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Extended School Year Special Education Program Evaluation

Department of Special Education

Scituate Public Schools

Scituate, Massachusetts

Conducted:  
July 2011

Submitted by:

Walker Partnerships  
A Division of Walker  
Needham, Massachusetts  
02492

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## *1. Introduction*

The Director of Special Education requested that Walker Partnerships conduct an evaluation of the Extended School Year (ESY) Special Education Summer Program. The administration wants to procure recommendations that will assist in addressing future program needs, enhance the current programming options, and determine the professional development needs of the instructional and support staff of the ESY program.

### *4. Purpose*

The purpose of an independent review of a specific program or service is to provide a school district with an objective report that identifies areas of strengths, needs and recommendations. An independent review allows for the district to be examined from the perspective that looks at what is working well in a particular program, but also speaks to areas that need to be strengthened. This review is focused on the specific domain of programs and services that are provided for students with special needs in the Extended School Year program.

The review process is designed, through a multi-step approach, to assist the school's Director of Special Education, and various school based special education personnel, in having a guided and focused discussion that will enable effective short and long range planning to occur while recognizing and addressing issues such as:

- Identifying trends and patterns in the referrals of special needs students to the ESY summer programming
- Identifying the main characteristics of the students who have been referred and those of newly referred students
- Determining the effectiveness and utilization of current special education personnel, and their roles and responsibilities with respect to serving students in the ESY program
- Identifying trends in the program placements of students
- Determining the effectiveness of current program and service interventions
- Staffing and resource needs that reflect student needs
- Creating a long-range plan that addresses the agreed upon needs of the student population for ESY services
- Establishing a comprehensive approach to program and service development that is linked to the budget planning process

This review process brings forth information that will enable the administration, and school-based special education personnel, to develop an action plan(s) that will lead to more effective approaches for serving the students who are enrolled in the ESY program.

It is important to recognize that, for the information contained in this report to be beneficial to the school district and the special education department, the stakeholders must come together to discuss the Findings and the Recommendations. Through a deliberative process, the administration and the school-based special education personnel can develop short and long range action plan(s) that will address the agreed upon issues.

#### *B. Reviewers*

Dr. James B. Earley, Managing Director of Walker Partnerships, has forty-one years of public education experience as a teacher, teaching assistant principal, Massachusetts Department of Education Supervisor and Acting Regional Special Education Director, and thirty years as Administrator of Special Education and Superintendent of Schools for the Watertown Public Schools. Dr. Earley has been a Senior Lecturer at Lesley University, Wheelock College and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Massachusetts/Boston. In addition to his role as Managing Director for Walker Partnerships, he is a Senior Consultant for the Center of Social Development and Education, University of Massachusetts/Boston. Dr. Earley has consulted for numerous educational organizations, participated in a variety of special education task forces and has conducted numerous independent program reviews, evaluations and professional development trainings for school districts within Massachusetts and several other states.

Mr. James Shillinglaw, CAS, Southeast Region Associate Manager for the Walker Partnerships, has thirty-four years of public school experience. He has been a teacher and a building coordinator. He was an Administrator of Special Education and Director of Pupil Personnel Services for twenty-nine years for the Provincetown Public Schools, Provincetown/Truro Public Schools, the Barnstable Public Schools and the Hanover Public Schools. Mr. Shillinglaw has been an Adjunct Professor for Lesley University and Framingham State College, as well as a presenter at numerous conferences. He was also president and a member of the executive board of the National Association of Pupil Service Administrators for six years. He has consulted with numerous school districts, conducted special education program evaluations, participated in state-wide special education task forces and committees, and has mentored newly appointed Directors of Special Education.

## *II. Methodology*

This program evaluation was conducted based on a three-pronged approach.

1. A review of written documentation that pertained to this evaluation included the following: the ESY program description, census data for program enrollment, comparative data with “like” school districts, entrance criteria data, follow-up student performance data, and review of twenty-five Individual Education Programs (IEPs).
2. A walk-through of the instructional settings at the high school was conducted with the Director of Special Education and the ESY Coordinator. While the observations of classes occurred, informal questions were directed to varied staff members as they worked in numerous instructional settings. This walk-through provided the reviewers with an opportunity to observe students and staff members engaged in learning and related service activities.
3. Seventeen (17) interviews and discussions were conducted with the following positions:
  - Director of Special Education
  - Coordinator of the ESY Program
  - Vocational Life Skills Program Director
  - Teacher of the Life Skills Program
  - School Nurse
  - Two Teachers of the Early Childhood Program
  - Teacher of the Primary Learning Center
  - Teacher of the Intermediate Learning Center
  - Teacher of the Elementary Program
  - Speech/Language Therapist
  - Two Academic Tutors
  - Two Paraprofessionals
  - Two Parents

The interviews were thirty minutes in length and emphasis was placed on the focus of the services of the ESY program. Questions and discussion focused on the following:

- What are the roles and responsibilities of their assignment?
- What are their main concerns?
- What is working well for students in the ESY program?
- What strengths of the program can they identify?
- What trends are they experiencing in the program regarding the student population?
- What changes do they believe need to occur in practices, procedures, and programming?

- Based on the students that they are serving, can they identify any program gaps?
- Are there any obstacles to students maintaining their present level of achievement?
- What role does the paraprofessional have within their program?
- Are they receiving adequate supervision?
- What topics of professional development need to be addressed?
- What practices need to be in place to enhance the program?
- What are some parents' concerns?
- Did they have an orientation meeting prior to the commencement of the ESY program?

These questions varied somewhat, depending on the specific role of the individual who was interviewed. Discussion expanded beyond these specific questions based on the individual's experience within their respective role, their experiences in the field of education, the length of time that they have worked in the ESY program, and any other factors that emerged from the interview process.

### *III. Commendations*

This section of the report is for the purpose of recognizing the efforts put forth by the district and the administration in their plan to meet the needs of the students who attend the ESY summer program. Special Education is a complex mandate for public schools to meet. There are competing interests that continue to place a significant pressure and financial burden on the school district. Scituate Public Schools has recognized its responsibility to meet the needs of the students who are enrolled in the ESY program.

#### *Specific Commendations:*

- The Director of Special Education for commissioning this evaluation of the ESY program in order to gain insight into program/service enhancements and improvements for the program
- The effort of the director to meet with staff members, in a consistent manner, for the purpose of maintaining accessibility and for communicating program expectations
- The comprehensiveness of program options and choices available for special needs students who require the ESY program
- The fact that all ESY program services are conducted at only one location, the high school (This consolidates program oversight and staff supervision responsibilities.)
- The establishment of the position of Coordinator of Extended School Year programs. This position allows for ongoing direct program oversight, staff supervision, parent contact, response to various urgencies, coordination of transportation, coordination of daily attendance reports and weekly progress reports, and assurance of the ongoing operation of the ESY program
- The accessibility of the ESY Coordinator to the ESY program staff and parents
- The dedication of the ESY instructional staff and support staff to their students, and the commitment of all staff members to the successful operation of the ESY program
- The high percentage of special needs students participating in the ESY program (37% of the school year special education population)
- The fact that discussion on eligibility for ESY programs and services takes place at the student's annual IEP review meeting, and that a well-defined rubric to determine who should be referred to the ESY program is used

- The fact that criteria for the ESY program are clearly stated to prevent regression, and assist with the process of recouping skills that are currently being addressed on the IEP
- The practice of notifying parents in April of the recommendation for their child to attend the ESY program, and the usefulness of providing them with the Decision-Making Guide that details a comprehensive explanation of the ESY program and its services
- The various forms for referral, notification, goals and services to be provided, progress reports, and stated practices and procedures that are currently in place
- The extensive data collection that is conducted by special education staff on the progress that students make following their participation in the ESY program by using the AIMS web-based system and other forms such as daily class work and attendance
- The tuitioning-in of students to the ESY program from other districts that creates a "budget offset" for the district
- The preparation time that is made available to the instructional personnel for planning instruction, curriculum, activities, and set-up of their classrooms (6 hours)
- The one hour daily preparation time provided for special education personnel
- The structured folders of students' work assignments, prepared in advance by their school year special education provider, that includes five weeks of material
- The diversity of job sites, along with academic and transitional planning, that is occurring for students in the Life Skills Program
- The fact that all but one of the ESY program staff, thirty-seven out of thirty-eight (98%), are employed by Schuette Public Schools during the regular school year
- The fact that there is a substantial percentage of ESY program staff members who have been working in the ESY program for more than one year:
  - 19 out of 38---4 or more years
  - 30 out of 38—2 to 3 years
- The general consensus by instructional personnel that students are maintained, and in many cases, make progress during the summer program (The assessment that takes place in the fall will provide data to indicate if student progress does occur.)

- Ongoing efforts by the director and special education staff to make adjustments and changes to the program options and choices available for students through the ESY program (As an example, related services are not part of a student's instructional time, but are in addition to it. Also, an additional hour of programming for students with more intensive needs is provided.)
- The practice of having paraprofessionals work with different children throughout the week in a one-on-one setting
- The fact that Scituate is the only ESY program of twelve "like" districts that provides weekly written progress reports
- The quality and consistency of the Individual Education Program (IEP) and the fact that the special education staff has been well trained in the development of IEPs
- The Tutorial Program that serves approximately seventy students, primarily at the elementary level, and the continuum of services that is based on the students' needs ranging from two to four hours of service a week
- The fact that classes designated as self-contained, or substantially separate, are well staffed with a special education teacher and three to four paraprofessionals. These staffing patterns are directly related to the needs of the students.
- The excellent relationship that the school district has with the town of Scituate (The town provides many work site opportunities for students, and, in some cases, stipends are given. There is also a good deal of coordination with the recreation department. This department provides a two week program for students with cognitive and developmental disabilities. In some cases, based on students' needs, the recreation department will subsidize additional staff.)
- The district's initiative and implementation of response to Intervention (RtI) that will greatly benefit staff members by assisting them in determining service eligibility through the utilization and monitoring of student progress data

#### *IV. Factors Affecting the Implementation of Programs and Services*

There are numerous factors that impact on the district's ability to deliver instructional and related services to students within the ESY program. None of these factors are more pressing than the census and the needs of the students. These two factors drive program development and service initiatives. The Extended School Year program is designed to prevent substantial regression of the progress that students attained during the school year.

One of the most complex and misunderstood components of a school district's special education programming is the Extended School Year program. Questions are frequently asked by parents and advocates when IEP teams meet to discuss student eligibility for the ESY program at the students' annual reviews. These can best be addressed by referring to the Question and Answer Guide that was developed by the Program Quality Assurance Services, a division of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) that monitors compliance of state and federal special education regulations. One of the most frequently asked questions in this guide follows.

**Question: Couldn't all children benefit from "extended year programs," not just children with special needs?**

**Answer: All children "regress" or lose progress, forget, and revert to previous behavior to some extent between school years. It must be determined whether a child's regression would likely be substantial, and whether the child would require greater than usual time to "recoup" to get back to the level the child had achieved before a break in service.**

At best, it is difficult to determine eligibility with the vague guideline of "at substantial risk of regression." Teams attempt to use a break in service, such as a school vacation, to determine if a student is "at risk." In most cases, the decision is based on qualitative evidence rather than quantitative data.

In the past, eligibility was generally focused on students who had significant to severe academic, behavioral, or developmental issues. Most of these students were placed in self-contained programs, thereby making it easier for teams to recommend them for the ESY program. Clearly, these are the most challenging students in the school district, and they would be at a significant risk of regression without the ESY program. In recent years, ESY services have been extended to students with mild to moderate disabilities. Eligibility for this population presents much more of a challenge for team members.

Another frequently asked question is: "How much service should be provided?" The goal for the ESY program is to avoid substantial regression, not to advance skill attainment. Parents have a difficult time with this concept. With the tremendous increase

of students being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder over the last ten years, the question of “how much service” becomes paramount. These students no longer fit into the standard five or six week programs.

One model that school districts are looking at to assist them with a better articulation of eligibility is the Response to Intervention. RtI is a tiered approach that provides different levels of intervention for students, and it is based on collecting data and monitoring student progress. As districts become more sophisticated in the analysis of data, they will be better able to develop guidelines that indicate which students are “at risk” for regression. For further information on the ESY program, please refer to the Question and Answer Guide that was mentioned in this section.

#### *V. Findings.*

Through this evaluation process, it was very apparent that the Director of Special Education has a complete understanding of the programmatic needs of the students who are referred to, and participate in, the ESY program. In reviewing documentation for this evaluation, there have been additions made to the ESY program because the needs of the students have intensified, and the number of students requiring the benefit of the ESY program has increased. The following findings are provided to assist the district with the work that needs to be completed. These findings are presented in no particular order of priority.

#### *Specific Findings:*

- A comprehensive staff orientation is not conducted prior to the opening of the ESY program each summer.
- Paraprofessionals do not have any scheduled time for preparation, nor do they have a common planning time with their supervising teacher.
- There appears to be an inconsistency among school-based special education personnel on their understanding or interpretation of the criteria for referral to the ESY program.
- In a review of twenty-five IEPs, it appears that school-based personnel are inconsistent in their recommendations for the type and frequency of services to be provided during the ESY summer program.
- There are a limited number of typical students enrolled in the Early Childhood ESY program.
- In a review of twelve “like” school districts, all of them are operating ESY programs four days a week. Scituate is doing the same. This is a regional phenomenon, for in other parts of the state, ESY programs are conducted five days a week.
- Of the twelve districts, only two, Hull & Scituate, are conducting a six week program, and one district, Hanover, is conducting a seven week program. These “additional week programs” are for students with significant needs.
- Scituate is the only district of the twelve that is doing benchmarking assessments in June and September.
- ESY staff members do not have the opportunity to share student information with paraprofessionals prior to the opening day of the ESY program.

- There is not an evaluation form available that assists the administration with making an effective determination of which paraprofessionals should be assigned to which group of students and program staff.

## *VI. Recommendations*

The following recommendations are a direct outcome of the evaluation process that was recently completed of the Extended School Year Program. The findings listed in the previous section are the foundation for the following recommendations. Each recommendation is followed by an explanation that is intended to further expand on the rationale for the recommendation. These recommendations are intended to provide insight and direction for the administration and school personnel to make decisions regarding the direction they determine to follow with respect to the existing ESY program. These recommendations should be viewed as a point of departure for involved personnel to engage in discussions that will lead to the development of expanded programs and services that truly meet the needs of the student population.

It will be necessary for the stakeholders to come together and develop an action plan that is comprised of short and long-term steps. Budget implications, as well as structural and organizational issues, need to be well understood so that appropriate program development can be instituted. Through an inclusive process of discussion, a plan will emerge that is comprehensive, meaningful, and purposeful. These recommendations are presented in no particular order of priority.

**1. Stakeholders, including the Director of Special Education, the elementary team chairperson, the elementary principals, and the ESY Program Coordinator should meet to establish eligibility guidelines for students who receive ESY services.**

### **Explanation:**

- Currently, there appears to be an inconsistency among the elementary schools in determining which students should receive ESY services. This is especially a concern for students who are classified with specific learning disabilities. At this time, 37% of Scituate’s special education population is receiving services in the ESY program. When compared to other south shore communities, this number is above average.
- The district should be congratulated for their efforts in developing and implementing Response to Intervention (RtI) program at the elementary level. There are many districts in Massachusetts that are lagging behind in this initiative. As knowledge and experience expand, the staff should be able to utilize data from regular progress monitoring to determine guidelines for students who are at a substantial risk for regression.
- It would be useful to view progress monitoring data in the fall in order to determine how the students who received ESY summer services performed. Did they maintain skill level from previous testing that was conducted in the spring? This would also be a good indicator to determine if the level of service that was offered during the summer was appropriate.

**2. An orientation program should be established prior to the beginning of the ESY program.**

**Explanation:**

- In general, the district has been fortunate to have many of its school year staff personnel continue to work throughout the summer in the ESY program. This, obviously, provides consistency and familiarity with individual students and their IEPs.
- Providing orientation would greatly benefit programs that require staff members to be knowledgeable about Applied Behavior Analysis or Discrete Trial Training requirements. There may need to be a specified amount of time spent in orienting new staff members to the programs associated with specific students. It would be helpful to have the BCBA conduct a review training program that would familiarize staff members with “how to implement discrete trials” and “how to take and interpret the required data.”

**3. In an IEP review, once it has been determined that a child is eligible for the ESY summer program, specific services and dates for the program should be written into the Service Delivery portion of the IEP.**

**Explanation:**

- Currently, ESY services are documented in the Scheduled Modification and Additional Information portions of the IEP. However, the Service Delivery page does not articulate the specific services that will be provided during the summer. Requirements for the ESY program services may not be the same as the services that a student requires during the school year.

- Although it appears that the current documentation is all that is required for circuit breaker reimbursement, the requirements may change and impact potential funds that the district could receive.

**4. Consideration needs to be given to matching the skills of the paraprofessionals to specific ESY services, and to renewing the assignments of these paraprofessionals on an annual basis.**

**Explanation:**

- The district should be very proud of the continued interest by the ESY staff members to reapply, annually, to work in the ESY program. Paraprofessionals are vital to the success of the students’ experiences during the ESY program period. These staff members provide an additional strength

element to the program. It would be beneficial to the students and the program if a rating scale or an evaluation process was created that highlighted the strengths of these service providers so that they could be allied to specific programs within the ESY service model.

- As with the professional staff, this would ensure that the strengths of the paraprofessionals are aligned with specific program focus. Given that virtually all the staff members are reemployed annually, it would be beneficial to the various programs if the paraprofessionals are reassigned to the program to which they are most appropriately matched.

**5. Paraprofessionals need to have daily allocated time to conference with their supervising teacher.**

**Explanation:**

- Currently, paraprofessionals do not have any time, either at the beginning or end of their day, to conference with their supervising teacher. It is essential that a portion of time, perhaps fifteen to twenty minutes a day, be made available for the paraprofessionals to confer with their supervising teacher. This would allow them an opportunity to discuss the current status of the students and plan for the next day's activities with their teacher.

- This additional time, obviously, becomes a budget issue, but given the increase in the severity of the needs of students in self-contained classes, it is essential that this staff have the opportunity to conference on a daily basis.

**6. It would be beneficial to special education students enrolled in the substantially separate ESY programs if enrollment of typically developing students was increased in the ESY program.**

**Explanation:**

- Although there are typically developing students enrolled in some of the substantially separate programs, it would be of increased benefit if the number of typically developing students could be increased in all the programs. Providing appropriate role models will enhance experiences for students with special needs.

- This increase in enrollment may impact on class size and require the formulation of additional classes. This issue should be monitored very closely and dealt with, annually, based on the projected enrollment of special needs students.

- The addition of typical students would also increase tuition receipts for the ESY program and this could offset the cost of program expansion.

**7. As the number of students on the spectrum increases, consideration should be given to increasing BCBA consultation service time for the ESY program.**

**Explanation:**

- The ESY program has experienced a gradual increase in the number of students on the autism spectrum over the past several years.
- As these students remain eligible for ESY programming, and new students enter from the Early Intervention program, additional consultation time by the BCBA consultant will be required to service this increased case load.
- The BCBA consultant has been able to provide consultation to ESY staff regarding students who are not on her direct case load. This is another area that will need to be monitored carefully over the coming years as students are identified who may benefit from the services of the BCBA consultant.

## *VII. Summary*

The Director of Special Education Services requested that Walker Partnerships conduct an evaluation of the Extended School Year (ESY) Special Education Program. The administration requested this evaluation in order to obtain a status report on the operation and effectiveness of the current ESY program, address areas of programmatic needs, and provide assistance with future program development.

Through the review of documentation, on-site observation of classes, and one-on-one interviews with individuals, data was collected to formulate the Findings and the Recommendations for this report.

These Findings and Recommendations have been presented, and are supported with full explanations to assist the administration and program-based personnel in formulating an action plan(s) that will lead to more effective ESY programs for students.

Walker Partnerships recognizes and extends its appreciation to Ms. Judith Norton for all her assistance with scheduling the various activities of this program evaluation and her availability to respond to various inquiries.