



**Special Education and Pupil Personnel Department  
Overview & Budget Report to the Shrewsbury School Committee  
March 2023**

---

**Margaret M. Belsito  
Assistant Superintendent for Student Services**

**Meghan E. Bartlett  
Assistant Director of Special Education & Pupil Personnel Services**

---

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 and social-emotional needs of all 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, and district, prioritizes equity and access for all students. 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. This year we prioritized the following initiatives.

- 1. Inclusive Practices/Co-Teaching:** Professional development opportunities for educators working in their years 1-3 of Co-Teaching have been deployed by our Special Education Directors by level. Professional development was designed to provide classroom and special educators with an overview of current Co-Teaching models across all grade spans from Preschool through Grade 12. We proudly recognize that the district now has over 40 teams of Co-Teachers. Our designed professional development encompassed the following topics: how to effectively use common planning, how to create 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, and social worker) continue to gather data around practices and procedures. A full report on Counseling and Mental Health and Nursing services will be presented at the end of March.
- 3. Social-Emotional Behavioral Academy:** Our district was selected to participate in the [Social-Emotional Behavioral Academy](#) which is a three year endeavor. Over the course of next three years, our district team will be working towards integrating and aligning SEL and mental health supports with existing systems and practices guided by a Multi-Tiered System of Support framework. We will be supported by our Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and Educational Development Center's technical assistance specialist, Lauren Gilman. She will guide us through the three phase process: assessing and planning; implementing and providing; and scaling and sustaining SEL and mental health systems. In year one, our focus has been on assessing our district's strengths and identifying priority areas of growth.
- 4. Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC):** The SEPAC and Special Education leadership continue to have open communication. This year SEPAC has held the following events including: General Meetings, Collaborative Problem Solving, and ADHD Essentials.
- 5. Paraprofessional Support:** 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 Instructional Aides to ensure our students are accessing their free and appropriate public education. This year, the district experienced a large number of students move into Shrewsbury that required additional support in the classroom to ensure students were able to access their education in a least restrictive environment.
- 6. Program Evaluation:** A collaborative relationship was established with the [JED Foundation](#). The JED Foundation is a nonprofit whose mission is to protect the emotional health and provide suicide prevention of the nation's teens and young adults, giving them

the skills and supports they need to thrive in a healthy manner. The JED team will offer support for senior leadership for initiatives and resources aimed at promoting and protecting mental health by reviewing our policies, procedures and processes in discipline, crisis management, and truancy/absenteeism. JED will provide ongoing, customized technical-assistance support; two virtual focus groups with district leaders and school community members; report findings from review/focus groups and recommendations; and a presentation of findings in-person to all appropriate stakeholders.

7. **Professional Development:** This school year, all special education staff members have been participating in meaningful professional development opportunities during department meetings with a focus on progress monitoring. **Data collection and progress monitoring** practices were introduced as part of DESE's [New IEP Improvement Project](#) which will be implemented during the 2023-2024 school year. In working with Special Education Directors, staff have had the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues to evaluate current progress monitoring practices and began developing systems for data collection to monitor student achievement and growth in alignment with the New IEP. **Progress monitoring** is the standardized process of evaluating student performance toward a performance target, based on rates of improvement from frequent assessment of a specific skill. **Data collection** is the process of gathering quantitative and qualitative information on specific variables with the aim of evaluating outcomes or gleaning actionable insights. Purposeful data collection requires a process to ensure the data is clear, consistent, and reliable.
8. **Paraprofessional Professional Development:** This year, we relied on the skills of some of our clinical team to provide professional development to all of our paraprofessional colleagues. After listening to our keynote speaker, Ms. Noelle Freeman, Director of School Nursing, began the day with a training on how to use Epi-Pens. Following that, all paraprofessionals participated in a rotating schedule that covered the following topics. **Self Care and Trauma Informed Care:** *Felicite Boisvert*, District Social Worker; *Jamie Millett*, Director of Counseling and Mental Health Services; **The Principles of Behavior:** *Aimee Bunn*, ELC Coordinator; *Dr. Colleen Canty*, Clinical Coordinator; *Daryl Rynning*, Clinical Coordinator; **Introduction to Crisis De-Escalation:** *Alycia Hudson*, ELC Coordinator; *Janet Murphy*, ELC Coordinator; *Rob Parry-Cruwys*, Clinical Coordinator; **& Prompting Hierarchy:** *Nicole Bradley*, Clinical Coordinator; *Colleen Callahan*, ELC Coordinator.
9. **Unified Champion Schools:** Unified Champion Schools are accomplished by implementing inclusive activities, inclusive youth leadership opportunities, and whole school engagement through Special Olympics. The inclusivity of this 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. Our preschool, middle schools and high school have the designation of being Unified Champion Schools. This year, all of our elementary schools have been working toward the Unified Champion Status and are on target to receive the designation at the end of this school year. Each elementary school has established Unified Clubs, and have student leadership to perpetuate the mission of our department of creating inclusive schools. As of June 2023, Shrewsbury Public Schools should be a Unified Champion School district.

- 10. 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 exhibit substantial regression, and/or require a significant recoupment period for loss skills throughout the school year. ESY eligibility and data collections help teams make data-driven decisions. This data is used in annual IEP meetings to help the team determine the level of need for extended school year services. Throughout the school year, the ESY Coordinators and the special education leadership address: staffing, program organization, student recommendations and qualification for services. The programming needs are determined based on team recommendations in order to prepare for a July 2023 start date.
- 11. 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, and may be enrolled in preschools and daycare. It also encompasses students who are residents and non-resident students within our local private schools.

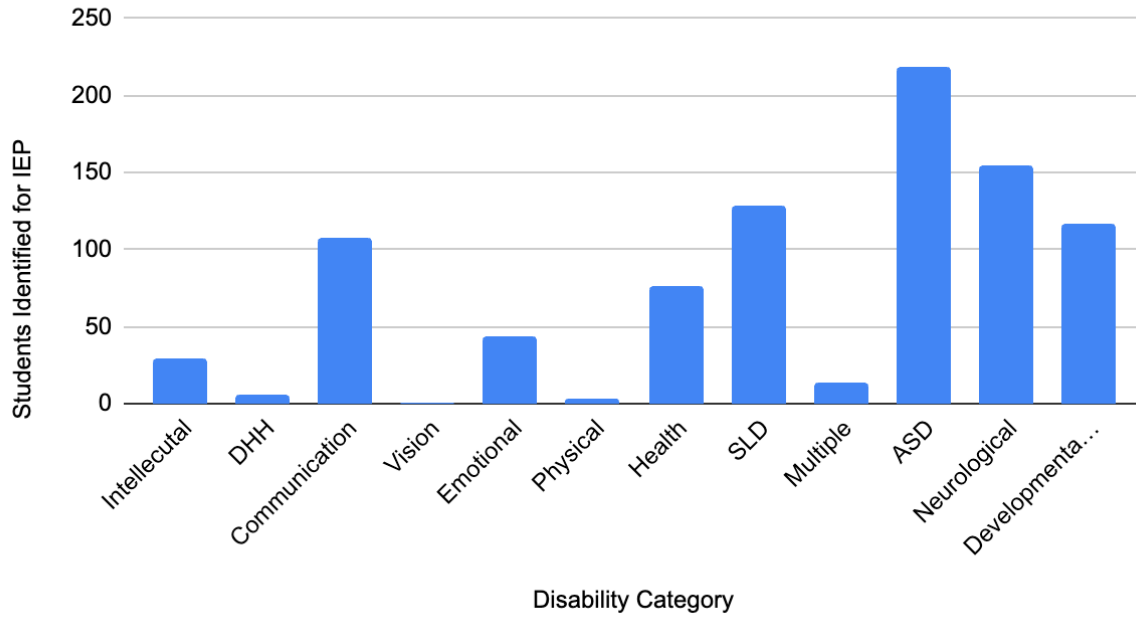
### **Department Overview**

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

### **Student Demographics**

As of February 2023, we have 893 students with active Individualized Education Programs (IEP) for ages 3-22 who are accessing special education services. The concurrent data indicated that there are 84 students with active referrals for Special Education. This number is included in the total Special Education number of 977 students. Students in referral are considered special education students until eligibility has been determined. The chart below breaks down the educational disability by eligibility of service. As it has been historically, qualification under Autism (ASD) remains our highest educational disability category.

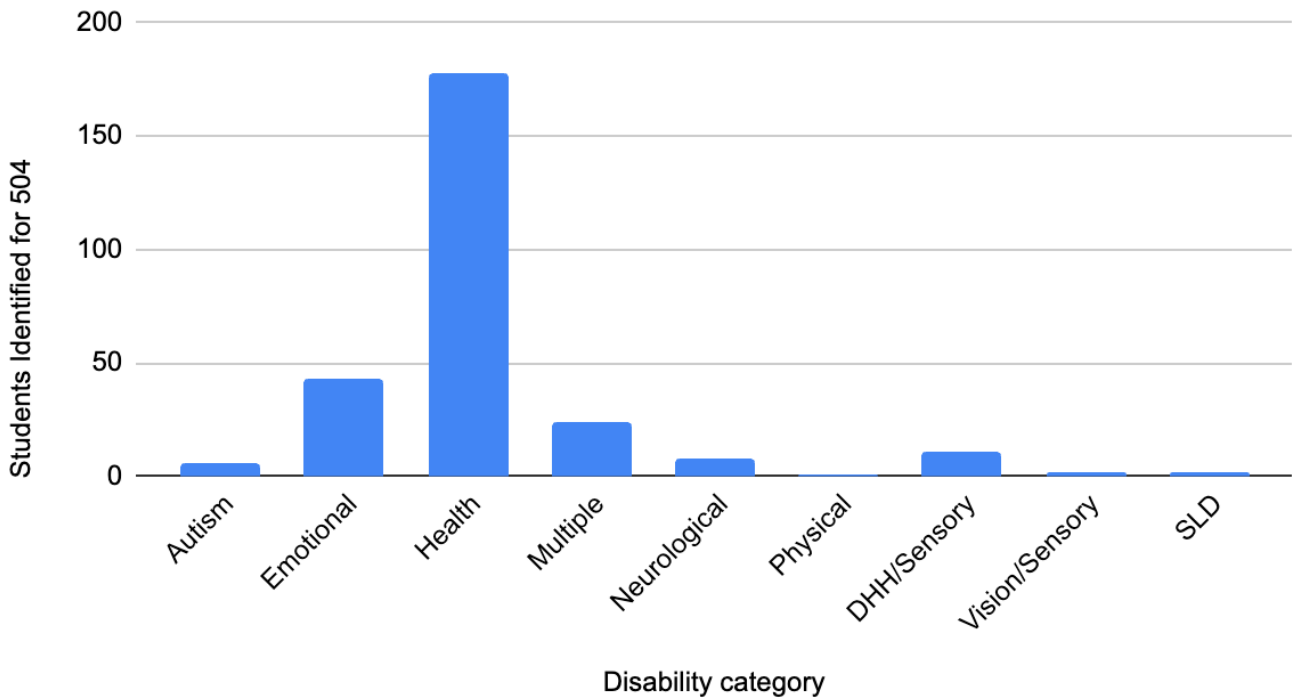
## Students Identified for IEP



504 Accommodation Plans define eligibility as a diagnosed disability that is limiting one or more 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. Students that are eligible for a 504 Accommodation Plans do not require specially designed instruction, however, they do require accommodations within the classroom to access their education. An additional 336 students are receiving accommodations within the classroom setting through Section 504 Accommodation Plans. There are an additional 10 students in referral for eligibility.

The district continues to identify Health impairment as the primary disability category for 504 eligibility. Many students that have this as a category may identify as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, food allergies, Diabetes, Asthma or other health impairments. The district is also seeing an increase trend in students with emotional disabilities becoming eligible for 504 Accommodation Plans. The Student Services Department will continue to support students with a variety of disabilities within both the IEP and 504 eligibility processes.

## Students Identified for 504



### Analysis of Services

There continues to be an increasing trend of students qualifying for 504 Accommodation Plans based on data collected over a 4 year period. This increase is due to the larger number of referrals; students moving into district; students with both IEPs and 504s; continued Child Find activities; impact of the school closure, health pandemic, and mental health crisis.

School Year	Total Number of Enrolled Students	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%
2022-2023	6,076	336	5.5%	977	16.1%

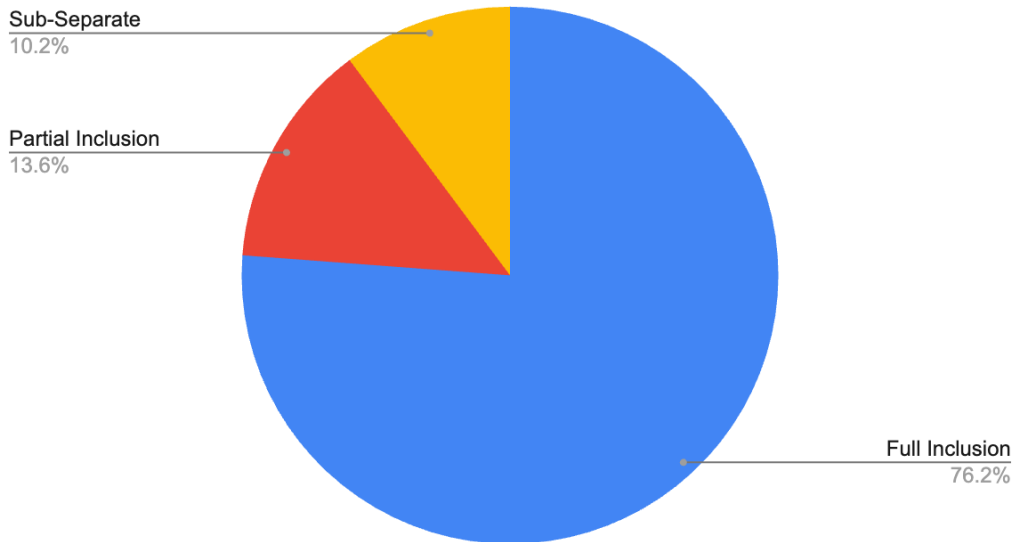
\*Note: percentages include students currently in referral

## Specialized Instruction Services

All of Shrewsbury's school buildings offer a myriad of services to meet each child's specific needs. These services are determined through the team process and are designed through discussion regarding 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 20% 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 aligns with the graph below by designing effective education for students within the least restrictive environment. All students are general education students. As such, receiving one's education in a full inclusion program should always be the first instructional placement of a child. Seventy-six percent of our students are receiving their specially designed instruction within full inclusion programs.

### Number of Students

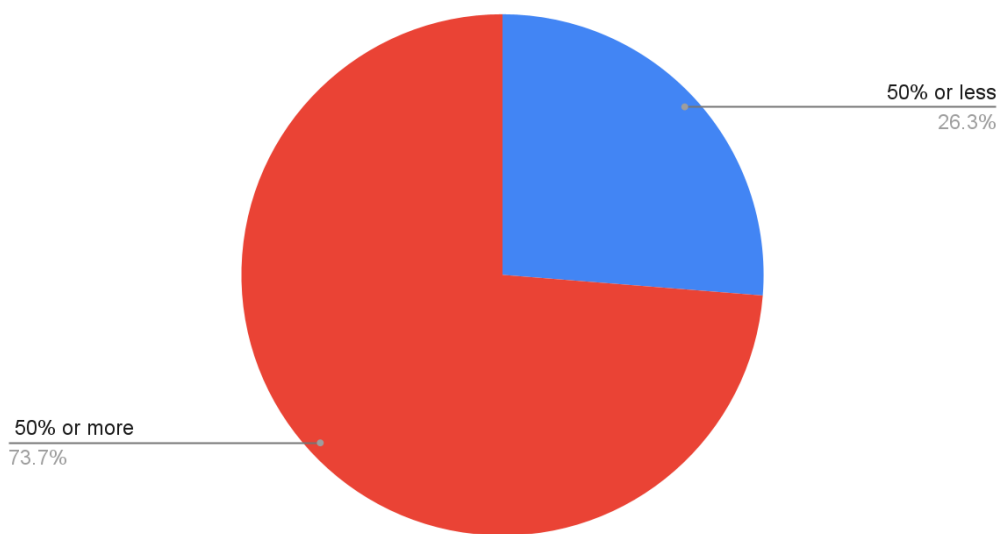


Students access their education through specialized designed instruction using the aforementioned criteria of Full Inclusion, Partial Inclusion, and Substantially Separate. Contingent on calculating the least restrictive setting, students may access instruction from general education teachers, special education teachers who carry either a license in either

moderate or severe needs, related service providers such as speech & language therapists, occupational and physical therapists, clinical staff, 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 Early Childhood Integrated 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 2018-2022 strategic priority of designing Learning Environments Where Everyone’s Success Matters, while maintaining high learning expectations for all learners.

An article published by [K-12 Dive](#), written by Kara Arundel reviewed a study conducted by Indiana’s University’s Center on Education and Lifelong Learning related to outcomes for students in inclusive settings for high school students. The article indicated that the following,

*“Reviews of outcomes on the state ISTEP assessment showed 10th graders with disabilities who spent 80% or more time in a general education classroom scored an average of 24.3 points higher in English/language arts and 18.4 points higher in math than their peers in low-inclusion settings.*



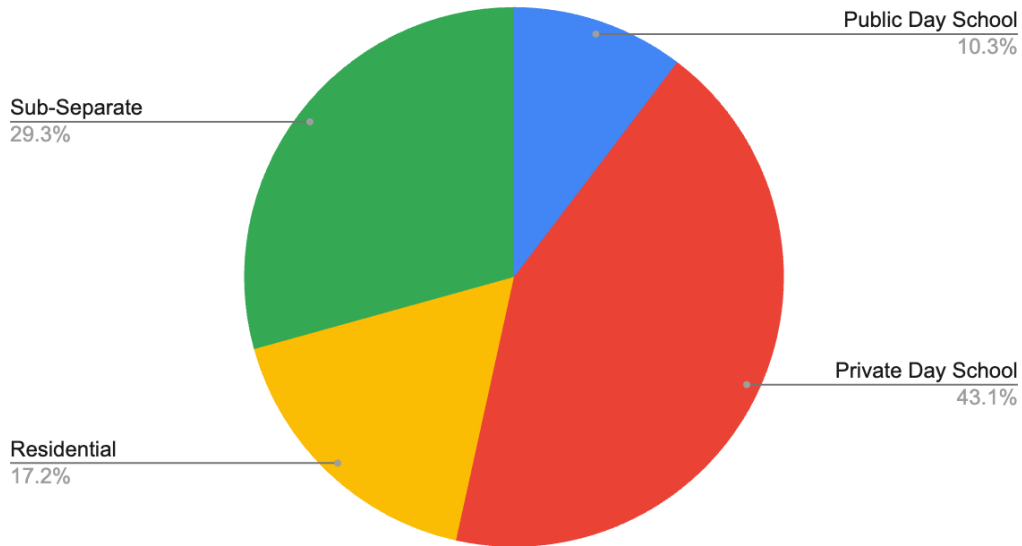
*Additionally, students with disabilities in high inclusion settings were 22% more likely than students in low inclusion settings to graduate with a Core 40 diploma by passing the state assessment rather than receiving a waiver. This is evidence that students in high-inclusion settings were more prepared for successful postsecondary educational and employment opportunities, according to the study.”*

### **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 educational experience 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.

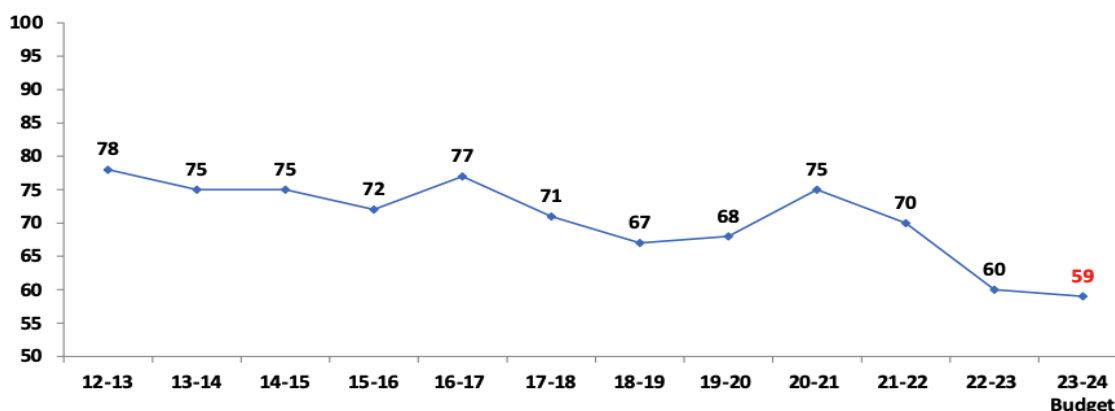
When considering out of district placements, approved programs grow in restrictive nature. Some out of district programs are still considered Substantially Separate placements. These are through collaboratives that are placed within a public school, or for students ages 18-22 accessing their entitlement services through a collaborative placement and are placed within the community setting. Students that access their education in a Public Day placement are accessing their education through a collaborative placement governed by a board of area town administrators. Private Day placements are for students who require an even more restrictive setting. These placements are [Chapter 766](#) approved placements and are sanctioned by the DESE. Residential Placements are also governed by the DESE. However, these placements are for students that due to the scope of their disability and safety needs, the child requires 24 hour 7 days a week and 365 days coverage and supervision.

## Student Accessing OOD Placements



Out of district enrollment is projected to decrease in the following fiscal year. This was forecasted when Shrewsbury began designing their own 18-22 program. The students that are eligible for entitlement services historically would have been referred to a collaborative and would have been in a Substantially Separate placement. For the following fiscal year, this equates to 15-19 students remaining in our district and their local community to receive their entitlement services. In addition, there also continues to be a staffing shortage within out of district placements which impacts acceptance. Shrewsbury has 6 students who are waiting to be accepted to an out of district program that range from residential to substantially-separate based upon the needs of the students.

## Enrollment Projections: Out of District Special Education Students



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. Shrewsbury special education staff pride themselves in being able to design in-district programming to meet the needs of our students.

### **Out of District Fiscal Impact**

As indicated above, the out of district budget is a moving target and may shift as students are accepted into approved special education programs. Typically, the annual approved tuition increase is between 3-4% of the annual cost for most out of district placements. The district has projected a 4% increase in tuition for students in Substantially Separate and Public Day school placements.

In planning for the next fiscal budget, the district did not use the calculation of 4% increase for Chapter 766 approved programs. The [Operational Services Division](#) sets the tuition prices for M.G.L. approved private special education programs for purchase by cities and towns and Commonwealth departments. This year the Operational Services Division approved an unprecedented 14.1% increase of all Chapter 766 approved schools. For Shrewsbury this is 60% of the out of district placements which will have an impact on the projected budget, even with the decrease of students accessing this level of education. 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.

### 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, the Student Services 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 more costly 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.

For out of district placements, total tuition costs have increased by 11.1%. But the Net Amount in the Town-Appropriated Budget is going down by 7.6% due to using a greater amount of Circuit Breaker funding.

	<b>FY23</b>	<b>FY24 Initial</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>Percent Difference</b>
Total Tuitions	\$ 6,485,088	\$ 7,208,035	\$ 722,947	11.1%
Circuit Breaker Funding Use [aka "Offset"]	\$ (2,946,840)	\$ (3,938,345)	\$ (991,505)	33.6%
Net Amount in Town Appropriation Budget	\$ 3,538,248	\$ 3,269,690	\$ (268,558)	-7.6%

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

In Shrewsbury, Federal Special Education Grant 240 primarily funds special education transportation. The 240 Grant also allocates funds for 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 student's residence and those that are home-schooled and reside in Shrewsbury. The 240 Grant, this fiscal year, was also used to off-set the district’s finding of Significant Disproportionality. These funds were used to help support the social-emotional and behavioral needs of our students.

#### *Proportionate Share*

In July 2017, DESE issued guidance regarding the IDEA funds through the 240 Grant allocation to monitor Proportionate Share. Annually, our district must calculate the proportionate share for privately placed schools in Shrewsbury and home schooled students. Each year the district must have meaningful consultation with our local private institutions at minimum 3 times a year. The allocated set funds for FY23 was a net sum of \$93,045 to support the needs for students that are eligible and maintain active IEPs. This net sum is calculated using the Department’s formula which is based upon the enrollment numbers of students with active IEPs that is provided to Shrewsbury by the private schools.

In terms of expenditures, Shrewsbury has 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 eligible students with active IEPs. Shrewsbury also consulted with Gateway School to provide additional academic and social skills support as well as curriculum materials for their students with active IEPs. Shrewsbury does have 7 private schools; however, the other schools in town do not have students with identified disabilities and therefore are not eligible for special education services. Shrewsbury is then not able to partner in expending the proportionate share funds to the other institutions.

Additionally, the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs approved the proposed resolution by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for resolving concerns relating to IDEA funds that school districts were required to spend on parentally-placed private school children with disabilities and home-schooled children with disabilities. As a result, in FY23, Shrewsbury had an additional \$13,275 allocation of these resolution funds for all 7 private institutions regardless of having identified students with special needs. All private schools were notified of this funding and most are considering professional development opportunities, supplies and materials.

### ***Significant Disproportionality***

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 United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs regarding Significant Disproportionality in special education within 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 and the Student Safety and Discipline Reports for the prior three years. DESE determined that our calculated risk ratio for students who identify as white with emotional disabilities exceeded the threshold rate established by the state (4.0).

For FY23, the state indicated that we will need to reserve 15% of our 240 Grant for Significant Disproportionality. We were required to shift approximately \$250,000 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. This year the district needed to continue to implement a Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services 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. The district expended these funds to enhance our current supports and services. Specifically, using a Multi-Tiered System of Support, Shrewsbury is targeting Tier 1 social-emotional learning standards, and Tiers 2 and 3 direct targeted instruction. These resources have been utilized by providing professional development

for teachers and other school staff to enable them to deliver scientifically based academic instruction and social- emotional 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.

Through the prioritization of the district to support the mental and behavioral health needs for all students, Shrewsbury was no longer found to have over-identified students identified as white with emotional impairments. For this upcoming fiscal year we do not need to set aside the 15% of the 240 Grant. We anticipate to have carryover funds from FY 23 that will be used for FY 24 to continue to support this critical work. The state will continue to issue an annual report regarding Significant Disproportionality. We will continue to monitor for the overidentification of any group of students based on race and ethnicity as it impacts the disproportionality relating to placement, disability type, and discipline.

**Fiscal Year 23-240 IDEA Grant Expenditures for  
Disproportionality, Proportionate Share & Resolution Funds**

Budget	Source	Awarded
Stipends	Disproportionality	50,000
Contractual Services	Disproportionality	150,000
Contractual Services	Resolution Funds	10,000
Contractual Services	Proportionate Share	93,045
Supplies and Materials	Disproportionality	53,803
Supplies and Materials	Resolution Funds	3,275

**Contracted Services**

Student Services uses certified contract specialists to support low incidence disabilities and mandated services. These specialists are within the following domains: 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, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, and Assistive Technology.

Legal Consultation: Our legal counsel supports the district with administering state and federal laws governing special education. Special education legal counsel helps to support legal decision making as district representation through appeals processes. Despite our team's best efforts to resolve family and district IEP disputes, the school system may need to proceed to mediation, pre-conference hearings and/or hearings through the Bureau of Special Education Appeals in

order to find educational programming appropriate for a student. Full legal representation may be warranted through those proceedings.

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.

Assessment Materials: Special education staff use standardized assessments for initial evaluations and reevaluations to determine eligibility for special education. Once a testing assessment battery is obsolete, there is a two-year window for when it must be replaced.

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

Contracted Services	FY 22 Budget	FY22 Actual	FY 23 Budget	FY24 Recommended	Difference FY23 to FY 24
<b>Legal Fees</b>	40,000	17,180	41,000	45,000	4,000
<b>Home/Hospital</b>	13,000	0	5,000	5,000	0
<b>Educational Services</b>	82,000	70,745	82,000	82,000	0
<b>Translations</b>	27,500	93,390	50,000	90,000	40,000
<b>Evaluations</b>	17,500	14,529	17,500	17,500	0
<b>Psychological Services</b>	50,000	32,992	50,000	50,000	0
<b>Summer Therapies</b>	7,500	18,250	7,500	10,000	2,500
<b>SPED Therapies</b>	250,000	147,842	206,692	206,692	0

**Staffing**

Student Services continues to monitor the staffing needs across the district to ensure teams 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 across all domains of their education. Even with this focused lens, the district continues to experience staffing challenges given the number of unanticipated move-ins students, along with other students who were identified with high levels of academic, behavioral and complex medical needs.

	FY23	FY24	Difference	Notes
Special Education paraprofessionals	213.45	237.70	24.25	Six existing students had IEP changes requiring paraprofessional support. The net balance of 18 is a combination of move-ins/move-outs and referrals from preschool Early Intervention.

**Mental and Behavioral Health**

Student mental health is a shared responsibility and commitment for all members of the district/school community. Everyone is included in a community of care and compassion with equitable implementation of all efforts to promote and protect mental health.

Under our 2018-2022 Strategic Priority of Enhanced Well-Being for All, we had an opportunity to specifically create a common understanding of the benefits of the skills, habits, and mindsets of social-emotional behavioral learning and develop a shared, systematic approach to explicitly teach, integrate, and assess these competencies. Counseling, behavioral and mental health support are truly key to increasing our students social and emotional abilities and overall well-being.

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, social-emotional, and behavioral challenges. Thanks to the new position added this school year, our Director of Mental Health and Counseling has been leading the collaboration across the district to streamline our identification, placement and interventions across buildings.

We have teams consisting of staff who work together to identify students with needs in this area, provide recommendations, interventions, support, and closely monitor cases. At the school level this includes Psychologists, Nurses, School Adjustment Counselors, Administrators, Special Educators, and Classroom Educators.



This school year we have added an additional layer of support for students and families by having a District Social Worker. Over the course of this year she has supported families and students with unique life and living situations that require a complex level of care to ensure their basic safety needs are met.

The district staff members benefit from consultation from our Director of Mental Health and Counseling, Clinical Coordinators, Social Worker and contracted Child Psychiatrist who work together to identify students with needs in this area and provide enhanced recommendations, interventions, support, and closely monitor cases. These professionals provide clinical support which are customized to each student, including counseling, behavior management, crisis intervention, family engagement or care coordination. This year we secured two additional Clinical Coordinators to allow these staff members to be more visible within the school buildings to support acute and chronic behavioral needs.

### **RISE (Reaching Independence through Supported Employment) Program Update**

Shrewsbury Public School's RISE program is a post-secondary program designed for students, ages 18 – 22, who qualify for additional learning opportunities following their high school experience. The goal of RISE is to provide students with the skills and experiences they need to successfully and independently navigate their local community. The focus is to increase students' overall independence with functional academic life skills, employment opportunities, and community access.

RISE focuses on ensuring students are able to be contributing members of society. A large part of this is to provide students with opportunities to be active in their local community and become familiar with their community at large. During their time at RISE, students participate in community learning experiences, volunteer and paid work opportunities, and community-based leisure activities. Students practice the skills they have learned in the classroom and apply those skills in the natural community setting. They will participate in community-based activities to learn and practice skills related to independent living, such as shopping, ordering at restaurants, community leisure activities, and travel training. Social and leisure activities are incorporated regularly into RISE programming and might include social groups, games, community leisure activities, and social meetup groups with other 18-22 programs.

Our intention for RISE is to also open a retail business in the center of Shrewsbury. This retail space will allow teachers to target pre-employment skills such as inventory, point of sales, social skills, etc. We are continuing the planning process for the RISE storefront. After surveying various community groups like the Shrewsbury Town Center Association, Shrewsbury Public Schools District Leadership, Shrewsbury High School (SHS) students, Special Education Parent Advisory Council members and the RISE Advisory Committee, our students will be selling

local merchandise set to highlight our lovely town and schools. While shopping, community members will be invited to look around and browse our unique and fun candies, drinks, and more. Our program's staffing plan will include a site-based Coordinator, two Special Educators, Job Coaches and a Retail Business Manager.

RISE and the new retail store will be located in the center of town at 557 Main Street. The district will be leasing the property from Chacharone Properties. Renovations of the site will be completed this spring. The center of town is an ideal location for this business and program. The students will have access to other local businesses or agencies such as police, fire, banking, library, the Shrewsbury Senior Center, and the post office, which will allow them to explore other vocational and work opportunities and travel training. Of note, an additional vehicle was purchased using grant funds for the students to access community internships, field trips, etc. For further RISE information, an informational document is included with this document.

### **Recommendations for 2023/2024 School Year**

Through observations, analysis and collaborative conversations with administrators and staff, the following positions will further develop RISE program integrity and consistency. New investments for next fiscal year will be grant funded. By establishing our own program, next fiscal year, we are projecting an annual savings of over \$83,000 by creating this program "in-house" as opposed to continuing to tuition-out this student population.

### **Recommended New Investments through IDEA 240 Grant Funds:**

RISE Program:

- 2.0 RISE Special Education Teachers
- 1.0 RISE Related Services (Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy, Counseling)
- 1.0 RISE Retail Store Manager
- 8.0 RISE Job Coaches/Paraprofessionals

*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 and identity, exposure to trauma, disability status, housing insecurity or immigrant 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.*