

POTTSTOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Response to Instruction & Intervention: “Early Intervening” services; Data-based and research-based decision-making ; Continuous progress monitoring; Intervention Specialists & Instructional Coaches; Reduction in referrals and identification for special education

Co-teaching : Providing high levels of inclusion/ Least Restrictive Environment; access to and success in regular curriculum for *all students*.

Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness – community-based school readiness initiative, facilitated by PSD, in cooperation with local childcare providers (13 sites, over 600 children, including 126 PA PreK Counts slots in 7 classrooms.)

AYP: All 7 school buildings made AYP last year; (Title I Recognition for Lincoln for spec ed proficiency)

Pottstown Demographics

Free/Reduced Lunch - is 58% increased approximately 15% over 8 years

Tax base - decreased almost \$17 million dollars in assessed value from 2006-07 to 2009-10,

In one year the decrease was almost \$9 million.

Transiency – 40% (~30% external with ~10% internal)

Special education students: 611 (approx 20% of students)

Since 2000, percentage of severely disabled has risen from 14.5% to 22.1%

Total Special Education costs (2008-09): \$11.5 million

Tuition costs alone = over \$3 million

Average cost per special education student: \$13,515 in-district/\$25,216 out-of-district, with an average for all special education students of \$15,210.

Severely disabled: 6 students cost over \$75,000 / 9 students \$50-75,000 / 40 students \$25-50,000
These 55 students require over \$2 million dollars to support.

In-district programs: LS, LSS, ES, AUS, Speech, and new partnership program SBP – 40 spec ed teachers

District-employed OTs, speech, psychologists. Contracted behavior specialists, 1:1 nurses, IU services for vision and hearing services.

Identified Problems

Inequitable funding – based on general enrollment alone, it does not address actual demographics and other variables in a district like Pottstown – has resulted in local funding sources having to contribute approximately \$1 million. As the cost of providing special education has risen, federal and state funding has not kept pace. Since 2006, the cost of Special Education to our District has increased 15.74%, while State subsidies have only increased by 10.88%.

Contingency funding – current allowance does not address actual needs in terms of numbers of severely disabled. (Max set at \$150,000 in 2007.)

ACCESS billing – does not support early intervening through RTII model – cannot bill for services to groups over 4 – so push-in, RTII, and reduced identifications have significantly reduced the amount that can be recouped through MA. Our claims for speech and OT services are down by 50% - amounting to \$37,000 lost in funds through this source.

Innumerable mandates from PDE - ex. 60 calendar days, 2-year re-eval for APS placements, 3-yr re-eval for identified non-pub students, re-eval for every change of placement & change in level of intervention, restraint reporting, Compliance Monitoring, State Plan

Placements for severely impaired - difficult to obtain and expensive. APS/4010 slots are rarely available, and programming/services at APS have become poor. In addition, IU placements are very costly.

Outlook

Special education and its concomitant regulations and mandates are one major force that is crippling Pottstown School District – fiscally and functionally.

Currently doubtful that Pottstown will have financial resources to support and continue the advances we have seen in the past two years – specifically: need a research-based core reading program and instructional coaches, both of which are crucial elements in maintaining efforts like RTII. These efforts have just begun to reduce the numbers of identified special education students *and* promote higher achievement for *all* students.

The cost of providing what is required by PDE is ultimately a disservice to disabled and nondisabled students, as Pottstown and other districts like us are unable to provide opportunities on par with districts who are better funded and who serve students and families who present with fewer risk factors associated with poverty.

We are asking that changes be made in funding allocations and regulations, to alleviate the burden that school districts bear, and to ensure that all students, no matter what district they live in, have an equal educational opportunity.