

# **Andover Regional School District**

## **Special Education Audit Action Plan 2023**



**Purpose:** The following action steps were devised by ARSD leadership in response to findings in the August, 2023 Special Education Study prepared by Pepe-Ahearn Associates, LLC. The district celebrates the areas of strengths presented as well as offers actionable steps to address any deficiencies. This plan is formatted with the following areas reviewed: Areas of Strengths, Compliance, Confidentiality, Consistency, Communication, Conflict of Interest, and Program & Services.

### **Areas of Strength:**

- **Small class size**
- **Dedicated staff**
- **Tight-knit community**
- **Recognition of the need to improve special education services**
- **Interest in a quality improvement process that involves innovative thinking**
- **A desire to provide a continuum of services**

## Action Items: Compliance

Reported Issue	Action and Response	Indicators of Success
<p>1. Families report being required to seek and pay for outside services/therapies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CST team members will always encourage parents to have a continuum of services. Primarily providing connections to resources to parents for both outside and home services.</li> <li>● Occasionally, parents request services that are not educationally based, but instead medically based (ie. Occupational Therapy)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Several students receive additional outside services courtesy of their insurance.</li> <li>● Some students receive in-home services for behavioral concerns (ie ABA)</li> </ul>
<p>2. Many students required multiple referrals before being tested for eligibility. Some also required legal representation or an advocate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The referral process as identified in the Special Education Administrative Code 6A:14-3.3-3.6 clearly identifies the steps of the process.</li> <li>● The CST will provide ongoing education to parents of the Intervention (RTI) and referral process.</li> <li>● A professional development opportunity, by the State of NJ will be offered to all staff on understanding of the district's required Multi Tiered System of Support (MTSS) intervention and data collection process.</li> <li>● To date, there are very few families who have retained legal counsel or advocates for their students. We will continue to work alongside our families in determining the most appropriate interventions for struggling learners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● During the 2018-2019 school year, the district had a 28% classification rate, with many students who should not have been. We currently have worked towards a 20% classification rate.</li> <li>● Currently, we are ensuring all classifications are supported by the eligibility requirements set out by the state. This process will be reviewed as a NJ QSAC item.</li> </ul>
<p>3. Students not always being placed in the least restrictive environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CST Team members will consistently promote the inclusion of students in the LRE.</li> <li>● CST will educate parents not only on the importance of the LRE, but the Administrative Code and practices (6A:14-4.2) that govern Special Education and Related Services.</li> <li>● A yearly professional development opportunity will be</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ongoing and continuous promotion of LRE in accordance with 6A:14-4.2</li> <li>● Copies of the Administrative Code 6A:14-4.2 provide to parents</li> </ul>

	recommended with the School Board attorney.	for their understanding.
4. Families reporting not receiving a draft prior to/or at the child study team meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The referral process as identified in the Special Education Administrative Code 6A:14-3.3-3.6 clearly identifies the steps of the process.</li> <li>• All families will receive a draft of any IEP being considered at the time of the eligibility meeting. Proper timetables will be followed for suggestions, questioning, and signatures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvements will be gauged informally and by future parent surveys.</li> </ul>
5. Families reporting not receiving evaluations 10 days prior to/or at the child study team meeting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All evaluations will be sent both digitally and in hard copy format to families in the timeframes required.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All evaluations will continue to be sent both digitally and in hard copy format to families for review within 10 calendar days of their CST meeting.</li> </ul>
6. No evidence of Child Find on the district's website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The website has been updated to include Child Find information.</li> <li>• The website has also been updated to include commonly used terms in special services and roles and responsibilities of the CST team as a means of educating parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing website updates will be completed in a timely manner, and as updates become available from Local or State agencies.</li> </ul>
7. No evidence of an annual Special Education Parents Advisory Group (SEPAG) meeting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Supervisor of Special Services has met with a parent who has expressed interest in becoming a parent coordinator of the SEPAG group.</li> <li>• Resources were provided to the parent, by the Special Services Supervisor to help support the SEPAG.</li> <li>• The first meeting of SEPAG, led by administrators, will be dedicated to the purpose and process of the group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of a sustainable parent group that meets regularly with administrative support.</li> </ul>
8. Families reporting not receiving a copy of PRISE (Parental Rights in Special Education).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The PRISE manual is available in both digital and paper copy to all parents in both English and Spanish</li> <li>• Links to PRISE are available on all Case managers and CST secretary's email.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English &amp; Spanish version on all case managers &amp; secretary's email</li> <li>• IEP's have a digital link</li> <li>• Website has a digital link</li> <li>• A paper copy is also offered to all families</li> </ul>
9. Families reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CST members will respond to all phone and email</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A district 24-48 hour rule,</li> </ul>

<p>communication delays as well as delays in implementing services.</p>	<p>correspondence while maintaining appropriate records.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CST members will review Special Education Administrative Code 6A:14.</li> <li>● Realtime Training will continue to occur for all recordkeeping for special education students.</li> <li>● Supervisor has reached out to an outside consultant for CST professional development opportunities in areas of need.</li> </ul>	<p>during business hours, is in place in the district for returning parent correspondence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● All CST have received a copy of revised NJ Special Education Administrative Code 6A:14</li> <li>● Ongoing Realtime training for record keeping</li> <li>● Ongoing CST training by outside professionals</li> <li>● Ongoing Bi monthly CST Team meetings</li> <li>● Ongoing Bi-monthly Case Manager Meetings</li> </ul>
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**Action Items: Confidentiality**

Reported Issue	Action and Response	Indicators of Success
<p>1. Loyalty/trust/ethics concerns with staff communications with families around special education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Special Education Specialist, Damien Pettino, invited to provide training for the whole staff on applicable legalities.</li> <li>● High professionalism expected from all staff during communications with families.</li> <li>● Explicit confidentiality expected from all staff with ongoing reminders of this expectation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Staff conduct and partnership with administration for proper support for students and families.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Families reporting issues around protecting the anonymity of students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Procedural safeguards have been established to guard the anonymity of special education students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Investigation of any future reports of breached anonymity for correction.</li> </ul>

## Action Items: Consistency

Reported Issue	Action and Response	Indicators of Success
<p>1. Families reporting examples of students being referred and found ineligible only to be assessed and found eligible at a later date.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ongoing review of Special Education Administrative Code 6A:14, procedural safeguards regarding referral process.</li> <li>● Data points and consequently, eligibility itself can change from time to time as a student progresses and regresses in current performance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Providing clear communication of Code and all possibilities during CST meetings with parents.</li> </ul>

## Action Items: Communication

Reported Issue	Action and Response	Indicators of Success
<p>1. Reported lapses in productive communication between the CST Team and parents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CST members will respond to all phone and email correspondence while maintaining appropriate records.</li> <li>● A district 24-48 hour rule, during business hours, is in place in the district for returning parent correspondence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improvements will be gauged informally and by future parent surveys.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Reported lapses in productive communication between the CST team and teachers working with special education students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CST members will be active in classrooms, team/department meetings, RTI/I&amp;RS meetings, and available to teachers for discussion, conferencing, and student support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improvements will be gauged informally and in future staff surveys.</li> </ul>

## Action Items: Conflict of Interest

Reported Issue	Action and Response	Indicators of Success
<p>1. Reported issues with the conflict of interest possibly created by a dual supervisor and case manager role.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The dual role of supervisor and LDTC is challenging. As mentioned in the recommendations of the document, hiring an LDT-C in either a FT or PT capacity would assist this issue but will be difficult in a challenging budget year.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This dual role will continue to be explored and discussed at the BOE and administrative levels.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Reported issues with eligibility and amendments of referred and classified students being viewed as a team decision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The referral process as identified in the Special Education Administrative Code 6A:14-3.3-3.6 clearly identifies the steps of the process.</li> <li>• The CST will provide ongoing education to parents of the Intervention (RTI) and referral process.</li> <li>• Both staff and parents will understand the role and responsibilities of being part of CST decision on eligibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvements will be gauged informally and by future parent surveys.</li> </ul>

## Action Items: Programs & Services

Reported Issue	Action and Response	Indicators of Success
<p>1. Reported issues on a lack of differentiation instruction in resource rooms designed to meet the needs of struggling learners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differentiation is a growth area identified by administrators in both general and special education settings. This year, we are supporting this growth by providing a series of professional development opportunities with Dr. Tracey Severns. This initiative's focus is on "Student Engagement" in the classroom.</li> <li>• The full implementation of the latest version of the Danielson's Observation rubric this school year will also support the improvement of teaching practices at all levels of learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher levels of student engagement across our school district.</li> </ul>

<p><b>2. Reported issues on a lack of student led or discovery learning in resource rooms.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Differentiation is a growth area identified by administrators in both general and special education settings. This year, we are supporting this growth by providing a series of professional development opportunities with Dr. Tracey Severns. This initiative's focus is on "Student Engagement" in the classroom.</b></li><li>● <b>The full implementation of the latest version of the Danielson's Observation rubric this school year will also support the improvement of teaching practices at all levels of learning.</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Higher levels of student engagement across our school district.</b></li></ul>
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