



**Special Education and Pupil Personnel Department  
Overview & Budget Report to the Shrewsbury School Committee  
March 2022**

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The mission of the Special Education and Pupil Personnel Department is to identify students who meet the federal and state criteria for a disability requiring specialized instruction and/or accommodations through an Individualized Educational Program or 504 Accommodation Plan. It is Shrewsbury's responsibility to provide services in the least restrictive environment that will empower access to our students to become active members of society based on their individual strengths and abilities. As a district, we are committed to providing an inclusive setting of dedicated multidisciplinary teams while involving parents and community members to help meet the academic, emotional and social needs of all our students in a respectful and positive environment.

Our vision is to afford *all* students the opportunity to succeed through high quality, evidence-based practices, and we will do so by connecting and communicating with families, students, school teams, and the greater community. Together, we will focus on the positive attributes and recognize the individual strengths and achievements of our students while promoting their future successes.

Our Department continues to prioritize equity and access for all students with an emphasis on the following focus areas. This ongoing work has ensured that the Shrewsbury Public Schools continue to meet high expectations with efficient and thoughtful resources and programs to meet the needs of all learners.

1. **Inclusive Practices/Co-Teaching:** Professional development opportunities for teachers working in years 1-4 of co-teaching have been deployed again this year. Instructional coaching has been provided, which has been designed to provide classroom and special educators with an overview of current co-teaching models across all grade spans from Preschool through Grade 12. The district has over 40 teams of co-teachers. Some coaching topics include: common planning time, specially designed instruction, research-based instructional strategies, and communication/collaboration tools.
2. **Social, Emotional, Mental and Behavioral Health Collaborations:** Social emotional learning committees (district and building) along with current clinical department services (psychologists, school adjustment counselors, clinical coordinators, etc.) continue to gather data around practices, processes and interventions as the district works through an implementation plan. In addition, a subcommittee has been established this school year to select and design an implementation plan for a universal mental health screener.
3. **Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC):** The SEPAC and Special Education leadership continue to have open communication. Special Education administration, Superintendent and School Committee representatives meet on a quarterly basis. This year SEPAC will hold multiple events including: General Meeting, *Ask the Advocate*, and Turning Three Essentials.
4. **Paraprofessional Support:** Shrewsbury PS, like all employers, have been faced with the nationwide hiring crisis. Our special education leadership partners with building teams to assist in determining the level of additional support for Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) Technicians, Child Specific Aides, and Special Education Aides to ensure our students are accessing their free and appropriate public education. Due to the ongoing staffing needs, this year the leadership team has interviewed over 100 ABA Technicians and Child Specific Aides, and continues to staff the Special Education Aides to support the identified needs of our students for inclusion services.
5. **Program Evaluation:** A collaborative relationship was established between Melissa Orkin and Catherine Ullman Shade of Crafting Minds, and the administration and faculty members in the elementary and middle schools, with the purpose of conducting an evaluation of literacy practices in grades K-6. The current program evaluation was undertaken to determine the nature of the current instructional model as it relates to English language arts screening and benchmark assessment, tiered instruction, and progress monitoring at the K-6 level. More specifically the report will be designed to determine the ways in which the current processes can be further aligned with evidence-based practices (i.e. tiered interventions, structured reading) including those published by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).
6. **Professional Development:** This school year, all of our staff have been participating in meaningful professional development opportunities during our department meetings.

Preschool educators have been working the Collaborative for Educational Services on Culturally Responsive Teaching, Social Emotional Learning, and Family Engagement. Our K-6 educators are participating in professional development related to the science of reading designed by Crafting Minds. Educators in grades 7-12 participated in professional development related to effective transition planning and student voice. Our clinical department accessed webinars through Mass Youth Partnership, a resource for mental and behavioral health. Our physical and occupational therapists were also enrolled in field specific course work. And finally, our speech pathologists and intensive educators received additional training related to assistive technology through Cotting Consulting.

7. **Unified Champion Schools:** Unified Champion Schools are accomplished by implementing inclusive sports, inclusive youth leadership opportunities, and whole school engagement. The program is designed to be woven into the fabric of the school, enhancing current efforts and providing rich opportunities that lead to meaningful change in creating a socially inclusive school that supports and engages all learners. SHS was recognized as a National Unified Champion School in November 2019. Our Young Athletes Program at Parker Road Preschool has allowed for Preschool to also be the recipient of being a Unified Champion School. Sherwood and Oak Middle Schools achieved this status in June of 2020. Currently, a middle school unified basketball team has been formed and played their first-ever games this past month (after its inaugural season was interrupted in 2020 by the pandemic). As a result of this work, a Unified Booster Club was formed by the middle school students in support of the team and their peers.
8. **Extended School Year Services (ESY):** ESY services are required and developed for students with disabilities who qualify for a continuation of services based on the nature or severity of their disability or who exhibit substantial regression and/or significant recoupment throughout the school year. ESY eligibility and data tracking help teams make data-driven decisions. This data is used in annual team meetings to help the team determine the level and need for extended school year services. Throughout the school year, the ESY Coordinators and the special education leadership team meet monthly to address: staffing, program organization, student recommendations and qualification for services. Student recommendation forms are reviewed and used to develop programming for students who require the longer school year. The programming needs are determined based on the recommendations in order to prepare for a July 2022 start date.
9. **Child Find:** This mandate requires all school districts to identify, locate and evaluate all children with disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disabilities. This obligation to identify all children who may need special education services exists even if the school is not providing special education services to the child. Child Find expands to children who are residents of Shrewsbury, but are enrolled in private schools, preschools, and daycare.

**10. Transition Programming 18-22:** Through one time grant funding, Shrewsbury began the initial work of designing effective community based instruction for students ages 18-22 to learn functional academics, independent living skills, and vocational skills in order to be as independent within the Shrewsbury community.

It should be noted that the last budget report that was shared with the School Committee was in February of 2020, one month prior to the date of the Covid-19 school closure. Our Student Services Department includes our dedicated medical professionals. Our nurses are to be celebrated and thanked as they worked through the health pandemic helping us all navigate the health and safety standards during closure, re-opening, and now once again, being front line workers through the mental health crisis that has emerged on the other side of the pandemic.

### **Department Overview**

*The following information was compiled through collaboration with Central Office, special education and leadership teams, as well as staff input, observations, and ongoing conversations with students and families.*

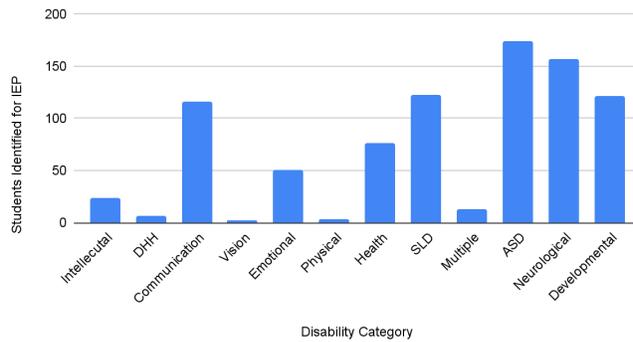
### **Student Demographics**

As of March 2022, we have 996 active Individualized Education Programs (IEP) for students ages 3-22 who are accessing special education. The concurrent data indicated that there are 91 active referrals for Special Education services. This number is included in the total Special Education number of 996. Students in referral are considered special education students until eligibility has been determined.

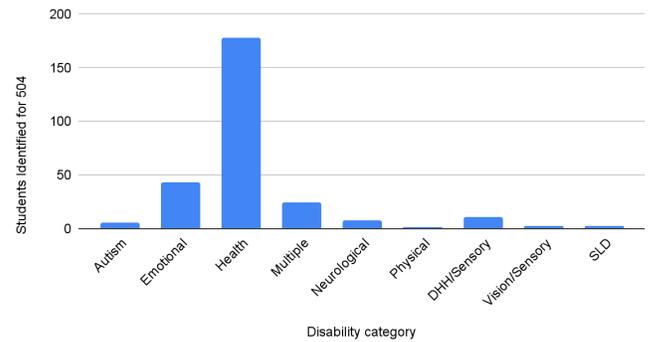
An additional 275 students were receiving accommodations within the regular education setting through Section 504 Accommodation Plans, which are provided to students who are diagnosed with a disability, but who do not require specialized services to make effective academic progress, this includes 10 students in referral. 504 Accommodation Plans define eligibility as a diagnosed disability that is limiting one or more of major life functions. To be eligible for a 504 plan, the student needs to have a record and be regarded as having such an impairment.

We continue to support students with a variety of disabilities within both the IEP and 504 eligibility processes. Of note, our top disability categories for a special education are within the primary disability categories of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Neurological Impairment. In contrast, the primary area that the district is noticing for 504 eligibility is within the disability category of Health. Many students that have this as a category may identify as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, food allergies, Diabetes, or other health impairments.

Students Identified for IEP



Students Identified for 504



### Analysis of Services

Year	Total Number of Students (financially responsible)	Students with Section 504 Accommodation Plans	Percentage of Students Receiving 504s	Students with Individualized Educational Programs	Percentage of Students with IEPs
2018-2019	6,207	206	3%	962	15.4%
2019-2020	6,251	235	3%	1,020	16.3%
2021-2022	6,008	275	4.5%	996	16.6%

\*Note: percentages include students currently in referral

In comparing 2018 to 2022, there is an increase of students qualifying for 504 accommodation plans and special education. This increase is due to the larger number of referrals; students moving into district; students moving from 504 Plans to IEPs; students with both IEPs and 504s; continued Child Find activities; impact of the school closure and health pandemic.

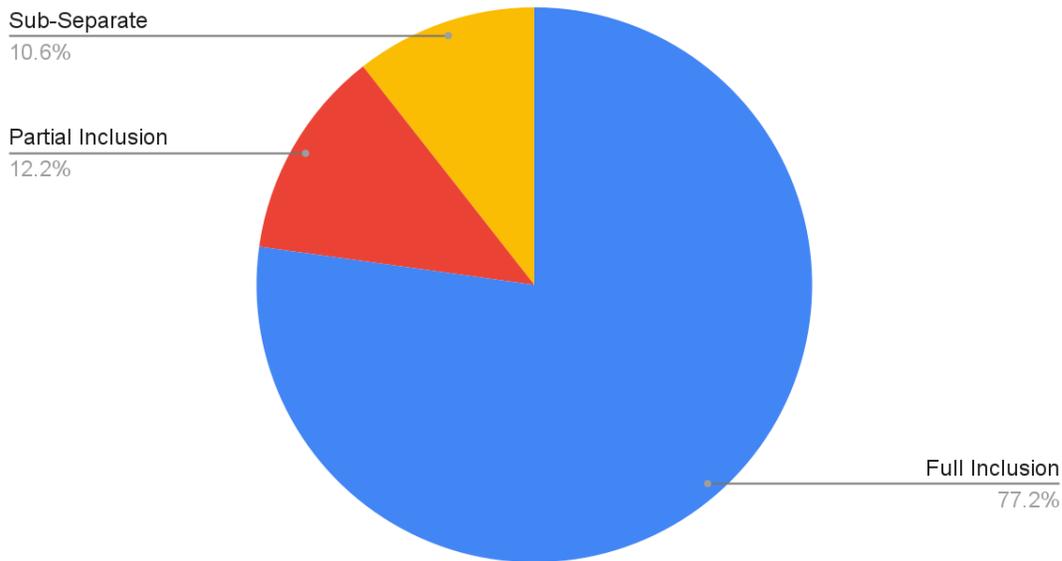
### Specialized Instruction Services

Each SPS building offers a myriad of services to meet each child’s specific needs. These services are interpreted through placement and service delivery options. Students access inclusion, partial inclusion, or substantially separate options based on the team process when calculating the least restrictive setting for individual students. Full Inclusion is defined as students having special education services outside the general education classroom less than 21% of the time. Partial

Inclusion is defined as special education services outside the general education classroom 21-60% of the time. A Substantially Separate classroom is defined as special education services outside the general education classroom more than 60% of the time.

Our mission correlates to the graph below of educating students within the least restrictive environment. General education in a full inclusion program should always be the first instructional placement of a child. Seventy-seven percent of our students are receiving their specially designed instruction within full inclusion programs.

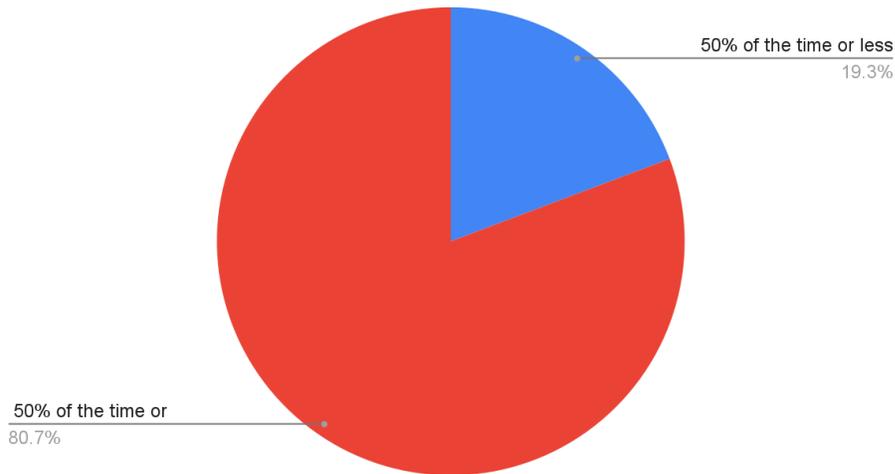
### Number of Students



Students access their education through specialized instructional programming using the aforementioned criteria of inclusion, partial inclusion, and substantially separate. Contingent on calculating the least restrictive setting, students may access instruction from general education teachers, special education teachers who carry either a license in either moderate or severe needs, related service providers such as speech & language therapists, occupational therapists, etc., and/or paraprofessionals.

Our youngest learners with special needs, ages 3-5, continue to have inclusive learning experiences through our integrated preschool programs and kindergarten. Their programming is broken into hours per week where they are integrated into the general education classroom. Below highlights the amount of students accessing their personal least restrictive learning environment.

## Time Spent In General Education Classroom

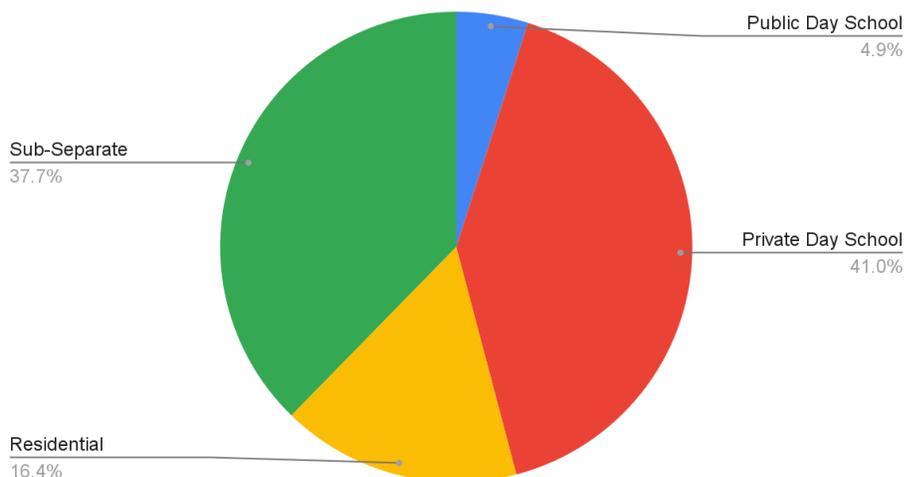


In comparing both graphs, it should be highlighted that the majority of all Shrewsbury students who receive special education services are fully included and learning for the majority of the day along with their peers. This continues to celebrate our strategic priority of designing learning environments where everyone's success matters, while maintaining high learning expectations for all learners.

### **Out of District Programming**

As previously mentioned, the mission of the Special Education Department is to provide services in the least restrictive environment that will empower and provide access to our students to become active members of society based on their individual strengths and abilities. There remains a population of students that, due to the scope and severity of their disability, the child will require a more restrictive programming in order to make effective progress commensurate with their disability. When identifying programs for students to access their education, teams must consider placements that are gradually more restrictive than public schools. Below is a graph that highlights the programming demographics related to the proportion of the current 60 students we currently have enrolled in this fiscal year across public day, private day, sub separate and residential settings. In addition to this figure, 7 students are currently awaiting acceptance into special education placements.

## Student Accessing OOD Placements



The Special Education Department continues to review the profile of students that require more restrictive placements. This is a multi-tiered approach that includes further examination of the student demographics that are currently being serviced in an out of district placement and identifying if their unique needs could be met within the district, and/or what supports and services would be needed to have students transition to a less restrictive setting.

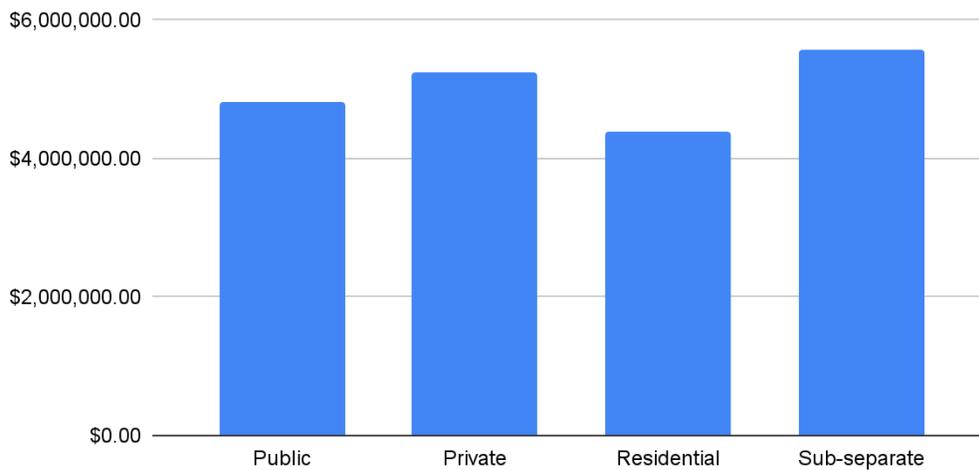
Covid-19 also had an impact on the out of district budget for this current fiscal year. Over this year we have had 14 students terminate their out of district placements. Five students who had entered into entitlement transition services accepted their diplomas and proceeded onto their post-secondary areas of interest. We had five students move out of Shrewsbury to other towns. Four students moved to less restrictive placements. With that being said, we continue to currently have students being recommended for out of district placements. Shrewsbury currently has seven active referrals issued for placements that range from residential to substantially-separate based upon the needs of the students. In addition, there are multiple teams across all grade levels that continue to monitor if Shrewsbury Public Schools is the least restrictive setting, and if another placement should be considered.

These placements are working with very complex student profiles that range from unsafe and risky behaviors to significant cognitive deficits. During the pandemic these placements, like us, had to shift their programming to maintain the health and safety of their community. As they began to reopen, they had to redesign how to keep students and staff safe. What was unexpected was the lack of highly qualified staff to work as teachers and direct care attendants. This has negatively impacted their ability to accept students into their programs as they were struggling to meet the needs of those already enrolled. This has subsequently delayed many of our students

from being accepted and accessing the specialized instruction they require. As we have said in the past, the out of district budget can be volatile. This has been compounded by the pandemic.

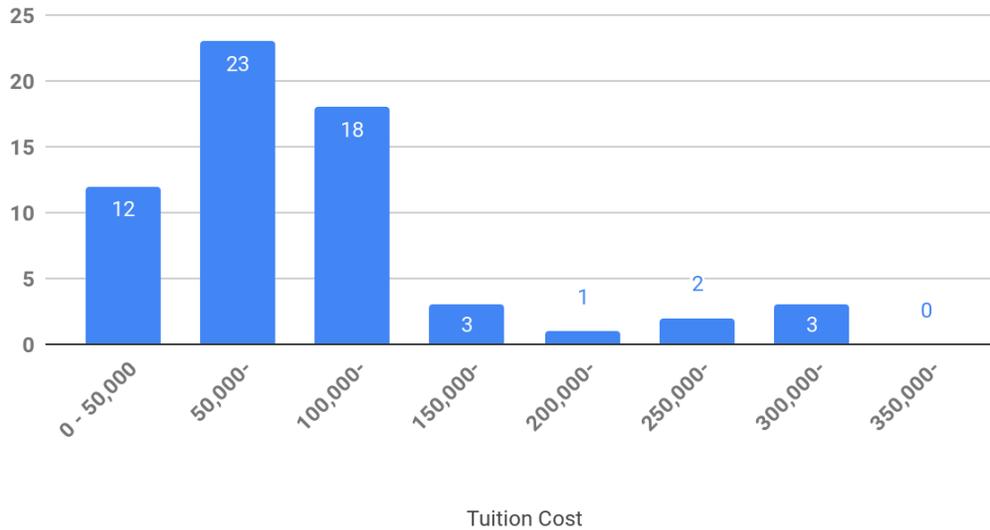
As indicated above, the out of district budget is a moving target and may shift as we secure more placements for our students. In the category of special education out of district tuitions, there continues to be a 2.7% annual tuition increase approved by the Operational Services Division. We also continue to expect an increase in students who will require placement in these very specialized educational settings. Because the number of students in out of district placements can fluctuate depending on varied circumstances, this projection could shift in either direction in the coming months. The charts below break down the number of forecasted out of district students by tuition cost.

### FY 23 Budgeted Cost



FY 23 Budgeted Cost

### Number of OOD Students By Tuition Cost, FY 23



### Special Education Circuit Breaker

The state’s Special Education Circuit Breaker reimbursement program began in fiscal year 2004 to provide additional funding to districts for high special education costs. Reimbursements are for the district’s prior year’s expenses. Each spring, our office completes and submits claim forms to DESE listing the types and amounts of services, and tuitions provided to students that meet the threshold formula. Rates are determined by the department and established annually. The circuit breaker account is essential to ensuring that municipalities and school districts are able to pay the costs associated with expensive special education placements without cutting from other general and special education areas. Below highlights the allocation of funds through the special education and pupil personnel services budget for out of district placements and circuit breaker reimbursement.

	FY22 Budget	FY23 Budget	Difference
Out of District Special Education Tuition	\$ 7,053,811	\$ 6,550,088	\$ (503,723)
Less Circuit Breaker Use	\$ (2,950,000)	\$ (2,946,840)	\$ 3,160
<b>Net Appropriation Budget</b>	<b>\$ 4,103,811</b>	<b>\$ 3,603,248</b>	<b>\$ (500,563)</b>

### **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Special Education Grant #240**

Federal Special Education Grant #240 funds special education transportation. Over the past three fiscal years, the 240 grant also allocates funds for Proportionate Share. For FY23, the state has indicated that we will need to reserve 15% for Significant Disproportionality. We will be required to shift approximately \$230,000 of grant funds currently used to pay for out of district special education transportation costs to purposes related to addressing the needs of students with emotional disabilities.

### **Proportionate Share and Disproportionality**

In July 2017, DESE issued guidance regarding the IDEA funds through the 240 Grant allocation to monitor **Proportionate Share**. Proportionate Share is an amount of the district's IDEA funds allocated to eligible parentally-placed students who are privately educated in the district's geographic boundaries regardless of where the students live. Annually, our district must calculate the proportionate share for private and home schooled students within our geographic area, demonstrate upon request that we have spent this amount of our allocation of IDEA funds on eligible students who are privately enrolled and educated in the district. For this school year, the proportionate share equals \$59,390. This year meaningful consultation has occurred with our local private institutions. We have partnered with St. John's High School and their Gregory Academic Center to provide two part time tutors to address the academic and executive functioning needs of students with active IEPs who attending their programs. We also have contracted support of occupational therapy services for a student that attends Shrewsbury Montessori School. Finally, we have also consulted with Gateway School to provide additional academic support to their students with active IEPs. Shrewsbury does have 7 private schools. However, the other schools in town do not have students with identified disabilities that have the students eligible for special education services. Therefore they are unable to access funding so far this school year.

In August of 2019, the district received notification regarding **Significant Disproportionality**. DESE is required under federal regulations to analyze data from school districts to identify and report to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) significant disproportionality in special education of racial and ethnic groups. This analysis is conducted pursuant to requirements under IDEA. The determination was made following a review of data reported to DESE through the Student Information Management System (SIMS) and the Student Safety and Discipline Reports (SSDR) for the prior three years. DESE determined that our calculated risk ratio for white students with emotional disabilities exceeded the threshold rate established by the state (4.0).

The district began the mandated implementation of the Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CCEIS) and designed a targeted plan to address the students in the subgroup that was significantly disproportionate from age 3 through Grade 12 with and without

disabilities. These supports and services continue to be expended. We are targeting Tier 1 social-emotional learning standards, and tier 2 and 3 direct targeted instruction. We have been utilizing these resources through professional development for teachers and other school staff to enable them to deliver scientifically based academic instruction and behavioral interventions, including scientifically based literacy instruction, and, if appropriate, instruction on the use of adaptive and instructional software, providing educational and behavioral evaluations, services and supports, including scientifically based literacy instruction.

### **Contracted Services**

We currently contract specialists in the following areas in order to support low incidence disabilities and mandated services: Psychiatry, Orientation and Mobility, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Vision Specialists, Behavior, Speech and Language, Teacher of the Deaf, Home Based Services, Teacher of Deaf/Blind, Audiological services and Assistive Technology. Within the domain of educational services, Shrewsbury continues to partner with Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services (SYFS). In an effort to provide support to families identified and referred through SPS personnel, SYFS clinical staff provide family support services such as counseling, crisis management, links to other supportive agencies, assistance with problem solving and communication with other collateral contacts.

Legal Consultation: Our legal counsel supports the district with administering state and federal laws governing special education. At times, despite our best efforts, the school system must go to mediation, pre-conference hearings and/or hearings through the Bureau of Special Education Appeals and may require full legal representation.

Translator/Interpreter: Students and parents receive written and verbal communication in their home language as stated in state and federal law.

Home/Hospital Tutoring: The district must provide tutorial services for students when they are absent for more than 14 consecutive school days or cumulative days due to illness. A physician's statement requesting home/hospital tutoring must be completed in order for the tutoring process to be initiated with the district.

Instructional Materials: Special education staff use standardized assessments for initial evaluations and reevaluations. Once a testing battery is obsolete, there is only a two-year window where it must be replaced. Department Leads take a yearly inventory and update our office with ongoing needs.

The table below shows the recent history and projection for contracted expenses.

<b>Contracted Services</b>				
<b>Expenses</b>	<b>FY20 Actual</b>	<b>FY21 Actual</b>	<b>FY22 Budget</b>	<b>FY23 Requested</b>
Legal Fees	\$52,606	\$34,374	\$40,000	\$41,000
Translator/Interpreter	\$46,117	\$51,926	\$27,500	\$50,000
Home/Hospital Tutoring	\$2,870	\$0	\$13,000	\$5,000
Educational Svcs	\$108,110	\$60,960	\$82,000	\$82,000
Psych. Services	\$21,251	\$29,899	\$50,000	\$50,000
Evaluations	\$16,486	\$13,759	\$17,500	\$17,500
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$247,440</b>	<b>\$190,918</b>	<b>\$230,000</b>	<b>\$245,500</b>

### **Staffing**

We continue to monitor the staffing across the district to ensure we are providing students with the necessary support and the greatest opportunities for independence. We have seen great success with our programs where students are accessing more of their day independently and are making continued progress. Even with this focused lens, the district continues to experience staffing challenges given the number of unanticipated move-ins to SPS, along with other students who were identified with high levels of academic, behavioral and complex medical needs, and the current hiring crisis.

### **Mental and Behavioral Health**

Under our 2018-2022 Strategic Priority of Enhanced Well-Being for All, we have an opportunity to specifically create a common understanding of the benefits of the skills, habits, and mindsets of social and emotional learning and develop a shared, systematic approach to explicitly teach, integrate, and assess these competencies.

Counselors, mental and behavioral health professionals play a vital role in identifying, supporting and intervening when students exhibit mental and behavioral health challenges in the school environment. A collaborative approach is taken to working with students presenting with mental health, emotional, social and/or behavioral challenges. School teams may consist of Psychologists, Nurses, School Counselors, Administrators, Special Educators, and consultation with Clinical Coordinators, Psychiatrist, who work together to identify students with needs in this area, provide recommendations, interventions, support, and closely monitor cases. These professionals provide clinical supports which are customized to each student, including counseling, behavior management, crisis intervention, family engagement or care coordination. Counseling, and behavioral and mental health support will be key to increasing our students social and emotional abilities and overall well-being.

### **Tiered Focused Monitoring (TFM)**

During the week of December 6, 2021, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Office of Public School Monitoring (PSM) conducted a Tiered Focused Monitoring Review of the Shrewsbury Public Schools. The Office of Public School Monitoring visits each district and charter school every three years to monitor compliance with federal and state special education and civil rights regulations. Areas of review related to special education include student assessments, determination of eligibility, the IEP Team process, and IEP development and implementation. Areas of review related to civil rights include bullying, student discipline, physical restraint, and equal access to school programs for all students.

In addition to the onsite visit, the review chairperson from the Office of Public School Monitoring sent all parents of students with disabilities an online survey that focuses on key areas of their child's special education program. During the onsite review, the Office of Public School Monitoring interviewed the chairperson(s) of the district's Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC). Other onsite activities included interviews of district staff and administrators, reviews of student records, and onsite observations.

### **Recommendations for 2022 - 2023 School Year**

Through observations, analysis and collaborative conversations with administrators and staff, the following positions will further develop program integrity and consistency throughout the district.

#### **District Budget Focus:**

- Addressing increased need for mandated special education and English language education services
- Staffing resources to both address the student mental health crisis and provide proactive support for students' mental, behavioral, social, and emotional well-being
- Restoring student opportunities where cuts were made in the past or where our current requirements are a barrier to participate

#### **Recommended New Investments:**

*Special education services for student need and enrollment:*

- Restoring one preschool teacher and one preschool aide position lost to budget cuts in a previous year
- Adding a moderate special education teacher at Shrewsbury High School to address caseloads
- Adding speech and language pathologist support at the elementary level (0.4 FTE)

*Investing significantly in increasing specialized personnel to address:*

- Adding two additional adjustment counselors at SHS to address student needs and increased caseloads
- Adding an adjustment counselor at the middle school level to respond to increased caseloads and needs
- Adding two additional clinical coordinator positions across the district, doubling the number of board-certified behavior analysts to provide support for significant student behavioral challenges
- Establishing the position of Director of Clinical Counseling, Mental Health and Behavioral Services to coordinate the district's team of adjustment counselors, school psychologists, and clinical coordinators and to be the primary district connection with outside mental health providers
- Providing a social worker to address significant family needs and barriers across the district while coordinating with outside social services agencies

**Resources and Programming:**

Shrewsbury Public School's plans on designing a program for students that are ages 18-22. Best practices in transitional services for this student population have continued to evolve, including an increased emphasis on providing community-based opportunities for students to develop key skills related to independent living, including employment. Creating our own 18-22 program for students entitled to these services beyond high school will allow for our students to receive instruction to help reach their post-secondary vision, employment opportunities, local community experience and access to independent living skills within their town of residence. Our vision and hope is to create a program that will support our 18-22 student population with disabilities while also including peers without disabilities as partners in work and social opportunities.

Shrewsbury Public Schools has determined that our priorities continue to be focused on our students with mental and behavioral health challenges based upon multiple advisory councils and district data. Over the next few years, our goal is to add capacity and programming for student support to further enhance our inclusive practices.

Professional development (PD) efforts will focus on two of our district strategic priorities: Learning Environments Where Everyone's Success Matters and Enhanced Well-being of All. We will continue to move forward with identifying a universal mental health screening tool and provide opportunities for our staff to understand the implementation of the screener and how to

appropriately respond. Educators have a responsibility not only to teach and care for students, but to support them in their social and emotional development.

Continued professional development in order to move towards an understanding of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports' (MTSS) philosophy: All students are capable of learning with adequate support. MTSS is rooted in proactivity and prevention. The system utilizes evidenced based practices. Decisions and procedures are driven by school and student data. The degree of support given to each student is based on their individual needs. Implementation occurs schoolwide and requires stakeholder collaboration.

Targeted professional development for implementation of appropriate progress monitoring tools around IEP targeted domains to ensure we are appropriately targeting the learning objectives and adjusting instructional practice as needed. Including additional co-teaching opportunities to ensure students are receiving specially designed instruction that is targeted and explicit.

*In conclusion, and as stated in previous reports, our district, with continued support from families and stakeholders, is committed to providing a high-quality public education to every child, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, cultural background, sexual orientation/identity, exposure to trauma, or disability status. We aim to structure professional development for staff so that we enhance our shared understanding and ability to engage in inclusive and culturally proficient practices; the skills, habits, and mindsets of social and emotional learning, and the mental and behavioral health of all.*