



Hampshire County Schools Special Circumstance Review Report

Special Education Services



**West Virginia Board of Education
2023-2024**

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Introduction

The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) conducted a Special Circumstance Review of Hampshire County Schools at the specific direction of the State Superintendent beginning September 20, 2023, to examine compliance with the laws and policies affecting student, school, and county performance and progress regarding the provision of special education services.

A team consisting of staff members from the WVDE compiled the information during the onsite review and provided the findings outlined in this report. The report will acknowledge identified strengths and provide corrective actions to address deficiencies and improvement of county administrative practices regarding the delivery of special education services to students with disabilities in Hampshire County.

Onsite Review Team Members

- » Debbie Adams, Coordinator, Office of Special Education
- » Jonah Adkins, Director, Office of PK-12 Academic Support
- » Rebecca Boggs, Coordinator, Office of Special Education
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- » Angela Urling, Coordinator, Office of Accountability
- » Whitney White, Coordinator, Office of Special Education

Background

Hampshire County Schools consists of five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school serving a student population of approximately 2,800 students (ZoomWV). Figures 1 and 2 compare total students and the special education student population proficiency data for English language arts and mathematics for school years 2015-2023. Proficiency data is not available for 2019-2020 due to the COVID 19 national emergency.

Figure 1: ZoomWV State Assessment Results Grades 3-8 and 11

English Language Arts Proficiency: 2015- 2023

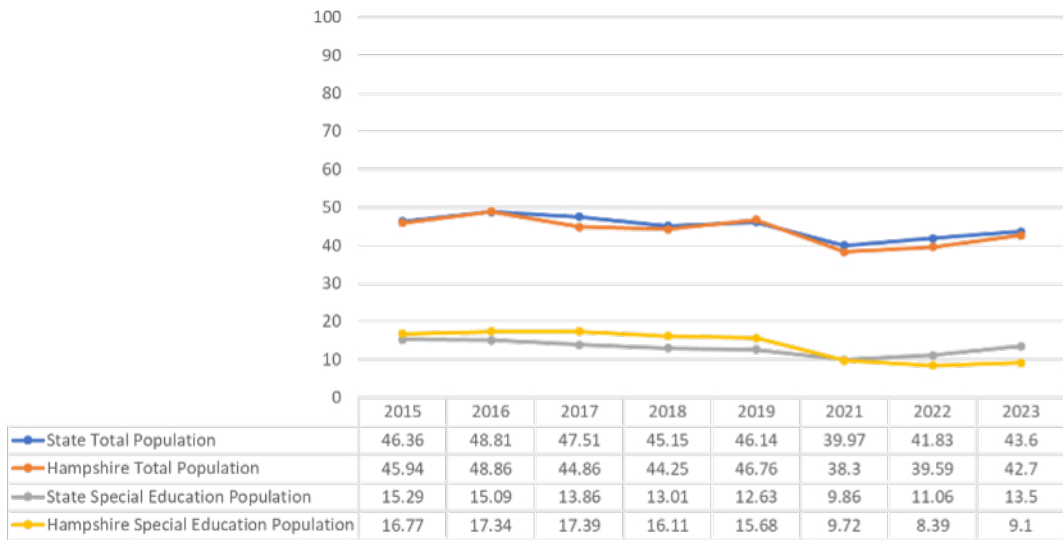
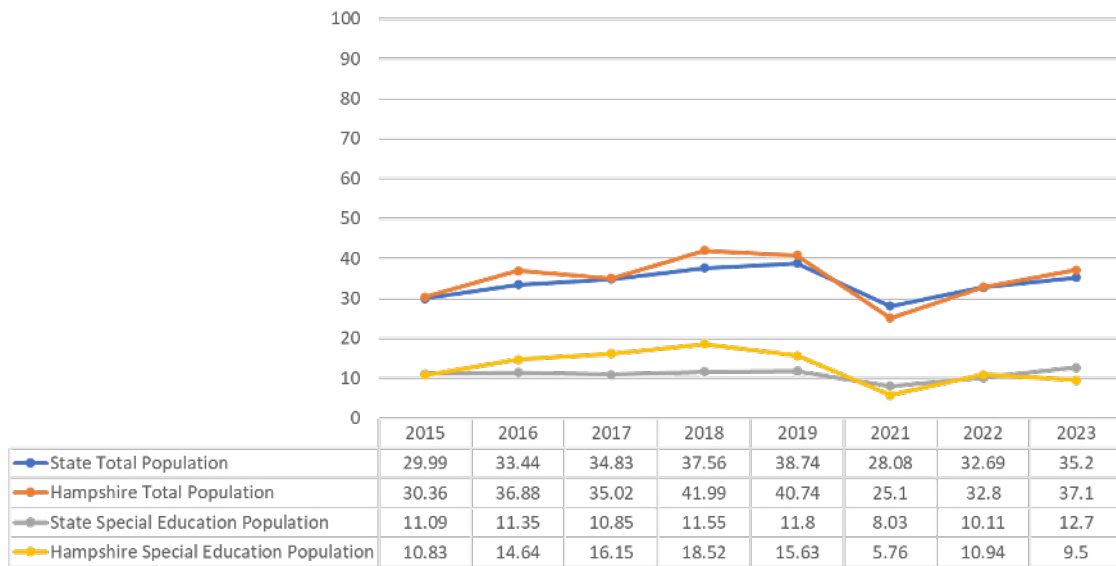


Figure 2: ZoomWV State Assessment Results Grades 3-8 and 11

Math Proficiency: 2015- 2023



Focus Area 1: Efficiency Indicator Status

- » The West Virginia Accountability System (WVAS) County Operational Effectiveness Indicators of Efficiency ensure efficient management and use of resources in counties and schools.
- » A county's operational effectiveness is reported annually to the West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) based on 11 indicators of efficiency. The county's performance under any given indicator, identified as "Meets Requirements" or "Needs Assistance," is the result of an evaluation of records, reports, and other documents on the quality of education and compliance with statutes, policies, and state-approved standards under each efficiency indicator.
- » The appropriate WVDE division determines the identification of each efficiency standard. In making each county's annual determination, the Office of Special Education uses a results/compliance matrix reflecting data collected through the annual desk audit, cyclical monitoring, and dispute resolution.
- » Hampshire County Schools received a rating of "Needs Assistance" in the Special Education Indicator of Efficiency in the 2021, 2022, and 2023 County Approval Status and Accreditation Reports.
- » A rating of "Needs Assistance" means the county must, with assistance from the WVDE, develop an action plan to address deficiencies. Hampshire County's focus areas for improvement, as informed by the results/compliance matrix were graduation rate, dropout rate, full-time regular classroom placement, and 80% regular classroom placement.
- » In 2022 and 2023, the WVDE Office of Special Education team required that the district develop a targeted systemic improvement plan with frequent progress monitoring and participation in technical assistance activities, which are ongoing.
- » Due to Hampshire County's lack of acceptable progress, as reported in the November 2022 District Approval Status and Accreditation Report, a Special Circumstance Review in the area of Special Education was scheduled for Spring 2023. Due to the testing window for the General Summative Assessment, the county requested the review be rescheduled to the start of the 2023-2024 school year. Hampshire County was again identified as "Needs Assistance" in the Fall 2023 Approval Status and Accreditation Report.

NONCOMPLIANCE 1.1: In SY 2023, Hampshire County received and expended a \$49,865 West Virginia Guideposts to Graduation grant to improve graduation outcomes for students with disabilities. Object codes in the grant financials indicated grant expenditures were not completely aligned with activities described in the application. In SY 2024, Hampshire County was awarded an additional \$46,000; however, as of the date of this report, no grant monies have been expended.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 1.1: Central office staff collaborate with the WVDE Guideposts to Graduation coordinator to verify grant monies are being expended to support research-based practices to improve the graduation rate for students with disabilities. Ensure the Special Education Director is able to prioritize participation in the Guideposts to Graduation Community of Practice. The WVDE will provide technical assistance to ensure grant funds are expended in alignment with grant activities to support improvements to this metric.

NONCOMPLIANCE 1.2: In addition to being designated "Needs Assistance" under the WVAS, Hampshire County Schools was also designated "Needs Substantial Intervention" in June 2023 according to Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEA). Per *State General Supervision Responsibilities Under Parts B and C of the IDEA: Monitoring, Technical Assistance, and Enforcement (OSEP QA 23-01)*, a state's determination that a Local Education Agency (LEA), in this case a county school district, "needs substantial intervention," must result in the State's withholding, in whole or in part, any further payments under Part B to the LEA.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 1.2: Any diverted funds will be used by the WVDE to recruit and hire a contracted employee to be located in Hampshire County for the purpose of supporting special education services, specifically with regard to the four identified areas of focus.

Focus Area 2: County Administrative Practices and Allocation of Resources

- » The team found that the Hampshire County administration and school staff demonstrated care for students and fostered positive relationships with all stakeholders.
- » A Special Education onsite cyclical monitoring visit took place in Hampshire County Schools in 2022. Based on the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) guidance, all corrections must be completed within one year from the date the LEA was made aware of the findings and the district must show that findings have been systemically corrected through a new data pull known as Prong 2 monitoring. Corrections have been ongoing since the 2022 review. During the visit, the county was able to clear all remaining outstanding corrections from the 2022 cyclical monitoring process and the 2022 monitoring review has been closed.
- » During interviews, principals and teachers expressed that a positive and collaborative culture exists within schools throughout the district.
- » Both veteran and new special education teachers discussed a lack of personnel at the central office and school levels to support the IEP process.
- » A compliance specialist position at the central office was vacated last year. This person provided additional support for IEP compliance throughout the district. The position was vacated and has since been posted as two part-time positions rather than one full-time position. The rationale expressed for this decision was to avoid taking a teacher from the classroom to fill this role. However, as of the time of the review, there had been no applicants for the part-time positions. A full-time compliance specialist to support the IEP process was frequently mentioned in interviews as a necessary component to improve special education services.
- » During interviews, teachers indicated that the compliance specialist had been an invaluable resource for them, as they could ask questions and verify information, saving time and errors related to IEPs.
- » Many teachers interviewed and observed by the team were inexperienced, uncertified, and/or long-term substitutes. At the time of the review, it was shared there are three schools in Hampshire County without any certified special education teachers. The challenge of recruiting and retaining certified staff was mentioned throughout interviews.
- » The challenges facing beginning special education teachers were mentioned during interviews. Many teachers stated that they were supported by their administrators and more veteran teachers at the school. Interview respondents characterized turnover and unfilled positions as negatively affecting the administration of special education services. At one school, teachers expressed concern, stating a lack of teachers and allocated positions had resulted in changes to students' placements.
- » Professional learning for special education teachers is primarily delivered by the Special Education Director. The director described visiting each school at the beginning of the school year to discuss writing Standards-Based IEPs aligned with the WV College- and Career-Readiness Standards or Alternate Academic Achievement Standards. She described walking through the entire IEP process with each teacher at each school and spending 60 minutes at each school discussing differentiation and supplemental services calendars and accommodations. Some teachers interviewed, however, described teaching themselves to use the online IEP program due to a lack of assistance and available central office personnel to provide support. They attributed IEP errors and mistakes to inexperience and feeling overwhelmed.
- » During interviews and service verification, the team found that some principals did not articulate a clear understanding of special education procedures. However, other principals demonstrated a solid understanding of special education, as reflected in accurate service verification at those schools.

FINDING 2.1: The team determined based on interview comments, service verification data, and Hampshire County Schools' designations for both IDEA Part B and the WVAS, the IEP compliance specialist is a necessary support for the IEP process. The specialist position has been advertised as two part-time positions and has received no applicants.

RECOMMENDATION 2.1: In order to attract a qualified candidate for this position, it should be advertised as a full-time position with benefits rather than two part-time positions, as it is currently advertised.

FINDING 2.2: The team determined based on interviews the current model for providing professional learning and support to new, uncertified, or long-term substitute teachers is inadequate to support high-quality processes.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2: Prioritize professional learning experiences designed to support new, uncertified or long-term substitute teachers working in special education roles. In collaboration with the WVDE Office of District and School Improvement, develop a data-informed, systemic model for professional learning utilizing a variety of delivery models.

FINDING 2.3: The team determined through interview responses the Special Education Director manages a multitude of responsibilities within the central office, including providing professional learning for special education teachers, attending special education Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, and providing oversight for over 520 IEPs.

RECOMMENDATION 2.3: In collaboration with the WVDE Office of District and School Improvement and/or Office of Special Education, conduct a strategic review of central office responsibilities, procedures, and protocols. Prioritize the efforts of central office staff and analyze the support available to ensure the effective use of central office time and resources.

Focus Area 3: Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

- » The team performed a service verification process for 45 randomly selected IEPs (five per school) to compare IEP services with school and student schedules. Documentation of the location, start time, end time, duration, and provider of services was reviewed.
- » Based on interviews, Student Assistance Team (SAT) procedures and interventions were unclear and inconsistent.
- » A classroom listed as self-contained was functioning when observed during the on-site visit as a resource room, and the concern existed that master schedule coding errors were occurring.
- » Team members expressed concern with regard to the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) determination process described in interviews. The primary delivery of special education services in some elementary schools was self-contained classrooms, and some interview comments suggested placement determinations were made based solely on behaviors rather than putting necessary supports in place to teach and reinforce appropriate behaviors in a less restrictive environment.

NONCOMPLIANCE 3.1: Twenty-nine of the forty-five IEPs had at least one unverifiable service. For instance, minutes were written into IEPs without the accompanying frequency and duration. This indicates many students with disabilities may not be receiving special education services in the frequency or duration determined necessary by the IEP team (WVBE Policy 2419, Chapter 5, Section 2.G).

NONCOMPLIANCE 3.2: During the review of the randomly sampled IEPs, the team found selected files to be incomplete and out-of-date.

NONCOMPLIANCE 3.3: In several instances, when the team requested additional documentation or records, the additional information provided was also incorrect (WVBE Policy 2419, Chapter 5, Section 2.G).

NONCOMPLIANCE 3.4: During the file review process, several examples of students being either overserved and/or underserved with special education or related services based on the documentation and schedule provided were noted.

NONCOMPLIANCE 3.5: Interview comments and observations suggested some LRE decisions may be informed by a one-size-fits-all approach to the provision of special education services. Interview comments suggested that students may be placed based on school schedules, available staff, and current classroom configurations rather than to support the individual needs of students with disabilities.

CORRECTIVE ACTIONS FOR IEP REVIEW NONCOMPLIANCE:

- » Conduct a review of each school’s master schedule, bell schedule, and documentation of services to ensure all students with disabilities receive special education and related services as determined in the student’s IEP. Take necessary steps to ensure documentation of any service meets the requirements of WVBE Policy 2419, Chapter 6, and aligns with the IEP as written.
- » Offer compensatory services to any student who has not received documented special education and/or related services in accordance with his or her IEP.
- » Utilizing the established professional learning communities, conduct a districtwide review of LRE determinations for students with disabilities to ensure determinations are based on individual student data and goals, and progress is regularly monitored to ensure appropriate services are provided.

Focus Area 4: Access to Curriculum

- » During observations, the team noted one school had an exemplary co-teaching model occurring. However, overall, co-teaching in the county was inconsistent.
- » A summary of all instructional observation data revealed the effective use of instructional time and the preparation of materials in advance of the lesson to be overall strengths. Most classrooms were observed to be inviting and student-centered learning environments.
- » Observers noted limited opportunities for students to exhibit age-appropriate leadership roles such as performing classroom jobs or leading groups of peers. Observation data reflected student leadership opportunities were observed in 16.7% of classrooms. Students provided input and choice in few of the observed classrooms.
- » Differentiation of instruction and/or personalized learning experiences were observed to be a pervasive practice in fewer than 10% of observed classrooms and were not observed at all in most classrooms. Students were observed receiving the same instructional content in a class that was coded as Grades 6-8, raising concerns about how grade level content standards and differentiated learning could occur.
- » Learning targets, the written or verbal communication of those targets, and learning activities connected to those targets were rarely observed.
- » During observations, most students were compliant with teacher instruction. However, a low level of student engagement was observed. Several missed opportunities for student engagement were noted by the team. Students had limited opportunities to collaborate with one another during instructional activities.
- » Safe and appropriate student behavior was observed in the majority of classrooms. Most teachers communicated behavioral expectations and redirected disruptive behavior effectively when it occurred.
- » Formative assessment practices, and resulting changes to instruction, were not observed in most classrooms.
- » Throughout observations, the team noted a limited number of instructional strategies were utilized, with few examples of the use of multiple instructional strategies utilized within the same lesson.

FINDING 4.1: Instructional improvements, specifically in the areas of formative assessment and differentiation of instruction, are necessary in some classrooms to ensure access to standards-based instruction and to increase student engagement. These were not pervasive practices in all classrooms throughout the district.

RECOMMENDATION 4.1: Utilize the instructional coach, professional learning communities, and instructional leadership strategies to collect data about instruction and develop districtwide goals for implementation of high-yield instructional strategies and differentiation in all classrooms.



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