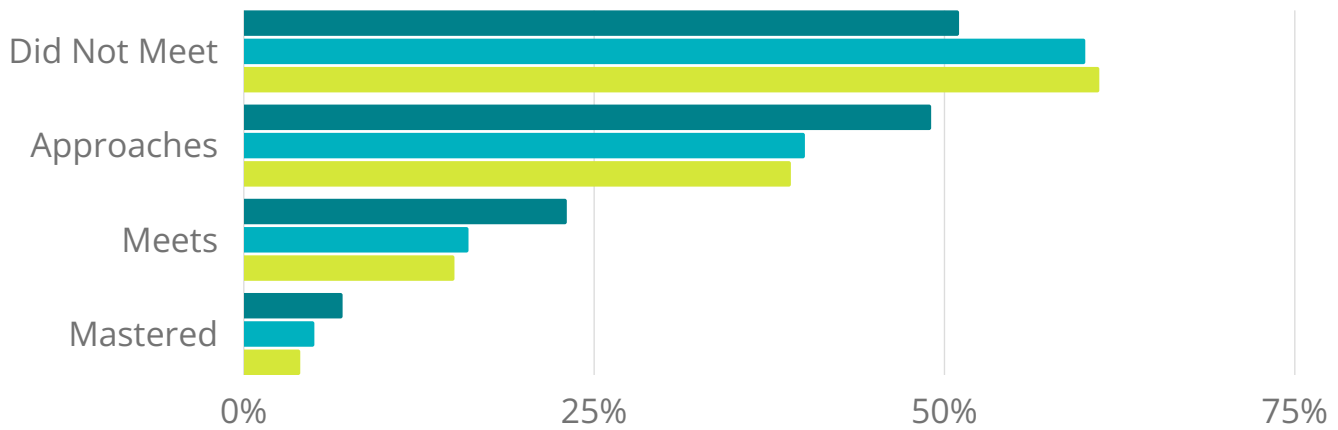
STAAR RLA Grade 6 Special Education Spring 2023

■ Fort Bend ■ Region 4 ■ State



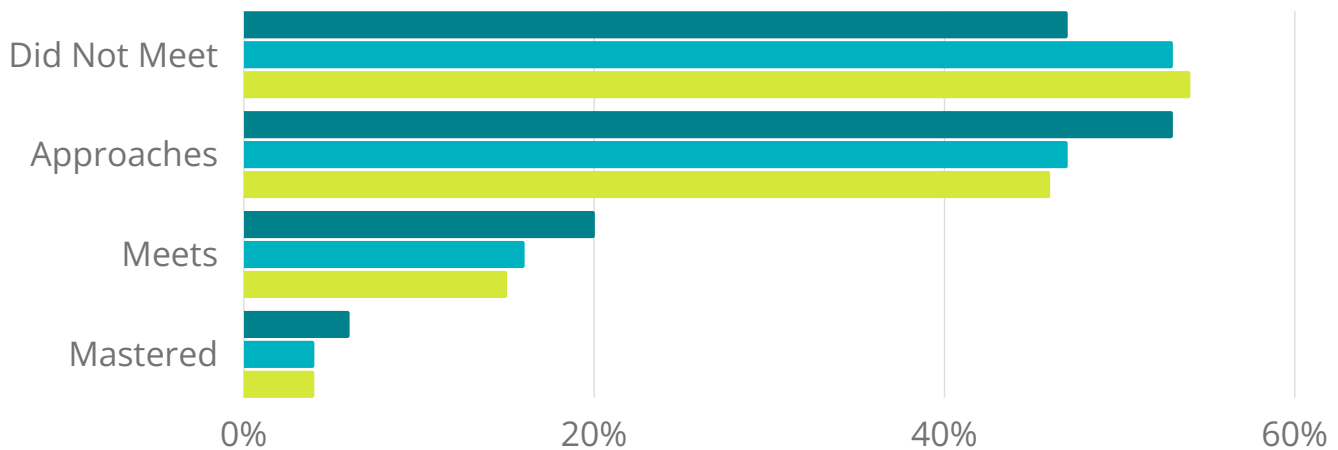
STAAR RLA Grade 7 Special Education Spring 2023

■ Fort Bend ■ Region 4 ■ State

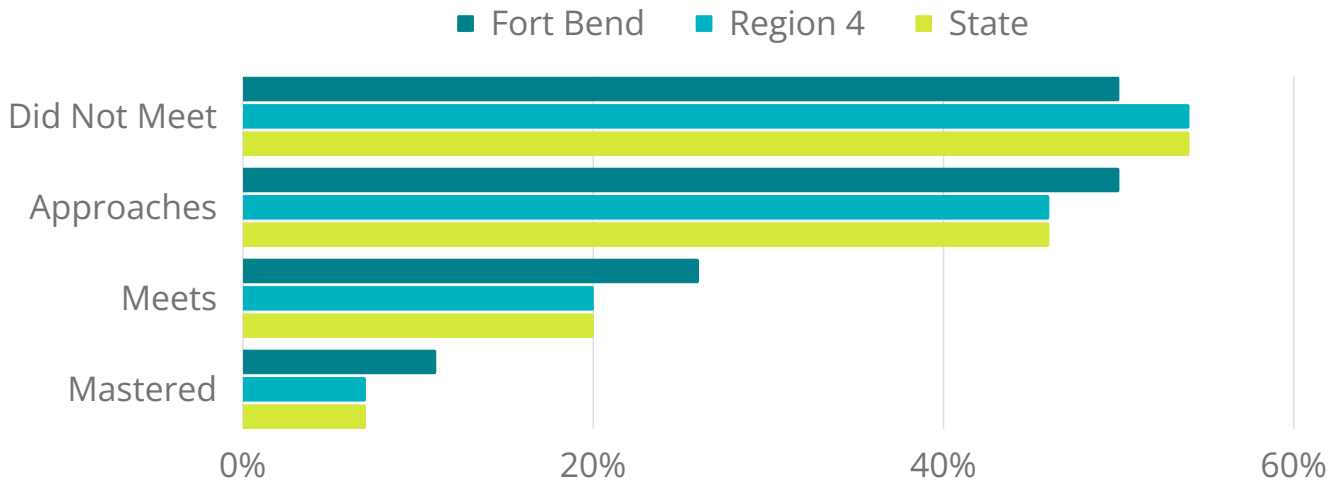


STAAR RLA Grade 8 Special Education Spring 2023

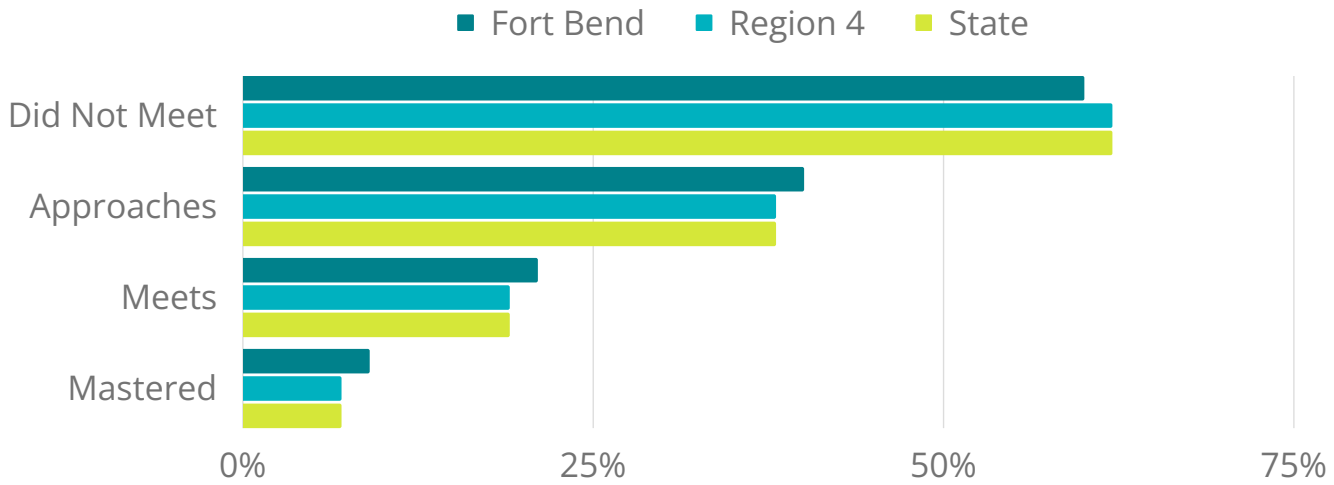
■ Fort Bend ■ Region 4 ■ State



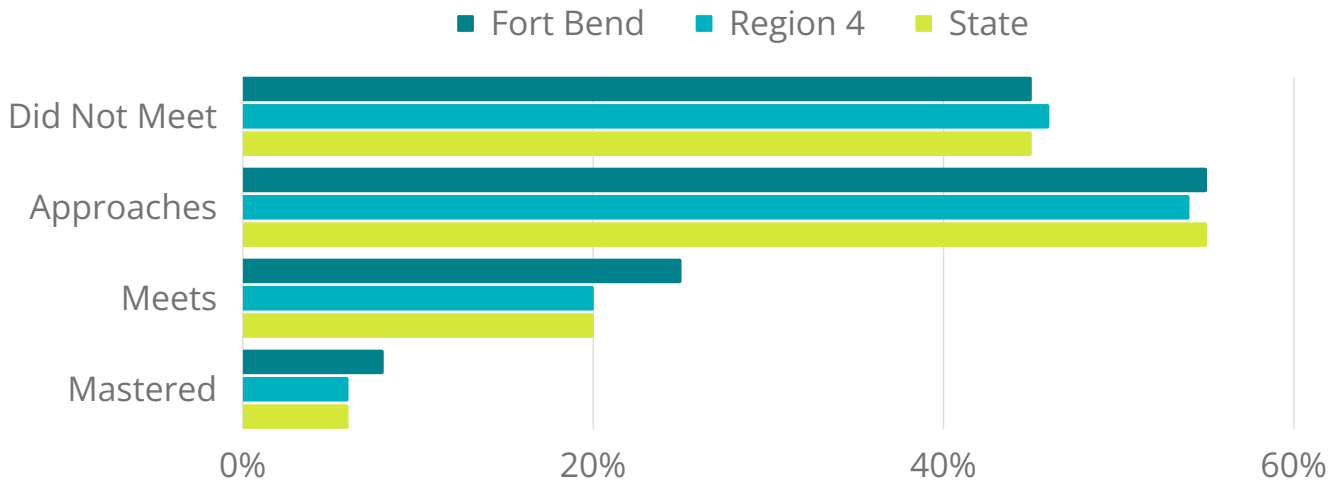
STAAR Grade 3 Math Special Education Spring 2023



STAAR Grade 4 Math Special Education Spring 2023

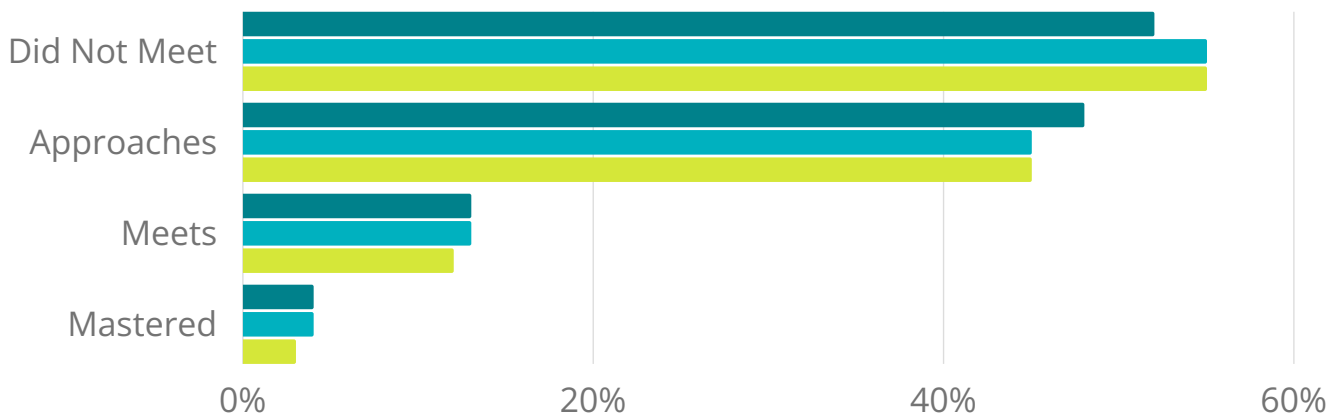


STAAR Grade 5 Math Special Education Spring 2023



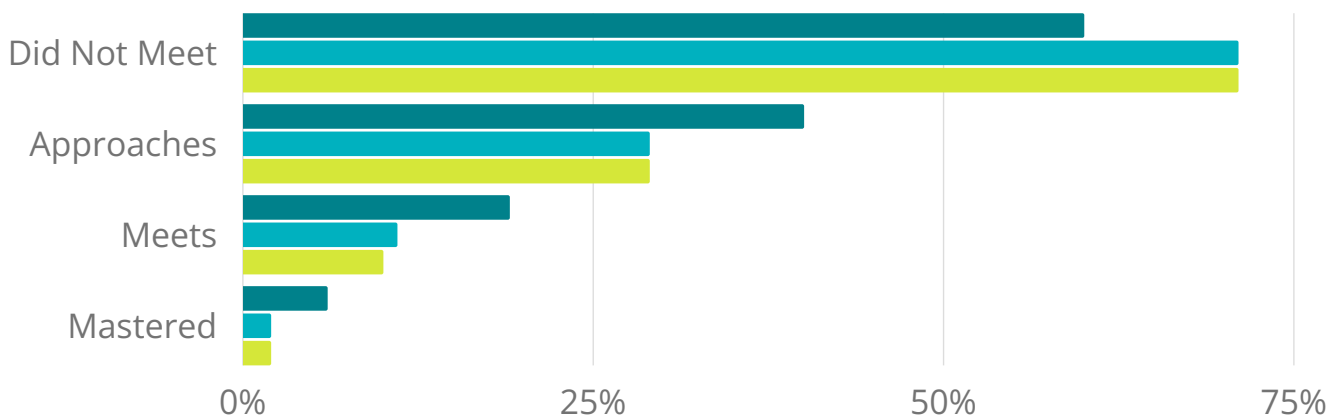
STAAR Grade 6 Math Special Education Spring 2023

■ Fort Bend ■ Region 4 ■ State



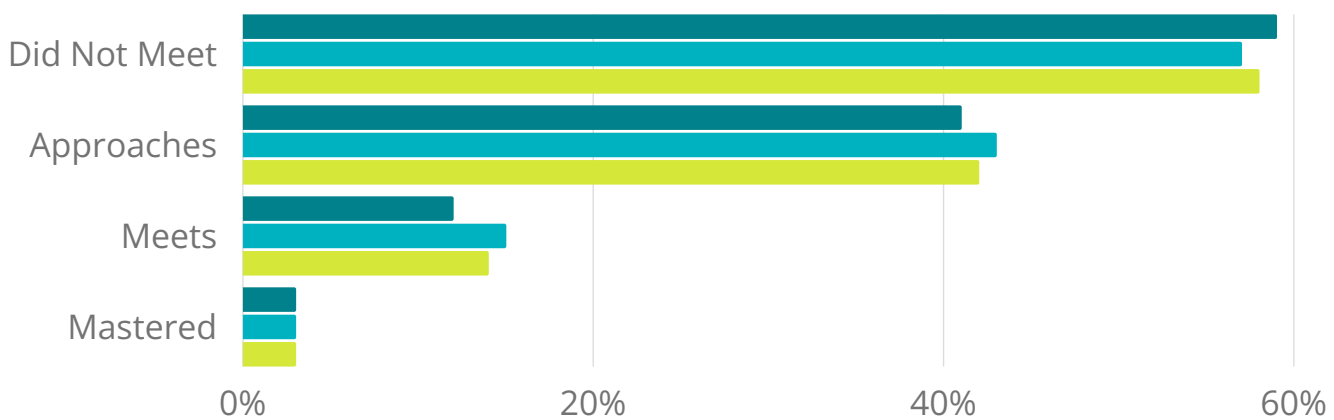
STAAR Grade 7 Math Special Education Spring 2023

■ Fort Bend ■ Region 4 ■ State



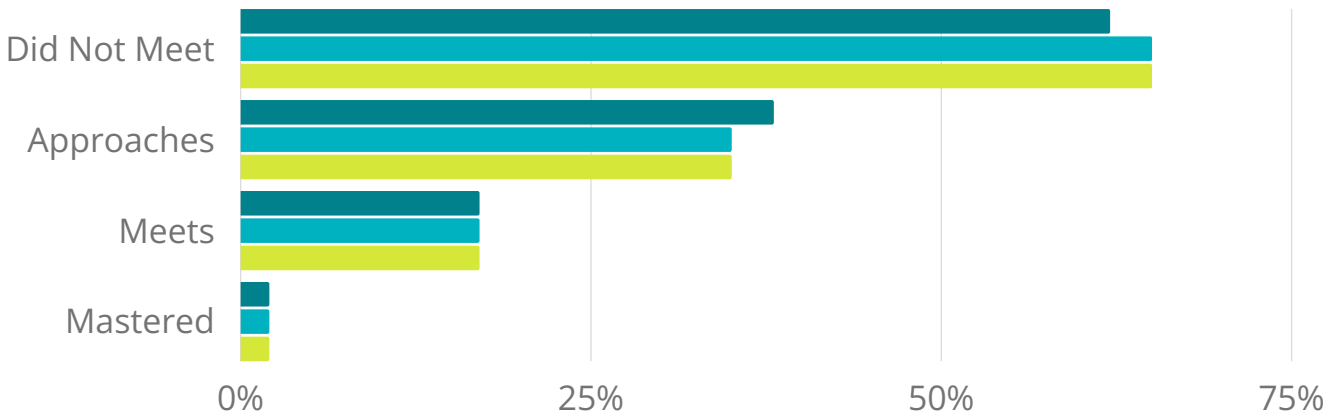
STAAR Grade 8 Math Special Education Spring 2023

■ Fort Bend ■ Region 4 ■ State



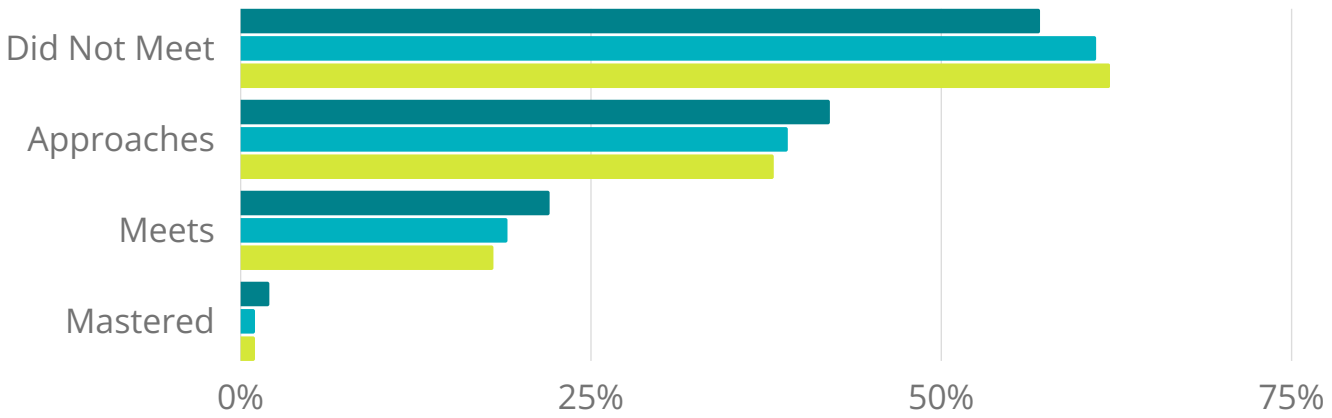
STAAR EOC English I Special Education Spring 2023

■ Fort Bend ■ Region 4 ■ State



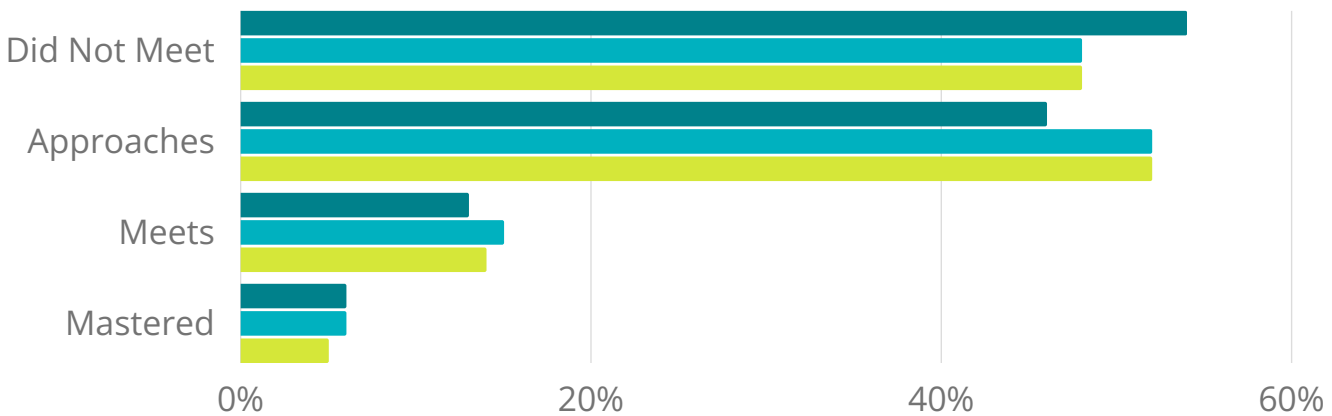
STAAR EOC English II Special Education Spring 2023

■ Fort Bend ■ Region 4 ■ State



STAAR EOC Algebra I Special Education Spring 2023

■ Fort Bend ■ Region 4 ■ State



Enrollment Information

The district is facing challenges related to rapid population growth which puts pressure on school infrastructure, funding, and resources. Managing this growth while maintaining high educational standards is an ongoing challenge. In FBISD, the growth especially impacts special education programs, as the district has experienced a high rate of students qualifying for special education services since 2016. The chart below shows special education enrollment has grown 143% since the 2014-2015 school year.

Enrollment			
	Total Enrollment	Special Education Enrollment	% of Special Education Enrollment
2014-2015	72152	4571	6.34%
2015-2016	73115	4675	6.39%
2016-2017	74146	5101	6.88%
2017-2018	75275	5907	7.85%
2018-2019	76112	6714	8.82%
2019-2020	77756	7868	10.12%
2020-2021	76735	8348	10.88%
2021-2022	77545	8810	11.36%
2022-2023	79660	9831	12.34%
2023-2024	80095	11109	13.86%
<i>2014-2023 Information from TEA Student Program and Special Populations Reports 2023-2024 Information provided by Fort Bend ISD</i>			

This growth in special education enrollment is attributed to four main factors:

- The removal of the Texas Education Agency 8.5% cap in 2017
- Districtwide growth
- Changes to the way Texas identified and serves students with dyslexia
- COVID-19 school interruptions

Special Education Eligibility Information

Special education eligibility refers to the criteria that students with disabilities must meet in order to receive special education services and support. The process of determining eligibility is a critical step in providing appropriate and individualized education to students who have special needs. Texas uses the following list of disability categories to determine if a student (aged 3-21) is eligible for special education and related services:

Eligibility categories	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autism (AU) • Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) • Deaf-Blindness (DB) • Emotional Disturbance (ED) • Intellectual Disability (ID) • Multiple Disabilities (MD) • Orthopedic Impairment (OI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other Health Impairment (OHI) • Learning Disability (LD) • Speech Impairment (SI) • Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) • Visual Impairment • Non-Categorical Early Childhood (NCEC)

The chart below represents the percent eligible by category in Fort Bend ISD, the region, and the state.

PEIMS Data 2022-2023	OI	OHI	AI	VI	DB	ID	ED	LD	SI	AU	TBI	NCEC
Fort Bend	0.55%	11.77%	0.99%	0.49%	N/A	9.40%	7.50%	31.75%	13.18%	23.05%	N/A	1.32%
Region	0.42%	12.47%	0.99%	0.48%	0.01%	10.76%	5.87%	31.48%	17.32%	18.13%	0.01%	0.17%
Texas	0.46%	12.88%	1.03%	0.52%	0.01%	9.77%	5.68%	33.66%	18.75%	15.43%	0.18%	1.58%

FBISD serves a higher rate of students with autism than both the region and state. There can be various reasons why one school district might have a higher rate of students with autism compared to others. Some potential factors could include:

- The district might have better diagnostic resources or a higher level of awareness about autism. This can lead to more accurate identification and reporting of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) among students.
- Certain regions might have a higher prevalence of autism due to various factors such as environmental influences, genetic predispositions, or access to healthcare. Socioeconomic factors such as income levels and access to healthcare services might impact the identification rates of autism in a particular area.
- Families might move to a specific district due to its reputation for providing better support and services for children with autism. This can cause a higher concentration of students on the spectrum within that area.
- The level of acceptance and understanding of autism within the community can influence the rates of identification. A more accepting and supportive community might encourage families to seek diagnoses and support for their children.
- Discrepancies in data collection, reporting methodologies, or differences in how districts classify or report students with autism might contribute to apparent variations in rates between districts.
- Some districts might have more specialized programs or support services specifically designed for students with autism, attracting families with such needs.

It's important to note that while rates of autism diagnosis may vary among different school districts, it doesn't necessarily indicate a true difference in the prevalence of autism. Variations in reporting, access to resources, and societal factors can significantly impact the apparent rates within different areas.

Instructional Arrangement Information

Instructional arrangements for special education refer to the specific ways in which students with disabilities receive education and support services to meet their unique learning needs. These arrangements are designed to ensure that students with disabilities have access to a FAPE in the LRE.

FBISD Instructional Arrangement District Totals			
00 Speech Therapy	11.66%	50 Residential Nonpublic School	0.2%
01 Homebound	0.4%	60 Nonpublic Day School	0.11%
08 Vocational	0.01%	70 Texas School for the Blind	0.01%
40 Mainstream	34.07%	81 Residential Care-Mainstream	0.06%
41 Resource <21%	18.81%	82 Residential -Resource <21%	0.06%
42 Resource 21-< 50%	13.39%	83 Residential-Resource 21-<50%	0.08%
43 Self-Contained 50-60%	2.7%	85 Residential Self Contained >60%	0.4%
44 Self-contained >50%	16.43%	86 Residential-Separate Campus	0.01%
45 Full Time ECSE	1.71%	96 Off Home Campus	0.01%
		97 Off Home Campus-Community	0.06%

2023-2024 Information provided by Fort Bend ISD

District Comparison



In order to better understand and address the complex needs of the district, it is essential to delve into a comparative analysis of special education programs across various school districts.

	Fort Bend ISD	Austin ISD	Conroe ISD	Cy-Fair ISD	Humble ISD	Katy ISD	Klein ISD	Lamar CISD	Northside ISD
Accountability Rating	B	B	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Approaches or above	79%	73%	83%	82%	74%	87%	79%	83%	74%
Meets or above	56%	50%	61%	58%	48%	68%	54%	59%	47%
Masters Grade Level	32%	27%	35%	32%	22%	41%	28%	32%	21%
Academic Growth	76%	76%	73%	78%	71%	76%	75%	76%	73%
Total Enrollment	76,543	71,883	67,490	116,913	47,477	88,165	53,059	38,877	101,584
% Economically Disadvantaged	47.80%	50.90%	40.50%	57.60%	41.40%	39.80%	51.20%	49.50%	48.90%
% Special Education	11.20%	13.10%	9.10%	10.40%	10.20%	13.30%	11.40%	13.60%	13.70%
% African American	27.80%	6.30%	9.10%	20.20%	24.60%	13.50%	16.10%	21.00%	6.90%
% Asian	26.70%	4.40%	4.90%	9.40%	2.80%	15.90%	7.80%	7.60%	3.60%
% Hispanic	26.60%	54.40%	38.50%	44.80%	37.90%	36.20%	44.10%	41.80%	68.10%
% White	14.70%	30.90%	43.30%	21.60%	31.10%	29.90%	27.60%	25.90%	17.40%

Information from TEA District Comparison 2021-2022

The following represents the TEA 2022 Special Education Determination Status. As of the time of this report, TEA has not released 2023 results.

NA= Needs Assistance MR= Meets Requirements

2022 Special Education Determination Status								
Fort Bend ISD	Austin ISD	Conroe ISD	Cy-Fair ISD	Humble ISD	Katy ISD	Klein ISD	Lamar CISD	Northside ISD
NA	NA	MR	MR	NA	MR	MR	NA	MR

Information from TEA District Comparison

The following chart represents the percent of special education teachers reported in PEIMS 2022.

Teachers by Program									
Texas	Fort Bend ISD	Austin ISD	Conroe ISD	Cy-Fair ISD	Humble ISD	Katy ISD	Klein ISD	Lamar CISD	Northside ISD
9.6%	9.5%	16.6%	14.2%	11.2%	9.1%	11%	12.3%	8.2%	9.2%

Information from TEA District Comparison

The following chart represents the number of FTEs by district and position.

2022-2023 Employed Personnel - FTEs				
District	# of Students SE	Educational Diagnosticians	LSSPs	SLPs
Fort Bend ISD	9831	65.84	53.93	65.77
Austin ISD	1019	0	0	0
Conroe ISD	7252	90.01	31.4	69.03
Cy-Fair ISD	13786	114.41	26.42	131.78
Humble ISD	5851	65.50	32	62.2
Katy ISD	13688	107.88	55	123.36
Klein ISD	6714	91.9	39.5	50.23
Lamar CISD	5829	25.63	11.95	35.69
Northside ISD	15214	2	91.64	128.57

Information from Texas Public Information Resource and PEIMS Standard Reports

The following chart represents the number of evaluation and SLP staff to students in special education ratios.

2022-2023 Evaluation Staff to Student Ratios					
District	# of Students SE	Diagnosticians: Students	LSSPs: Students	Diags + LSSPs: Students	SLP:Students
Fort Bend ISD	9831	1:149	1:182	1:82	1:149
Austin ISD	1019	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Conroe ISD	7252	1:81	1:231	1:60	1:105
Cy-Fair ISD	13786	1:120	1:522	1:98	1:105
Humble ISD	5851	1:89	1:183	1:60	1:94
Katy ISD	13688	1:127	1:249	1:84	1:111
Klein ISD	6714	1:73	1:170	1:51	1:134
Lamar CISD	5829	1:228	1:488	1:155	1:163
Northside ISD	15214	1:7608	1:166	1:162	1:118

Information from Texas Public Information Resource and PEIMS Standard Reports

FBISD SLPs currently serve an average of 77.5 students, with a range between 50-138 students. Caseloads for reevaluations that include speech range between 45-65 at the elementary level and 100-140 at the secondary level.

Initial evaluations by LSSPs and diagnosticians average around 40-50 each school year, with reevaluations ranging from 45-65 at elementary and 100-140 at the secondary level.

While these caseloads exceed best practice recommendations, this is not atypical in educational settings due to a nationwide shortage of providers.

METHODOLOGY

TCASE Services by Design gathered multiple sources of data in order to complete this review as described below in detail. The project began with an in-person planning meeting with key district special education department personnel.

Site Visits

In September 2023, TCASE Services by Design visited a total of 30 sites over 3 days. Each visit included a 30 minute interview with the building principal or supervisor and structured classroom observations including general education and specialized settings. Site visits included:

Elementary campuses		Middle school campuses	
Austin Parkway	Mission West	Baines	McAuliffe
Bhuchar	Oakland	Garcia	Sartartia
Commonwealth	Oyster Creek	Hodges Bend	Sugar Land
Fleming	Palmer	High School Campuses	
Goodman	Parks	Austin	Hightower
Jones	Scanlan Oaks	Bush	Ridge Point
Jordan	Sienna Crossing	Specialized Programs	
Lexington Creek	Sugar Mill	James Reese CTE Center	
Madden		Early Intervention Academy	
		STEP	

Focus Groups & Interviews

TCASE Services by Design conducted 35 focus groups and 52 face-to-face interviews to include central office and campus groups to gain insight into how special education programs, services, and supports operate within FBISD. These focus groups and interviews occurred over the same time period as site visits. Focus groups were conducted virtually to increase participation with minimum disruption to the school day. Group sizes ranged from 4-15 participants. TCASE Services by Design worked closely with FBISD staff to ensure a wide range of stakeholders were able to participate in sharing their perspective.

Focus groups conducted:

- Principals, by level
- Campus compliance coordinators
- ARD facilitators
- Special education apprentice teachers
- Special education associate teachers
- Special education teachers-In class support/resource, by level
- ECSE teachers
- ATS teachers
- Special education dyslexia teachers
- General education dyslexia teachers
- SAILS/FLASH teachers
- CLASS and CLASS plus teachers
- BSS teachers
- SLPs
- LSSPs
- Diagnosticians
- OT/PT/MT/APE providers
- Special education nurses
- Counselors, by level
- Paraprofessionals, by level
- SEPAC parents
- General education teachers, by level



Interviews conducted:

- Superintendent
- Deputy Superintendents
- Chief of Schools
- Chief Academic Officer
- Chief Financial Officer
- Chief of Human Resources
- Associate Superintendents
- Executive Director of Student Affairs
- Executive Director of Student Support Services
- Executive Director of Human Resources
- Executive Director of Curriculum
- Executive Director of SEL/Comprehensive Health
- Executive Director of Organizational Development
- Executive Director of School Leadership
- Executive Director of Budget and Finance
- Executive Director of Transportation
- Directors/Special Education Routers
- Director of Budget
- Director of Special Revenue
- Director - Special Ed Instructional Programming
- Director Specialized Programs
- Director of Talent Acquisition
- Director of Employee Operations
- Director of Training/Employee Development
- Assistant Directors of Student Affairs
- Assistant Directors of Special Education
- Program Manager - Out of District Facilities
- Program Manager - Safety
- RDSPD Coordinator
- RDSPD Specialist
- Program Managers -ICS
- Program Specialists-ICS
- Program Manager Evaluation Team
- Lead LSSP
- Lead Educational Diagnostician
- Lead Speech Pathologist
- Program Managers-BSS
- Program Specialist-BSS
- Program Manager-ATS
- Program Specialists-ATS
- Program Manager-AT/VI
- Program Specialists-AT/VI
- Program Manager-Compliance Team
- Program Specialists-Compliance Team
- Program Manager-Behavior Response Team
- Program Specialists-Behavior Response Team
- Program Manager-Dyslexia/504/Homebound
- Program Team-Dyslexia/504/Homebound
- Program Manager - ABC/CLASS
- Program Specialists-ABC/CLASS
- Program Manager-ECSE
- Program Specialists-ECSE



IEP Folder Reviews

An extensive folder review was conducted to determine strengths and areas of growth for Fort Bend ISD Individual Education Programs (IEPs). The evaluator reviewed 20 randomly selected IEP folders covering a range of eligibility and grade bands. The audit rubric covers 105 areas of compliance, and evidence of alignment between evaluation results and current levels of performance, goals, accommodations, and instructional settings; data-based decision making; and participation of family members and, when appropriate, students.



Document Review

TCASE Services by Design collected and analyzed more than 60 documents made available by FBISD including the following: district staffing guidelines, internal operational guidelines and procedures, district improvement and department strategic plans, job descriptions, accountability data, Texas Education Agency (TEA) reports, transportation data, and other publicly available information on the district’s website and the TEA website.



Staff Surveys

All staff were invited to complete a survey with 17 Likert scale questions and four open-ended response questions. Survey questions included topics regarding the effectiveness of the referral process, the responsiveness of the department to needs of students and staff, satisfaction with level of training provided, the level of collaboration between educators, and effectiveness of services provided to students with disabilities. 1,496 district staff members responded to the staff survey.

Number of responses by grade band	
Early Childhood	60
Elementary	658
Middle	281
High	372
All levels	125

Number of responses by role	
Campus administrators	99
General education teachers	610
Special education teachers	231
Paraprofessionals	210
Evaluation/related service	100
Counselors	48
Other	198

Parent Surveys

Parents with students served in special education were invited to complete a survey with 11 Likert scale questions and three open-ended response questions. Survey questions included levels of satisfaction with services provided, communication with campus and district personnel, and how the district might improve services to their child. A total of 1,081 parent responses were received. 991 parents responded in English, and 90 parents responded in Spanish.

Number of responses by grade band	
Early Childhood	92
Elementary	538
Middle	217
High	234

FBISD is to be commended for the high rate of responses received from both staff and parents. A high survey response rate is a clear indicator of the value the organization places on feedback, and it reflects the trust that respondents have in the feedback process.

FINDINGS



The findings are categorized in the following areas with notable strengths and possible areas for improvement. Some findings might overlap and are noted in more than one section.

Leadership, collaboration and communication

Leadership, collaboration, and communication are essential components of an effective special education program within a school district. In special education, strong leadership is critical to create a supportive and inclusive environment. Leaders must guide the development of policies and practices that prioritize the needs of students with disabilities, ensure compliance with legal requirements, and promote a culture of high expectations through a vision of shared ownership, collaboration and communication.

Equitable resource allocation

Equitable resource allocation involves distributing resources such as funding, personnel, and support services in a manner that ensures every student with special needs receives the necessary assistance to succeed, regardless of their disability or background. This approach is necessary to ensure students with disabilities make progress in the general education curriculum, ultimately promoting an inclusive and quality education for all students.

Effective staffing practices

Effectively staffing special education programs requires careful planning, recruitment, and support. Effective staff at all campus and district levels must have the training needed to provide services and supports to promote the success of diverse learners and the educators that serve them.

Inclusive systems and structures

Inclusive systems and structures refers to the organizational framework and policies within a school district that are designed to promote and support the inclusion of all students, including those with disabilities. These systems and structures involve creating a culture of high standards in implementing accessible curriculum and teaching methods, providing individualized support for students with special needs, and ensuring that staff, resources, and facilities are accessible and responsive to the unique needs of each student. In essence, they aim to create an inclusive educational environment where every student can learn, thrive, and participate fully, regardless of their abilities.



Quality instruction

Quality special education instruction involves the delivery of personalized, specially designed instruction and support to students with disabilities. It encompasses a tailored curriculum that addresses individualized education programs (IEPs), differentiated teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning needs, and ongoing assessment to track progress. Effective special education instruction is also characterized by a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that empowers students with disabilities to reach their full potential and participate meaningfully in their education.

Family and community engagement

Quality family engagement in special education refers to the active and collaborative partnership between families of students with disabilities and the educational system to support the child's development and educational progress. It involves open and respectful communication, mutual respect, and shared decision-making. Quality family engagement ensures that families are active participants in the special education process, contributing to the development and implementation of IEPs, and working together with educators to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that meets the unique needs of the child. This collaboration fosters better outcomes for students with disabilities by recognizing and valuing the expertise and insights of their families.

Leadership, communication and collaboration

Strong leadership, collaboration, and communication within a district are essential for creating a supportive and effective learning environment for students with disabilities. Special education leaders in FBISD:

- Have a clear vision of inclusive education and are committed to promoting the success of all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds.
- Include special education priorities in the District Improvement Plan and other continuous improvement activities.
- Advocate for the rights and needs of students with disabilities, ensuring that policies, practices, and resources align with legal requirements and best practices.
- Empower educators, support staff, and parents by providing guidance, resources, and professional development opportunities to enhance their capacity to support students with special needs.
- Use data to assess program effectiveness and guide decision-making, making adjustments as necessary to improve outcomes. Campus report cards are provided quarterly with data related to student discipline, attendance, assessments, and other accountability measures. This is an excellent means for sharing campus progress.
- Share responsibility for the success of students with disabilities, ensuring that all aspects of their development, from academic progress to social and emotional well-being, are addressed holistically.
- Facilitate collaboration through regular team meetings, where progress is reviewed, strategies are discussed, and adjustments are made to meet students' evolving needs. Special education staff are represented on district and building leadership teams.
- Promote inclusive practices to create a seamless continuum of services, enabling students with disabilities to learn alongside their peers in general education classrooms.
- Effectively communicate through openness and transparency. Information flows freely among educators, students, families, district administrators and board members. The district special education department's website outlines specialized programming and services and informs parents and community members how to receive assistance when needed.
- Keep parents well-informed about their child's progress, challenges, and opportunities. Parents are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process and are viewed as valuable partners in their child's education.

- Are highly regarded as supportive and responsive to campus needs. The executive director is credited with putting solid systems in place.
- Participate in campus walks to share feedback with campus principals on quality of services for students with disabilities.
- Have developed strong systems and structures to support students and campuses, however, each branch of the department organizational chart functions independently rather than synergistically.
- Holds department members accountable, but a lack of accountability at the campus level was reported. Special education leaders reported a general lack of buy in for special education programs.
- Have designed a comprehensive, coordinated continuum of services for students with disabilities. There is a need to address fidelity of programming. Several auditors mentioned that while visiting different programs it was difficult to differentiate the function of each specialized program as they appeared to operate the same.
- While job descriptions are clearly written and updated, roles and responsibilities sometime conflict with expectations. For example, program managers are expected to support campuses through building capacity, providing professional learning, coaching, and modeling, but also cover classes and respond immediately with perceived crisis calls from the campus. This reactive approach is not conducive to improving programs and services and creates a disruption to the staff depending on them. This may be a temporary challenge due to the high number of vacant positions and the number of apprentice and associate teachers who require a lot of support, but it has the potential to become the norm if not monitored.
- Are responsible for a balance of supporting both compliance and specially designed instruction. The practice of providing immediate assistance at campuses is competing with the long term responsibility of designing systems and structures for specially designed instruction in specialized and general education classrooms.
- Are consistently challenged to find space for specialized programming. This can create disruption to families, campus staff, and organizational challenges for transportation.

Equitable resource allocation

A strong business and finance office within a school district that supports special education programs is an essential component for the effective delivery of services and the promotion of inclusive education. The Business and Finance department in FBISD:

- Operates with a high degree of transparency, ensuring that all special education funding is accounted for and allocated appropriately. Detailed budgets, expenditure reports, and financial information are readily accessible to stakeholders.
- Provides adequate financial resources allocated to special education programs, reflecting the district's commitment to meeting the unique needs of students with disabilities.
- Employs professionals with expertise in special education finance. These experts understand the complex funding mechanisms, compliance requirements, and grant opportunities associated with special education.
- Efficiently allocates resources to ensure that they directly benefit students with disabilities.
- Actively seeks and manages grants and external funding opportunities to supplement the district's special education budget. Grant application processes are streamlined, and the district has a strong track record of securing additional resources.
- Collaborates closely with the special education department to create budgets and allocate resources that align with the district's special education goals and priorities.
- Maintains compliance with all relevant state and federal regulations, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Robust internal controls and regular audits ensure accountability in the use of special education funds.
- Makes decisions based on data, allowing the district to make informed choices about resource allocation, program effectiveness, and areas of improvement within special education.

Special education finance in Texas is a complex and vital component of the state's educational system. This financial framework is designed to support the unique needs of students with disabilities, ensuring they receive appropriate and inclusive education. It involves a combination of federal and state funding, grant opportunities, and meticulous budgeting to provide resources, personnel, and services that promote the academic and developmental growth of Texas students with special needs.

FBISD's Federal IDEA-B formula funding has grown a little over \$630,000 from 2021-2022 with the grant planning amount of \$13,637,913 for the 2023-2024 school year. This increase is not significant given the increase of students served in special education. IDEA-B pre-school funds has remained fairly flat with less than a \$4,800 increase in that same time period. The state special education allotment as posted in the Final Summary of Finance reports for 2021-2022 was \$64,916,155, which represents an additional \$8,528,087 increase since 2019-2020.

In reviewing the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) report, TCASE Services by Design looks at compliance in Test 2, as this is the only test in which the district has full control. The latest completed report is from 2021-2022 and reflects all expenditures in Fund 199 (local) with Program Intent Codes (PIC) 23, 33, and 43.

Texas requires 55% of the state allotment to be spent on special education program expenditures, however, Fort Bend ISD spent over 155% of the state allotment on special education supports and services in the 2021-2022 school year. Unfortunately, this is a common practice among many school districts due to the increased number of students served in special education as needs are out-pacing funding increases.

Program expenditures

School Year	Program Expenditures	State Allotment	Special Education Enrollment
19-20	\$92,212,312	\$56,388,068	7,868
20-21	\$94,543,305	\$51,748,789	8,348
21-22	\$100,990,874	\$64,916,155	8,810

Additional findings:

- The business and finance office reports a strong collaborative relationship with the department of special education built on mutual respect.
- The business and finance office has well defined systems for purchasing in place.
- The Regional Day School for the Deaf is financially solvent with positive relationships with the districts they serve.
- While there is an existing staffing model designed to meet the current needs and projected future student population within the special education department, the business and finance office is seeking a more streamlined approach to staffing allocations.
- The business and finance department has raised concerns regarding the perception of the district's reputation of providing "Cadillac" special education services and the need to manage stakeholder expectations. This becomes even more critical as state funding struggles to keep up with program growth. Although the findings did not support this concern, the report will later address certain efficiencies that should be considered.
- As of the site visit, the district had 32 vacant special education teacher positions and 118 paraprofessional vacant positions.
- There is a concern that School Health and Related Service (SHARS) reimbursements are not maximized and the district's IEP platform does not provide clear data.
- There is a need for clear communication and collaboration on specialized programming.
- Funding for Early Childhood Special Education is based on the number of hours students spend on campus. The current schedule for a.m. and p.m. students is 3.5 hours which does not allow for full funding.
- There are 21 students being served in non-public day schools and residential treatment facilities. In 2022-2023, the district spent \$1,477,244.98 in out of district placements. The district did recoup \$824,218.84 through the High Cost Funds Grant to offset these expenses.
- There will be a potential financial impact on funding based on changes to the way Texas identifies and serves students with dyslexia.
 - Any student in special education who was served in a fully mainstreamed setting, receiving dyslexia services will move from an instructional arrangement of 40 to 41. Funding for this student will go from \$7,084 to \$8,806. General education funding will go from \$6,160 to \$3,225. This is an overall net loss of \$1,213.00 per student.

- For a student currently in 504 and receiving dyslexia services, and newly evaluated and identified under IDEA as required beginning in 2023-2024, served in an instructional arrangement of 41, special education funding will increase from \$0 to \$8,806. General education funding will go from \$6,160 to \$3,225. This represents an overall net gain of \$5,871 for each student.
- These changes will not be fully implemented until the 2024-2025 school year. As of the writing of this report, the TEA has not made any changes to the dyslexia allotment.
- FBISD has been identified for a third consecutive year as significantly disproportionate in the disciplinary removal of African American students served in special education. This designation requires the district to reserve 15% of their IDEA-B grant for Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CCEIS) to address the root cause. This process puts further strain on the special education budget.
- The district is using CCEIS funds for the newly created Behavior Response Team in order to address issues with disproportionate discipline. This innovative approach will have great impact, but only if truly implemented to address the root cause of disproportionate discipline.
- FBISD provides transportation as a related service to students with disabilities in accordance with state and federal guidelines. Related services are provided to children with disabilities to assist them in benefiting from special education services. The need for related services is considered in the Admission, Review, and Dismissal Committee (ARD) meeting.
- At the request of FBISD, TCASE Services reached out to the comparative districts to request data related to transportation. Only two districts responded: Conroe ISD and Northside ISD.
- The following chart represents the percent of students within each district that are transported as a related service, by eligibility. FBISD provides transportation as a related services to the lowest percentage of students with disabilities compared to the other two districts.

District	Fort Bend	Conroe	Northside
Total number receiving transportation	1691	2054	2989
Percent receiving transportation	15%	24%	19%
OI	1.6%	1%	.76%
OHI	6%	10%	9%
DHH	3%	2%	1%
VI	.71%	1%	.53%
DB	.23%	.09%	.23%
ID	17.6%	24%	18.5%
ED	7%	8%	4%
SLD	2.5%	3%	5.5%
SI	3%	1%	21%
AU	53%	42%	36%
TBI	.47%	.14%	.3%
NCEC	4%	7%	3%

*Information provided by Fort Bend ISD, Conroe ISD, and Northside ISD
Fall 2023*

Effective staffing practices

Effective staffing practices in special education are vital to ensure that students with disabilities receive the necessary support and high-quality education they require. This includes recruitment and retention of staff, allocating staff resources, onboarding new staff, and continuous professional development for existing staff.

Recruitment and retention

FBISD:

- Considers innovative hiring practices including the apprentice and associate teacher roles to help fill critical staffing shortages. Both groups receive extensive onboarding and continued professional development and reported feeling highly supported. While this inventive approach provides relief for vacant positions, IDEA requires teachers providing services to students to be fully certified, so a teacher of record should be assigned until certification requirements are completed.
- Collaborates with universities to recruit new graduates.
- Has a “Grow Your Own” program to assist employees in support positions transition into teaching.
- Offers sign-on bonuses, retention stipends, and stipends for critical needs areas.
- Maintains current job descriptions for all positions. However, there is a need to clarify roles and responsibilities of district staff as there seem to be competing priorities for many positions. While job descriptions are clearly delineated, the function of several positions has shifted to providing immediate support for campus staff to fill vacant positions, or address other immediate needs.
- Continues to struggle to fill special education teacher and paraprofessional positions, and evaluation and service providers such as speech language pathologists (SLPs), and licensed specialists in school psychology (LSSPs). This is not unique to FBISD, as there is currently a national shortage of special educators.
- Utilizes interns for LSSP positions to fill the gap of vacancies. During the 2022-2023 school year, FBISD employed eight LSSP interns and was able to keep all 8 in positions for the 2023-2024 school year. This school year, the district has hired ten interns and is hoping to hire all ten in full time positions.
- Might have difficulty filling paraprofessional vacancies due to the pay. In FBISD, paraprofessional substitutes can earn a higher wage than full-time employees.
- Is to be highly commended for having a highly staffed RDSPD program. Central office staff, elementary, and middle school campuses are fully staffed with vacancies remaining at the high school and itinerant levels. That speaks to the quality of the services provided as this is an especially challenging program to staff.
- Might need to address three critical positions in which pay is not aligned with responsibilities:

- The campus compliance coordinator (CCC) position was created to provide leadership to campuses for compliance and coordination of special education, 504, and national and state testing programs at the elementary level. This position was reported as critical by principals, yet multiple groups mentioned the role is far too broad, there is frequent turnover, and the pay is not aligned with similar positions within the district. In the focus group, the respondents reported feeling overwhelmed, working beyond the scheduled workday, and not able to complete necessary tasks in the manner that is expected. CCCs are paid on a teacher salary and receive stipends and step increases.
- The ARD facilitator (ARDF) position was created at the secondary level to provide support for administrators and case managers in completion of ARD paperwork and to monitor campus compliance. Caseloads vary greatly campus by campus, and positions are often difficult to fill due to the salary. ARDFs are paid on an administrative pay scale and teachers moving in to the role often lose stipends and no longer receive step increases provided on the teacher pay scale.
- Specialists within the department are considered to be a pay grade below the specialists in other departments. Specialists may make less than a classroom teacher because of the loss of stipends when moving to a central office position.

Staffing allocations

FBISD:

- Has a staffing model based on best practice in place intended to guide decisions for allocating positions at the campus for programs and services. The model is a point of confusion between the special education department and business and finance department.
- Has positions intended to reduce the campus paperwork workload with Admission, Review, and Dismissal facilitators (ARDF) and CCCs. These positions are highly valued, however with the program growth, the caseload is reported to be a challenge.
- Consistently moves specialized programs to address student needs. While necessary, this process can create uncertainty for parents, staff, administration, and transportation. Improved communication and timelines might be necessary to ensure smooth transitions for all stakeholders.
- Struggles to fill positions in key areas that creates a disruption of services to students with disabilities. This is especially evident in teacher and paraprofessional positions, SLPs, and LSSPs.

- Has experienced a substantial influx of new staff, demanding increased focus on staff training, especially notable for apprentice and associate teachers.
- Stakeholders reported high caseloads due to staffing shortages, which is taking a toll on special education providers who have to pick up the responsibilities to ensure services are delivered.
- Has a broad continuum of services to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. As the district looks for ways to use resources most effectively, the district might consider de-centralizing programs and have less 'places', which might also help reduce the number of vacant positions, and reduce transportation costs.
- Has a significant number of paraprofessionals supporting general education classroom, instead of certified special education teachers. Even when certified teachers were present, auditors observed special educators serving as 'helpers,' rather than providing specially designed instruction.
- Has an organizational structure aligned mostly with specific programs. The department has continued to redefine positions to meet the changing needs of the district since the 2015-2016 school year. While these organizational changes have facilitated better coordination and collaboration with campuses and district departments, there is a risk of each branch of the organizational chart functioning independently, rather than as a single department.
- Has a Change of Placement Process (COP) to monitor student placement decisions to prevent inappropriate placements in more restrictive settings. This process was recently streamlined to address perceived department gatekeeping. The process may need to be further adjusted to meet campus needs.
- Has created the Behavior Response Team (BRT) to address significant disproportionality (SD). This team is led by an assistant director and program manager and includes 10 program specialists, 15 behavior aides, and 5 Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs). This new team is struggling to find their identity and purpose, and this is creating confusion between other special education teams and campus staff. This is understandable with a brand new initiative.

Central office staff

The special education department includes the following leadership positions:

- 1 executive director who oversees special education, 504 accommodations, state and federal programs, summer school and state and federal testing. In comparing this position to that in other large districts, this position has extensive roles and responsibilities more in-line with those of assistant superintendents in other districts.
- 2 director positions.
- 5 assistant director positions
- 17 program managers
- 33 program specialists
- 1 RDSPD Coordinator
- 1 Early Intervention Academy supervisor
- 1 STEP supervisor

The organization of special education departments differs greatly between one district and the next. The model employed by FBISD is heavily focused on programs, which may contribute to the 'places, rather than services' mindset observed in the district. There are sufficient positions within the department, but there is a silo effect due to the specialized program roles. Each department functions as a mini-department, rather than a part of the larger department. This organization requires campus teams to collaborate with multiple teams for information and support.

Campus staff

The following chart represents staff to student ratios by grade band and by program. The district is sufficiently staffed with a very low staff to student ratio in all areas. While multiple stakeholders reported the need for more staff, it might simply be more of a need to fill vacant positions. However, it might be possible to ensure coverage with existing staff due to low ratios. Note that the information provided was from September 2023, and many changes may have taken place as the district has a leveling process for the beginning of the year.

Staff to Student Ratios by Program, Program Level, and District Program

Program By Level	Students	Teachers	Paras	Total Staff	Teacher: Student Ratio	Staff: Student Ratio
Elementary RICS & Mainstream	3240	199	164	363	1:16	1:9
Middle School RICS & Mainstream	2208	98	60	158	1:23	1:14
High School RICS & Mainstream	2235	105	59	164	1:22	1:14
Elementary ABC	181	24	53	77	1:8	1:2
Middle School ABC	29	5	10	15	1:6	1:2
ATS	105	15	25	40	1:7	1:3
Elementary BSS	81	13	26	39	1:6	1:2
Middle School BSS	61	11	22	33	1:6	1:2
High School BSS	61	13	22	35	1:5	1:2
Elementary CLASS	137	16	31	47	1:9	1:3
Middle School CLASS	54	6	13	19	1:9	1:3
High School CLASS	39	5	10	15	1:8	1:2
ECSE	242	35	69	104	1:7	1:2
EIA	64	9	19	28	1:7	1:2
Elementary FLASH	29	5	10	15	1:6	1:2
Middle School FLASH	14	2	4	6	1:7	1:2
High School FLASH	20	4	8	12	1:5	1:2
Elementary SAILS	431	48	96	144	1:9	1:3
Middle School SAILS	222	25	49	74	1:9	1:3
High School SAILS	331	37	64	101	1:9	1:3
STEP	34	10	20	30	1:3	1:1
Program District Total	Students	Teachers	Paras	Total Staff	Teacher: Student Ratio	Staff: Student Ratio
RICS & Mainstream	7683	402	283	685	1:19	1:11
ABC	210	29	63	92	1:7	1:2
BSS	203	37	70	107	1:5	1:2
CLASS	230	27	54	81	1:9	1:3
FLASH	63	11	22	33	1:6	1:2
SAILS	984	110	209	319	1:9	1:3

Professional development

FBISD:

- Maintains a comprehensive professional learning plan based on the needs of staff and is aligned with the District Improvement Plan and other department priorities. The plan is focused on improving student outcomes, on-going, differentiated, and results driven. Many stakeholders spoke highly of training provided, especially to teachers and paraprofessionals. Campus administrators would like to have more specific training on the purpose of specialized programming, behavior support, and the delivery of specially designed instruction. School counselors would like to have training relative to their role in supporting special education programming. In fact, all groups conveyed the desire for more frequent training.
- Provides a robust onboarding process for new staff, including apprentice and associate teachers. New teachers conveyed that they would have benefited from content training prior to the start of school, in addition to the training they received.
- Department members voiced frustration with interrupted schedules due to responding to crisis at the campus level. This is having a negative impact on the climate of the department.
- Should clarify roles and responsibilities of case managers at the campus level. This was conveyed by multiple groups at all levels.
- Should re-focus efforts on academic and behavior supports aligned with other district supports through a clear Multi-Tiered System of Support, as this was a common challenge reported by multiple stakeholder groups.
- Might consider a recurring training for teachers struggling with classroom management with follow up support for implementation.

Inclusive systems and structures

FBISD is dedicated to fostering a culture of inclusivity and providing high-quality education and support services for students with diverse needs.

FBISD offers a full continuum of services within the special education program that encompasses a comprehensive range of support and educational options tailored to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. This continuum spans from inclusive classrooms and support within the general education environment to more specialized settings. It includes various intervention strategies, therapies, and services that ensure each student receives the appropriate level of assistance and accommodations necessary to access a meaningful education.

The following descriptions from the district's website explain the instructional arrangements which might be considered for students with disabilities:

- Inclusion is an instructional arrangement provided for special education supports to a student in the general classroom in accordance with the student's IEP. Special education personnel (including paraprofessionals) provide direct or indirect services to the student as determined by the IEP.
- Mainstream is an instructional arrangement that occurs when special education supports such as accommodations, modifications & related services are provided within the general education classroom during the instructional day
- Speech Therapy is an instructional arrangement for providing speech therapy services. Students who have a speech impairment and receive only speech therapy are not eligible to be counted for any other instructional arrangement.
- Resource is an instructional arrangement for providing special education instruction and related services in a setting other than the general education classroom.
- Self-contained, mild/moderate/severe, regular campus is an instructional arrangement for providing special education instruction and related services for 50 percent or more of the school day on a regular school campus.
- Homebound is an instructional arrangement for providing special education instruction to eligible students with disabilities who are medically unable to attend school at the campus site.

- Non-public day school is an instructional arrangement for providing special education instruction to students through a contractual arrangement with an approved non-public school for special education services.
- Vocational Adjustment Class is an instructional arrangement for high school students providing special education, academic, or job-related instruction to students who are placed on a job with regular supervision by the Transition teacher.
- Residential is an instructional arrangement for providing special education instruction to students with a contractual arrangement with an approved residential non-public school.

The self-contained programs available in Fort Bend ISD include specialized services as outlined below.

- Academic, Behavior, and Communication (ABC) services are designed for students who exhibit a combination of severe cognitive, communication and behavioral challenges.
- Adult Transition Services (ATS) are designed for students who have met high school graduation requirements but require additional supports to facilitate the transition to adult life beyond the age of 18.
- Behavior Support Services (BSS) are services designed for students who exhibit significant challenging behaviors and require social and/or behavioral support.
- CLaSS provides social and/or behavioral services for students who are able to function academically in the lesser restrictive setting, but require social and/or behavioral support in order to facilitate the development of socially appropriate behaviors.
- CLaSS Plus services are designed for students who exhibit significant challenging behaviors and require social, emotional and behavioral support to facilitate the development and demonstration of appropriate behavior and functioning in the school setting.
- Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Services are offered to students with identified developmental delays who are 3-5 years old.
- Functional Living and School Health (FLaSH) services provides a developmentally appropriate program for students who exhibit significant, profound cognitive and communication impairments and/or multiple impairments.
- Succeeding in Academic and Independent Living Skills (SAILS) services are designed to provide students with significant cognitive disabilities an educational program focusing on life skills such as personal care, pre-vocational activities, communication, functional academics and/or social skills.

- Dyslexia services are provided across all FBISD campuses with educators trained in the Orton-Gillingham program. The district understands that individuals with dyslexia can achieve success in reading and writing when given the appropriate support and instruction.
 - With Project Read, FBISD is nicely positioned to adapt to the new dyslexia rules and support students with dyslexia.

The chart below summarizes the number of specialized settings by level.

	Elementary	Middle	High School	Total
ECSE	31			31
ECSE-FLASH	3			3
SAILS	48	26	38	112
BSS	13	12	12	37
FLASH	5	2	4	11
ATS			15	15
ABC	24	6	0	30
CLASS	15	5	5	25
CLASS Plus	2	1	2	5
Total	141	52	76	269

Additional centralized specialized settings are described on the website.

- Early Intervention Academy is meant to redefine early intervention services by providing individualized educational services 31.40 hours a week, 12 months a year, in which the child is engaged in systematically planned, developmentally-appropriate educational activities targeted toward identified objectives.
 - Students who attend EIA have the opportunity to have recess with their general education peers.
 - The opportunity for more inclusive opportunities is limited due to only 2 Pre-Kindergarten class for 7 EIA classes (3 for 3-year-olds and 4 for 4-year-olds).
 - The campus which houses EIA has embraced the program and welcomed it as part of the campus, including being part of the PTO.
 - It is consistently reported that students tend to struggle to transition back to their home campus after attending EIA.
 - Students who would otherwise attend a collaborative program, as indicated in the IEP, are mostly or fully self-contained at EIA.
 - Students who might not require such specialized services are enrolled, while others are served at their home campus with less support.
- STEP (Structured Therapeutic Education Program) is a full day self-contained centralized behavior program in Fort Bend ISD that provides a structured therapeutic environment while supporting students in academics, social emotional and behavior interventions. It is designed to serve special education students, who have not been successful in a specialized support service classroom, students transitioning back to the district from an out of district placement and elementary general education students that have been referred for testing that need additional behavioral support during the evaluation period.
 - Active learning was observed in classrooms, with highly engaging instruction and paraprofessional involvement.
 - The structure of the program seems like a solid behavior program which has lost some resources but remains highly successful. The campus administrator is organized and passionate about the program.
 - There is a high success rate with transition and the program is well monitored.
- The Brazoria-Fort Bend Regional Day School Program for the Deaf (RDSPD) has been established through a shared service arrangement between eleven (11) neighboring school districts within Fort Bend county, Brazoria county, and southwest Harris county.
 - The RDSPD is fully staffed, which is remarkable given state-wide shortages, which is a credit to the organization and leadership of the program.

While the district is to be commended for such a varied program delivery model, there is a need to ensure that:

- Services are seen as portable in order to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education, rather than a specific place to provide the services.
- The district has a common mental model of the purpose of programs. Several stakeholders mentioned students were 'misplaced' into programs and administrators reported not understanding the different program intentions, especially when a new program was added. Program delivery varied throughout the district which is an additional indicator that it might be time to re-visit program intentions and identify the profile of a student within each instructional arrangement or setting. Auditors reported difficulty in identifying program intentions while observing, as many looked identical and the function could not be identified.
- There is a frequent review of the needs of the students placed in day programs and residential treatment facilities to see if some students could be returned to the district and served in the STEP program. Additional resources could be provided to the district's internal program rather than to the varying centers students are currently attending.
- There is an alignment of all programs, including the Behavior Response Team. A coordinated effort will go further than individual teams responding in isolation.

FBISD's commitment to an inclusive environment is also evident in the development and implementation of Individual Education Programs (IEPs). Following is a summary of the IEP folder review.

- Full and Individual Initial Evaluations (FIEs) were completed within the required timelines.
- Full and Individual Initial Evaluations were based on a variety of different sources to determine the student's educational needs.
- When making placement of services decisions the ARD Committees:
 - Included an explanation of how the student is educated with children who are not disabled.
 - Ensured the removal of a child with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only if the nature and severity of the disability is such that education and regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.
 - Considered a full continuum of services.

- Determined the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) based on the student's needs in the IEP and chose the LRE as close as possible to the child's home.
- Included information that a continuum of alternative placements was considered prior to determining student placement.
- Ensured parents received notice of ARD at least 5 school days prior to the meeting.
- Parents received a copy of the procedural safeguards at least once a year.
- Prior Written Notice was provided for all ARD meetings.
- Three-year reevaluations are not occurring within expected timelines. Some folders had evaluation dated 2016 or 2017. In one instance the annual ARD was held four days prior to the reevaluation being due (11/22); however, the reevaluation was never addressed or completed. (34 CFR § 300.305)
- A more detailed description in the Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance Statement (PLAAFPs) is necessary to address the disability impact in addition to checking the subject area boxes. Describe how the disability impacts a particular subject. Not all PLAAFPs included an impact statement. (34 CFR 300.320(a)(1))
- Some PLAAFPs were missing the students strengths and weaknesses. (34 CFR 300.320(a)(1))
- Some goals are not written in standards-based format. The goal is a broad statement and determining mastery is difficult. Many times the the objectives are actually goals. Not all goals align to what is written in the PLAAFP. (34 CFR 300.320(a)(2))
- Transition supplements do not always contain measurable post secondary goals. They would be stated as "the parent would like....". (34 CFR 300.320(b))
- Some ARDs were not fully constituted ARDs. (19 TAC 89.1050) Those not present did not have written consent for excusal (34 CFR 300.321(e)(2)). The general education teacher was missing from some ARDs. (34 CFR 300.321(a)(2)). DHH teacher was not at or did not sign the ARD. (19 TAC 89.1050(c)(3)(B))

The department has a renewed focus on IEP development, as there has been a significant turnover in staff. Additionally, the district has taken great strides since 2016 to identify and serve students needing special education services. The challenge remains as an increasing number of students require evaluation, identification, and reevaluation for special education. Current special education enrollment for the 2023-2024 school year is at 11,109. This number will increase throughout the year as students are identified for services, move in to the district, or enroll in the Early Childhood Special Education program on their third birthday.

The district has employed the following strategies to address evaluation staff shortages:

- Assigned a centralized group of SLPs to focus on initial evaluations.
- Supplemental pay for evaluation staff to conduct evaluations on weekends and evenings.
- Provided training for evaluation staff on strategies to streamline evaluation processes while still providing comprehensive, quality evaluations.
- Provided sign-on and retention bonuses for evaluation staff to recruit and retain staff.
- Assigned lead positions to manage oversight.
- Increased internship opportunities for evaluation positions.
- Utilized evaluation contract staff for vacant positions.
- Added Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) positions to conduct Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs).

The special education department regularly assesses and communicates transparently with all stakeholders, while advocating for additional resources. The evaluation practices within the district are aligned with best practices and includes a centralized tracking system for monitoring. The commitment to quality evaluations is not circumvented due to the lack of resources. The district has provided additional resources to address evaluation and reevaluation backlogs, and the department has made significant progress. Some of these expenses could be addressed by using the funds allocated to salaried positions which are vacant, or with SHARS funding. The department will continue to provide monthly updates to the board with regards to evaluations and reevaluations.

Other findings include:

- Evaluation staff need improved access to testing materials to address the backlog.
- All evaluation staff, including speech, need a secure location for testing and delivery of services. This seems to be a campus-based issue, but needs to be addressed to ensure there is no disruption to services. When an evaluator has to 'find space,' this interrupts the schedule and delays timelines.

- The district is still conducting most ARD meetings virtually. While this was an excellent way to conduct business during school closures, the district has returned to all in-person meetings for other school business and should do so with regard to ARD meetings. Many stakeholders reported the lack of professionalism with cameras turned off or other noted interruptions during virtual meetings. Virtual meetings should be a last effort to ensure parent participation and not be used solely for convenience of the school.
- Stakeholders mentioned that some students were kept in more restrictive settings than necessary so as not to upset parents or for other adult conveniences. An example of this is when students who no longer qualify for Homebound services are allowed to continue because parents enjoy the convenience.
- All required legal and local board policies and operating procedures are posted on the Legal Framework as required by TEA.
- The Change of Placement (COP) process is seen as a committee that makes placement decisions. This process can be seen as a barrier to finding appropriate services to students and should be reviewed.
- The Manifestation Determination Review process for DAEP placements was reported as problematic by multiple stakeholders. Campuses reported having decisions provided after a change of placement had occurred, and the department reported having to spend a significant time reviewing campus decisions. If possible, this process should be streamlined to ensure appropriate protections for students are in place, without requiring so much oversight by the department.
- Several campus respondents reported too much time was spent on paperwork, which is not an uncommon complaint in regards to special education. The district does provide extensive job aids to help employees reduce time spent on paperwork. The reviewers did not uncover any district expectations not required by state or federal requirements.
- Data collection processes were reported as being campus-based decisions. The district might want to ensure there are common expectations with regards to the frequency and method for data collection.
- The department reported an improvement in writing student Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs).
- There is an extensive audit system in place to support campuses, however, this centralized process relies on a small department of three to review all campuses. This process might be more efficient as a department-wide approach. A shared ownership of the process would contribute to more accountability and reduce the silo effect within the department.
- More students in the 18+ program are entering gainful employment. The teachers and department leaders within this program reported needing access to more resources. As was evident throughout site visits, each program is functioning in a unique manner, with some far more successful than others.

- While there are effective procedures and operating guidelines in place, they are not all implemented with fidelity. The locus of control resides with the district with little accountability at the campus level.
- Restraints are closely monitored and accurately reported with a plan to address areas of need.
- There is a need to continue to monitor the following indicators due to risk of significant disproportionality within the Results Driven Accountability system. As of the writing of this report, results for 2023 were not available, results represent data from 2022.
 - Indicator 9 measures the percent of students ages 3-4, and age 5 not enrolled in Kindergarten, served in special education who were placed in a regular early childhood program. The district scored a 3 on this indicator, which represents a high number of students who are self-contained, not served in the general education setting.
 - Indicator 12 measures the percent of students served in special education placed in separate settings. FBISD rated as significantly disproportionate in separate setting placements for white students, year 1.
 - Indicator 18 measures the disaggregated percent of total disciplinary removals of students ages 3-21 served in special education. FBISD was rated significantly disproportionate in this area for the third year in a row, which required the district to set aside CCEIS funds to address the root cause.
- FBISD participated in required TEA targeted monitoring during the 2022-2023 school year and completed the required strategic support plan and corrective action plan to address areas of noncompliance related to IEP Development.
- FBISD participated in the required Special Education Self-Assessment process. The purpose of the special education self-assessment is to assist leadership teams in evaluating and improving their educational program serving students with disabilities receiving special education services. The special education self-assessment is completed annually. FBISD rated 17 of the 23 areas as “Developing,” and 6 areas as “Proficient.” Here is a breakdown of the ratings assigned:

Proficient	Developing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dyslexia • IEP implementation • Early childhood transition • Secondary transition • Behavior • Family engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Find • Intervention • Evaluation • Reevaluation • FAPE • Data analysis • Teachers and staff • Graduation • Instructional strategies • Disproportionality-behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disproportionality-identification and placement • Behavior intervention plans • Connection to community and school climate • Least restrictive environment • State assessment participation • Properly constituted ARD committee • IEP content & development

Quality instruction

Instructional best practices in special education are tailored teaching methods designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. These practices ensure that students receive effective and inclusive education that supports their academic, social, and emotional growth. The following was observed in classrooms during site visits:

- Teachers tailor instruction to accommodate the diverse learning needs of students, including varying levels of ability and disability. Differentiated instruction included modifying content, process, or product to match individual student needs.
- Specially designed instruction (SDI) was not as frequently observed. As defined by the Council for Exceptional Children, “SDI addresses their Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals; accounts for their disability; provides modifications or adaptations to content; and encourages access to the general education curriculum.”
- Teachers provided a structured and organized classroom environment that minimizes distractions and helps students stay focused.
- Teachers implemented strategies to address challenging behaviors and promote positive social skills.
- Teachers provided multi-sensory instruction, incorporating visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile elements to engage students and support different learning styles.
- Special education teachers collaborate with general education teachers, therapists, and support staff to provide a comprehensive approach to meeting students' needs.
- Teachers clearly and explicitly taught new skills and concepts, breaking them down into manageable steps.
- Teachers provided direct instruction providing clear and direct teaching with opportunities for guided practice and feedback.
- Paraprofessionals provide the majority of in-class support services. While this is a cost saving measure, it does impact the quality of specially designed instruction provided to students.
- In most classrooms, special education support, whether provided by a certified teacher or paraprofessional, was limited to the assistance of task completion rather than the delivery of in-class support.
- Teachers had access to resources, including general education materials, although access to supplementary materials was limited.

- Staff in all settings were actively engaged in supporting students.
- Student to staff ratios were reported as low in most settings, although most stakeholder groups reported feeling understaffed.
- Teachers reported having access to high quality curriculum and scaffolding supports.
- There is not a consistent model of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for academics or behavior implemented across the district. This might be contributing to the increased referrals for special education evaluation.
- Assistive technology devices were used to support students with communication needs.
- Appropriate structures were evident in most specialized settings.
- The use of the instructional resource Unique was not consistently observed across specialized settings.
- ATS programming differs around the district. Some campuses actively engage adult students through campus enterprise options and have effective partnerships with community supports. Teachers reported a lack of resources and low acceptance of their students in the Career and Technology Programs.

Early Intervention Academy observations include the following:

- Teachers are guided to design instruction on the vertical alignment to Pre-K and supplement with resources to address individual student skills.
- Teachers have access to online resources consistent with the Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten district programs.
- Classrooms at EIA are clean, organized, and free of clutter.
- Classrooms were observed to have appropriate instructional materials for routines such as “who is here” charts, job charts, and visual schedules for the class.
- The adults at EIA create a sense of community in the classrooms and have a positive rapport with students, and students were on task.
- A BCBA trains teachers on and oversees the use of 5 main ABA strategies. The teachers are also trained to follow a hierarchy of prompting and cueing, and the BCBA supports this through classroom visits.
- Student assessments done at EIA assess skills include some not aligned to the Pre-K Guidelines. The assessments do not include critical components such as growth of student language.
- Students who attend EIA receive group therapies including music therapy, even if it is not indicated as a need in the IEP.
- While it was reported some students have First, Then supports or individual schedules, none were observed to be utilized or readily available.
-

- Differentiated materials with visuals and work tasks were observed to be available in centers in the classrooms.
- Large group activities observed lacked active roles for instructional assistants. One was observed sitting at a table cutting out materials. The instruction in large group settings appeared to be designed for Pre-K classrooms with little to no differentiation observed.
- When small group activities were observed, the teacher was teaching whole group and assistants sat with students at their small group tables. Having a low adult to student ratio could allow for more targeted small group instruction.

STEP observations include the following:

- Active learning was observed with high levels of engagement and paraprofessionals supporting instructional activities.
- The structure of the behavior program is a solid approach to supporting students with significant behavior needs.
- Overall, the program is well run and organized with a high commitment to the delivery of quality services.

Family and community engagement

Family and community engagement is critically important in special education because it fosters a collaborative and supportive network that significantly benefits students with disabilities. It empowers families to actively participate in their child's education, helping to tailor individualized support and ensuring that the student's unique needs are met. Furthermore, community involvement extends the educational experience beyond the school, providing additional resources, networks, and opportunities for students with disabilities to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

FBISD:

- Provides regular, open, and two-way communication between families, educators, and service providers.
- Makes efforts to make information, meetings, and school events accessible to all families, including those with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- Provides resources and training to empower families to advocate for their child's needs.
- Involves families in school improvement initiatives and decision-making at the district level.
- Provides support networks and peer mentoring opportunities for parents of children with disabilities.
- Provides families with regular updates on their child's progress, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.
- Ensures that families have access to the policies and procedures related to special education, including their rights and responsibilities.
- Provides available clear information on how to navigate the special education process.
- Operates a highly functioning Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC) committed to cultivating strong relationships between the district and parents of students with disabilities.
- Parents are concerned about the length of time in which it takes to complete initial evaluations.
- Parents are concerned about the delay in reevaluations for students with disabilities.
- Parents are concerned about the lack of speech services due to a shortage of SLPs.

EFFICIENCIES



One particular purpose for commissioning the study of special education programs in FBISD is to ensure optimization within the system to enhance resource allocations, while continuing to provide high quality instruction and services to students with disabilities. In this section, we will outline a few steps the district may consider to achieve better outcomes for students while effectively managing resources:

- Eliminate the Early Intervention Academy and return students to existing programs across the district to a school as close to their home as possible. If necessary, use EIA positions to reallocate to campus-based ECSE programming.
- Centralize ATS or 18+ programming to provide students with more support in transitioning to adult life. This would require the district to identify appropriate space that allows for the implementation of more current practices, rather than serving students with 9-12 students. This may free up campus space, but will require the district to identify an appropriate centralized location. This process would allow the district to provide more support getting students out into the community in volunteer and job placements. However, this change would impact transportation.
- Prioritize returning students from out of district placements by expanding the current STEP program to serve these students, when feasible. An appropriate location would need to be secured with a long term plan for transitioning students to and from the STEP program and their home campus.
- Centralize the FLASH program to ensure appropriate oversight of the students needing more specialized medical support. While this step may increase transportation needs for this group of students, it should reduce the number of nurses required.
- Consider the potential benefits of reducing specialized settings, thereby allowing essential services to be offered directly on the home campus. This shift would demand a change in perspective, transitioning the focus from the physical locations of services to the provision of services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FBISD has many notable strengths, including its passionate and core beliefs of inclusion, its knowledgeable staff, and its willingness to undertake this review and act on the recommendations as part of a continuous improvement cycle. Each of the following recommendations are interrelated and will require an investment on the part of FBISD to undertake.



Leadership, communication & collaboration

- Clarify roles and responsibilities of campus and district leadership positions to foster a culture of shared responsibility. Prioritize activities that create a proactive system rather than a reactive one.
 - Consider alternatives to pulling special education central office staff for coverage of vacant positions to limit disruption of support for teachers and students.
 - Provide additional professional learning opportunities for campus administrators to build capacity.
 - Integrate special education priorities as a fundamental component of the District Improvement Plan and other continuous improvement activities, reflecting the commitment to serving students with disabilities effectively.
- Continue to use data to assess program effectiveness and guide decision-making, making adjustments as necessary to improve outcomes. Building on the school report cards and campus walks, develop a menu of tiered support based on campus needs.
 - Maintain and enhance effective communication through openness and transparency. Ensure information flows freely among educators, students, families, district administrators, and board members. Include transportation in specialized program placements.
 - When relocating specialized programming, ensure a comprehensive plan is in place for informing campus teams of the purpose of the program and necessary components of the program such as classroom environment and instructional best practices. Ensure necessary resources are in place, and encourage campus teams to visit established programs to increase understanding of the program design.
 - Create a system to reduce the siloed effect within the special education department. Look for opportunities to streamline job responsibilities and eliminate duplication of effort.



Equitable resource allocation

- As the district closes the 22-23 budget, the spending threshold to maintain MOE compliance should be \$100,990,874. Anything spent above this could be accounted for through SHARS revenue which would negate any further increase in MOE spending expectations.
 - Collaborate with the special education department to clarify and improve upon the existing staff allocation process to prioritize needs for the 24-25 school year.
 - Maximize SHARS revenue by reviewing salaried positions being paid with IDEA-B grant funds. Positions not providing billable services should be grant funded whenever possible.
-
- Train staff for consistency of documenting services in IEPs to eliminate the need to mine for SHARS related data.
 - Consider sign-on bonuses for special education teacher positions to reduce vacant positions.
 - Leverage dually certified PK/special education teachers to assist in serving ECSE students in order to generate full day funding.
 - Increase the instructional day for ECSE half day programs by 30 minutes in order to generate full day ADA funding. The district currently runs a program for 3.5 hours, generating only part time funding.
 - Examine the feasibility and cost effectiveness of returning students from out of district placements by serving students in the STEP program. This would include identifying a location appropriate for the expected growth of the program over time.
 - Analyze dyslexia classes and consider prorating teacher salary with PIC 37 and 43 for those serving only students in 504.
 - Prioritize funds to address the initial evaluation and reevaluation backlog, and any areas where services are not being provided, such as speech therapy. Consider using SHARS funds for this purpose.
 - Continue to monitor and reduce any areas of significant disproportionality in order to eliminate the need to set aside CCEIS funds.
 - Create a flexible process for reallocating funds from salaries to contracted services and vice versa as the needs and availability of staff occur.





Effective staffing practices

- Monitor efficiency of programs based on available staff. For example, when there is a teacher vacancy in a specialized program, where can the district combine programming or utilize existing staff to provide services to students? Consider services rather than places or locations.
 - Create a flexible system to hire hard to fill positions early to reduce competition with neighboring districts, such as pre-hiring high quality candidates.
 - Consider tying stipends to training or competencies to improve attendance in professional learning opportunities.
 - Reduce disruption to coaching and support opportunities for new teachers.
-
- Consider reducing the number of paraprofessionals and increasing teacher positions wherever possible. This could be done through increasing student to staff ratios in specialized settings and reducing student to teacher ratios for in-class support. An increase in teachers should improve instructional practices in the general education setting and reduce the caseload/workload of teachers.
 - Build upon the existing professional learning framework to provide necessary training to all positions serving students in special education from administrators to transportation providers.
 - Establish expectations and provide behavior training to all campus groups. This should be done in conjunction with other departments since behavior for general education students was a frequently reported concern.
 - Address the job duties and pay disparities in the CCC and ARDF positions. Consider reassigning state assessment responsibilities or provide more support through additional allocations based on campus caseloads. Implement a staffing model similar to that of other department such as school counselors, or other support roles.
 - Compare pay for paraprofessional and substitute paraprofessional positions and address the gap to reduce the number of vacant positions.
 - Clarify roles and responsibilities of campus based positions such as case manager and school counselors.
 - Prioritize recruitment and retention activities for addressing evaluation staffing shortages.
 - Address the climate within the special education department by reducing silos and creating clear communication processes within the department, providing opportunities for continued learning and growth, and implementing a recognition program to recognize hard work and achievements of the department staff. Consider reorganizing teams to align with other district department, such as building levels. Streamline the number of leaders the principal must communicate with.



Inclusive systems and structures

- Improve communication related to the Behavior Response Team. Create a system-wide process for assisting campus teams with behavior needs with clear directions for accessing support at each level.
 - Reiterate the Change of Placement process and its purpose to campus teams, emphasizing the importance of using clear and appropriate language to clarify that the process aims not to restrict students from programs but to guarantee proper placement decisions are made.
-
- Clarify the purpose of each setting and identify the profile of a student who would be appropriately served within the setting. Create a mental model to include the classroom environment, data collection processes, necessary instructional materials, and aligned curriculum with scaffolding documents. Identify quality exemplars around the district and use these to train other groups. Include examples of appropriate impact and PLAAFP statements, goals, and exit criteria.
 - Redesign the current audit system to include campus staff and administrators to create the shared ownership of the process.
 - Streamline expectations, processes, and communication from each program to eliminate confusion, or having conflicting demands at the campus level.
 - Identify a comprehensive process for moving specialized programming to ensure smooth transitions. Include transportation, administration, resource planning, and other stakeholder groups within the process.
 - Redesign the MDR DAEP placement review process to give campuses more ownership of the process. Provide guidance documents and consider doing spot reviews and provide training, rather than a review of every placement.
 - Wherever possible, build capacity through empowering campus leaders to decentralize the locus of control from the department.





Quality instruction

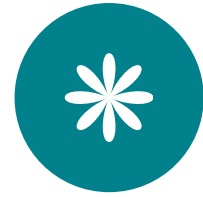
- Establish, communicate, support and monitor clear Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports guidelines for academics and behavior.
 - Provide training related to building an inclusive master schedule.
 - Review the provision of 'patterns of services' for in-class support to reduce over supporting students in the general education classroom.
 - Clarify and streamline the process for accessing student IEPs and the way general education teachers are provided instructional accommodations.
 - Eliminate the practice of using special education staff to substitute for teacher absences.
-
- Focus on the delivery of specially designed instruction in the general education classroom rather than special education paraprofessional or teacher presence. Identify 1-3 high leverage strategies by content to focus on district-wide to improve instruction. Combine this process with the campus walks.
 - Use campus walk data to inform a menu of services to differentiate support for campuses, based on need.
 - Develop a system for new teachers to visit job-alike classrooms with strong instructional practices in place. Include a checklist for the visiting teacher to identify areas they plan to improve upon.
 - Monitor the provision of dyslexia services to ensure instruction is provided within the school day.
 - Develop a plan for transition for serving students with dyslexia in special education. Identify case management responsibilities and build capacity of special education teachers and other providers of dyslexia services for shared ownership.
 - Shore up the planning process for special education and general education teachers. Identify roles and responsibilities of each. For example, the role of the general education teacher is to provide the lesson plan and the special education teacher to design the specially designed instruction for the lesson. What is the expectation, process, and timeline for the general education teacher to provide the lesson plan?
 - Review the usage of special education curriculum resources to ensure teachers are using them. Establish usage guidelines, or eliminate any expensive products not being utilized effectively.
 - Consider training all general education and special education teachers providing in-class supports in flexible grouping to improve instructional practices



Family and community engagement

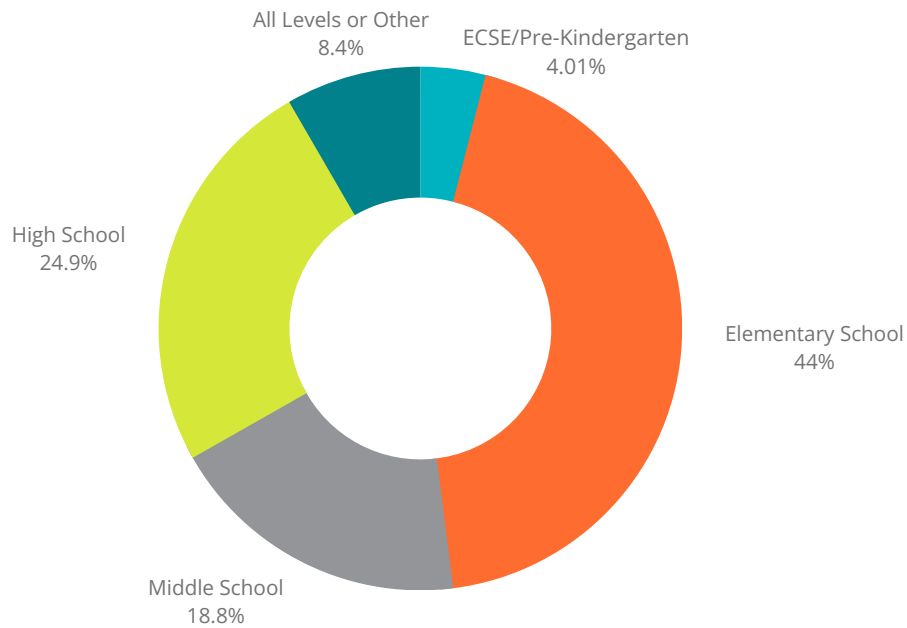
- To further strengthen family and school relationships, consider reducing the reliance on virtual IEP meetings. Virtual meetings should only be utilized when the parent might not otherwise participate.
 - Establish a clear and consistent communication plan between educators, administrators, and parents. Regularly update parents on their child's progress, individualized education program (IEPs), and any changes in services or accommodations.
 - Continue to offer workshops, webinars, or written materials to help parents better understand the system and advocate for their children effectively.
- Ensure that evaluation timelines adhere to legal requirements, and promptly reevaluate students as necessary to adapt their IEPs to their changing needs.
 - Continue to prioritize the increase availability of speech therapy services by hiring qualified professionals or contracting with external providers as needed.
 - Establish a system for parents to provide feedback on the special education program and their child's experiences. Use this feedback to continuously improve the quality of services and address any ongoing concerns, and to highlight successes.
 - Utilize the SEPAC to increase outreach to families in regards to understanding the special education process.
 - Improve communication regarding campus assignments when students attend specialized programming or transition from elementary to middle school and middle to high school. Parents would like to have their children assigned closest to their neighborhood school.
 - In order to build community trust, continue to publicly report at least twice per year on progress made or obstacles/delays encountered with regard to improving evaluation timelines and access to speech services.

STAFF SURVEY DATA

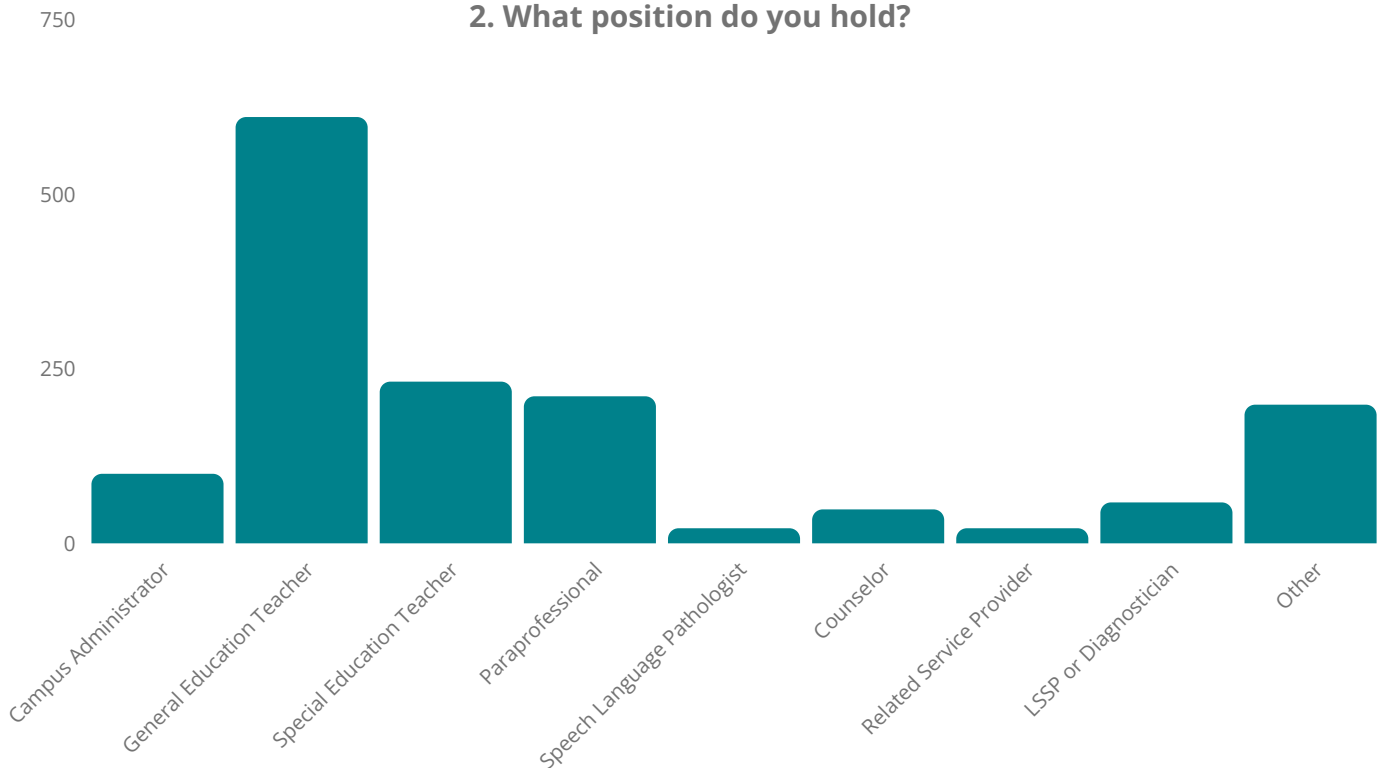


TCASE Services by Design developed a survey provided by Fort Bend ISD to district staff. **1,496** staff members responded to the survey.

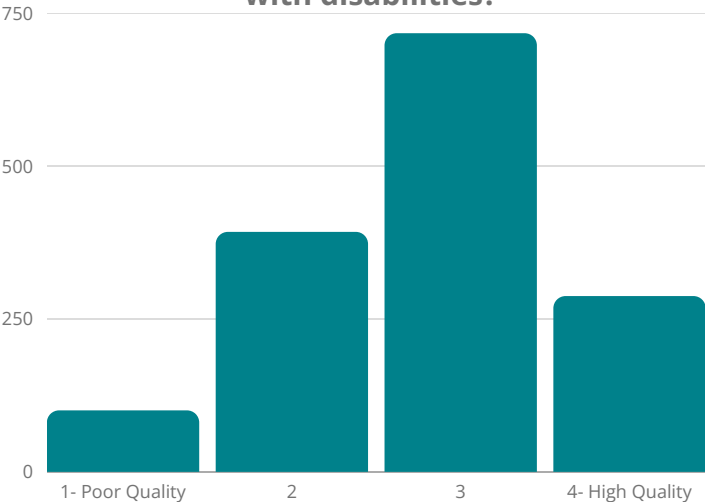
1. At which level do you serve?



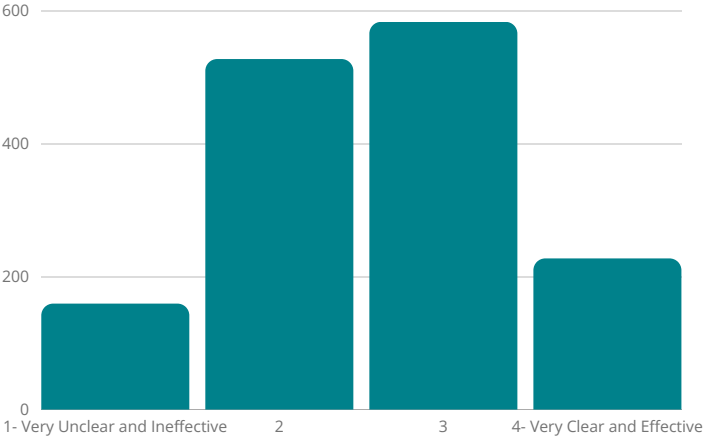
2. What position do you hold?



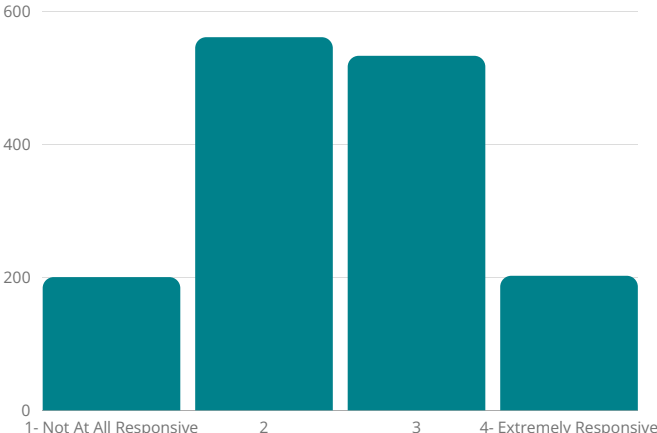
3. How would you rate the special education services the district offers to students with disabilities?



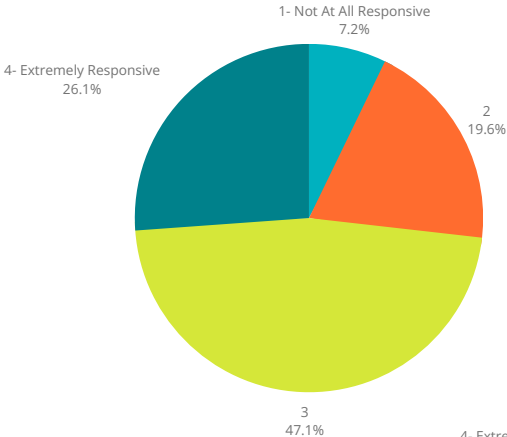
4. How would you rate the clarity and effectiveness of the referral process?



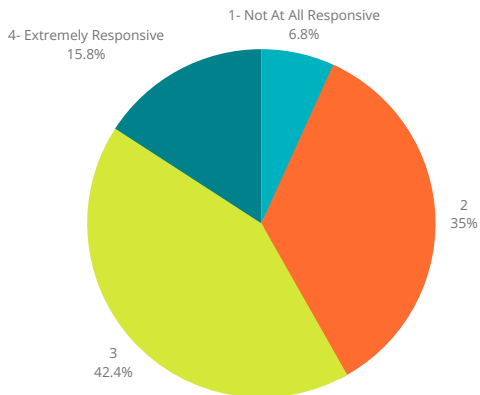
5. Please rate your experience with the district's responsiveness to the needs of special education teachers and students.



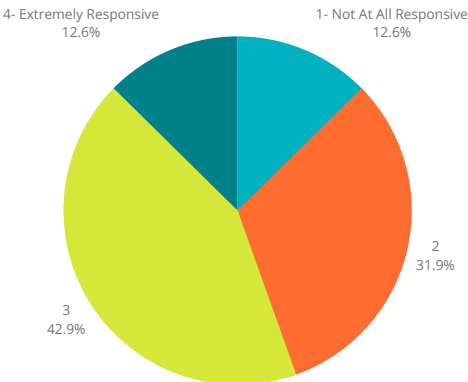
ECSE/Pre-Kindergarten



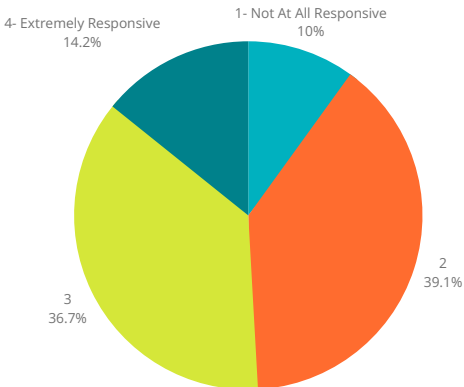
Elementary



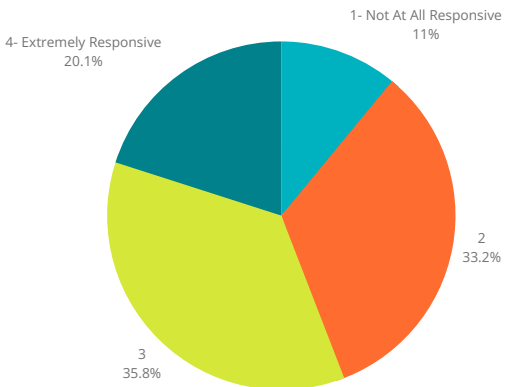
All Levels/Other



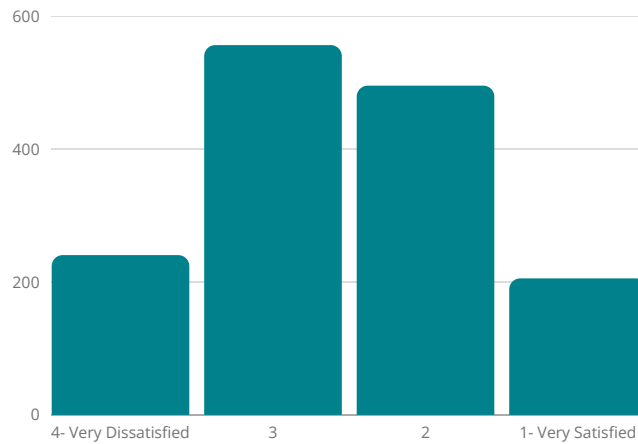
Middle School



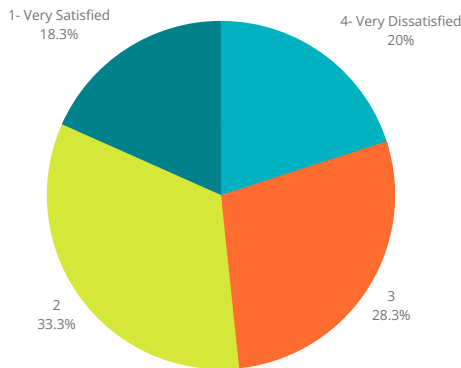
High School



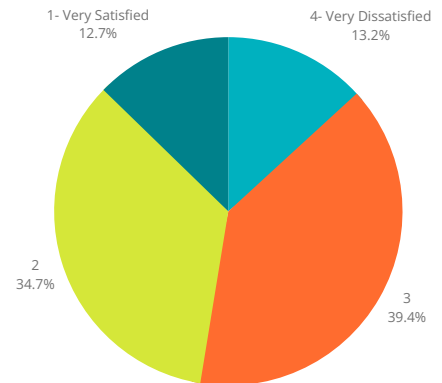
6. How satisfied are you with the quality of and access to training and professional development provided by the district to support special education teachers and staff?



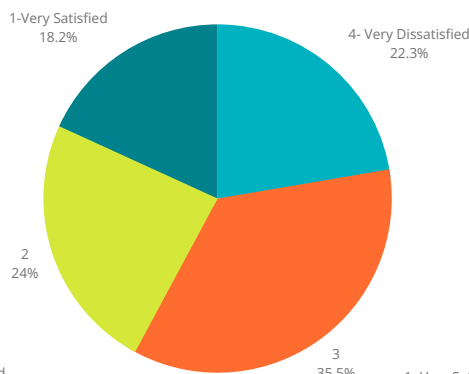
ECSE/Pre-Kindergarten



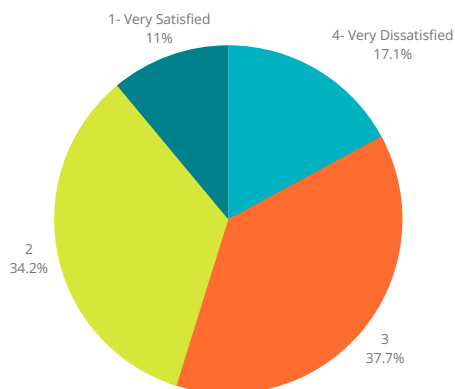
Elementary



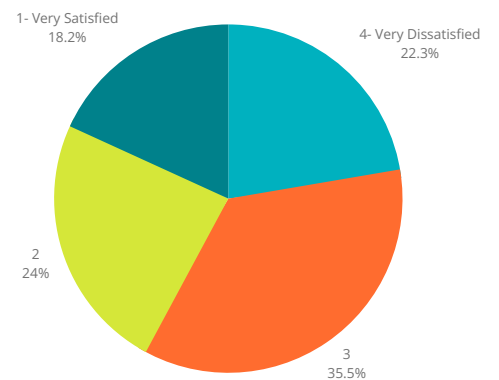
All Levels/Other



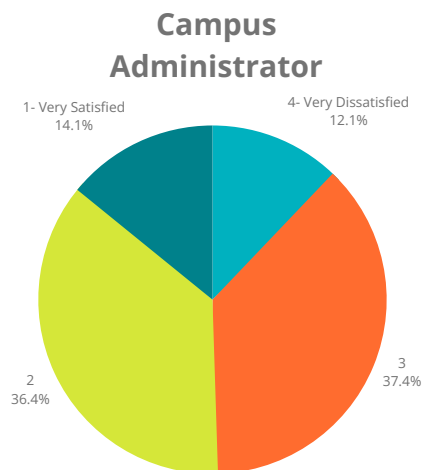
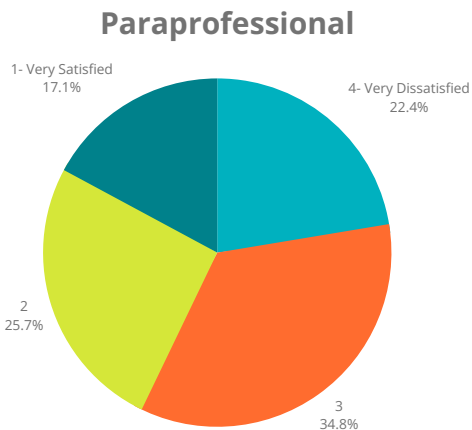
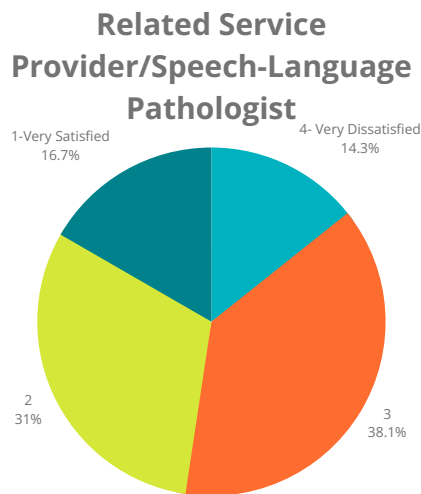
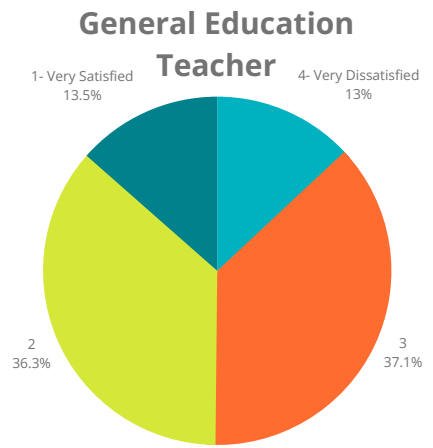
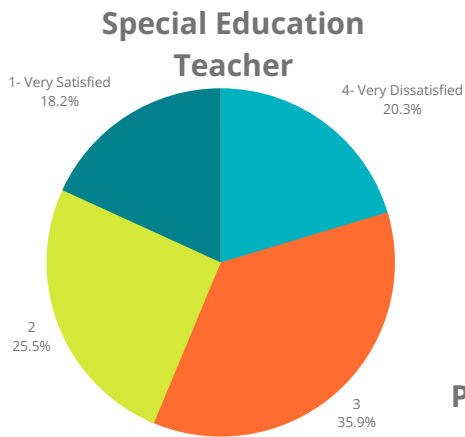
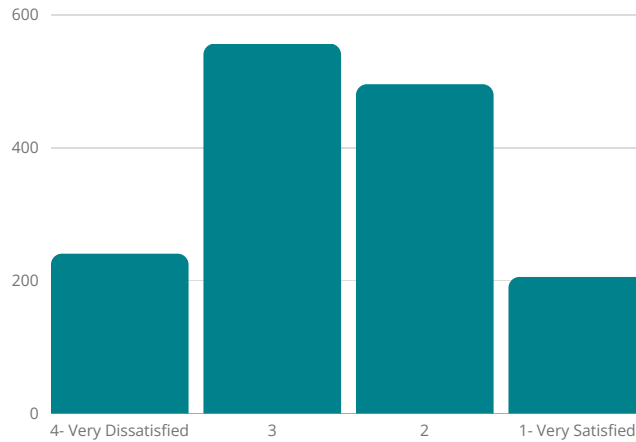
Middle School



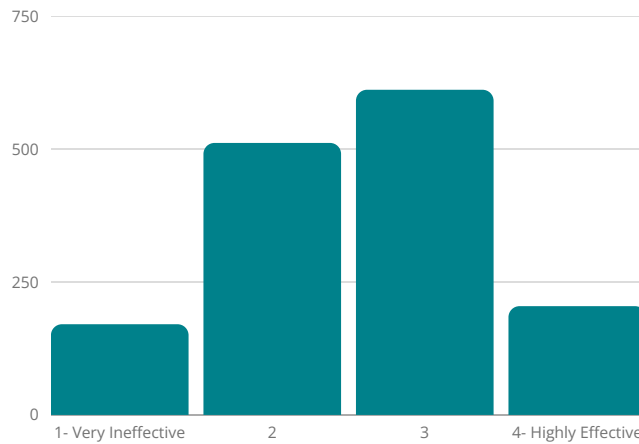
High School



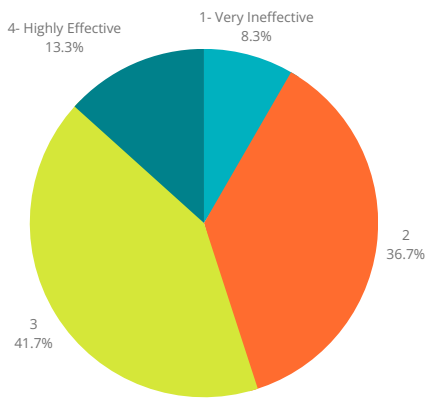
6. How satisfied are you with the quality of and access to training and professional development provided by the district to support special education teachers and staff?



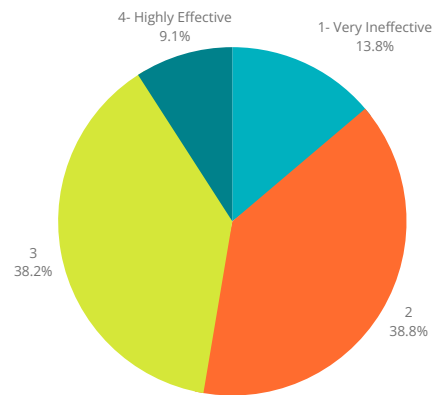
7. How effective is the current continuum of services and the range of options which serve students with disabilities?



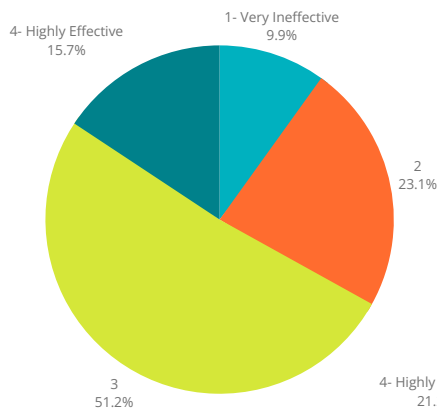
ECSE/Pre-Kindergarten



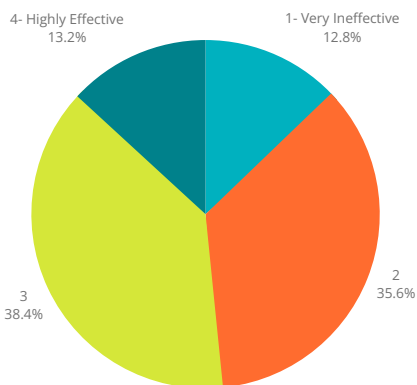
Elementary



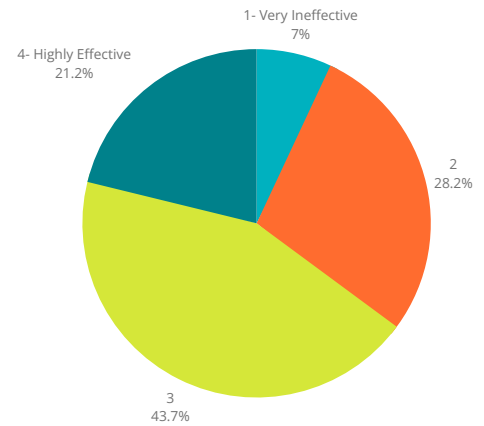
All Levels/Other



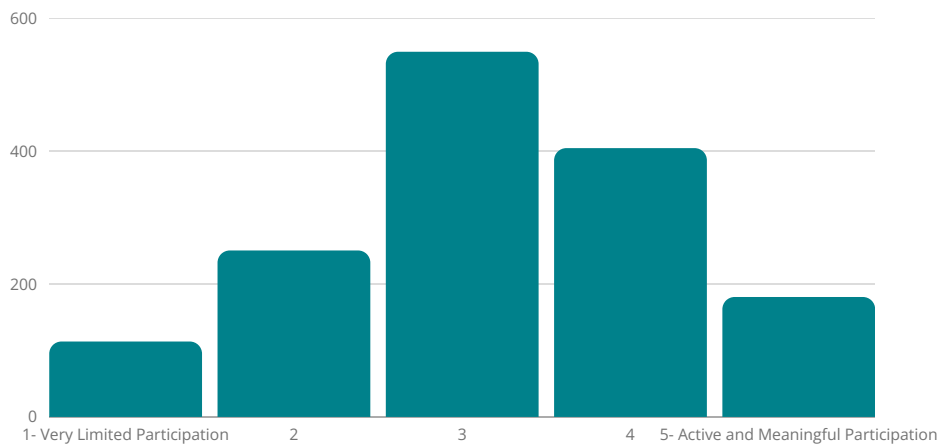
Middle School



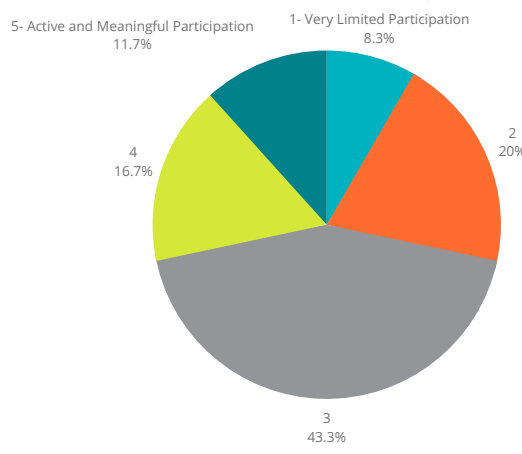
High School



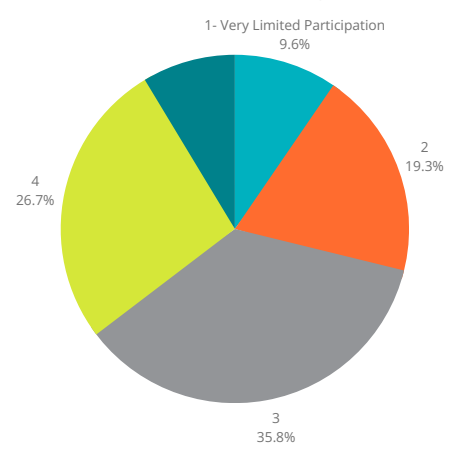
8. To what extent do you believe students with disabilities are actively participating in the general education curriculum?



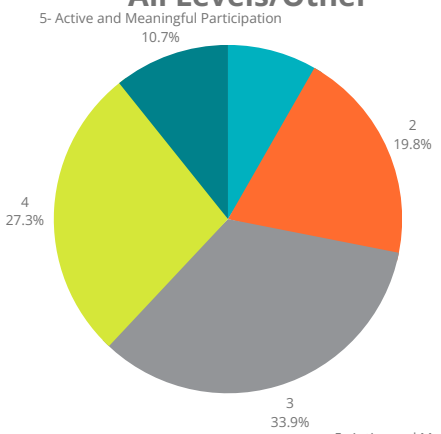
ECSE/Pre-Kindergarten



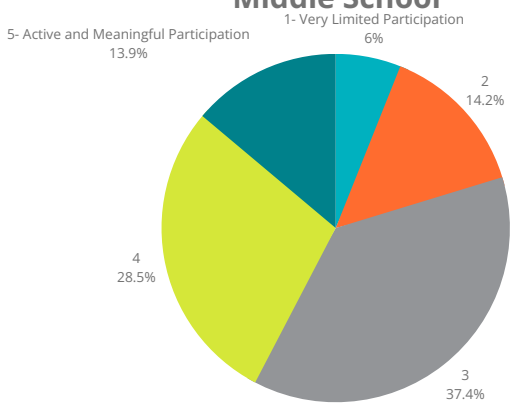
Elementary



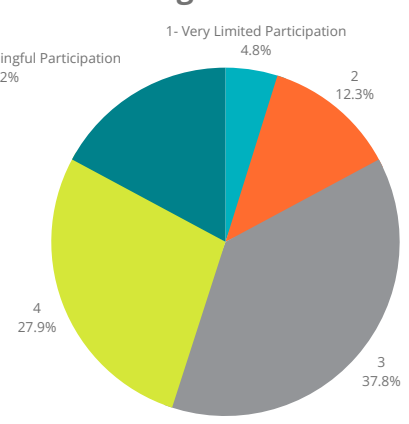
All Levels/Other



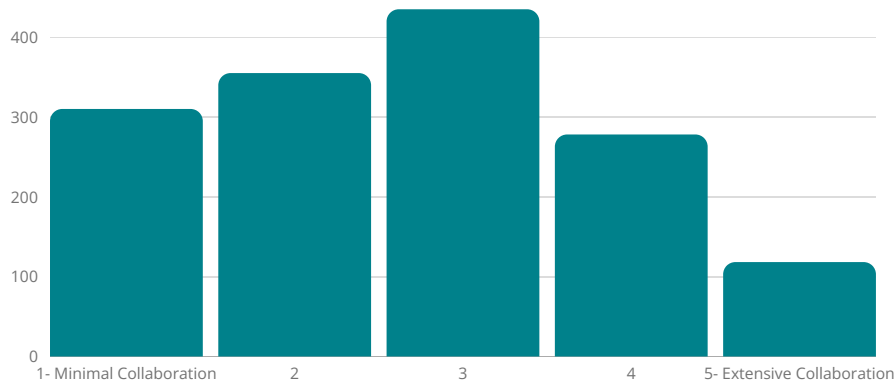
Middle School



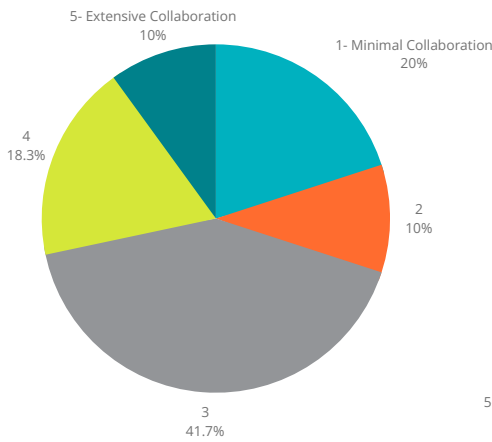
High School



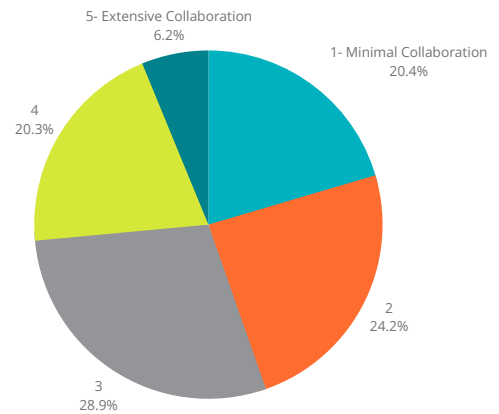
9. To what extent do general and special education teachers collaborate and share responsibility for developing lesson plans, discussing and implementing accommodations and modifications, and differentiating instruction to ensure the individualized needs of students with disabilities are effectively met?



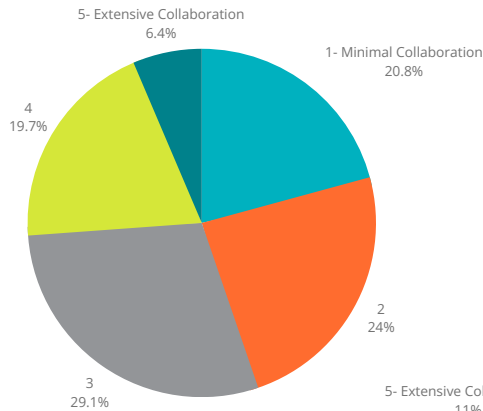
ECSE/Pre-Kindergarten



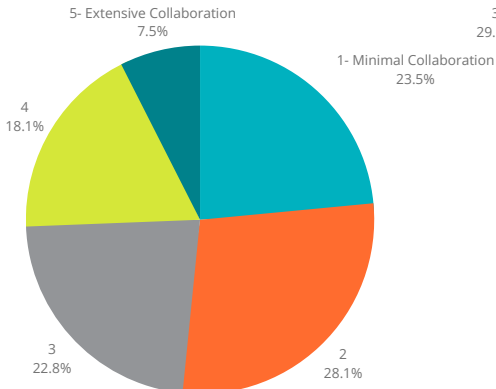
Elementary



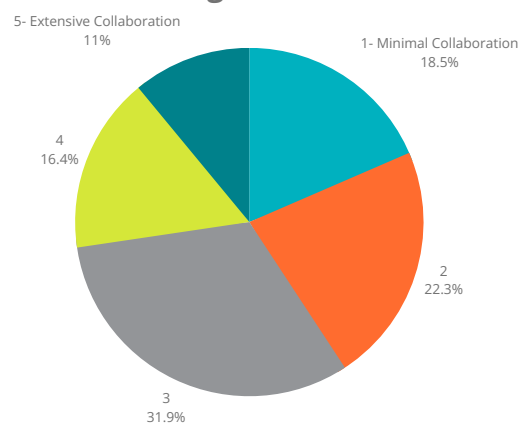
All Levels/Other



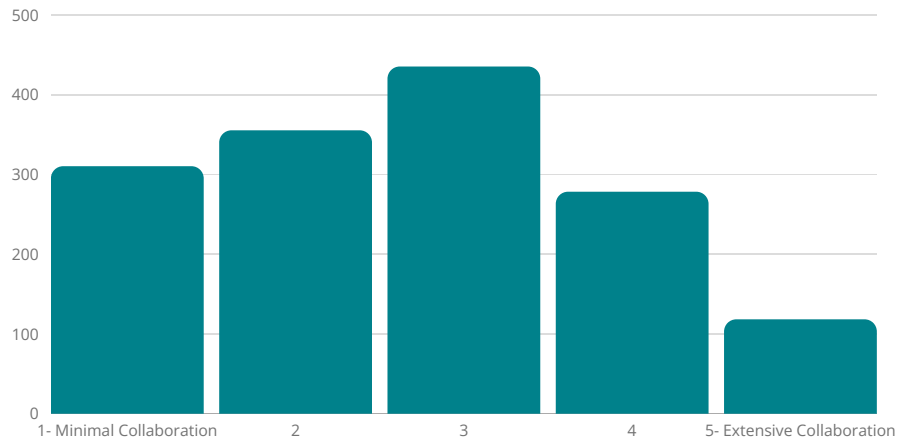
Middle School



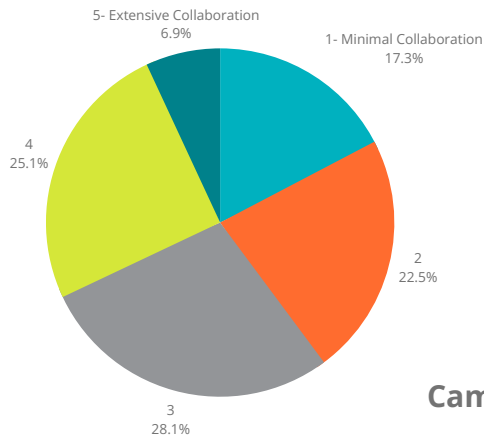
High School



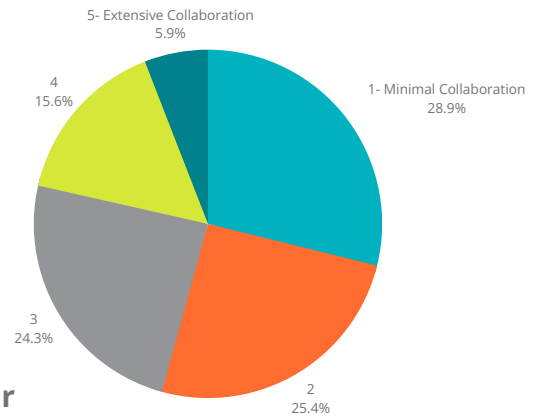
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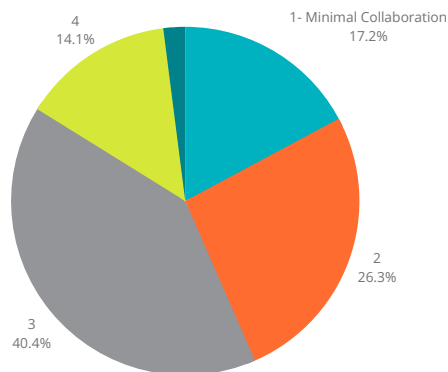
Special Education Teacher



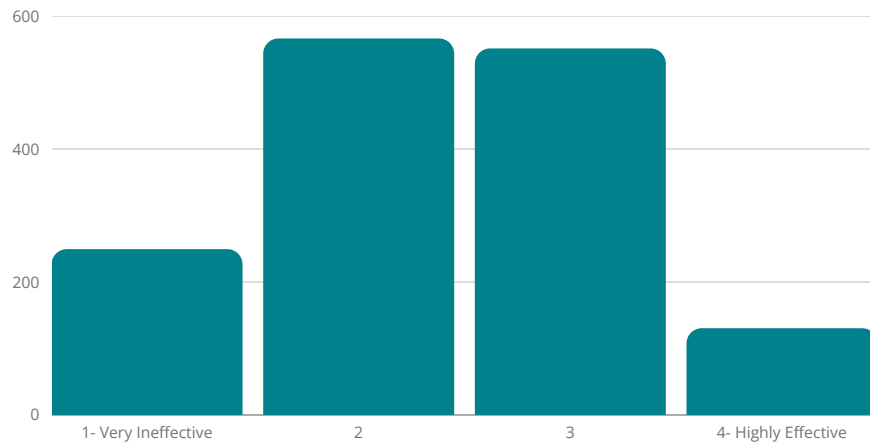
General Education Teacher



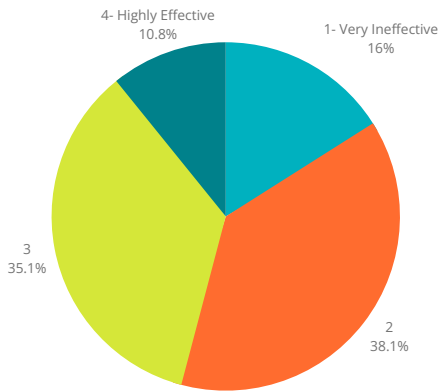
Campus Administrator



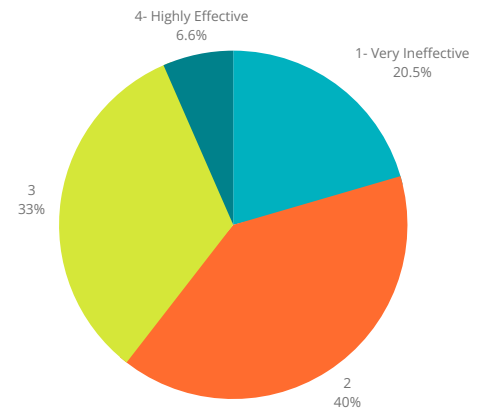
10. What is your opinion of the effectiveness of the district's MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) processes in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students?



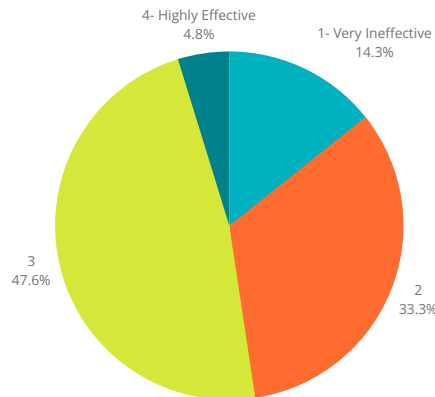
Special Education Teacher



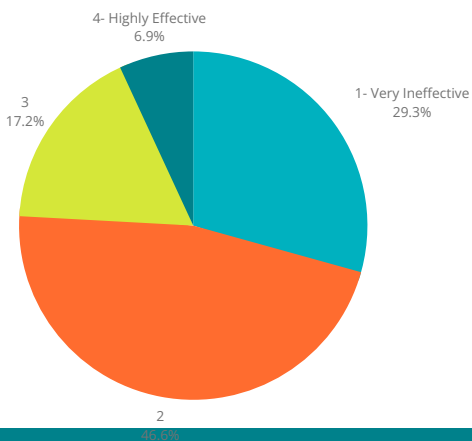
General Education Teacher



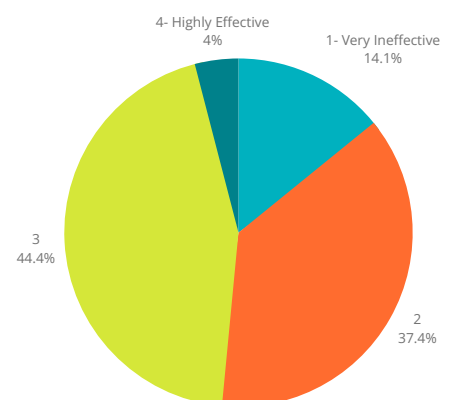
Related Service Provider/Speech-Language Pathologist



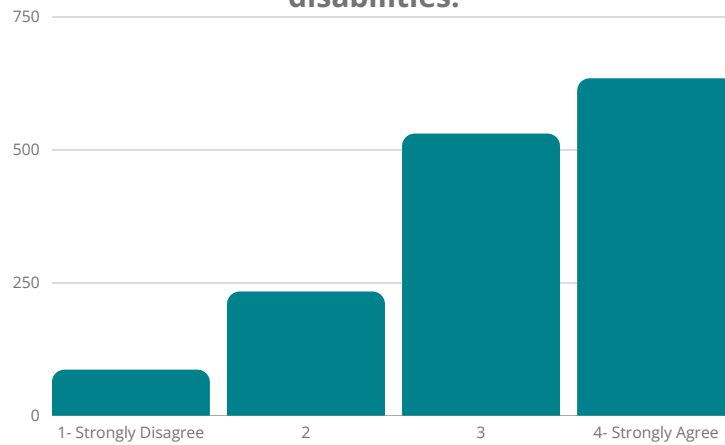
LSSP/Diagnostician



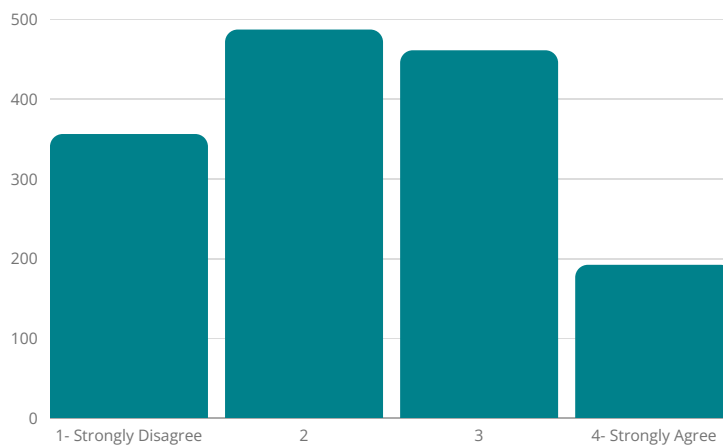
Campus Administrator



11. The faculty feels a sense of responsibility for all students, including students with disabilities.

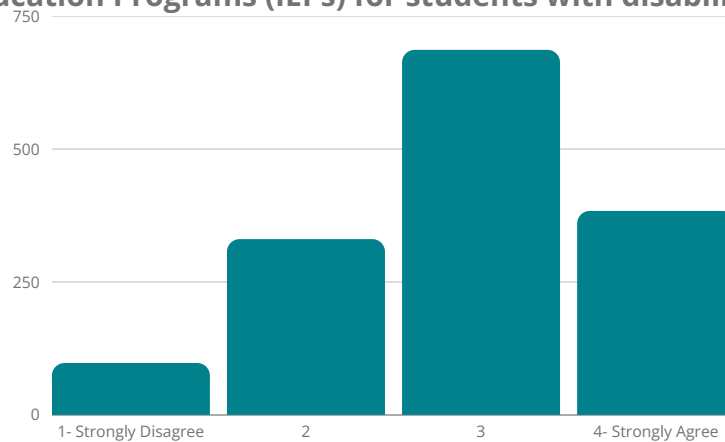


12. We have adequate resources to serve our students with disabilities.

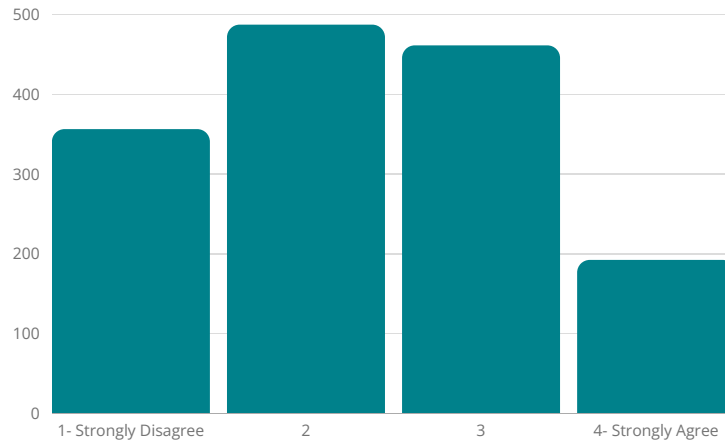


**See next page for breakdown of responses.*

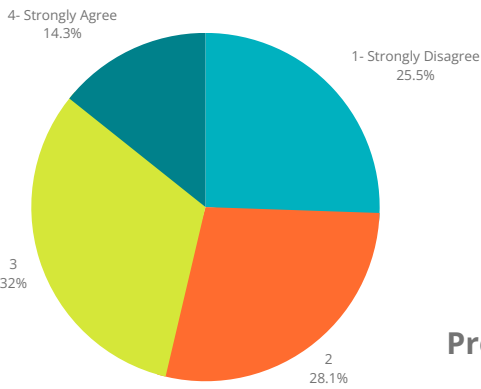
13. The general education curriculum is utilized when creating Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities.



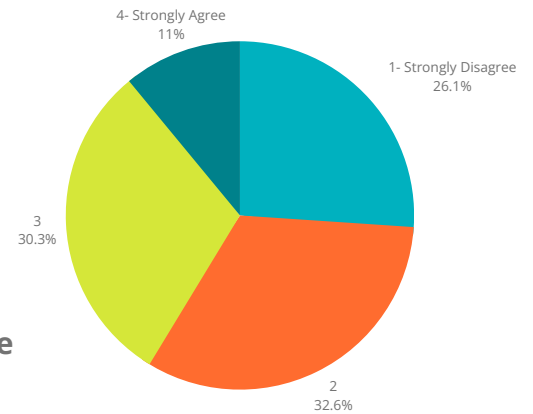
12. We have adequate resources to serve our students with disabilities.



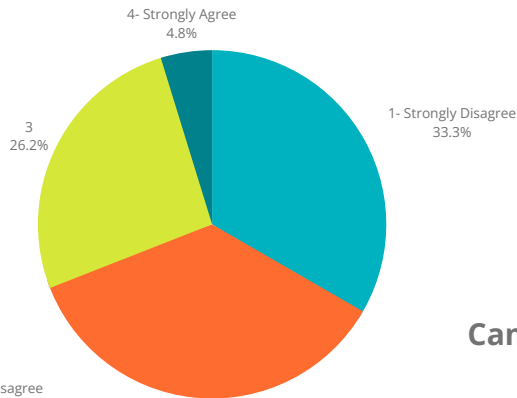
Special Education Teacher



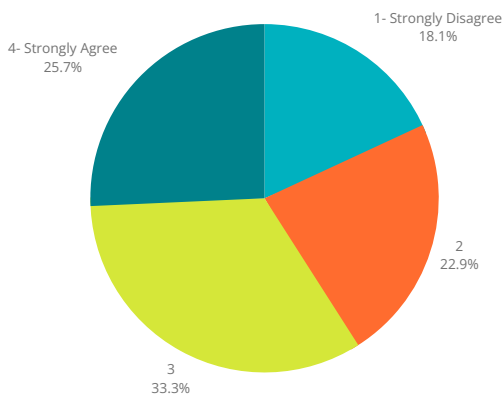
General Education Teacher



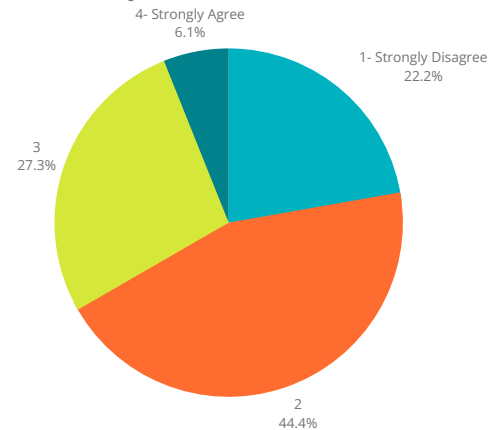
Related Service Provider/Speech-Language Pathologist



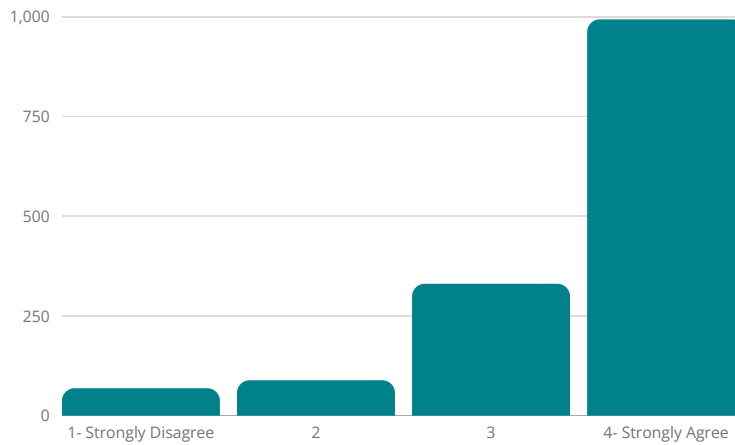
Paraprofessional



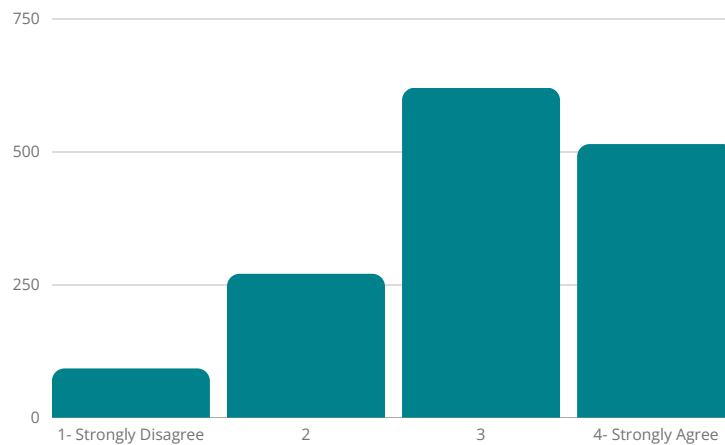
Campus Administrator



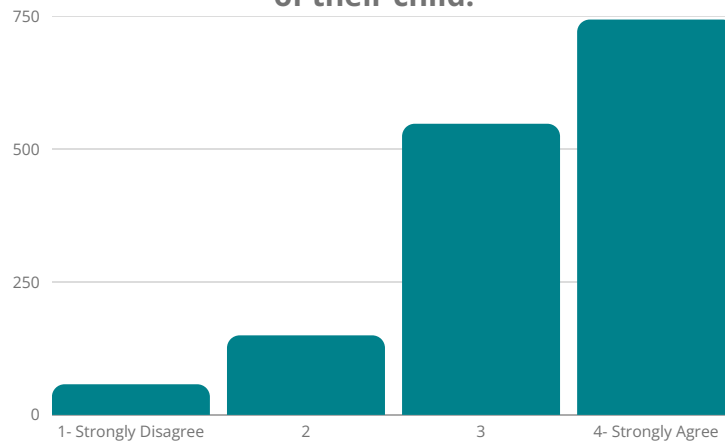
14. I have access to IEPs for each child that I serve.



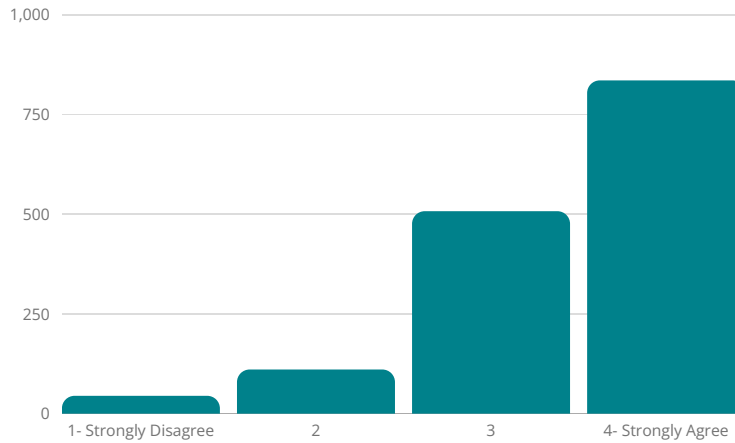
15. ARD Committees base services for students with disabilities on their individual needs, not eligibilities, to determine placement and services.



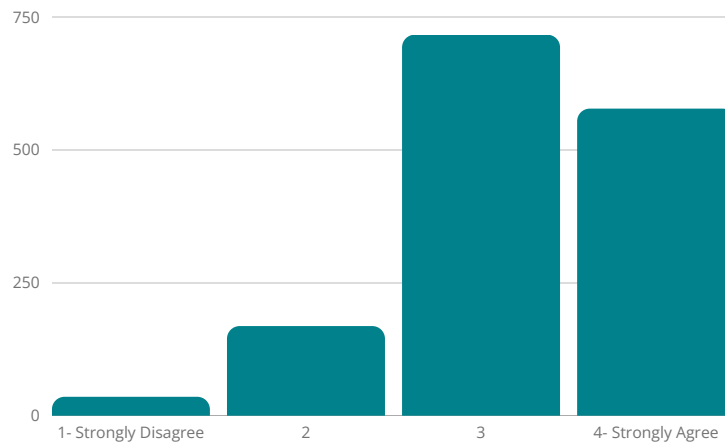
16. Parents of students with disabilities are viewed as equal partners in the education of their child.



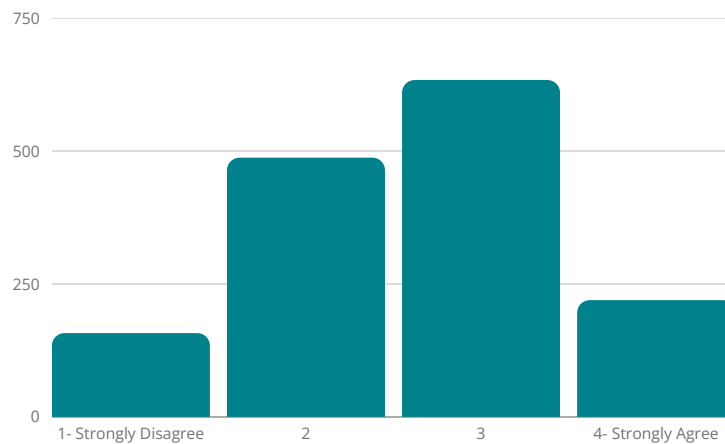
17. Parents of students with disabilities are equal members of the ARD committee.



18. Relationships between school and parents of students with disabilities are generally positive.



19. The implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) has positively impacted the overall support and performance of students.



STAFF SURVEY



OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE SUMMARY

What are your thoughts and experiences regarding the implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) in the district to address the diverse needs of students, including those with disabilities? Please share your insights and feedback.

The following statements represent comments frequently mentioned in the staff responses.

Staff recognize that the MTSS district processes have recently greatly improved.

The tiered approach seems to meet a lot of students' needs, and staff find it important that certain students' individualized needs are met with the interventions.

Fort Bend ISD staff recognize how challenging it is to effectively meet needs of all students in one classroom. Classroom teachers feel overloaded.

The delays and slow processes for evaluation are a common issue mentioned by staff.

A lack of consistency in MTSS processes across campuses results in a lack of fidelity in implementation of interventions and varied outcomes for students.

Some comments highlight concerns about students being labeled and shuffled through different programs without adequately addressing their unique needs. Some staff feel the process is more about providing a "label" versus giving students access to interventions.

Many educators mention a need for more training, especially for general education teachers, to understand and implement MTSS effectively. Training for working with students with diverse needs is also frequently mentioned.

Staff generally feel the MTSS process lacks behavior support options.

STAFF SURVEY

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE SUMMARY



To what extent do you believe there is shared ownership and collaboration among staff in providing services for students with disabilities? Please provide your perspective.

The following statements represent comments frequently mentioned in the staff responses.

Overall, the responses indicate a mix of opinions and varied perception which seem to vary depending on the campus, staff, or situation.

It is clear the Fort Bend ISD staff are dedicated to students and indicate a strong desire for increased teamwork between special education and general education teachers.

Many respondents highlight strong collaborative efforts among their campus staff to address student needs.

The challenges faced by staff members include understaffing, extreme workloads for teachers, lack of time, and unclear roles. There is a call for more communication to clearly define staff roles in student support.

There are indications of general education teachers not always considering students receiving special education students as “theirs” while general education teachers feel a lack of communication regarding information about and support for their students with disabilities.

STAFF SURVEY

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE SUMMARY



In your opinion, what areas of support for students with disabilities does the district excel in?

The following statements represent comments frequently mentioned in the staff responses.

Many respondents expressed overall satisfaction with special education programs and services provided in Fort Bend ISD.
Parental involvement is an important district strength highlighted by staff, including parent involvement in ARD meetings, communication with parents, and general collaboration between home and school.
The effectiveness of special education programs, quality of related services, and strong collaboration with related service providers are frequently mentioned as district strengths.
Respondents appreciated the availability of a variety of programs to meet students' needs.
Staff note the clear communication about accommodations. Staff commend the district for providing individualized accommodations.
Many believe that the district excels in providing in-class support making it easier for students to access general education.
Staff find that IEPs are easily accessible and user-friendly.

STAFF SURVEY

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE SUMMARY



In your opinion, what additional resources or support would be most beneficial for improving the district's services for students with disabilities?

The following statements represent comments frequently mentioned in the staff responses.

Fort Bend ISD staff feel that staffing is an issue, particularly needing paraprofessionals and better support and protocols for staff who serve during staffing shortages.

Staff consistently call for more Professional Development for both special education and general education teachers. The most common training topics mentioned were behavior supports and training for general education teachers on how to support students with disabilities effectively.

Staff strongly suggest more efficient and timely evaluations for special education services in order to provide earlier intervention for students.

Many comments suggest systems to develop more collaboration between general education and special education teachers, including utilizing PLCs.

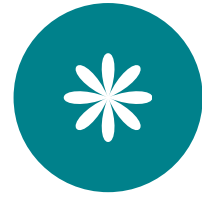
Several comments mention the need for more resources in classrooms to support students.

There is a consistent theme for the need to streamline processes and reduce workload for special education teachers.

Many respondents see the need for improved transparency and communication between all stakeholders (parents, teachers, administrators, and special education department staff).

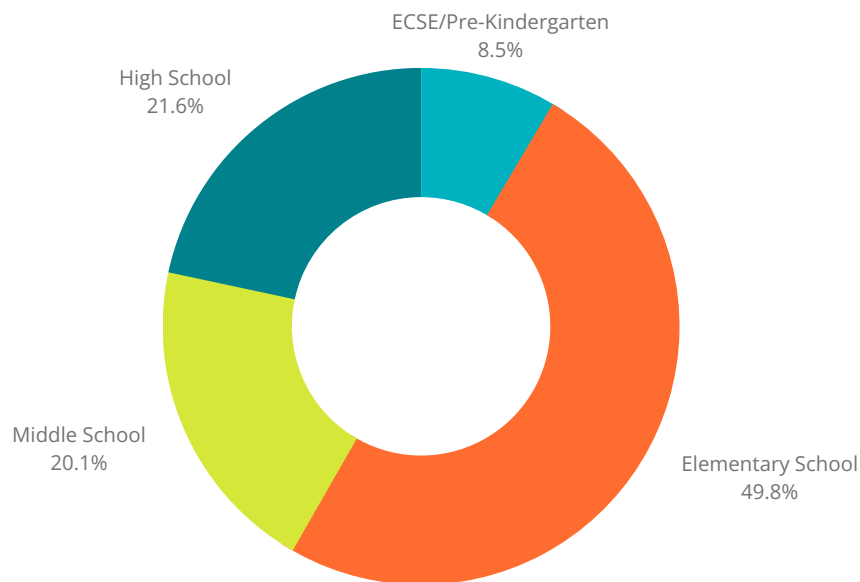
Staff frequently mention better pay for special education staff, particularly paraprofessionals.

PARENT SURVEY DATA

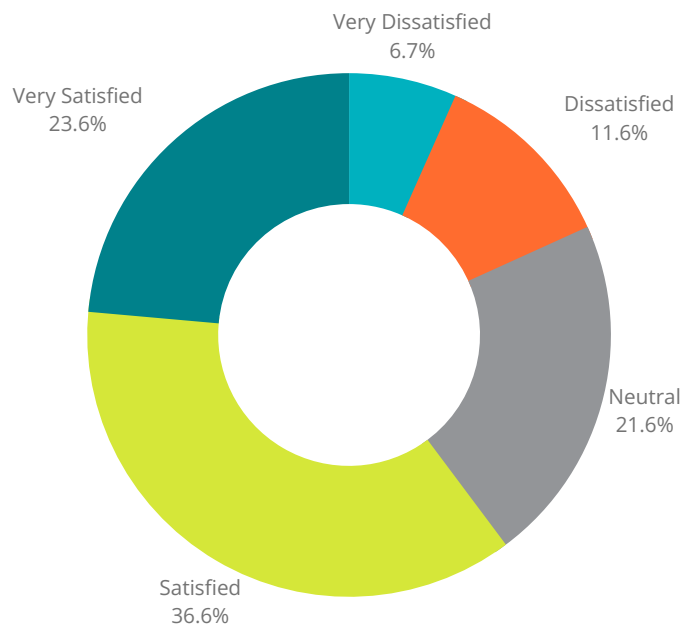


TCASE Services by Design developed a survey provided by Fort Bend ISD to parents of a child receiving special education services. The survey was available in both English and Spanish. **1,081** parents responded to the survey (991 in English and 90 in Spanish).

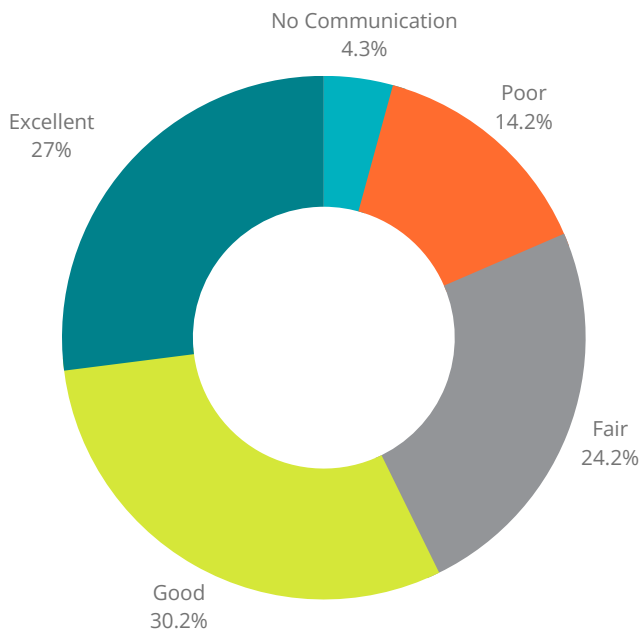
1. My child attends:



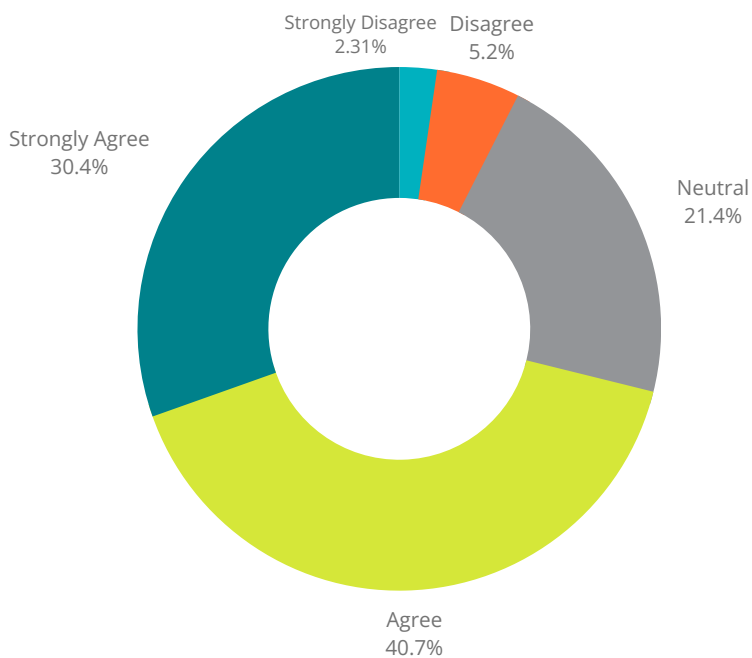
2. How satisfied are you with the overall education experience your child receives?



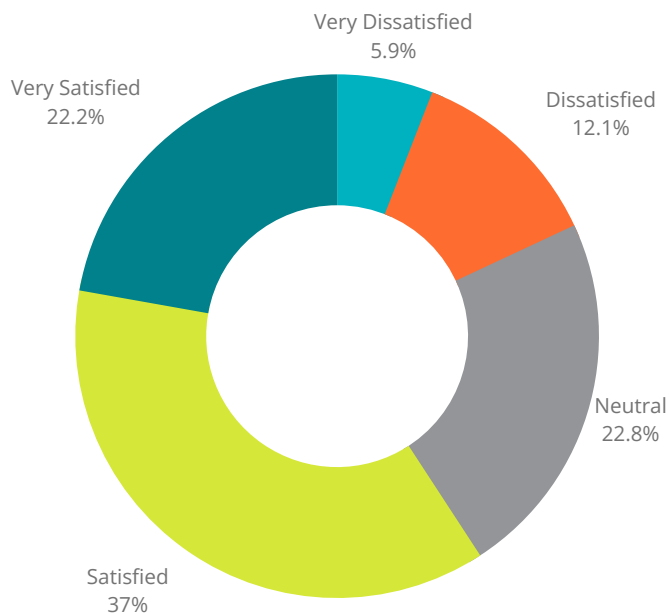
3. How would you rate the communication between school staff and parents regarding your child's progress and needs?



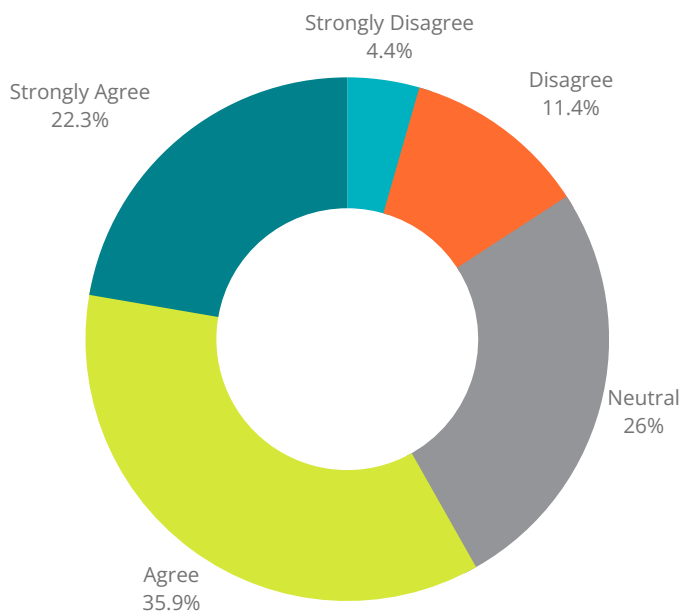
4. I am treated as an equal member of the ARD Committee, and my input is valued.



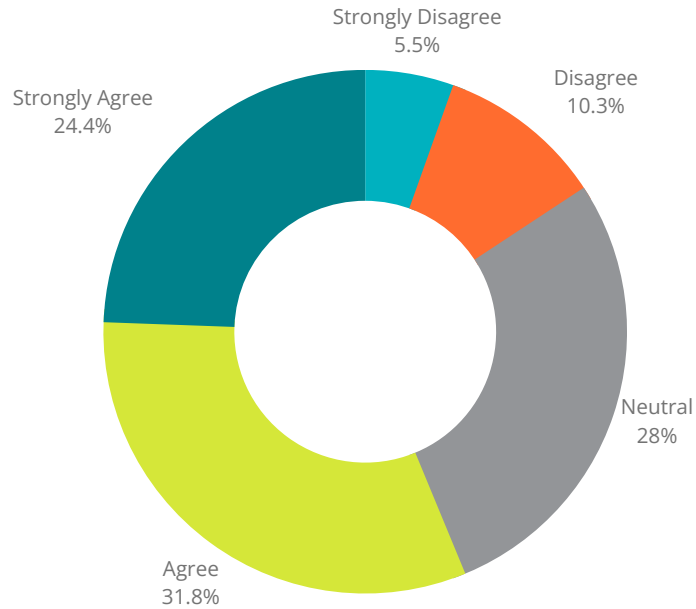
5. How satisfied are you with the development and implementation of your child's IEP?



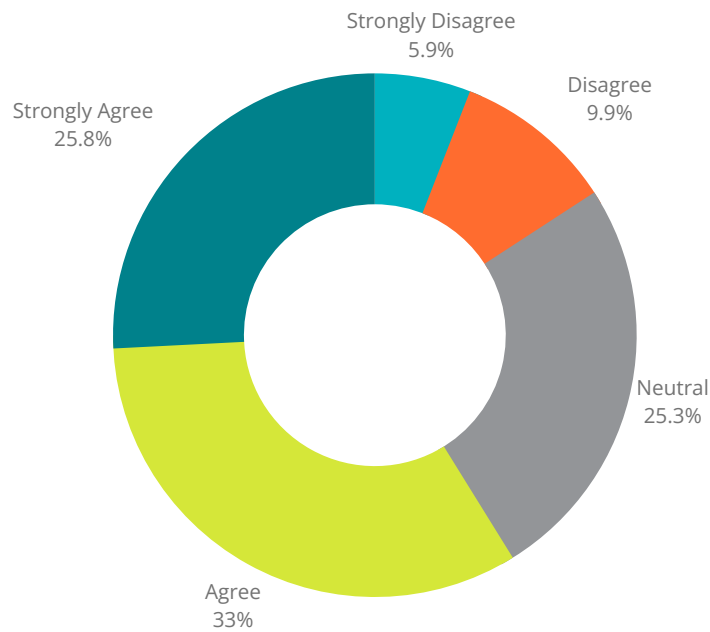
6. The school staff follow my child's IEP.



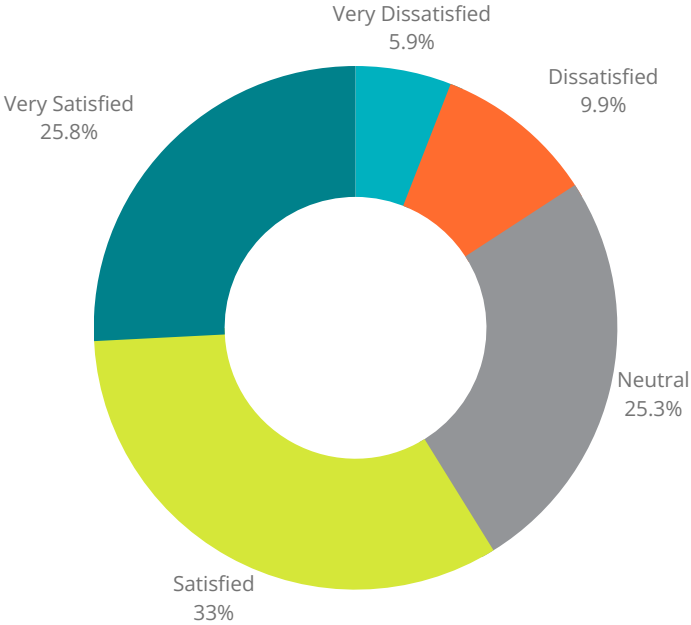
7. I feel supported by the principal in assuring that my child receives a quality education.



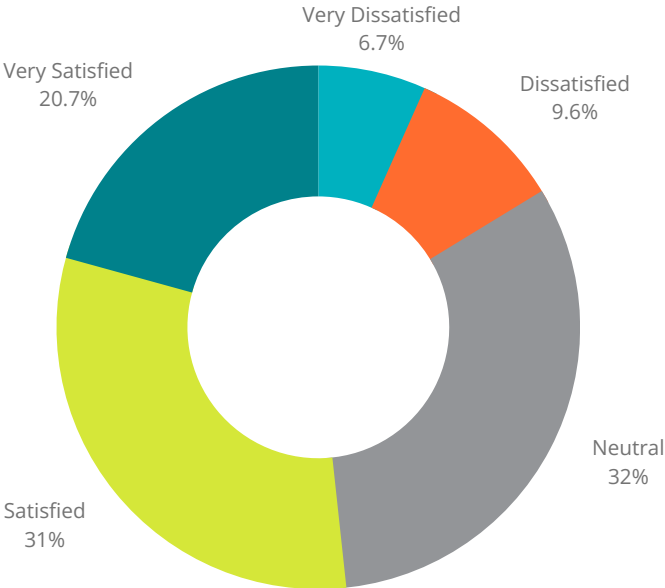
8. I feel supported by the special education central office staff in assuring my child receives a quality education.



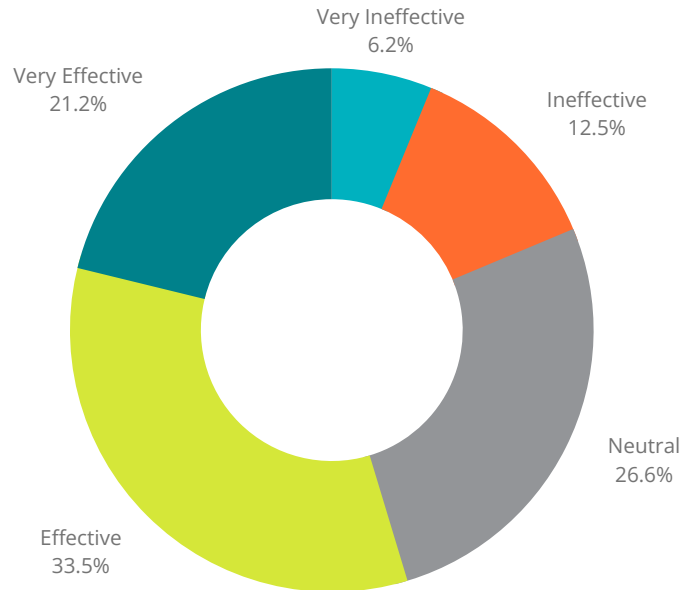
9. How satisfied are you with the quality and effectiveness of the teachers' skills to address your child's needs and deliver services outlined in your child's IEP?



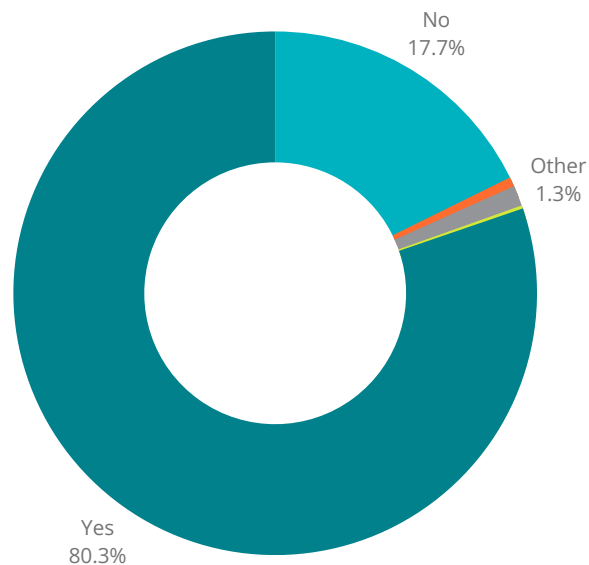
10. How satisfied are you with the quality and effectiveness of the related services (Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Music Therapy, Assistive Technology, etc.) your child is receiving?



11. To what extent do you feel that special education teachers and general education teachers collaborate effectively in planning and implementing your child's IEP?



12. Do you feel that your child has an equal sense of belonging and inclusion at school, regardless of their disability or needs?



Elaborated responses from parents who selected "other" can be referenced on the next page.

12 cont'd: Do you feel that your child has an equal sense of belonging and inclusion at school, regardless of their disability or needs?

Parents who selected "other" provided the following comments:

- No - but because my kid is AuDHD that's possibly his perception. Might be nice to get more information on clubs etc to help counter.
- somewhat but would like to find some way for my student to interact with other students better. Have the school start some kind of after school club for kids with autism to get together and maybe make some friends
- Maybe, not sure
- He is still adjusting to the change of school
- I have yet to be notified of an ARD for this year and have already had experience with bullying.
- New school so not enough time fo child to get use to settings
- He has a few friends and is put into groups which allows him to socialize.
- Not for any reason other than he has worked hard to make friends and grow relationships. The schools have had very little to do with his inclusion.
- I don't know
- Yes but other kids Have started to segregate now. Girls don't interact with my daughter as much and I feel the need for school or teachers to intervene more.
- My child has the ability to learn like other kids.
- I don't know. No communication about this.
- Not sure (this response was provided 2 times)
- Sometimes (this response was provided 5 times)
- He feels like he is singled out, so he won't use his accommodation. (E.g., he won't let anyone read the STAAR to him.
- New campus; struggled for 1mth (IEP failed/staff failed unsure) frustrated staff decided prior to talking w/parent to send to alt campus temporary. It was so difficult and blindsided feeling for the first time since beginning IEP almost 4yrs ago. Disappointed
- in some cases
- Neutral because I don't know what goes on there in school
- While not feeling specifically excluded, there seems to be no opportunity for inclusion.
- It varies
- Uncertain
- To some extent, but it could be improved
- Half and Half
- Somewhat
- He just has a hard time reading straight
- While not feeling specifically excluded, there seems to be no opportunity for inclusion.



PARENT SURVEY

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE SUMMARY

How would you rate the clarity and effectiveness of the referral process based on your experience with your child? Please consider aspects such as the ease of initiating the process, the transparency of communication, the timeliness of assessments, and the overall impact on your child's educational journey. Feel free to provide specific examples or suggestions for improvement.

The following statements reflect commonly expressed comments in the parent survey responses.

Overall, the feedback indicates a wide range of experiences and challenges within the referral process in Fort Bend ISD.

Transition processes for students were generally described by parents as smooth.

There were many comments about the referral and evaluation process lacking timeliness. Parents stated their child's evaluation (initial and re-evaluations mentioned) was delayed and that early intervention should have occurred sooner. Cited causes of delays include COVID, backlog from COVID, staff shortages, and unclear explanation of how to request an evaluation after speaking to school officials.

Parents frequently mention experiencing poor communication during the evaluation. Many mention a lack of transparency, infrequent updates, and difficulties understanding the process.

Some parents were satisfied with the entire referral and assessment process, finding it effective and clear.



PARENT SURVEY

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE SUMMARY

What positive aspects have you observed or experienced regarding services provided to students with disabilities?

The following statements reflect commonly expressed comments in the parent survey responses.

Parents shared many positive experiences about the impact on their child's attitudes toward school, academic progress, communication, and social skills.

Parents shared recognition of dedicated and caring teachers, case managers, and related service providers. It is clear many families have excellent relationships with Fort Bend ISD staff.

Observations of effective individualized learning, including teachers providing accommodations and taking time with their children, were shared by parents.

Many parents shared ARD meeting experiences that included good communication, organization, and collaboration.





PARENT SURVEY

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE SUMMARY

Are there any specific suggestions or improvements you would like to see in terms of services for students with disabilities?

The following statements reflect commonly expressed comments in the parent survey responses.

Parents stress the need for improved communication and transparency between school staff and the special education department. Families want regular updates on students' progress, behavior, and days at school. Some families report having little to no communication with the school, and others report delayed or limited responsiveness from the special education department.

Parents feel that school staff need more training on how to support and effectively teach students with disabilities.

The process for testing and placement of students with special needs is a frequent suggestion for improvement. Parents suggest the district minimize delays and ensure timely access to appropriate student support.

Speech Therapy is a major concern from parents. Some parents report their child having no therapy at all, a reduction in services, or inconsistent therapy provided.

Parents are worried that a lack of teacher training, support, and district efforts will create more teacher shortages and resignations. Parents suggest finding adequately qualified, experienced, and capable staff who can effectively support students with disabilities.

Parents strongly advocate for more social opportunities and inclusivity. A recurring theme for suggestions include efforts to promote disability awareness amongst the general education student population and more access for students with disabilities to participate in social programs and clubs.

CLOSING REMARKS



FBISD has taken an important first step toward large-scale improvement by commissioning this review. We recognize the universal challenges the district is facing due to staffing shortages, and inadequate funding. We commend the educators and leaders at all levels of the system for their commitment to addressing the needs of students with disabilities. We also commend the many family members who shared feedback regarding their experiences with the evaluation process and the implementation of special education services for their children. With continued commitment on the part of district leadership and meaningful engagement from families and educators throughout the system, FBISD will continue to sustain and improve upon quality services to students with disabilities.



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