

Strategic Planning and Department/Program Reviews

When is the last time your district did a review of one of the following areas to ensure maximum performance and cost effectiveness?

1- Special Education (and MTSS) Department Review

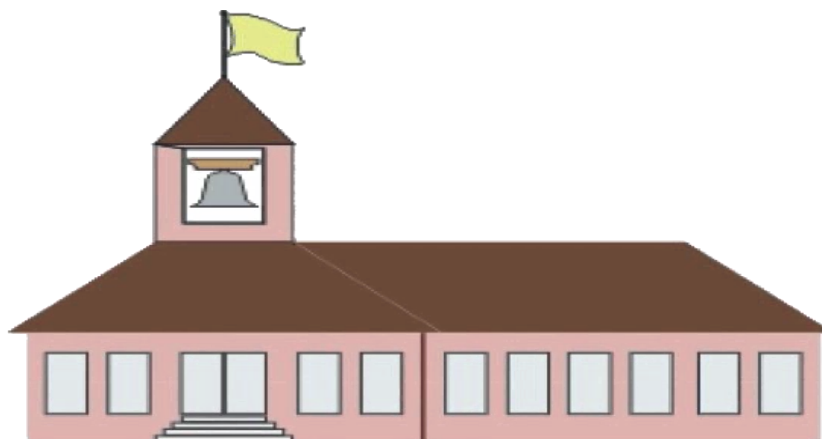
2. Strategic Planning

**3-Improve Student literacy (ELA) Skills in Classes from
PreK to 12**

**4. Educator Evaluation Audits/Reviews to Assess the
Accuracy, Quality and Consistency of the
Implementation of Your Educator Evaluation System**

5- Human Resources Department Review

**6- RISING NUMBER OF IMMIGRANT AND ML/ELL STUDENTS:
REVIEW OF YOUR DISTRICT'S OR SCHOOL'S RESPONSE TO
CHANGING STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**



1- Special Education (and MTSS) Department Review

Many districts have not had an outside review to determine if the present special education structure is the most effective for students and cost effective for the district. Districts are also looking at a more difficult budget environment. Some of the "budget stressors" are increasing special education costs that can be caused by a variety of factors.

1. Insufficient general education options for meeting the needs of struggling students such as 504s and Tiered Systems of Supports,
2. "Legacy" costs caused by the increase in special education students due to the pandemic and post pandemic student gaps,
3. Increased out of district placements that can be reexamined by reviewing present models of staffing,
4. Lack of knowledge of innovative solutions used in similar districts for closing achievement gaps for struggling students with other than putting them on and IEP.

These factors may lead to the total percentage of students on IEPs, the level of service in the IEPs, and the number of students in out of district placements having increased.

Reviews are also extremely valuable if you have a new special education or student services director starting coming to the district. Asking the new director to do a review and recommend changes can significantly impede their entry as they also develop relationships with special and general education staff.

Most special education departments are doing the best they know how. However, it might be time to have an outside look at your special education services with "a fresh set of eyes?"

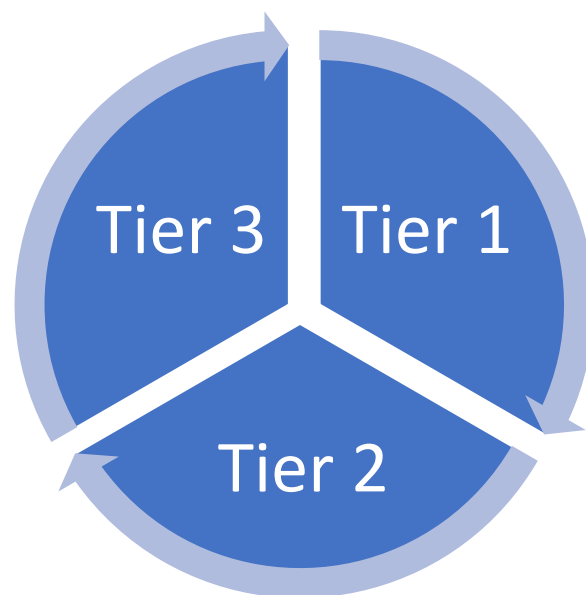
We have developed a process to review district special education programs:

1. to determine whether or not some of and IEPs need to be re-evaluated for service level and/or movement from out of district to in-district service,
2. if there are other special/general education programs and/or staffing areas that can be re-evaluated for quality and optimization of funding and student success.

Some of the questions districts are seeking to answer in reviews include the following. This is not an all-inclusive list. **During our review district specific questions are developed with the district as a first step of your personalized review.**

- What are the general education interventions currently in place in your district by grade span?
- Where are your inflection points with regard to inordinate requests for additional supports through the IEP process?
- What shifts is the district experiencing with respect to the student population that may be over burdening special education services?
- What do the 504 numbers currently look like in your district?
- What does the MTSS system look like in your district?
- What ramifications would building in-district special education and general education programs have for staffing that could lead to students on IEPs who could be serviced through general education using 504s or other general education services?
- What ramifications would building in-district special education programs have for support staff and specialists?
- What is the viability of building programs/services in your district that reduces out of district placement and/or include tuition students from other districts?
- What does the special education administration structure currently look like and can it be more efficient?
- What other instructional strategies/systems, both general and special education, are used to provide responsive and remedial instruction? Can we optimize their efficiency?

All of our reviewers are former or current directors or assistant superintendents for student services and superintendents



2. Strategic Planning

A practical approach to developing, implementing, and monitoring district priorities

Each district is unique and therefore the specific components of a plan can vary. Our consultant will assist the district in developing a plan that is specific to the district needs.

Completing a school district strategic plan begins with a thorough assessment of the district's current conditions and the meaningful involvement of its stakeholders. District leaders, with the assistance of our consultant, review student achievement data, attendance, graduation rates, enrollment trends, financial information, staffing patterns, school climate results, and other evidence that identifies strengths and areas for improvement. The process also gathers perspectives from students, families, teachers, administrators, school committee members, community organizations, and local government leaders through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and public meetings. This information helps the district clarify its mission and vision, identify the most important needs, and build broad support for the planning process.

Using the findings from the assessment, the planning team, with the assistance of our consultant, will select a limited number of high-priority goals that can guide the district over the next three to five years. Each goal will be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound, and it should be supported by clear objectives, action steps, timelines, responsible individuals or teams, required resources, and indicators of progress. The plan will address the district's major instructional and organizational priorities—such as student learning, equity, staff development, student well-being, family engagement, facilities, and financial sustainability—without becoming so broad that meaningful implementation is difficult. Before adoption, a draft will be shared publicly, revised in response to feedback, aligned with the district budget and other improvement plans, and formally approved by the school committee.

After approval, the consultant will show the district how to treat the strategic plan as an active management tool rather than a document that is filed away. Leaders should communicate the plan in clear, accessible language, assign accountability for every action step, incorporate the goals into school improvement plans and administrator evaluations, and provide the time and resources needed for implementation. Progress should be reviewed by the district at regular intervals using periodic reports that compare actual results with established benchmarks. At least annually, the district should evaluate what is working, explain any delays or obstacles, adjust strategies and timelines when evidence warrants changes, and update the community; at the end of the planning cycle, a comprehensive evaluation should inform the development of the next strategic plan.

Click here to see a sample of the steps of a strategic planning process. These steps are subject to the specific needs of the district and will be modified as needed based on prior discussion with the superintendent and/or their designates. [\[Bill and Carol, this would be a link the document Carol created when it is in final form\].](#)

3-Improve Student literacy (ELA) Skills in Classes from PreK to 12



Raising student achievement in the areas of literacy (ELA) **for all students** has proven difficult for many school districts. Some districts have found themselves being required by the DOE/DESE to swap their present programs to a set of programs that have been approved as “Research Based” but need help with selecting the best program for the district. Some districts have implemented one of these “Research Based Programs” that is improving the achievement of some students, but are finding gaps that leave other students behind. In many districts secondary teachers are being asked to integrate discipline

specific reading and writing instruction into their curriculum without the teachers receiving adequate training. These are just a few of the district needs the following programs are designed to address. **One or a combination of these programs may be what is needed to fill the gaps that are in your present literacy (ELA) teaching K-12.**

Program 1: *What To Do If Your “Researched Based” Literacy (ELA) Curriculum has Gaps That Leave Some Students Behind. Or, In Some Cases, Don’t Address Specific Essential Skills of Literacy.*

Program 2: *Learning to Embrace AI as a tool to augment, not supplant, student learning at the middle and high school levels.*

Program 3: *Teaching Discipline Specific Reading and Writing Strategies to Secondary Teachers in Math, Sciences, Physical Education, Fine Arts, Vocational and, Other Disciplines. Unlike Content Specific Literacy Strategies That Are Generalized Across Disciplines, These Strategies are Specific to Each Individual Discipline.*

Program 4: *Maximizing the Effectiveness of Your Literacy (ELA) Blocks in K and Elementary Classrooms.*

Program 5: *A Process for Adopting the Best “Research Based” Literacy (ELA) Program for Your District.*

4. Educator Evaluation Audit to Assess the Accuracy, Quality and Consistency of the Implementation of Your Educator Evaluation System

Do you systematically assess (**audit**) the accuracy, quality, and consistency of feedback administrators in your district provide teachers and SIS?

Do you have hard data that shows which evaluators give the most (or least) effective feedback in supervision and evaluation documents and target coaching based on performance?

Did you (will you) start work this year as a Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent in a new district and would like an independent review of the effectiveness and consistency of the educator evaluation feedback provided in your new district?

Did you need to R.I.F. more effective educators rather than less effective educators because the evaluation ratings of lower performers were inflated?

"Within three years of being trained, most evaluators stop using 80% of what they learned and revert back to previous practice unless district structures such as audits are implemented."

Different districts are at different places with their evaluators' accuracy and consistency. We have seen this in the over 175 cities and towns we have worked with on supervision and educator evaluation over the past 23 years.

Consistent and effective educator supervision and evaluation feedback is one of the most powerful tools Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents have to make significant positive change in the achievement and development of every student. We provide educator evaluation **audits** that provide hard data about the **quality and consistency** of the feedback given by each evaluator in the district.

Even in districts that have the in-house expertise, an outside **and unbiased audit** can unlock the information to ensure a supervision and evaluation system that maximizes student growth and achievement.

Research indicates that lack of a robust audit of the evaluators' work will result in the gradual decline back to previously ineffective or less effective practices. Lack of contract compliance, inconsistent ratings among evaluators, grade inflation, and unduly harsh evaluations are just some of the issues that can arise. These issues often result in teacher/school clinician and union frustration and may lead to litigation based on the inconsistent application of practices and ratings.

This audit is designed to maintain the quality control and consistency of the supervision, evaluation, and development program over the long term. An important part of this process is setting up an assessment program of the evaluators' work. In brief, the audit evaluates the "output" produced by the evaluators against exemplars and performance criteria. These exemplars and performance criteria are typically derived from previous training. Ribas Associates has sample exemplars and criteria districts may use for the audit. Some districts use audit data as evidence in the evaluation of administrators.

Reporting: Each assessed evaluator receives a report indicating his or her level of performance on each of the criteria for effective observation feedback, artifact review feedback, formative assessments, formative evaluations, summative evaluations, directed growth plans and improvement plans. The superintendent receives a composite report of the performance of all assessed administrators. The evaluator of each assessed administrator receives a report that is part of the evidence used in that administrator's evaluation.



Targeted Training and Coaching

Districts will, typically, then provide targeted training and/or coaching for those administrators identified in the audit with areas for improvement. This “differentiated” professional development ensures that people are only required to participate in individual or small group training and coaching specifically

designed for their need. This reduces the amount of time that administrators need to be away from their buildings or departments for unnecessary training.

Districts may choose to have the Ribas Associate consultant complete the audit or have a Ribas Associates consultant train an in-district auditor.

5. Human Resources Department Review Evaluation

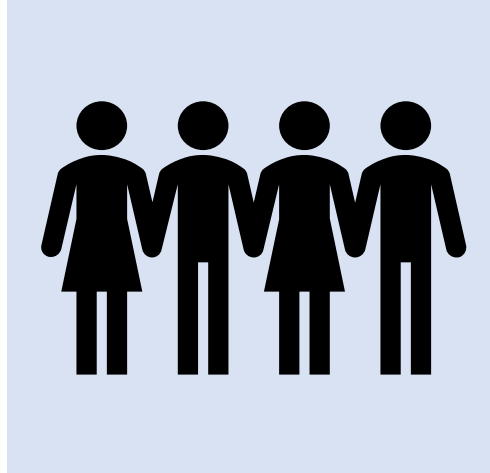
Human Resources (a.k.a. human capital) functions in public schools vary significantly from district to district. Some Assistant Superintendent level departments are responsible for all collective bargaining, managing "bumping" rights, supervision and evaluation, discipline and dismissal, medical and ADA management, MCAD complaint management, sexual and other harassment management, and recruitment, hiring, **and retention** of professional and paraprofessional staff. In some districts the head of human resources is only responsible for recruitment and hiring. And, in some districts, there is no human resources administrator at all (the functions are performed by an administrative assistant or delegated to the Town HR office) putting extra responsibilities for the functions above on the superintendent and assistant superintendent. This is **at a time when the HR functions are more complex and critical than ever before** thus requiring new and creative solutions.

Teaching and learning administrators, building administrators, and school finance administrators all have Masters degrees and more advanced degrees that specialize in these areas affiliated with colleges and universities. There are no such degree programs for school human resource management. As result, the successful completion of the assigned functions and the efficiency of the human resources departments vary widely from district to district.

Increasing the Effectiveness and Efficiency of Your Human Resources/Capital

Department: Ribas Associates has former Assistant Superintendents for Human Resources and Superintendents who can review the functions of your human/capital resources department and generate a list of strengths and recommendations for increasing its efficiency and effectiveness.

Restructuring A Human Resources Department if Needed: If you are considering restructuring the department our experts in school human resources can help you develop a plan. The plan is designed to take you from where your HR department is now, to where you want it to be going forward



6- Program Review (With Staff Support Recommendations) of Your District's or School's Response to Changing Student Demographics Due to an Influx of Immigrant and/or ELL/ML Students

Many districts are struggling in one or more schools with language and cultural barriers to student success as districts are experiencing either:

1. a large influx of immigrants speaking multiple languages and coming from unfamiliar cultural backgrounds: After many years of receiving a predictable enrollment of students from Latin America (including Brazil), economic and political troubles in the middle east, Africa, Haiti, China (31,000 Chinese immigrated illegally through Mexico in 2023), Central America, and Southeast Asia has increased the number of students from an array languages and cultures. Some of these languages and cultures are new to the teachers, school clinicians, and administrators in some district schools.
2. the shift of ELL/ML families from "gateway" communities to other nearby communities. Often immigrant families arrive in and originally settle in gateway communities. After 1,2, or more years they move to districts outside of the gateway communities. For example, one district with whom we worked saw their Latinx population increase from 5% to 19% as families who immigrated a year or more ago moved to the district from two gateway communities.
3. in some cases districts are facing both 1 and 2

Boston Globe Article: Massachusetts High Schools Struggle to Serve Immigrant Students as the Population has Tripled over the last 15 years, Report Finds- in

2022 5600 immigrant students enrolled in MA High Schools (the report only addressed high schools). 2023 figures are not yet available but are expected to increase significantly over 2022.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/11/16/metro/migrant-student-massachusetts-high-schools-tripled/>

Every district or school review varies based on the needs articulated by the district, the district's present programs, and the student demographics of the district.

Methodology

Part 1: Developing a Review Process That Meets the Specific Needs of Your District or School

The consultant works with an advisory committee designated by the Superintendent (not more than 4 people one of whom is appointed to be the advisory committee chair). The group has the following tasks:

1. Provide the consultant the information about the cultural and/or language groups that are within the district/school,
2. Develop with the consultant a list of the information the district would like the reviewer to obtain or struggles district staff may be facing,
3. Provide the consultant feedback on the draft interview protocol/survey for the focus groups or an online survey,
4. Once the protocol/survey is completed, Dr. Ramos will have it translated into the various languages using translation software.
5. The district/advisory committee will identify a staff member who is able to attend and translate at a focus group discussion in a language other than Spanish or English. Use of parents/caregivers is discouraged for confidentiality reasons. In exceptional circumstances the district may need to pay for translation services for a focus group.

Part 2: Focus Groups

Focus group members are jointly decided by the consultant and the chair of the advisory committee. Each focus group typically meets for 45 minutes and is scheduled with 15 minutes between each group in case a group runs over time. Focus groups should not exceed 9 participants to ensure all participants have an opportunity to speak. Dr. Ramos can complete 7 focus groups in a day.

Examples of Focus Groups can include:

- Directors of Student Services, ELL and Special Education, Homeless and/or Parent/Caregiver Liaison (1 group)
- Instructional Leadership Team from the office of Teaching and Learning Such as Academic Department Supervisors or others (1 group)
- Principals from impacted schools
- A group of parents/care givers for each cultural/language demographic (number of groups TBD)
- A group of teachers and/or school clinicians for each grade level (elementary, middle, high-a total of 3 groups)
- Two groups of students from each demographic (one elementary and one secondary). Some districts may choose to break the secondary into two groups (middle and high). For single school reviews one group from each demographic is sufficient.

Focus groups are asked a few similar questions for comparison purposes. Participants will be given a written copy of the protocol questions in their primary language. Participation is voluntary and confidential. The consultant does not write any names or descriptive information about individual participants in the report. Any direct quotes used in the report will be done with the permission of the participant.

Part 3: Report

1. After the interviews are completed, the consultant will hold a Zoom meeting with the advisory committee. At that meeting the consultant will give an overview of the information obtained in the focus groups. The advisory committee will keep all findings and discussions confidential. When there is a completed report, the advisory committee agrees to maintain confidentiality and that only the Superintendent will determine what, how and when to release information.
2. After that meeting the consultant will draft a report for the superintendent. The draft report will go to the superintendent and the advisory committee for comment.
3. The report will be finalized and sent to the superintendent.

Part 4 (optional): The district may request the consultant to attend a school committee or other group meeting when the report may be presented. The district will be charged for the additional time Dr. Ramos needs to prepare for and attend the meeting.

Ribas Associates and Publications Inc. 596 Pleasant Street Norwood, MA. 781-551-9120 ribasassociates.com wribas@ribasassociates.com



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