

Carol Iskols Daynard, Ed.D & Ellen G. Honeyman, C.A.G.S.

Educational Consultants

July 20, 2006

Dr. Matthew Malone
Superintendent of Schools
Swampscott Public Schools
207 Forest Avenue
Swampscott, Massachusetts 01907

Dear Dr. Malone,

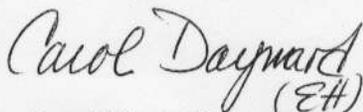
Thank you for the opportunity to work with you, your district administrators and faculty, and the community representatives as we completed the special education audit of the Swampscott Public Schools. The district appears to have many dedicated and concerned professionals and support staff.

We were impressed by the energy and the commitment of the many special educators whom we met. The data they gathered and provided to us was invaluable to the audit process. We were greatly assisted by the principals who took time out of their busy days to guide our visits and spend time answering numerous questions to help clarify our understanding of the services and programs for students with disabilities in their schools. The high level of participation of parents in this process appeared to be indicative of their current concerns as well as their willingness to participate in program improvement, as you consider and initiate change. We were moved by the passion of the parents and their abiding concern for the welfare of their children. Finally, we are deeply grateful for your interest and assistance in the facilitation of this process. Your strong commitment to reviewing and improving special education programs and practices was obvious throughout this process.

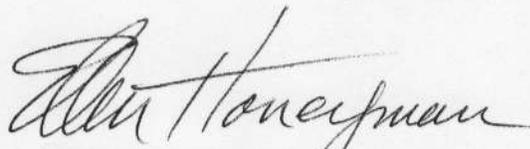
We are enclosing the final report of the Special Education Program Audit for your review. We look forward to discussing our findings and recommendations with you as well as answering any questions that you might have.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to learn about the Swampscott Public Schools. It was a very rewarding and pleasant experience.

Sincerely,



Carol Iskols Daynard, Ed.D.
90 Commonwealth Ave., # 9
Boston, MA 02116



Ellen G. Honeyman, C.A.G.S.
54 Ellis Drive
Worcester, MA 01609

SWAMPSCOTT PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AUDIT
SPRING 2006

At the request of Dr. Matthew Malone, superintendent of schools, a special education program audit was conducted by Dr. Carol Daynard, and Ellen Honeyman between February and May 2006. This audit had been requested by the school committee prior to Dr. Malone's appointment in Swampscott. As part of Dr. Malone's entry report and plan to the school committee, he referenced and supported this action and recommended that it be completed during the 2006 school year. Dr. Malone's goal was to assure that the needs of all students were being addressed by the Swampscott Schools. At the outset, Dr. Malone wanted the consultants to review current district practices and programs for students with disabilities and make recommendations for organization, programming and compliance for both short and long term implementation.

The consultants engaged in a comprehensive process that included the following activities:

- Review of multiple sources of data, including, but not limited to student rosters, MCAS scores, individual school staff schedules, Coordinated Program Review findings, out-of-district placement, organizational charts and budget data.
- Observation of facilities and programs at all schools.
- Interview with the superintendent.
- Interviews with all principals except the high school principal.
- Interview with the assistant high school principal.
- Interview with the Director of Student Services.
- Interview with the district's team chairperson.
- Focus group meetings with special education staff.
- Focus group meetings with parents.

Several questions were posed to guide the current analysis. The questions below cover the scope of the inquiry as they examined the programs and served to guide the process. The resulting data and interview materials provided the resources for discussion and recommendations.

The questions posed were the following:

- *Does the Swampscott Public Schools use the best and most current methods of identifying and serving students with disabilities?*
- *What is the best structure to deliver services at each grade level given each school's enrollment and physical characteristics, distribution of students with disabilities and what staffing patterns would support best practice and efficient use of resources?*
- *Do the students with disabilities in Swampscott have "access to the general curriculum" and are they included in the "life of the school"?*
- *Do all members of the school staff take ownership for the learning and participation of students with disabilities?*
- *Is there a clear and consistent decision-making process regarding the allocation of resources and how does the district identify and respond to emerging program or service needs.*
- *What processes are in place to measure the effectiveness of current practices?*

The consultants were assisted by the cooperation and dedication of Kathie Leonard, Maureen Szymczak, Mona Blumstein, the principals and the special educators. Many parents gave their time to meet with the consultants and share their experiences as parents of students with disabilities who receive services from the school district. The consultants would like to thank them and Dr. Matthew Malone who was committed to the completion of this project and gave generously of his time.

Section 1

1. Does the Swampscott Public Schools use the best and most current methods of identifying and serving students with disabilities?

The current percentage of students found eligible for special education (16%) is slightly below the state average. This indicates that there is an effective identification process and suggests that the district does not rely solely on special education to meet the needs of at-risk students who can benefit from differentiated instruction and accommodations within the regular education setting.

The transition from Early Intervention services to the preschool program and the identification of students not previously found eligible is consistent with what is considered to meet recommended and required educational practices as defined by professional organizations such as: (1) the Counsel for Exceptional Children and the National Council on Reading, (2) institutions of higher learning that conduct research related to positive school outcomes, and (3) regulatory agencies, e.g., the United States and Massachusetts Departments of Education.

Many of the district's programs and practices meet standards for what is currently considered good practice and some of the programs and services reflect adherence to scientifically research based practices. Many instructional practices are consistent with best practice. However, there are many parallel curricula and supplemental instructional

programs not currently used in the district that may benefit students for whom the current methodologies and/or programs have not proven effective in accelerating progress.

The Teacher Assistant Team process at the elementary level, and the array of regular education supports, assures that students at those grade levels are rarely misidentified. The effective communication and collaboration between regular and special education staff at the elementary schools has promoted a culture at these schools in which the entire staff shares responsibility for the success of all students. The principals are knowledgeable about the needs of the students with IEP's and are directly involved in assuring that the students with disabilities have full access to the curriculum. They are creative and energetic administrators.

At Machon School, which was named by the Department of Education as a "Compass School", the principal reported that all staff members are "on the same page". Some of the Compass funds have been used for Math training that incorporates a "constructivist" outcome-based approach. The school has also focused on Reading and data is collected and analyzed routinely to guide instruction. A new district-wide "Primary Discovery Learning Program" will open at Machon in Fall, 2006 and will serve the needs of a small group of kindergarten age students with significant disabilities.

Clarke School is the only handicapped accessible elementary school. The principal is a former special education teacher and attends all Team meetings in her building. She is "interested in providing intensive small group instruction to address skill deficits" for students with IEP's. Professional development has supported the introduction of Wilson Reading Program's *Foundations*, which is now used in eight kindergartens at Clarke and Stanley. The first cohort of students to benefit from this "developmentally appropriate" addition to the kindergarten curriculum has moved to first grade, and there have been fewer referrals of students to Teacher Assistant Teams for Reading concerns. This is just one example of professional development initiatives at the elementary level that are closely linked to measurable student outcomes.

The Hadley School houses all of the elementary district-wide special education programs. The principal clearly articulates a philosophy of inclusion that is implemented in a variety of ways in the school. The principal feels that the Educational Support Personnel (ESP's) are vital to the success of the programs. Many of them have teaching degrees and some hope to be hired eventually as teachers. The programs at Hadley have many elements of what is considered best practice in meeting the needs of students with disabilities at the elementary level. The teachers are knowledgeable and committed and there is a continual process of refinement and development of additional programs and services by the existing staff as student needs are recognized. The principal encourages flexibility and the involvement and support of parents is actively sought. For example, once a month a consulting psychologist meets with the parents of the students from the district-wide programs. The school is described as "diverse", with 12 languages represented, and the principal says "it's a good school for developmental diversity". As with Clarke and Machon, Hadley has completed a number of professional development trainings, e.g. all teachers have been trained in Project Read. While Hadley has developed many excellent inclusive practices that assure appropriate support for students when they are participating in the regular educational setting, the separate/pull-out classes for students with disabilities are clustered together in the basement. One of the Learning Center teachers explained that the classes are near each other so that there can be cross-class groupings for instruction.

The Stanley School effectively utilizes an integrated model of service delivery to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Instruction and support are provided by a special education resource teacher, a 20 hour per week Wilson tutor, a full-time speech/language pathologist, a reading teacher, a three day a week guidance counselor and a part-time inclusion specialist. In addition, there are several educational support personnel (ESP's), some of them assigned as 1:1 support for students, including students with autism spectrum disorders. The special education teacher completes all assessments and serves on the Teacher Assistant Team. The communication among staff about students' educational and social/behavioral needs is frequent and effective. Like Clarke School, the Stanley School is using the *Foundations* program as a supplement to literacy

instruction in kindergarten to teach or reinforce early reading skills. The staff reports that the results from using this program are very positive.

At all levels, consistent evidence of data driven decision-making to guide instruction and behavior management is just emerging. The preschool and elementary schools provided a number of examples of systematic collection of data and it is clear that the preschool and elementary schools have initiated processes that should lead to the strengthening of “evidence-based practices”. For example, the preschool routinely completes skills checklists, portfolios and behavioral charts. The secondary schools did not provide evidence of systematic use of curriculum based measures or collection and analysis of student behavior to guide decision-making and planning.

At all levels, comprehensive in-district programs and services for students with serious emotional disabilities were not available. This is a significant gap in the continuum of interventions that must be provided to students with disabilities.

Some parents and staff reported that many high school students become “disengaged” and that the drop-out rate for students with disabilities may be higher than district data reflects. Anecdotally, it was reported that several students identified with emotional disabilities had “left school” during the current school year. Parents and some staff expressed concern that the discipline code may be applied “differently” for some students than for others at the high school.

Recommendations:

The district should develop a comprehensive document that articulates its continuum of services and programs and provides information for parents and staff. This document should describe how the programs and services meet presenting educational needs and social/behavioral concerns related to specific disabilities.

Develop a plan for staff development in the implementation of additional reading, writing and math programs and methods to promote student progress.

Training and implementation of data-driven processes should be a district priority.

Collect accurate information regarding students who have “left school” in order to determine the actual drop out rate and to begin to plan programs to address unmet needs that should result in students completing their high school education.

Provide professional development to all high school staff regarding their understanding of and appropriate responses to students who have emotional/behavioral disabilities.

Section 2

2. What is the best structure to deliver services at each grade level given each school’s enrollment and physical characteristics, distribution of students with disabilities, and what staffing patterns would support best practice and efficient use of resources?

At the elementary level the district wide programs at the Hadley School are well-organized, appropriately staffed and provide for effective integration. Despite this, the Hadley School is not physically accessible. This is a potential problem should a student with multiple disabilities require the services provided by these programs.

At the three other elementary schools, staffing levels are appropriate and appear equitable. Students with disabilities and those “at-risk” benefit from receiving a broad array of regular education supports, e.g., the Wilson Reading Program, including the *Foundations* program used in kindergarten at Clarke and Stanley. This “unified support

system” provides a number of interventions to students with IEP’s at the elementary level that are not readily apparent as important district resources if only the special education Staffing is considered when describing the service delivery models.

There was frequent reference by parents, and also some staff, that ESP’s are often assigned as a “band-aid” for some students’ presenting needs rather than considering and developing additional district programs or resources. Students with emotional/behavioral disabilities and those on the autism spectrum were often identified as those for whom this response, i.e., the assignment of an aide, was a somewhat common practice.

At the middle school, the grade level Team structure provides an effective mode of communication for regular and special education teachers to plan and provide appropriate instruction. However, the lack of dedicated time for professional development devoted to differentiated instruction and training on the understanding of various disabilities and corresponding methodologies and strategies is a constraint. Unlike the elementary schools, where focused professional development that includes regular and special education teachers has promoted many consistent instructional practices and the introduction of additional instructional strategies and methodologies, the middle school has no structure for introducing and supporting new programs and practices. The principal wants “academic programs that are relevant to students’ needs” and, while the special education staff at the middle school is a veteran group, the lack of a school based professional development program curtails their ability to increase the repertoire of scientifically based curricula and strategies they can employ to effectively and efficiently meet student needs.

At the middle school, the principal reported that students with autism spectrum disorder receive support from Educational Support Personnel. There is no defined program, according to him, that specifically addresses the needs of these students. Again, the term “band-aid” was used by the principal to describe his perception of the role of the thirteen ESP’s at the middle school.

At the middle school, the principal expressed concern about the small group of students who have what he describes as a "life skills" profile. While they are encouraged to participate in all of the school's activities, he advocates for the development of a program that includes pre-vocational activities and functional skills related to activities of daily living. It is common practice in most middle schools to provide an array of services for students with moderate-severe disabilities that includes community-based activities and a combination of academic and functional instruction.

At the high school, the effectiveness of the special education program rests almost entirely on the initiative of the special education teachers to organize and plan student instructional groupings, including inclusion classes. The lack of a department chairperson creates a situation in which appropriate student assignment, utilization of resources and the development of additional programs or refinement of existing practices to meet unique student needs are difficult at best. A key role of a high school special education department chairperson, or otherwise designated coordinator or point person for the department, is to collaborate with other department heads to plan how students with disabilities will access the general curriculum and to help design and implement schedules and instructional practices that afford the best inclusive practices for successful integration of students with disabilities in regular classes or broader school settings.

At the high school, the Life Skills and Language Based Center programs are the most clearly articulated offerings. The Life Skills program provides community based job internships and has a curriculum that is based on preparing students for the post-secondary world of vocational and community opportunities. The Language Based program provides effective direct instruction using a variety of appropriate teaching methodologies and modifications. The goals are clear, the collaboration of staff is effective and the students are actively engaged in the learning process.

At the high school, there is not a specific program designed to meet the needs of students with serious emotional/behavioral disabilities. One of the special education resource teachers is assigned to provide instruction and support to some of these challenging or

fragile students. However, there is no clinical component included. The current standard for best practice in addressing the needs of such students is to have a program for a small group of students, typically no more than eight, which has a full-time special education teacher, full-time clinician and an aide. Such programs require very clear guidelines and criteria. Often, the presenting behaviors of the students reflect home and/or community based problems and the clinician's role as the case manager assists in assuring a comprehensive and informed approach to helping the student meet his or her social, behavioral and academic goals.

As already noted in this report, in many instances educational support personnel serve as the primary instructional support for students on IEP's. Appropriate and routine supervision of these individuals by licensed special education teachers and related service providers is inconsistent. At the Hadley School, where the district-based programs are offered, there is a process in place for communication and supervision of the educational support personnel. While the district has provided professional development for educational support personnel in the past, and intends to do so again this summer, that training regarding understanding of particular disabilities and support strategies does not replace the need for regular supervision of support staff by the liaison who is responsible for the student.

Recommendations:

Develop an organizational chart that includes all support personnel by role. Such a document would help parents and staff to understand the existing "integrated services" structure that often provides extensive, direct intervention to students with and without IEP's.

Formulate a document that provides program descriptors as well as guidelines to assist in determining specific pullout resource supports and inclusionary services that are appropriate for a wide array of students and to help align individual, unique student needs and characteristics with the most effective service delivery models.

Develop a program that includes a functional life skills curriculum, pre-vocational and community experience for middle school students with intellectual impairments.

Review the current service delivery model for middle school and high school students with autism spectrum disorders and Asperger's Syndrome and consider additional or different interventions that support effective instruction and inclusion of these students.

Develop a program and services at the high school to meet the needs of students with serious emotional/behavioral disabilities.

Consider the need to develop programs at the elementary and middle school levels to address the needs of students with serious emotional/behavioral disabilities.

Add an additional team chairperson. Assign one person to grades K – 5 and out-of-district and the other to grades 6 –12. The secondary position would facilitate more effective identification, student transitions and program planning as well as facilitate the integration of all elements of the special education program at the middle school and high school.

Develop a model of supervision for educational support personnel at all levels and assure its implementation.

Section 3

3. Do the students with disabilities in Swampscott have "access to the general curriculum" and are they included in the "life of the school"?

Preschool and elementary students in Swampscott have full access to the curriculum as was acknowledged by the Massachusetts Department of Education in its most recent coordinated program review. The integrated preschool programs offered to students with and without disabilities in Swampscott are well documented and comprehensive. The program has developed a booklet for outreach and distribution that is very accessible and descriptive. Parents of preschoolers who participated in the focus groups were uniformly pleased with the leadership, staffing and program. In the most recent full review of the program by the Department of Education, the district was cited for an over enrollment of students with disabilities in proportion to typical peers. Although this has been corrected, a plan for student placement mid year should be developed to anticipate this situation recurring. (See recommendations below.)

At the elementary level, even in the substantially separate programs at Hadley, students participate in grade level curriculum with supports. In the district wide inclusion program, one facilitator supervises 1-1 assistants in an effort to maintain students in the classrooms across the district. Although this individual is spread across levels and has limited time, teachers and parents think this model is effective in including students in classes. Training of these assistants is sporadic and has not provided sufficient information about regulatory or programmatic requirements. This was also cited by the Department of Education.

At middle school, many students begin to experience a separation from mainstream offerings. This appears to be a function of growing discrepancies between skill level and general class requirements as well as a belief by staff that individual needs cannot be met in the context of the general classroom. A variety of pullout programs exist at this level although it is unclear how students are differentiated and assigned for instructional purposes. As noted previously, programmatic gaps appear to exist at this level with an absence of a pre- vocational program for students with more intellectual impairments or supports and programming for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities

In general high school access is less than clear. A new form was distributed to teachers outlining accommodations for students requiring accommodations for 504 plans and IEP's. This document was well done and conceived but has not had the benefit of full implementation with oversight and training. Inclusive practices such as co-teaching have begun at the high school as reported by the faculty but the implementation is done totally by the teacher and at the convenience of both regular and special educators. Planning for individual student needs and most appropriate student placement do not necessarily guide the course selections. The special educators have worked hard at identifying and convincing teachers to participate but it is solely done on good will and not planned effectively or endorsed by the school structure and assignment of faculty. The lack of clarity results in uncertainty when developing plans for accessing all levels of the curriculum. Guidance staff is absent in the planning and advising process for students who are not college bound.

During the focus group meetings with parents, it was reported that some middle school students have been advised to apply to the regional vocational technical school since "the high school doesn't have the capacity to accommodate many students with disabilities". Some parents reported that their children had become disengaged and isolated at the high school. Commenting on the instructional realm, parents reported that there was not a language based classroom at the high school level. In fact, the high school has a program that is appropriately staffed and quite comprehensive for students with language based disabilities. This however is organized separately; the teacher of the program provides high-level instruction to the students. Beyond this program, at the high school, access to general curriculum is limited. The school provides the typical resource room (referred to as "Time Management") and a new transitional program that is for students with significant cognitive impairments which does have a community based component that is serving a small number of students. This latter initiative reflects current research and trends toward community inclusion. As at the middle school, students with significant emotional and behavioral needs have little programming or support except for one counselor and a special education teacher. This teacher is assigned as part of the time management team to support students with emotional needs.

Recommendations:

Involve all faculty and parents in a comprehensive planning process for high school organizational structures and leadership.

Include guidance staff in the transition planning process for all students.

Develop a comprehensive professional development plan on differentiated instruction for middle and high school faculty

Develop a comprehensive program guide for all programs elementary through high school to provide communication to parents and faculty.

Develop an alternative program for students who become disengaged for emotional/behavioral and or academic reasons at both middle and high school levels.

Fully implement a district wide curriculum accommodation plan under the leadership of the principals.

Section 4

4. Do all members of the school staff take ownership for the learning and participation of students with disabilities?

At preschool and elementary schools, all staff, including the principals, is part of the planning and provision of appropriate instruction and support for students with disabilities. Pull out programs are still the primary service delivery mode. At Stanley and Hadley a number of initiatives provided by other staffing (district wide at Stanley and

regular supports at Stanley) create more inclusive practices. Wilson reading is the preferred methodology utilized individually and for small groups. This is sometimes delivered by aides who may be certified teachers that have been trained in this method. At Machon, the principal has instituted an initiative that has looked at math in particular and tracked all student progress. The principal has taken leadership in this area as has the Clarke principal in reading interventions. At Hadley where the district wide programs are housed, the principal is a full member of the team and encourages inclusive practices across curriculum areas. The model that she has nurtured could be a model for inclusive practice at all grade levels in the district.

At the middle school, the grade level Team process serves as a vehicle for regular and special education staff to focus on inclusive instructional practices and management of troubling behaviors and/or emotional needs of students. Yet separate programming still is the pervasive practice. This reflects a philosophy within the school community. The current principal, as noted previously, felt that he lacked programming in pre vocational areas for students presently enrolled in the school.

At the high school there are no clear processes or supports in place to assist regular education staff to gain confidence and the skills necessary to effectively meet the needs of a diverse student population including those with disabilities. There are no department heads currently to implement a staff supervision and development program to change current practices. Separate classes and different program are often sought rather than the modification of existing offerings. Guidance counselors focus on the college process and not class selection and program development for individual students. The inclusion of students under the supervision of a facilitator is a new initiative that pushes on regular as well as special education teachers to include students with different disabilities than they have in the past. This is a beginning.

Recommendations:

Develop a functional district wide curriculum accommodation plan.

Continue to implement teacher assistance teams at the elementary level and expand to middle and high schools.

Reevaluate the role of guidance within the secondary settings and plan for inclusion in team and individual student planning.

Develop a targeted professional development program for secondary staff.

Section 5

5. Is there a clear and consistent decision-making process regarding the allocation of resources and how does the district identify and respond to emerging program or service needs?

While there is a response to individual need as required by special education regulations and students' IEP's, the identification of and planning for broader district needs is not evident. It was reported by the special education administrator and team chairperson that some additional programs and services have been identified as necessary components of the special education continuum but that budget constraints have delayed their implementation. The addition of a second team chairperson to the special education staff is considered to be an important priority as is the appointment of an additional school psychologist. It is important that a structure, and the personnel to support it, is in place to assure that the district is "in compliance" with state and federal regulations. The meeting of timelines for the completion of Team evaluations and the prompt provision of proposed IEP's to parents upon completion of the Team process are requirements that cannot be ignored. When the structure to support these obligations is insufficient,

extraordinary amounts of time, and possibly money, are often required to develop and implement corrective actions mandated by the Department of Education. More important, when these obligations are not met in a timely manner, trust with parents is broken. To respond appropriately to emerging program and service needs, the district needs to first assure that the supporting structure for special education is in place.

Specific student populations, e.g., students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Intellectual Impairments, have driven some successful program additions and the allocation of some resources. The consideration of the needs of the higher incidence special education population present in all schools has received less focus and systematic attention, particularly at the secondary level.

As stated elsewhere in this report, there was limited evidence of a comprehensive approach or a continuum of service options for meeting the needs of students with emotional disabilities. In considering the setting of priorities for the possible expansion and refinement of special education programs and practices, identifying and meeting the needs of emotionally disabled students should be viewed as a very important focus.

There is one inclusion specialist who has responsibility for the middle school and high school. Since the primary role of this person is to assist in the modification of curriculum for students with IEP's, it is difficult to imagine that the needs of all students are met consistently across the content areas. The successful provision of "specially designed instruction" in accordance with IEP's that require modifications to content, methodology and/or performance criteria, requires much more time and structure than is possible with only one secondary level inclusion specialist. Regular collaboration between regular education teachers and special educators that addresses the "what" and "how" of instruction as well as deciding on student specific performance measures is critical for setting the stage for successful student outcomes. Inclusion specialists should guide the process, help to develop materials and study guides and serve as important resources for regular and special educators' collaboration and planning.

Recommendations:

Begin a three to five year planning process that includes a needs assessment and subsequent goal setting with parent and community participation.

Review school-based psychological services across the district to consider the need for additional staff.

Review the service delivery priorities of the secondary level inclusion specialist.

Review service delivery for students with emotional/behavioral disabilities as part of a broader needs assessment and planning process at the secondary level.

Section 6

6. What processes are in place to measure the effectiveness of current practices?

There are inconsistent practices at the elementary level regarding the collection of data to plan and refine instruction. At Machon School, staff development has supported a consistent approach for measuring the progress of all students. At Hadley School, the Learning Center teachers described a variety of data collection methods that they routinely employ to assess student progress. At Stanley and Clarke progress is monitored by keeping portfolios containing student work. This practice appears to result in a more anecdotal approach since student work is not compared to a set standard.

The middle school and high school progress monitoring systems for students with disabilities have not been formalized to include an array of curriculum based measures or the use of rubrics across settings.

In general, at the time of IEP reviews, IEP Teams rely primarily on norm-based annual assessment data.

Recommendations:

Implement a progress monitoring system that consists of data directly linked to IEP goals and objectives.

Train all staff and Teams on the understanding and use of curriculum based measures and rubrics to monitor student progress. This is essential to planning “specifically designed instruction” and establishing eligibility for special education.

Improve data collection in general by incorporating district wide assessments, attendance and program outcomes. Share with teams and parents as well as community. Use for targeted planning.

SUMMARY:

It was quite clear throughout this program evaluation that there is strong interest in Swampscott for identifying and providing programs and services for students with disabilities that are consistent with best practice. The effort to examine current practices and to identify areas of need has been led by the superintendent. Dr. Malone included the completion of the current evaluation in his initial report to the school committee. He is actively seeking recommendations for change and has solicited parent engagement in the process.

In addition to the interest and commitment of the superintendent, parents responded overwhelmingly to the opportunity to discuss special education in Swampscott by attending a series of focus groups that were held during the school day. The input of parents was an important contribution to the process and provided the evaluators with a rich source of information about student outcomes and perceived strengths and weaknesses of the current programs and practices.

Principals and teachers were candid in their response to a series of questions discussed in focus groups and in conversation during site visits to all schools and most special education classes in the district. Their commitment to the students for whom they are responsible was evident. The sizable corps of veteran teachers was easily able to identify multiple positive aspects of the district's special education programs and advocated effectively for what they saw as necessary adjustments or additional resources.

There are many excellent programs and practices in place in Swampscott. Outreach to the community to identify students who may have disabilities that would make them eligible for special education is firmly established. The preschool and elementary schools have strong programs and provide a variety of appropriate interventions.

There are significant gaps in the secondary school programs and services that have been described in other sections of this report. There are multiple concerns related to organization at the high school and the lack of a continuum of services there to meet a variety of student needs. Most notable, and troubling, is the lack of a program and related services for students with emotional/behavioral disabilities. The district does not have an "alternative" program for middle school or high school students who may be "at risk" for dropping out or who would learn best in a smaller, more structured environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendations have been made throughout this report. The following is a summary of many of those suggestions. They are listed in order of priority, as determined by the evaluators.

1. Consider convening an ad hoc group, including parents and community members, to examine the current structure related to special education at the high school and to consider the development of additional programs and services.

2. Appoint an additional team chairperson.
3. Develop a process to enhance communication with and outreach to parents.
4. Provide professional development training to middle school and high school regular education and special education staff on “differentiated instruction” and co-teaching and consider having some of the elementary school teachers serve as trainers in this process.
5. Develop program descriptions and guidelines for all special education programs and related services.
6. Develop programs for students with emotional/behavioral disabilities at the middle school and high school. Examine the need for such a program at the elementary level.
7. Develop an “alternative” high school program.
8. Develop a Life Skills program at the middle school that includes a pre-vocational curriculum with community-based experiences.
9. Monitor the drop out rate.
10. Monitor student progress through data collection and analysis with an emphasis on curriculum-based measurement.
11. Appoint an additional school psychologist.

Submitted by:
Carol Daynard, Ed.D. and Ellen Honeyman, C.A.G.S.