

**Educational Consultant Report
On Special Education Programs**

Created for Pittsgrove Public Schools

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I. Introduction

The author was retained by the Pittsgrove Board of Education to perform an evaluation and analysis of the District's special education program. This report analyzes (1) the relationship between the special education teacher and the general education teacher, (2) the functionality of the Child Study Team ("CST"), (3) student placement out-of-district and on home instruction, and (4) the development and administration of I&RS and Basic Skills support, 504 plans and IEPs.

The author interviewed school-based personnel, including but not limited to, district-level administrators, building principals, special education teachers, general education teachers, and CST members. The author also interviewed various parents as well as participated in a meeting of the Pittsgrove Special Education Parent Advisory Committee. Finally, the author conducted a review of sampling of the District's 504 plans and IEPs. In total, the author reviewed no less than 60 IEPs, 11 of which began as 504 Plans. The author also reviewed a sampling of supporting documentation, such as meeting notices, eligibility statements, and evaluation plans.

The author covered the following topics with the Administrators:

1. Observations
2. Professional Development
3. Out of District Placements
4. Coordination between general education teachers and special education teachers

With regard to the Child Study Team, the author discussed a variety of topics including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Early Intervention services and Pre-School Disabled programs
2. Out of District placements
3. Socialization and generalization opportunities
4. Communication with parents and caregivers
5. Compliant testing and report issuance
6. Role of IEP meeting participants

Lastly, with regard to the parents, the author discussed the accommodations and modifications provided to their children as well as their participation in IEP meetings. In addition, the author discussed student participation in school activities.

The author found that, for the most part, the District's special education program is effective in ensuring that students with disabilities have been provided a free and appropriate public education and are making progress commensurate with their abilities. The author also

found that the District was compliant with regard to state and federal procedural requirements in this area.

Pittsgrove Public Schools, located in rural Salem County, is an excellent school district. From the Superintendent to the student body, there is caring and desire to grow. Pittsgrove educators comprise a community of hard working people, who have the best interests of their students at heart. Efforts in the following areas are to be commended:

- The Board of Education's willingness to reflect on the needs of the District's students
- The Administration's consistent implementation of sound policies and procedures
- The Child Study Team and Teachers' preparation of meaningful and appropriate IEPs
- The Child Study Team's innovations around reporting and organization (e.g., color coding evaluation reports)
- The Special Education Parent Advisory Committee's selection of informed parent educators
- The Child Study Team's compliance with substantive IEP development and associated timelines
- The Administration's provision of I&RS support to general education students in every building
- The creation of a Life Skills program for High School students
- The District's adherence to the IDEA and Section 504 of The Americans with Disabilities Act

II. Meetings with School Personnel

The author met with the Supervisor of Special Services, as well as the Superintendent of Schools and building principals to discuss the District's program.

A. Meetings with General Education Teachers

The author met with a sampling of general education teachers from the various schools. As more and more there is an emphasis on keeping children with special needs in their neighborhood schools and maximizing their exposure to non-disabled peers within that setting, the challenge is to build collaborative relationships between general educators and special educators servicing the same classroom.

General education teachers traditionally have placed emphasis on quiet classrooms and halls, such that the often "disruptive" presence of students with special needs can be a cause for concern. General education teachers generally express concern that they may be penalized in some manner for the relatively slower progress made by their students with special needs. This oftentimes creates friction between general education and special education. Therefore, a successful school environment requires a melding of special and general education wherein the two work collaboratively and seamlessly for the betterment of all students.

Based upon the author's observations and discussions with the general education teachers, co-teaching is not occurring on a daily basis. General education teachers should receive focused professional development as to their role in the special education/general education partnership. Co-teaching should occur on a daily basis as a consistent means of instruction, not an intermittent strategy. It should permeate the school and classroom cultures. A collaborative culture will require significant professional development and time to establish. Currently, this is not being done consistently in Pittsgrove.

Pittsgrove's students would benefit from establishing a policy and practice wherein every teacher working with a student has access to and reviews the pertinent portions of the student's IEP. This is not being done consistently. While the author's review revealed that the special and general education teachers had knowledge of each student's IEP, some teachers of non-academic courses -- referred to as "specials" (e.g., Art, Music, and Physical Education) -- were less familiar with the content of their students' IEPs. In order to ensure that every teacher has consistent access to students' IEPs, the Child Study Team should provide separate copies of the IEPs, or pertinent parts of each IEP, for each "specials" teacher at the start of the school year. It is recommended that each teacher sign-off on his/her receipt and review of the document.

B. Meeting with Special Education Teachers

Special Education teachers not only provide services for students with IEPs in the special education setting, they also provide support to special education students in the general education setting. As such, special education teachers and general education teachers need to ensure that there is constant communication and collaboration between them.

An analysis of the relationship between the general education and special education teachers in Pittsgrove suggested that additional steps could be taken to enhance communication and collaboration. One example would be for the general education teacher and special education teacher to meet at the start of the school year to discuss their individual needs and approaches. The author also recommends that the District arrange for professional development with the purpose of having the Special Education and General Education teachers learn different approaches to co-teaching. Sample co-teaching methods and explanations are attached hereto as Appendix C.

In addition, during the author's meetings, special and general education teachers both shared concerns about the amount of time they are given to collaborate regarding particular students. The consistent message was that there is insufficient time during the schedule to collaborate. At the Middle School level, the author recommends that special education teachers begin attending the general education teachers' weekly team meetings. Additionally, current schedules limit opportunities for the two to meet to ensure that meaningful collaboration is taking place. The author suggests that at least half an hour per day be allotted for co-teachers to discuss their students. These meetings may also occur via appointment. They should be strongly encouraged and supported by administration.

These meetings must also include discussion and collaboration on implementation of behavior plans for those students who have such plans in their IEPs. If a specific child has a behavior plan, the special education teacher and general education teacher should meet to discuss, at a minimum, the following: (1) who is responsible for enforcing which aspects of the plan; (2) who will collect data; (3) who will prepare behavior contracts; and (4) who will develop the reward or point systems, or other means of encouraging replacement behaviors. The teachers must then be given an opportunity to collaborate on what is and what is not working with each specific student. By way of example only, a particular technique that seems to be working in the main classroom, may not work in art or gym. The various teachers must have a regular opportunity to collaborate in order to ensure consistent application and effectiveness of the behavior plan across multiple environments. In order for the behavior plan to be effective, any adults working with the student must be made aware of the plan, so that enforcement and application is consistent.

The District should also ensure that teachers of behavior disabilities classrooms have current Crisis Prevention Intervention certificates. The author did not see evidence of this during the evaluation. In fact, one teacher advised that her certificate had expired. Training in this area is critical for the safety of students.

The author discourages the use of aversive measures with students exhibiting behavior problems and commends Pittsgrove for utilizing Positive Behavior Support techniques.

The author noted during interviews that general education teachers reported regularly providing large group instruction, while the special education teacher circulated the room to work with small groups and individual students. The special education teachers should work with the general education teachers to increase their use of small group instruction and "centers" based learning throughout the day. The students should be broken up into several small groups and both the general and special education teacher should work with the groups individually, so that teachers have greater awareness of students' depth of understanding and more opportunity to provide individualized instruction. Small groups also allow special education students to receive more individualized and direct instruction without being subject to undue attention from their general education peers. It also permits enhanced learning peer-to-peer, a benefit for both the special education and general education students.

General education teachers could also benefit from special education teachers' support with homework modification. The general education teachers in Pittsgrove expressed concern that the special education students were not finishing their homework. Special education teachers as well as the administration can assist by reiterating to general education teachers the purpose of homework: to practice skills that have already been taught. The special education teacher may also help with, and should be consulting when, determining how much homework would be appropriate for each student with special needs to complete. Homework duration should also be addressed collaboratively between general education and special education teachers. For instance, if the general education teacher desires that 20 minutes of homework be completed, the special education teacher should create alternate assignments that review the focus skill but is designed to take the student 20 minutes. Homework is an area of great frustration for many parents of students with special needs. Implementing this recommendation will also assist the home-school relationship.

C. Child Study Team

A Child Study Team (or CST) is a multidisciplinary group of professionals employed by the Pittsgrove Board of Education to provide students, parents, and teachers with a variety of special education services. These include consultative, evaluative, and prescriptive services for students who are experiencing academic difficulties as a result of a disability. Pittsgrove's Child Study Team consists of a School Psychologist, a Learning Disabilities Teacher-Consultant, and a Social Worker as prescribed by regulation.

The CST is currently housed in an administrative building. This arrangement lessens the amount of time team members are spending with students. It is strongly recommended that team members be housed in the buildings to which their assigned students are located. Since CST members in Pittsgrove have been assigned to students based upon grade, it should not be difficult to have team members housed in the specific school to which they are assigned. This would also allow a case manager to follow students over the course of their educational careers, strengthening their knowledge of and relationships with the students in the process.

While the author observed the CST's presence in the schools, more can be done to enhance overall connectedness. The CST should be familiar to both the students and teachers in the building. Presently, teachers and the building principals will come to the CST for advice as to how to handle specific situations. However, having the CST housed within the school will be an asset to the entire school. The CST in Pittsgrove has many very talented people on it and their strengths should be more readily utilized for improved academic and behavioral performance.

1. Roles of the Team Members

a. Director of Special Services

The Director of Special Services directs the administration and operation of the special education program in the district for students with special needs. He or she oversees the identification, classification, program development and placement of students with disabilities. In addition, he or she organizes and administers related-services services within the district and develops and manages the special education budget. The Director also facilitates the development and implementation of the special education curriculum.

b. Psychologist

The primary role of the psychologist is to assess students' developmental and cognitive abilities. In addition, the psychologist also assesses and monitors students' emotional status to ascertain any factors, which may affect behavior and academic performance. Although the author did not directly observe this in Pittsgrove, in certain situations, the psychologist may also provide counseling services and mentoring for students struggling with a combination of social, emotional, and behavioral problems.

c. Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant

The Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant (LDT-C) is a certified teacher with a graduate level specialization in Learning Disabilities. The LDT-C is trained to identify the learning styles and to develop a customized learning plan for the student.

d. Social Worker

The primary responsibilities of the social worker are assessing the interactions of the student in relation to family, school, and community. The social worker gathers information regarding students' health, family, and academic history as it relates to the their current situation. In addition, the social worker is responsible for connecting students and their families with community resources.

2. Findings and Recommendations

In Pittsgrove, the Director of Special Services is also the District's LDT-C. Given the weighty obligations of the Director position, a dual appointment as an LDT-C will be difficult to sustain successfully in the long-term. Moreover, as the Director, she is responsible for supervising all members of the CST. At the same time, as the LDT-C, she is a member of the CST who is charged with providing suggestions to other team members and to whom teachers can come to for assistance. As such, it is possible that a dual role can present a conflict. In addition, providing recommendations for improvement could become subjective rather than objective.

This item was not addressed in the author's original budget concerns, but the author would strongly recommend that Pittsgrove consider hiring a separate LDT-C in the future, even if it is as a part-time position.

III. Meeting with Special Education Parent Advisory Committee

The author participated in a meeting with the Special Education Parent Advisory Committee. According to New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:14-1.2(h) "Each board of education shall ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place in the district to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with disabilities."

The author commends Pittsgrove on its Special Education Parent Advisory Committee. A flier went home advertising the date of the meeting. For those who were unable to make the meeting, the Director of Special Services prepared a conference/speaker line. This was an excellent strategy for ensuring parent participation. The content of the meeting was on point: The Center for Autism – Resources for Independent Living. Some of the topics addressed were as follows:

- Transition
- School
- Insurance
- Housing
- Lego Therapy
- Equine Therapy
- Play Therapy

During the meeting, the author inquired as to how Pittsgrove ensures that special education students become involved in activities with typical peers. Students of all ages perform better academically when they can engage with appropriate role models (e.g., advisory groups). While this does occur during the school day, budgetary restrictions have prevented implementation of after-school activities where these engagements might continue. In the future, if the budget permits, it is recommended that Pittsgrove increase its after-school offerings.

Upon completion of the meeting, the author created a checklist for parents and CSTs to utilize during IEP meetings, which is attached as Appendices A and B.

IV. Meeting with Parents

Parents are at the forefront of their children's educations. Their presence is crucial to students' continued success. During the author's evaluation in Pittsgrove, parents were given a

number of opportunities to assemble as a group or voice any questions or concerns regarding their children's programs.

The first meeting was with the Special Education Parent Advisory Committee. It was well attended. The speakers were excellent. They provided useful information on county and community services for students with special needs.

The second meeting was facilitated by Pittsgrove's Department of Special Services. The Department of Special Services disseminated an email and a flier inviting parents to come into the CST office to speak with the author. Three parents attended this meeting. One had a child on home instruction for anxiety; one had a child on home instruction due to a medical condition; and one had a high school student who receives in-class support services. All three parents were happy with the services their children were receiving. In particular, they spoke very highly of the home instruction teacher who is a retired Pittsgrove teacher.

Because of the small number of parents who attended the second meeting, the author held a third meeting in the evening a few weeks later. Again, fliers, emails, and calls went out to invite parents to share their thoughts, observations, and experiences regarding Pittsgrove's special education services. Only two parents attended the third meeting. At that meeting, a PowerPoint entitled "Pittsgrove, K-12 School Success" was shown. Because the parent attendees were few, the participants were able to have very meaningful conversations. One parent has a high school student who receives supports in the classroom and is interested in going to the "Vo-Tech" program for Culinary Arts. The other parent had two students, an elementary student in a self-contained class, and a middle school student who receives supports in the classroom. The parents discussed in detail their children's receipt of academic supports, life skills, adapted living skills, and transition services. Both parents were extremely pleased with the services and supports their children were receiving from Pittsgrove. While the sample of parents interviewed for purposes of this report was small, the relative number of parents who participated in these three opportunities is not without significance. Indeed, when the community is dissatisfied with the services of its school district, one typically sees more attendance at such events. Pittsgrove should consider this an endorsement of its program.

Incidentally, the Department of Special Services is to be commended on the relationship it has built with the County Vocational Program. It has been the author's experience that County programs accept students in either their sophomore or junior year. Salem County is accepting Pittsgrove students in their freshman year.

Finally, the author would like to see more active parent involvement. A suggestion may be to open a booth at Pittsgrove Day and be available to answer questions. The school is the largest member of the community.

V. Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS), Basic Skills, 504 Plans and IEPs

The author conducted a review of the District's I&RS interventions, 504 Plans, and IEPs as part of the overall analysis of the special education program and related academic support services.

A. I&RS

After a review of a random sample of IEPs, the author has found that many of the classified students were first appropriately referred to the Intervention and Referral Service Team (I&RS).

When a student who is not classified is showing difficulty with academic progress, the student should be initially referred to the I&RS team in accordance with *N.J.A.C. 6A:8.1(a)(1)* and *6A:14-3.3(b)*. Many of the classified students in Pittsgrove went through the I&RS process. As such, the question becomes "Why might students who are receiving extra help and accommodations from I&RS still require classification?" The answer is two-fold. Some students have average cognitive functioning but poor performance. This is an indicator of a true learning disability. If basic accommodations are not allowing the student to make academic progress consistent with his or her cognitive functioning, classification should be considered. The other answer is the level of assistance and accommodation a student requires in a general education setting, may suggest the student needs classification.

A number of general education teachers appear to believe that special education teachers are responsible for, and should be, administering extra help, implementing modifications, and providing accommodations. Thus, classification can sometimes be driven by an erroneous belief that general education teachers are not responsible for modifying instruction or otherwise accommodating students' learning needs. However, both general education and special education teachers are required to differentiate instruction to students. This applies equally to students who are classified and to those who are not. It may take time for full acceptance of this approach to be achieved. Building principals should encourage this understanding. The author recommends that the District purchase the Pre Referral Intervention Manual (PRIM). This tool will provide specific teaching strategies to address all areas of student weakness.

B. Basic Skills

The author would like to see Pittsgrove raise the rate of graduation and students going to two or four year colleges post-graduation by ensuring students' preparation via Basic Skills, I&RS and 504 plans. Although the support services generally do not fall under the umbrella of special education, they are all connected. When a student enters Pittsgrove as a preschooler or kindergartner, he or she is evaluated. When there is a significant weakness in Math or Language Arts, the student is placed in the Basic Skills Program.

The author commends Pittsgrove on the curriculum, teaching materials, and assessments used for this group. The Dibbles Assessment and the Foundations curriculum are excellent. As the students age, the author suggests the Wilson Reading Program for those students who continue to demonstrate difficulty decoding words and a strong guided reading program to increase comprehension and understanding.

The author recommends maintaining small class sizes for this program and designating content area specialists to provide individualized instruction.

C. 504 Plans

The 504 Accommodation Plan, pursuant to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), seeks to ensure that students with disabilities have access to accommodations that will assist in improving the academic functioning of students with disabilities by facilitating equal access to public education and services.

In order to qualify for a 504 Accommodation Plan, a student must be evaluated (formally or informally) and found to have a disability. A diagnosis alone does not ensure that a student will be eligible to receive a 504 Accommodation Plan. The disability must substantially impair the student's learning or some other major life activity. Major life activities include, but are not limited to, caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, eating, sleeping, standing, lifting, bending, reading, concentrating, thinking, and communicating. This list is not exhaustive.

If the student qualifies for a 504 Accommodation, a 504 Accommodation Plan is created. The plan should specify the disability, the major life function impaired, and the accommodations needed by the student. Accommodations can consist of preferential seating, snacks or drink in the classroom (in the case of a diabetes diagnosis), extended time on tests or assignments, test modification and/or accommodation. Again, this list is not exhaustive. The list of potential accommodations is virtually without limit and can range from the seemingly insignificant, such as allowing a student to sit at the front of the classroom, to the more expensive and complex, such as an out of district placement.

Based upon the author's limited observations, Pittsgrove appears to be in compliance with the law under Section 504. However, this was not an area specifically identified in the original scope of the work.

D. IEPs

The IEP establishes every special education program for students with disabilities. It is a road map that indicates where the student is, where he/she should go, and how he/she will get there. The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) specifies minimum standards that an IEP must meet. Careful review of an IEP sampling suggests that Pittsgrove is in compliance with all requisite IEP components, which are outlined in Appendix D.

During the IEP review, the author observed that some students were receiving related-service, therapy sessions of 25 minutes in duration. The author would recommended therapy sessions of not less than 30 minutes for speech and language services, physical therapy, and occupational therapy. This is particularly the case if the therapy is provided one-on-one outside of the classroom (i.e., pull out). By the time the student gets settled in the therapy room, a 25 minute session becomes a 20 minute session. In order for the service to make an impact, it should be a minimum of 30 full minutes.

The author would like to commend the Department of Special Services for the creation of a Life Skills room and program in the High School. Although greatly needed in all districts, its actual existence is a rarity. This form of contrite, transitional learning is invaluable and students will reap its benefits for years to come.

The author would also like to commend Pittsgrove's special education staff for its compliance in including all requisite IEP components. IEPs reviewed ranged from Preschool to High School, including out-of-district placements. There were an equal number of boys and girls, and students' disabilities, needs, programs, and services varied. Not only were program development timelines honored but Pittsgrove exceeded various requirements. For example, to ensure an organized maintenance of critical evaluation reports, same were maintained on a color-coded basis:

- Pink - Learning Evaluation
- Blue - Psychological Evaluation
- Yellow - Social Evaluation/History

The use of color-coding the documents is excellent. It gives the reader the "go to" place to readily locate needed information. Most IEPs are quite comprehensive, and this allows IEP users the ability to efficiently locate needed information. This technique should be replicated elsewhere.

Through the reading of the IEPs, and speaking with staff and parents, the author learned that Pittsgrove has historically, and continues today, to engage in the practice of retaining students. This is an area of concern with particular impact on students with special needs. It is well documented that there are many negative effects of retention. One of the biggest negative effects is that students who are retained are more likely to drop out of school. It is also not an exact science. Research in this area reveals that students are more negatively impacted by school retention than they are positively impacted by it. School retention can also have a profound impact on a student's socialization. This becomes especially true for older students who have been with the same group of students for several years.

For these reasons, in lieu of retention, Pittsgrove should redouble its efforts to provide intervention and support services. With particular regard to students with special needs, a suggestion of retention should trigger a review of the student's IEP and the IEP's implementation. Program

adjustments and/or enhancements should always be considered in lieu of retention. Retention could be viewed as a failure to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education.

VI. Outsourcing of Staff

Pittsgrove currently outsources custodians, paraprofessionals (teacher assistants), and BCBA's (Board Certified Behavior Analysts). While this may be a cost effective way of employing staff, special education students who are in need of a one-to-one aide will fare better academically with the consistency of one person. Outsourced staff members should be limited to those who do not provide one-to-one support for students with special needs.

It is also recommended that Pittsgrove employ a part-time BCBA. A BCBA is an individual who has acquired a Master's degree in a human service field like Behavior Analysis or psychology. This individual must also have completed specific graduate level coursework in Behavior Analysis and must have supervised by or gained experience under someone who holds the BCBA or who is approved by the board in the application of behavior analysis over an extended period. Finally, this individual must pass an standardized examination and gain board approval. What this means is that this individual has established a minimum set of both academic and applied skills as attested via training, supervision, and examination.

BCBA's are highly valuable and highly effective in assisting students who exhibit behavioral concerns. The author observed one classroom in which four of the seven students were diagnosed with Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD). In speaking with the staff, only one child in that room has a behavior plan. Research has shown that students with ODD have a very high probability of developing Conduct Disorder later on in life – a disorder that is extremely serious and often leads to law-breaking. However, this outcome can be deterred or avoided through the implementation of behavior plans carefully designed by a BCBA. It is the author's recommendation that any child diagnosed with ODD should have a behavior plan in place.

In addition, BCBA's can be beneficial to districts in decreasing the need for out-of-district placements for students with behavioral difficulties (e.g., students commonly placed in Behavior Disabilities and Autism programs). A BCBA can assist in simultaneously effectuating the Least Restrictive Environment and lowering costs by providing appropriate behavioral supports to students in-district. The author recommends a BCBA focus on developing appropriate behavior plans for students and training staff in the implementation of the plans.

VII. Out of District Placements

In speaking with parents of students whose needs are not met in district, the parents are happy with the current placements as well as the IEP team collaborates that preceded the placement. After reviewing many IEPs written for students who are out-of-district, the author would like to commend Pittsgrove on its preparation of these documents. Eligibility meetings are held within the time limitation. Parents are appropriately notified regarding the meeting.

Required IEP meeting participants are in attendance and provide a corresponding record of their participation. If a team member cannot attend, parents are notified in writing before the meeting. Testing is thorough and developmentally appropriate. This is also the case for those IEPs reviewed for in-district students. However, it is noteworthy in this section as many districts fail to follow the proper procedures under the IDEA for their out-of-district students.

For the medically fragile students who have been placed out-of-district, the author would suggest that Pittsgrove begin the process of making the District a place where these students can be appropriately educated. For example, Pittsgrove should ensure that all buildings are handicapped accessible and ensure that all classrooms are configured to meet the students' needs (e.g., items such as handicapped bathrooms with private changing tables should be considered).

Many medically fragile students, including many of Pittsgrove's students have apraxia, a condition where they are non-verbal, but can produce utterances. The speech therapists should be trained in PROMPT, which is a multidimensional approach to speech production disorders that has come to embrace not only the well-known physical-sensory aspects of motor performance but also its cognitive-linguistic and social-emotional aspects. PROMPT is about integrating all domains and systems towards positive communication outcomes. It may be used (with varying intensity and focus) with all speech production disorders from approximately 6 months of age onward. To achieve the best outcome with PROMPT, it should not be thought of or used mainly to facilitate oral-motor skills, produce individual sounds/phonemes, or used as an articulation program. Rather, it should be used as a program to develop motor skills in language for interaction.

Additionally, speech therapists should be trained in feeding. Requirements of feeding support is often a factor in students' needs for placement out-of-district. The fear of aspiration is a real one. Many students will have an MBS test (Modified Barium Swallow) to allow the parents, speech therapist, and teachers to evaluate the aspiration risks. Some students will feed through a G-Tube but can begin the process of eating solids with appropriate support.

Lastly, the CST and special education teachers should visit out-of-district placements to begin a transition to a less restrictive setting process, where possible. There should be ongoing communication between the CST and the placement.

VIII. Home Instruction

The author's review revealed that a number of Pittsgrove students are on Home Instruction. Pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.8*, a strict protocol must be followed when placing a student on home instruction. Prior written notification that a district intends to provide home instruction shall be provided to the Department of Education through its county office. This notification shall be effective for a maximum of 60 calendar days at which time renewal of the notification may be made. Each renewal shall be for a maximum of 60 calendar days.

A written record of the student's home instruction, including dates and times during which home instruction is provided, shall be maintained, and the teacher providing instruction shall be appropriately certified as teacher of students with disabilities or for the subject or level in which the instruction is given. Instruction shall be provided for no fewer than 10 hours per week. The 10 hours of instruction per week shall be accomplished in no fewer than three visits by a certified teacher or teachers on at least three separate days. Instruction shall be provided at a location conducive to providing educational services, taking into consideration the student's disability and any unique circumstances. The parent shall be consulted in determining the appropriate location for the provision of home instruction.

Based upon the author's document review and interview with staff, it appears that Pittsgrove is in compliance with respect to the regulations governing the provision of home instruction.

Many of the students currently on home instruction have been diagnosed with anxiety and/or school phobia. These students have been given appropriate home instruction IEPs, with durations in accordance with regulation. However, there is very little evidence of any plans to transition these student from home instruction back to school. The author recommends that the CST develop written plans to gradually transition these students back to school.

The author has spoken with the Director of Special Services about visiting programs that assist school districts with the implementation of home instruction. These programs combine counseling and academic work. They also collaborate with the district to create a plan to return students to district schools. For many students with anxiety and/or school phobia, just leaving the house can be difficult. There are programs that can assist with this. They work very hard to build relationships with the students while transitioning them back to school. A student who has a solid relationship with at least one adult will do better emotionally and academically.

IX. Recommendations and Follow Up

Since every school district has room for growth, the author makes the following recommendations for making Pittsgrove a success in the years to come:

- Re-envision the policy on retention
- Relocate CSTs to school buildings
- Revisit the handicapped accessibility at Elmer School. Consider moving the trailer to a more accessible location
- Separate the Director of Special Services from the LDT-C role. Hire a part-time LDT-C
- Hire a part time Board Certified Behavior Analyst ("BCBA").
- Have BCBA prepare behavior plans for students such as those in Norma School who are diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder

- Consider using the RETHINK curriculum for students with Autism or Developmental Delay
- Ensure that all staff who teach students with behaviors are Crisis Prevention Intervention certified and certifications
- Do not outsource the one to one aides
- Gradually transition students anxiety and school phobia back to school. Visit programs that can accomplish this.
- Plan for the return of the students who are medically fragile
- Hire Speech Therapists who are trained in feeding or make feeding training available as professional development
- Hire a Speech Therapist who is trained in PROMPT or make PROMPT training available as professional development
- Schedule a Professional Development Day for the General and Special educators that are working together. Teach them the different kinds of co-teaching and what may work for them.

Final Thought

From the beginning of this project to its conclusion, the author found that Pittsgrove Public Schools is a welcoming community that is honest in its self-evaluation and open to growth. It is the author's hope that the recommendations contained in this report will facilitate continued growth.

The author would like to thank the Pittsgrove Township Board of Education, Administration, staff, and parents for the courtesies extended during this process. It was through their honest exchange that we have been able to ascertain the items that will help bring Pittsgrove Public Schools from “good-to-great” in their service of struggling students.

APPENDIX A
IEP Checklist for Parents

This checklist is designed with parents in mind. The checklist helps to ensure that the child has the most appropriate IEP possible, one that includes parent contributions. The checklist helps parents determine if the IEP puts the child's needs and strengths first.

- _____ What is an Individualized Education Plan and why does my child need one?
- _____ The assessments/evaluations used in the planning stages of the IEP were appropriate and supportive for developing an appropriate IEP.
- _____ I was informed of the IEP minutes in a timely fashion (usually within 30 days of the testing/assessment/evaluations).
- _____ The conference included all support staff and myself.
- _____ The information was presented to me in terms I fully understood and I was given the opportunity to share my thoughts and ask for clarification.
- _____ My contributions were taken into account and they provided necessary information for the IEP
- _____ I was made to feel like a valued member of the team and felt welcome.
- _____ I was given information about how to appeal any decisions regarding the IEP.
- _____ The goals were completely appropriate for my child. The goals included short and long- term objectives, the goal focus on what, how, and when my child would achieve the goals.
- _____ The IEP included specific support staff that would be involved as well as any special services needed and these services and support made fully understandable to me.
- _____ Present level of achievement

APPENDIX B
IEP Checklist for Child Study Team

This checklist is designed with the Child Study Team in mind. The checklist helps to ensure that the child has the most appropriate IEP possible, one that includes parent contributions. The checklist helps the Child Study Team determine if the IEP puts the child's needs and strengths first.

_____ Why does the child need one?

_____ The assessments/evaluations used in the planning stages of the IEP were appropriate and supportive for developing an appropriate IEP.

_____ The parents were informed of the IEP minutes in a timely fashion (usually within 30 days of the testing/assessment/evaluations).

_____ The conference included all necessary members of the IEP team, including the case manager, a general education teacher, a special education teacher, someone familiar with the evaluations, any support staff and the parents.

_____ The information was presented to the parents in terms the parents could fully understand and the parents were given the opportunity to share their thoughts and ask for clarification.

_____ The parents' concerns and contributions were taken into account by the CST and included in the IEP.

_____ The parents were made to feel like a valued member of the team.

_____ The parents were provided a draft IEP at the beginning of the meeting or before the start of the meeting. The IEP was clearly marked "DRAFT" on every page.

_____ The goals were developed with this child in mind. The goals were written in an individual manner, using the child's name, and not copied from a generic list of goals/objectives. The goals included short and long- term objectives. The goals were objective and measurable. The team asked itself "how will we measure these goals" and "how will we demonstrate mastery/progress" if called upon to do so in court.

_____ The IEP identified specific support staff that would be involved as well as any special services needed. These services and support were explained to the parents.

_____ The present level of achievement is updated following every IEP meeting. The present

level section includes the child's "present" levels and, therefore, is not the same from one year to the next.

Someone on the team has reviewed the IEP from front to back to ensure that the child's name is correct throughout, that the names of no other children appear in the IEP, and that it is correctly spelled. The IEP has been proofread for typos, grammar and spelling errors.

The parents were provided a copy of the PRISE booklet.

APPENDIX C
Co-Teaching Strategies

How are the Co-Teaching Strategies similar?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two or more co-teachers in the classroom. • Capitalizes on specific strengths & expertise of co-teachers. • Provides greater teacher/student ratio and brings additional 1-1 support for students in the classroom. • All approaches have benefits and cautions associated with their use. • Students are heterogeneously grouped with mixed abilities and interests. • Shared responsibilities. • Requires trust, communication, planning time, and coordination of effort. 			
How are the Co-Teaching Strategies different?			
Supportive Co-Teaching	Parallel Co-Teaching	Complementary Co-Teaching	Team Teaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One co-teacher is in the lead role; others provide support. Who is in lead and who provides support may change during the lesson. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-teachers work with different groups of students in the same room. (There are numerous different options for arranging the groups.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The co-teachers share responsibility for teaching the whole class. One takes a lead content role and the other facilitates access to the curriculum. This is the model that many Pittsgrove teachers use. • One co-teacher teaches content; the other clarifies, paraphrases, simplifies, or 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both co-teachers are equally responsible for planning, instruction of content, assessment, and grade assignment. • Requires the greatest amount of planning time, trust, communication, and coordination of effort.

		<p>records content.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One co-teacher may pre-teach specific study or social skills and monitors students' use of them; the other co-teacher teaches the academic content. 	
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What are potential problems with co-teaching?

Supportive Co-Teaching Cautions	Parallel Co-Teaching Cautions	Complementary Co-Teaching Cautions	Team Teaching Cautions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beware of the "Velcro effect," where a supportive co-teacher hovering over one or selected students, stigmatizing both students and the co-teacher. Beware of making the supportive co-teacher the "discipline police," materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beware of creating a special class within the class and lowering student achievement by homogeneously grouping lower performing students together. Beware that noise level can become uncomfortably high when numerous activities are occurring in the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beware of not monitoring the students who need it. Beware of too much teacher talk, repetition, and lack of student-student interaction. Beware of "typecasting" the co-teacher delivering content as the "expert" or 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beware of not monitoring the students who need it. Beware of too much teacher talk, repetition, and lack of student-student interaction.

<p>copier, or in-class paper grader rather than an instructor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beware of ineffective use of expertise of supportive co-teacher (e.g., special educator) • Beware of resentment if the skills of the supportive co-teacher (e.g., special educator) are not being used or the lead (e.g., content teacher) co-teacher feels an unequal burden of responsibility. • Beware of staying in the supportive role, due to lack of planning time. 	<p>same room.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beware of failing to adequately prepare other co-teachers to ensure they deliver instruction as intended, since you cannot monitor each other while you all are simultaneously co-teaching. 	<p>“real” teacher.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beware of failing to plan for “role release,” so all co-teachers get to teach the content 	
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APPENDIX D

Elements of an IEP

1. IEPs Must Have Statements of Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance

Every IEP must include a description of the child's skills in all areas of concern and explain how the child's disability affects his progress in the general education curriculum. Statements should address academics, life skills, physical functioning, social and behavioral skills, and any other areas of concern affecting the child's ability to learn and make meaningful progress. IEP teams (which include the Child Study Team), typically use formal assessments to determine the child's functioning and establish a baseline of performance. The team may also use anecdotal information and progress data from the child's classroom teachers to describe the child's skills. Care should be taken to update this section at every IEP meeting.

2. The IEP Must Contain Objective Measurable Goals

The IEP must contain objectives of the child's goals that are updated at least on an annual basis. Goal statements specify what the child is expected to learn in the coming year. Goals include academic skills as well as functional skills, as appropriate. These goals/objective must be objective and measurable.

For students who participate in functional skills programs, and who take alternate assessments, such as the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) or the Dynamic Learning Map (DLM), the IEP must also contain measurable short-term objectives used to measure the student's progress toward reaching his annual goals.

3. Explanation of Progress Measurement

The IEP must contain an explanation of how progress toward goals and objectives will be measured and describe how that information will be reported to parents.

4. Individual Education Programs Need a Description of Special Education Services

The IEP must include a description of the student's special education program, specially designed instruction, and related services the child will receive to help him progress toward meeting his educational goals. The amount of time he will receive services and a description of the setting.

Related services could include any or all of the following:

- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy

- Speech therapy
- ABA therapy
- Transportation
- Extended School Year (ESY)
- Parent training
- Services necessary to allow the student to participate in extracurricular activities

5. Statement of Participation in the Regular Education Program

To ensure that children are educated in the least restrictive environment to the greatest extent appropriate, the IEP team must consider if and how the child will participate in the general education program with non-disabled children. The IEP must specify the amount of time a child will participate in regular education programs and explain the rationale for that decision.

6. IEPs and Testing - Statement Describing Testing Adaptations and Modifications

The IEP must explain what types of testing adaptations and modifications are used with the student and why they are necessary. If the child will participate in an alternate assessment, the rationale for that decision must be included in the IEP.

7. Statement of Length and Duration of Services with an Explanation

The IEP must include a projected beginning and ending date of services, the frequency of the services, where they will be delivered, and for how long they will be provided.

8. IEP Statement of Transition - Preparations for Adult Life and Independence

Beginning no later than age 16, the IEP must include measurable goals for the student's anticipated postsecondary program and a description of the services needed for the child to reach those goals. Transition goals and services focus on instruction and support services needed to help the child move from the school environment into a job, advocate for himself or herself in college, vocational program, or other program designed to promote independent living.