



# **SPECIAL EDUCATION UPDATE**

## **Board of Education Presentation**

**December 21, 2015**

# Key Points

I. The State of Special Education in SOMSD

II. Recommendations/ Best Practices

III. Budgetary Implications

Appendix: Recurring Themes in NJ Special  
Education

# **I. The State of Special Education in SOMSD**

# SOMSD's Vision for Special Services

SOMSD's Department of Special Education Services seeks to break down the historical and perceived silos of special education and general education, and to use and employ all available resources to improve the service delivery and effectiveness of programs for all students.

The goal and vision for all students, and in particular for students with disabilities, is to provide a supportive academic, social, and emotional environment that will provide students the skills needed to sustain an independent adult life to the maximum extent possible.

# Referrals for Evaluation for Services

Referrals have increased significantly during 2015-2016:

As of	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Dec. 15	144	140	204
End of Year	321	333	TBD

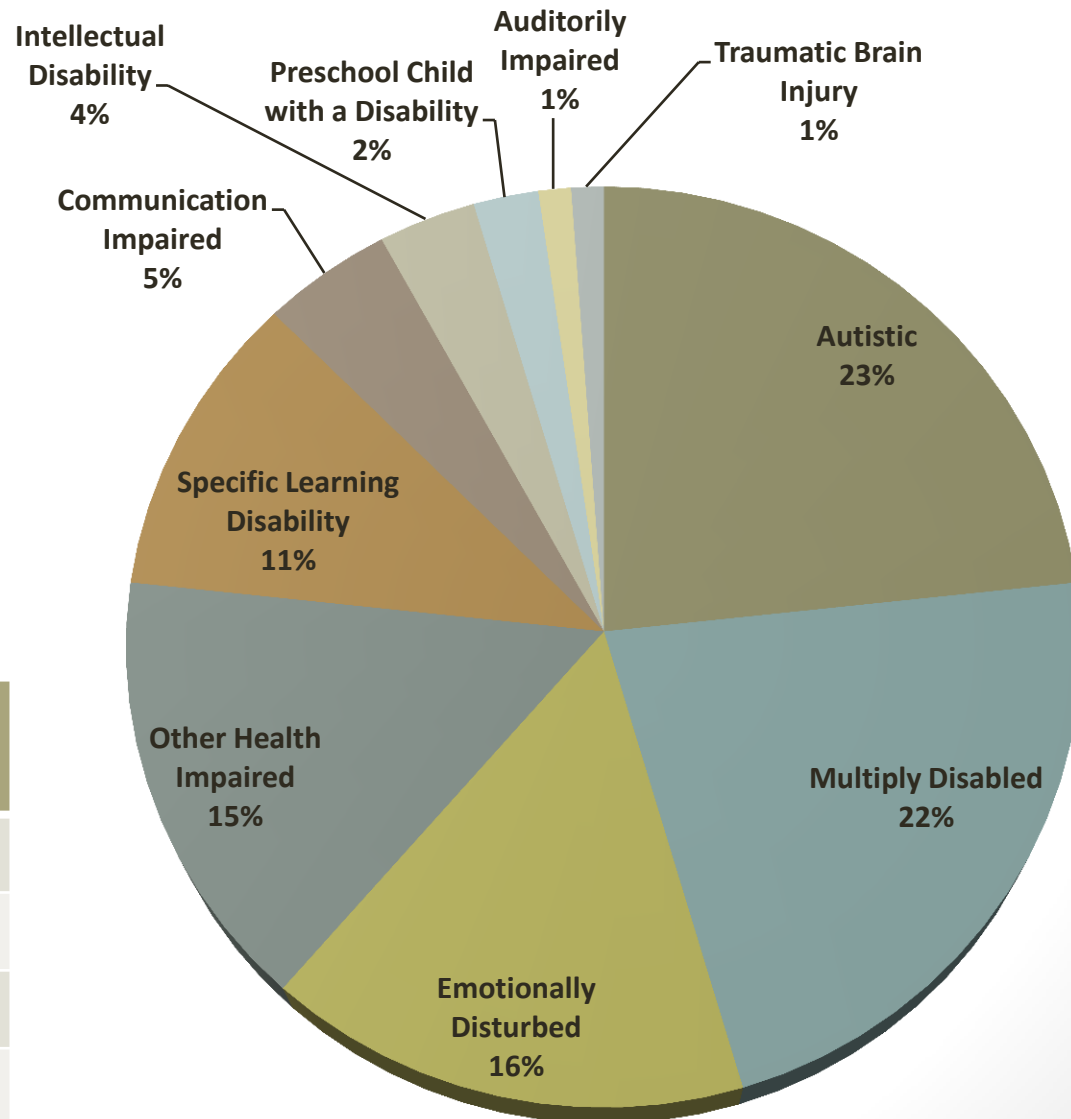
- At the current rate, 400 students may be referred for a Child Study Team (CST) evaluation by June 2016.
- Trends for 2<sup>nd</sup> Half of Year:
  - High rates of referrals in the spring.
  - Rolling enrollment for Pre K students.
- May need to add additional hours for CST teams during the summer of 2016 given large number of referral requests for families moving into the District.

# Placement [as per the ASSA, October 15 count for three years]

School Year	In-District	Out of District	Total
2015-2016	779	171	950
2014-2015	775 (11.3%)	159	934
2013-2014	772 (11.3%)	142	914

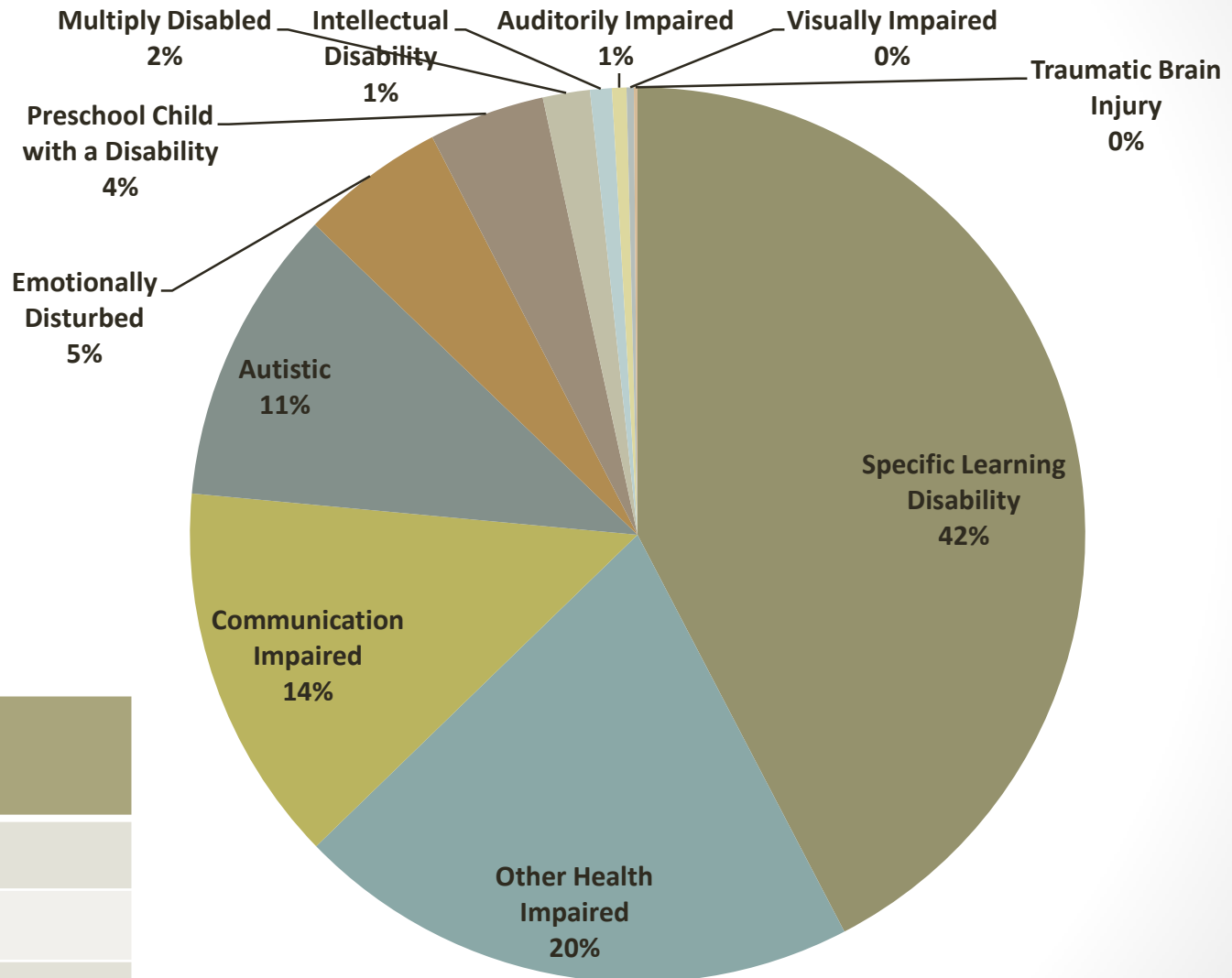
Case managers (child study team members) are reviewing OOD placements to explore and create in-district, multi-tiered options for student support.

# Classification Categories - OOD



Grade Range	#
Pre-K	6
K-5	40
6-8	47
9-12	81

# Classification Categories – In District



Grade Range	#
Pre-K	33
K-5	274
6-8	243
9-12	229



# **II. Recommendations/ Best Practices**

# Preschool

The opening of the Montrose Early Childhood Center(MECC) has allowed the SOMSD to address the following:

- Responsibility for students eligible for special education services at the pre-K level. This number is difficult to predict given the open enrollment policies for this population.
- Information regarding best practices for students who are from economically disadvantaged homes, support the importance of having a quality pre-K experience .
- Enrollment is currently at 61; daily telephone calls inquiring about the MECC indicate that there will be an increase in enrollment numbers for the '16 –'17 school year.

# Elementary

## **Program options for 2015-2016 include:**

- In- class support/ In- class replacement programs in all elementary buildings.
- There are five self-contained classes located in three elementary buildings.

## **Program suggestions for 2016 – 2017:**

- Additional program options may include a hybrid program for students who may need intensive reading, writing, and/or mathematics support.
- The need for therapeutic support has been identified at the elementary level for students at the K-2 level and/or the 3-5 grade level.
- There is a need to address students who may need support for executive functioning skills.

# Secondary

## **Program options for 2015-2016 include:**

- In- class support/ In- class replacement programs in all 3 schools.
- Therapy program (ISTEP) offered at MMS.
- Multiple Disabilities program at SOMS.
- Therapy (Effective School Solutions) and a Multiple Disabilities program at CHS.

## **Program suggestions for 2016 – 2017:**

- Therapy program (ISTEP ) at SOMS and MMS.
- Executive Functioning cohort at SOMS, MMS, and CHS.
- One period of resource room support at SOMS, MMS, and CHS.

# Communications

Communications are a high priority for the department, and it was at the SOMSD Education Summit. The department is working to improve in this area by doing the following:

- Continue regularly scheduled meetings that are held with SEPAC and the Special Education PTO at the building and district levels.
- The Department of Special Services held a new “Back to School Night” Event this Fall 2015 for parents to meet all district CST members, Speech therapists, and building Social Workers.
- New email alerts to OOD student families from both the district and their district home school. This service should be available districtwide by January 4, 2016.
- Parents of students with IEPs, should contact the Department of Special Education Services if they are not receiving notices to confirm and / or update their email address and telephone number.

# Transitions to Adult Life

There is growing recognition of the importance of transition services that are available to students who receive special education and related services. These services help students reflect on what is needed for them succeed in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living.

- Students with IEPs who are pursuing college after high school should work with their guidance counselors in conjunction with their case-managers to discuss college options and support after graduation.
- SOMSD is in the process of expanding our transition options to adult life services for students who are not interested in pursuing college. Regular meetings with the transition coordinator and with the case-manger are scheduled help students consider and to explore job sampling and vocational opportunities.

# **III. Budgetary Implications**

## **Possible budget impact for '16 – '17 program implementations :**

- Two additional classrooms needed at Montrose (based on enrollment)
- One additional elementary teacher.
- Two additional teachers at CHS.
- One additional CST psychologist to provide therapeutic support at SOMS.
- One additional LDTC to complete the additional educational evaluations at the current referral rate.
- One additional school social worker to support therapy programs and restorative justice practices at the elementary level.

### **Total of Eight additional special educational staff.**

By providing these multi-tiered program options, the Department of Special Education services will support more students in-district and will explore the possibility of returning students to district.



# Appendix

# NJ Task Force on Improving Special Education

The *New Jersey Task Force on Improving Special Education for Public School Students* issued a report in August 2015 after studying “issues associated with improving the funding, delivery and effectiveness of special education programs and services for public school students:”

- Evaluation of practices for classifying and educating students who are eligible for special education programs and services;
- Development of best practices for education professionals working with special education students;
- Strategies to reduce the costs associated with the placement of eligible students in out-of-district public schools or private schools, including the development of in-district special education programs and services; and
- Development of standards and appropriate oversight to ensure that programs and services address the needs of students, focus on student achievement, and assess the effectiveness of programs and services.

# II. Recurring Themes in NJ Special Education

## Complexity

- Due to the range of placements from the general education classroom to out- of- district in public or private schools for students' eligible for special education and related services, add to the complexity of special education.
- SOMSD is gathering data on OOD placements. We must ensure that OOD students, who are eligibility for special education services, are appropriately placed in schools that are NJ certificated schools for students with disabilities.

## Early Identification and Remediation of Reading Disabilities

- SOMSD is in year four of providing support for all students who are identified as needing remediation due to a reading disability. This was a collaborative effort on the part of general education and special education. Funding for materials and teaching staff was also provided through the department of special education and the department of curriculum and instruction.
- Recent on line training was provided in each of the elementary buildings for teacher; learning disabilities teacher consultants (LDTs) and speech therapists viewed the training together for open discussion and understanding of the identification of Reading Disabilities, specifically Dyslexia, and best practices for support services.

## Least Restrictive Environment

- The SOMSD recognizes the importance of interactions with in general education programs. It is the intent of the district to continue training on the 'mindset' of all educators (Administrators, Teachers, CST, Therapists, Paraprofessionals, Custodians, Lunch and Bus Monitors, etc.) in inclusive environments based on the 'individual' student needs.
- The LRE is the least restrictive environment based on the individual students. (Clarification on this subject will be addressed later in recommendations)

## Multi- Tiered System of Supports

- **Special Education is not a place.** The Task Force recognized that there are distinct silos between general education and special education that contribute to the thinking of special education as a “place” where students go rather than an effective system of supports that help students succeed. Many of the changes recommended by the NJ Task Force require general education initiatives.
- The SOMSD has several options for student support at the district level and in OOD placements. The Department of Special Education Services is working with administration, teachers, CST, and parents to identify more comprehensive, multi-tiered supports at the building and district level. (Clarification on this subject will be addressed later in recommendations)

## Partnerships

- The Task Force and the SOMSD recognizes that children benefit most when the educational system forms a partnership with parents, students, teachers, related service professionals, and school administrators.