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Review of the Student Support Services for the
Nantucket Public Schools
Nantucket, Massachusetts

Conducted:
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Submitted by:
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A Division of Walker
Needham, Massachusetts
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I. Introduction

The Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent of Schools requested that Walker Partnerships conduct a review/evaluation of Student Support Services for the Nantucket Public Schools. The intent of this review/evaluation is to assist the administration in clarifying the roles and responsibilities of Student Support Services personnel, the organizational structure under which these positions function, leadership and supervisory schema, identification of the focus and intent of the various services, and the identification of issues that are, or may be creating, obstacles that prevent the services from being more effectively and efficiently delivered to students.

A. Purpose

The purpose of an independent review of a specific program and service is to provide a school system with an objective report that identifies areas of strength, needs and recommendations. An independent review allows for the system to be examined from the perspective that looks at what is working well in the system, but also speaks to areas that need to be strengthened. This review is focused on the specific domain of programming and services that serve students through Student Support Services personnel.

The review process is designed, through a multi-step approach, to assist the school system's leadership team and the school based personnel in having a guided and focused discussion that will enable effective short and long range planning to occur, while recognizing and addressing issues such as:

- Identifying trends and patterns in the students being served by Student Support Services
- Identifying the main characteristics in the students who are being served
- Determining the effectiveness and utilization of current Student Support Services personnel, and their roles and responsibilities with respect to serving students
- Determining what existing Student Support Services need to be enhanced, strengthened and/or developed
- Determining what other required services need to be in place to serve the needs of the students across the district
- Determining the effectiveness of current program and service interventions
- Identifying staffing and resource needs that reflect student needs

- Creating a long-range plan that addresses the agreed upon needs of the student population
- Establishing a comprehensive approach to program and service development that is linked to the budget planning process

This review process brings forth information that will enable the system's administrators and school based personnel to develop an action plan(s) that will lead to more effective approaches for serving the students of the Nantucket Public Schools.

It is important to recognize that for the information contained in this report to be beneficial to the school district, the stakeholders must come together to discuss the Findings and the Recommendations. Through a deliberative process, the administration and the school based personnel can develop short and long range action plan(s) that will address the agreed upon issues.

B. Reviewers

- Dr. James B. Earley has forty years of public education experience as a teacher, teaching assistant principal, Massachusetts Department of Education Supervisor and Acting Regional Special Education Director, twenty-eight years as Administrator of Special Education and thirteen months as Superintendent of Schools for the Watertown Public Schools. Dr. Earley has been a Senior Lecturer at Lesley University, Wheelock College and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Massachusetts/Boston. In addition to his role as Managing Director for Walker Partnerships, he is a Senior Consultant for the Center of Social Development and Education, University of Massachusetts/Boston. Dr. Earley has consulted for numerous educational organizations, participated in a variety of special education task forces and has conducted numerous independent program reviews, evaluations and professional development trainings for school systems within Massachusetts and several other states.
- Dr. Gerald Mazor spent twenty-nine years as the Executive Director of the CASE Collaborative. Following this experience, he was interim Executive Director of the LABBB Collaborative. In his role as a Collaborative Director he worked closely with over 150 Superintendents and Special Education Administrators. These experiences provided him with a unique opportunity to work alongside some of the truly outstanding educational leaders in Massachusetts. He is currently Director of Special Projects for the LABBB Collaborative as well as a Senior Staff Consultant for Walker Partnerships. Dr. Mazor is the past President of both the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC) and the Massachusetts Chapter of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). He recently completed six years as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Metrowest Community Health Care Foundation. In addition, he served as a Finance Committee representative for twelve years in his local community, the

last two of which were as Vice Chairman. He is currently on the Board of Trustees of the Morse Institute, the public library in Natick, Massachusetts.

- Mr. Edward Orenstein has spent over thirty-two years in a variety of public education leadership positions, including twenty-five years as a Special Education and Student Services Director (most recently eighteen years with the Belmont Public Schools). He has also served as a teacher, school psychologist and Coordinator of Psychological Services. After retiring as Executive Director of the Concord Area Special Education (CASE) Collaborative, Mr. Orenstein was interim Director of Student Services with the Lincoln Public Schools. He has served on a number of Boards and Executive Committees, and is currently a Trustee with Schools for Children, Inc., the umbrella organization for two private special education schools and one independent school. For eighteen years, Mr. Orenstein was a Sponsor of the Say Yes to Education Program – a partnership with Lesley University and the Cambridge Public Schools. He is a co-founder of SPEDCO which promotes systemic special education reform initiatives. Mr. Orenstein has presented to numerous professional and municipal organizations and committees on a range of leadership and educational topics.

II. Methodology

This program review was conducted based on a two step approach:

1. A review of all written documentation pertaining to this review was conducted. This included a complete review of job descriptions, program and service descriptions, reporting data material for the various support services delivered by the Behavioral Specialists, various survey reports, the Behavioral Ad Hoc Report and the five year Strategic Plan for the district.
2. Interviews and discussions were conducted with fifty-nine (59) individuals who hold the following positions:
 - Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction
 - High School Principal
 - Middle School Principal
 - Elementary School Principal
 - High School Assistant Principal
 - Elementary Assistant Principal
 - Director of Pupil Personnel Services
 - Director of Special Education
 - Three School Committee Members
 - One Former School Committee Member/Parent
 - Six School Council/Parent Members
 - Community Coordinator
 - Community School Director
 - Seven Elementary Teachers
 - Six Middle School Teachers
 - Six High School Teachers
 - Two School Psychologists
 - One School Adjustment Counselor
 - Alternative Program Coordinator
 - Three Behavioral Specialists
 - Six Guidance Counselors
 - Two School Nurses
 - Conflict Resolution Counselor
 - Director of Nantucket Behavioral Health Services
 - Two NBHS Counselors
 - Resource Officer

The interviews were thirty (30) minutes in length, with emphasis placed on the focus of the service and program under review. Questions and discussion focused on the following areas:

- individuals' roles and responsibilities
- organizational structure
- supervision
- student needs
- program and service strengths and areas of need

- successful approaches
- obstacles to student success
- trends
- parent and staff concerns

The discussions varied somewhat depending on the specific role of the individual who was interviewed. The interviews expanded beyond these specific areas based on the individual's experience within their respective role, their experience in the field of education, the length of time that they have been in their current position and other factors that emerged from the interview process.

An exit interview was conducted with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of Schools.

III. Commendations

This section of the report is for the purpose of recognizing the efforts put forth by the district in their plan to address the needs of students. Student Support Services for the district have been increased over the past several years due to the unfortunate number of student suicides and attempted suicides. The district and community of Nantucket has responded in a very proactive manner to increase the support services that are available to students at all levels, with particular emphasis on the secondary level. There are competing interests that continue to place a significant pressure and financial burden on the school district. The Nantucket Public Schools has recognized its responsibility to address the needs of its students.

Specific Commendations:

- The Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent and School Committee for initiating a study to review the district's Student Support Services
- The engaging, forthright and caring interviewees who presented a plethora of thoughts, perceptions and ideas
- The overall efforts made by the district to respond to the challenging mental health crises and issues that have occurred during the past few years
- The efforts by the School Department and community to develop programs and services to address the mental health needs of the school population
- The addition of various staffing positions to Student Support Services by the administration and School Committee in response to the mental health crises and needs of the student population
- The ongoing discussion by the guidance counselors as to approaches for strengthening the guidance curriculum and consideration of using the Massachusetts Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs as a guide
- The ongoing dialogue between and among the local and state human service agencies and the public schools regarding student mental health issues
- The placement of grant funded staff positions through the Massachusetts Departments of Public Health and Mental Health at the high school
- The initiation of the Signs of Suicide (SOS) program at the high school
- The creation and implementation of the Referral Protocol for Emergency Safety Assessment (March '09)

- The creation of a structural process by which students return to the high school following psychiatric hospitalization
- The development of the Behavioral Ad Hoc Report for the elementary school (June '08)
- The collection of various data by the high school Behavioral Specialist with respect to the Behavioral Support Program at the high school, and the use of this data to track trends and interventions for students
- The implementation of the Student Assistance Program at the high school
- The availability of a trained Drug and Alcohol Specialist in the public schools
- The placement of the police department Resource Officer within the schools to assist in fostering effective communication between and among the schools and the community
- The implementation of a peer leadership program at the high school
- The availability of mental health services for all children in the district and not just students who are on IEPs

- Students do not have to be on an IEP in order to receive mental health services. Only four students on IEPs have been identified as having emotional difficulties as their primary disability.

Number of Students on IEPs Identified as Having Emotional Challenges*

Disability	FY 2009 - # of Nantucket Students on IEPs by Disability	%
Autism	8	4.8%
Communication	17	10.1%
Developmental Delay	15	8.9%
<i>Emotional</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2.4%</i>
Health	5	3.0%
Intellectual	2	1.2%
Multiple Disabilities	22	13.1%
Neurological	0	0.0%
Physical	5	3.0%
Sensory/Deafblind	0	0.0%
Sensory/Hard of Hearing	1	0.6%
Sensory/Vision Impairment	1	0.6%
Specific Learning Disabilities	88	52.4%
	168	100.0%

* Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Annual Student Data Report for FY 2009

- The reconstituted Student Support Team at the high school with a strong follow-up component as part of the process
- The reasonable case load of the various Student Support Services personnel
- Efforts by various high school Student Support Services personnel to meet on a weekly basis and collaboratively review students' status

IV. Factors Effecting Programming and Services

There are numerous factors that impact on the system's ability to deliver Student Support Services to students throughout the district. None of these factors is more impacting than the inconsistency in administrative leadership at the Central Administration and the building level.

- Over the years, the district has experienced a rather high turnover rate in the leadership positions of the three schools and the central office. This turnover of administrative leadership directly impacts the consistency of the implementation of policies, practices and procedures. School personnel are continually affected by the turnover, thwarting their efforts to provide consistent instruction and support to students. Policies are changed, not consistently implemented, or new initiatives are implemented before current approaches are deemed inappropriate through data driven analysis.
- School based personnel who participated in the one-on-one interviews expressed a great deal of frustration with the administrative turnover. Many felt that it led to disjointedness in the system as well as to a degree of mistrust with the administration. The exact origin of this mistrust is difficult to pinpoint, but it was a common theme through the numerous interviews with staff from all three levels. It was expressed by many that decisions were made before school based personnel input was requested.
- The School Committee needs to take ownership of the issue of leadership continuity with a plan that will ensure greater stability to the administrative leadership of the schools and the district as a whole. This is greatly complicated due to the cost of housing on the island, island isolation, and the general issue that life on the island is like living in a "fish bowl" where everyone knows everyone. Attracting and maintaining skilled leaders will be an issue that is not easily resolved, but it is one that the School Committee must take under advisement and develop a plan.
- The isolation of island life, and the conflicting influences that it places on the citizens and the students of the school district, have an effect on how issues related to student needs are addressed. There is a concern by interviewed personnel that there is a breakdown in the professional and personal boundaries in the lives of students and adults. Because there is a great deal of blending with school life and life outside of school, the needs and issues of students are known by many people. Many interviewed individuals expressed a concern with breaches of student confidentiality. It also became apparent that many of the interviewed individuals felt that the way of life on the island (which includes a calendar of events and celebration with alcohol) has an enormous influence on the behavior of students. There is an atmosphere that begins in April and lasts through December with the various tourist events that are conducted throughout the year encouraging partying and good times. Staff members feel such events

have an adverse effect on the students' perception of life and how to cope with the various stressors with which they are confronted.

- There is not an effective implementation of programs and services under Student Support Services. There is not a structural organization that is commonly referred to as the Department of Student Support Services. Though the Department of Student Services or Pupil Personnel Service model has been in place for over sixty years in public schools, there is not a uniformed structure in place that unites components of services and personnel who commonly function under this structure. Given the array of personnel and positions that are currently identified as Student Support Services, there is not a mission, focus, intent or purpose under which current personnel function and operate. In addition, there is not a leadership model in place to provide oversight, supervision and accountability to the district for the performance and services that are provided to students.
- Fiscal resources do, and will continue to, impact on the district's ability to maintain and even increase Student Support Services. The district has had to make substantial budget reductions from the FY 2009 budget for the FY 2010 budget. This will mean a reduction in positions, services, and a consolidation of positions throughout the district. Though needs of the students continue to place pressure on the district, the reality of the current economic environment is that there are not the resources available to maintain the level of current FY 2009 services. The Administration and School Committee have had difficult decisions to make. The School Committee and the Administration have acknowledged the importance of addressing the mental health needs of the students. This issue has to be a priority and seriously considered as the School Committee makes decisions about budget reductions. Budget line items that directly affect the mental health and well being of students need to be seriously discussed by the district and the community. This is not simply a school based issue, but a community wide concern that has to have the support and input of all. Budget deliberation, for all practical purposes, was concluded by the time this review was completed. The administration had to make decisions that will impact services, staffing and students. However, it is strongly recommended that the discussion process regarding priorities for the FY 2011 budget commence earlier this coming fall so that a clear and unified direction will emerge sooner in the school year regarding the budget decisions that will need to be made.

V. Findings

The following Findings are provided to assist the system with future planning and direction. These Findings are a direct result of the review of written documentation and the one-on-one interviews. These Findings are presented in no particular order of priority.

Specific Findings:

- There is currently a lack of consistent administrative oversight of Student Support Service programs and services throughout the district.
- The roles of the support services personnel versus special education staff is blurred and misunderstood by many school based personnel.
- There is not a clear understanding by staff of the roles and responsibilities of student services personnel: Who is responsible for what services? Who reports to whom within the school?
- There is not a clear understanding of “Who reports to whom?” within the student services unit.
- A number of interviewees were not aware of the services offered by certain high school staff members who are funded by the Massachusetts Department of Mental and Public Health.
- Within the school community, there is a stated lack of trust of the administration.
- The role of the current Director of Pupil Personnel Services is not clearly defined or understood by Student Support Services personnel and other general education personnel.
- The constant turnover/changes of many of the key leadership positions in the schools has a major impact on staff morale and the ability to make long term systematic changes.
- There is a lack of agreement among interviewees as to the value of the Alternative Middle/High School Program as it presently exists.
- There was agreement among interviewees that the student body has significant mental health needs and continues to require many coordinated supports.
- As an island, Nantucket does not have the same option as most of the public school districts in the Commonwealth regarding the placement of students in out-of-district day placements. The statewide average is 5.4%, while in Nantucket no students on IEPs are placed in out-of-district day programs.

Comparison of Students on IEPs Educated in Day Placements*

	NANTUCKET	STATE DATA
PUBLIC (Collaboratives and other LEAs) and Private Day Placements	0.0%	5.4%

* Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Annual Student Data Report for FY 2009

- As a result of not being able to educate students in out-of district day placements, Nantucket finds itself having to educate a greater proportion of their students on IEPs in residential programs off the island.
- Numerous interviewed personnel reported not being evaluated for several years by a supervisor.
- There lacks a uniformed, coordinated, systematic approach in dealing with student support services district wide.
- The current job description for the position of Director of Pupil Personnel Services is most unusual and does not reflect typical responsibilities as they exist in other districts for this type of position.
- Professional development for personnel who provide student support services are uneven with no overarching theme and lack in-depth content focus.
- Professional development for the special and general education staff at all three buildings is not based on the assessed needs of the staff.
- There is a lack of ongoing and consistent clinical consultation/supervision for personnel who provide treatment to students.
- There is a lack of clarity with respect to consideration and determination of the filing of 51As (reporting of child abuse/neglect) and how the process works.
- There is a lack of clear guidelines for student support personnel on how they are to interact, support students, and provide clinical guidance and treatment.
- There are student support personnel functioning independently who have not documented a systematic approach to treatment.

- There is a lack of program options and choices for non college bound students on what should be offered to them during their high school career.
- School nurses lack a duty free lunch schedule.
- School nurses do not play an interactive role in the buildings with the various Student Support Services personnel.
- There is a perceived climate of professional mistrust that was articulated by interviewees.
- There is a lack of a coordinated cohesiveness of staff role definition between the building administrators and the Student Support Services personnel.
- The role of the Behavioral Specialist at each building is very inconsistent with the original intent of the position.
- Practices by the Behavioral Specialist are not consistent or uniformly outlined among the three positions.
- There lacks a vision of what the guidance counselors throughout the district should be doing in the area of student growth and development.
- Guidance counselors at the three schools are not articulating a consistent approach to child development and following a research based model of what guidance should be in the 21st century.
- There is an acknowledged concern that student confidentiality is frequently breached and there is a blur between the boundaries and parameters of school life and out of school life by the professional school community.
- There lacks a consistent approach to student behavior throughout the district. There is not an approach that addresses school climate and student behavior in one uniform methodology.
- Staff members report a culture of inconsistency in practice on student discipline based on “who you are” and “who knows who in the community.”
- There is a lack of uniformed policy and practices between the staff of the Nantucket Behavioral Health Center and school personnel with respect to sharing student information.
- There is a lack of stated policy, procedures and stated practices with respect to how to deal with family work/consultation.

- Interviewees report that the ongoing issue of student substance use and abuse is prevalent, and in some respects has become an acceptable behavior.
- There is a lack of comprehensive training for paraprofessionals on an ongoing basis.
- There is a reported sense of frustration with the administration at the elementary and middle school level with respect to “who is in charge?” There seem to be different roles and responsibilities for the various staff positions.
- There is a lack of consistency with follow-through of procedures regarding severe acting out behavior at the elementary level.
- There is a lack of more restrictive and intensive programming for students with serious emotional disabilities.
- There is no uniformed approach to the collection of data regarding the frequency and intensity of student behaviors, and the outcome of interventions for the elementary and middle schools.
- Due to the lack of administrative oversight, supervision and accountability, student support personnel have been able to carve out their own niche of what their role and responsibilities are.
- Building administrators have transformed the roles and responsibilities of several positions to suit their needs, as opposed to a planned district strategy.
- Some staff believe that they should be better informed regarding confidential student information.

VI. Recommendations

The following Recommendations are a direct outcome of the review process that was recently completed of the Student Support Services of the Nantucket Public Schools. The Findings listed in the pervious section are the foundation for the following Recommendations. Each Recommendation is followed by an explanation that is intended to further expand on the rationale. These Recommendations are intended to provide insight and guidance for the district in making program, service and staffing decisions. They should be viewed as a point of departure for involved personnel to engage in discussions that will lead to the development of programs and services for students.

It is important for the stakeholders to come together and develop an action plan(s) that is comprised of short and long-term steps. Budget implications, as well as structural and organizational issues, need to be well understood so that appropriate program adjustment and development can proceed. Through an inclusive process of discussion, a plan should emerge that is comprehensive, meaningful and purposeful. These Recommendations are presented in no particular order of priority.

1) The creation of an administrative structure and organizational chart that ensures system wide coordination, oversight, supervision and evaluation of all student support programs, services and personnel is necessary.

Explanation:

- The current model for Student Support Services does not provide the district with the ongoing administrative oversight for programs, services and personnel.
- The position of Director of Pupil Personnel Services needs to be created. The Director must have the authority to coordinate the personnel and services that are in place, or need to be in place in each of the three schools, so that the mental health needs of the students are met.
- The Director also needs to be part of the Central Office Administrative Team, have the role and responsibility to supervise and evaluate all personnel who are aligned with Student Support Services, and coordinate with other departments within the district and the community. The Director needs to make recommendations to the Superintendent, and must also have the authority to determine how positions are to be established, utilized and sustained within the three schools.
- An organizational chart needs to be developed that reflects the supervisory and reporting responsibilities of all personnel who comprise the newly designated department.

- Lines of authority and communication of the various positions within the department need to be clarified and adhered to.
- Supervision and evaluation of all personnel must be an ongoing requirement of the Director or others charged with that role if it is to be a shared responsibility.
- Scheduled department meetings need to occur on a regular basis throughout the school year for all designated Student Support Services personnel. This approach will assist in updating staff on policy, practice, procedure and information regarding student support services. It will also aid in the sharing of information among the department staff, and enhance articulation between and among the three schools.
- The Director should report directly to the Superintendent of Schools and be part of the Central Office Administrative Team. In some districts, this position is Assistant Superintendent for Student Services or Pupil Personnel Services. Given the high profile of the mental health needs of the student population, the recent suicides, the response of the district to increase support personnel, and the ongoing issues of island life, serious consideration should be given to the elevation of this position to Assistant Superintendent for Student Services. In doing so, other programs and services such as Director of Special Education could be incorporated under the Student Support Services umbrella.
- A district wide mission statement and vision for the department that includes intent, focus and purpose of student support services needs to be developed.

2) Administrative turnover and leadership instability needs to be addressed by the School Committee.

Explanation:

- The issue of administrative turnover, especially the position of principal at the three schools, must be addressed. For all the wonderful reasons of living and working on Nantucket, these same reasons can lead to difficulty for school administrators. The School Committee needs to take ownership of why administrators leave their positions after relatively brief tenures.
- The School Committee needs to develop a plan for leadership stability. A sub-committee or task force should be considered and comprised of administrators, school committee members, teachers and community representatives. This group would be charged with making recommendations to the entire School Committee on strategies for recruitment, retention, search process, supports, mentoring, professional development, active supervision, salary and benefits.

3) Roles and responsibilities of all the positions that are included within the Department of Student Support Services need to be reviewed and updated based on current needs and functions.

Explanation:

- Currently there are numerous positions with similar titles that are functioning under different assumptions of what their roles and responsibilities are. Some of these positions have morphed over time based on the preference of the principal. Others have taken on roles or responsibilities that best suit their skills, while still others have carved out a niche of service that is not consistent with their job title.
- A lack of consistent administrative oversight has contributed to this evolution of these positions. In addition, the frequent changes in building leadership over the years have contributed to this current status.
- School based personnel, as a whole, are not clear on what the roles and responsibilities are for Student Support Services personnel. It is evident that there are varied perceptions for the same position by the general education staff. General education staff reported that they do not always know “who to go to for what service.” They are often told “that is not my job,” when in fact, based on the job title, one would assume it would be their job.
- Given the number of new positions that have been added over the last few years, it is apparent that not all general education school based staff have a clear understanding of the interventions that are in place, and how these positions are to function and support students as well as the general education staff.

4) A more trusting climate needs to be created.

Explanation:

- The district has experienced substantial trauma over the past several years due to the attempted and actual suicides. This trauma appears to have contributed to a gradual growth in the feeling of mistrust between administration and the school based staff. There does not seem to be a specific event or a series of events that has brought the district to this point. It was, however, very clear from the interviewees that there is a feeling of mistrust that has emerged over time. Some may be related to how information is communicated and shared, some related to the administrative turnover and some related to a host of perceptions that may or may not be accurate.
- Whatever the cause or causes are of this sense of mistrust, it must be addressed. It is adversely impacting how staff members perform their roles and responsibilities

both as general education staff and student support personnel. This impact on staff performance will not improve unless the district creates an aggressive plan for ongoing communication. This would include “in person” meetings by the Superintendent, principals and other key stakeholders to identify the issues that have led to this sense of mistrust and to formulate strategies to reverse it. This problem can be solved through a supported effort by all stakeholders.

- Some form of staff survey assessment needs to be disseminated to ascertain specific feelings that staff may have. Data collection will enable the district to then formulate strategies and plans on how best to address the identified issues, enhance communication, and increase personal connections. Through the solicitation of ideas and feedback prior to decision making, a more inclusive process of staff investment and involvement will be created.
- A consulting Discussion Facilitator may assist in identifying issues and potential solutions.

5) Ongoing assessment of continued at-risk students and their continued impact on student support services is necessary.

Explanation:

- Although there is limited system wide documentation that supports the number of at-risk students and identifying the risks the students are dealing with, it was the general consensus of those individuals interviewed that students remain at-risk for potential harm due to substance use, depression, acting out behaviors and anxiety.
- The district has conducted a number of at-risk surveys and needs to continue to do so. There also needs to be a more coordinated approach to data collection on students who are at risk of harming themselves. This data can be obtained directly from staff, the school nurses, the Student Support Teams, parents, the Resource Officer, the Nantucket Behavioral Health Staff and other community based sources.
- A Student Support Service Advisory Group should be established that is a standing committee. This committee would meet at least quarterly each year, if not more often, to continue monitoring the students’ mental health needs and at-risk behavior. Having this type of committee in place would provide the district with updated data and assist in the planning for the annual budget development, resource allocations and staffing patterns.

6) The current staffing allocations for Student Support Service Personnel that were present in the FY 2009 budget appear to be adequate to meet the mental health needs of the students.

Explanation:

- One issue that the Superintendent and several School Committee members put forth was whether or not the current staffing of Student Support Services personnel is sufficient to continue to address the mental health and at-risk needs of the student population. This issue is not a simple yes or no due to the varying reasons of why and how the district arrived at the number and types of staffing positions currently being utilized.
- Without an organizational structure that is well defined with structured roles and responsibilities, oversight, supervisory accountability, and ongoing data collection and analysis, it is difficult to make a determination of what is sufficient or adequate staffing. Should there be reduction in at-risk behavior that is documented and no reoccurrences of attempted suicides or suicides, then it may be stated more conclusively that the current level of staffing is sufficient.
- Once there is a stated mission for a department with clear focus, intent and purpose, and with consistent leadership, then it may be stated whether or not the current level of staffing is sufficient.
- When all positions are functioning based upon agreed role definitions and responsibilities, with administrative oversight and supervision, and then the School Committee will be able to more accurately evaluate staffing levels.
- The number of Student Support Services personnel positions should be based on the results of the implementation of these recommendations. To abruptly increase or reduce the number of positions without well documented data could have an adverse effect on the services provided to the students with mental health needs. When dealing with such sensitive issues, it is essential not to move too quickly without concrete data that can provide decision makers with the most accurate information to assist in formulating action steps. These steps may result in consolidation of positions, maintaining the status quo, or increases in the number of positions as necessary to keep the students safe.

7) Clinical treatment guidelines and clinical supervision need to be provided to those charged with the clinical treatment of students.

Explanation:

- Treatment roles and responsibilities need to be developed with manual/procedural guidelines for those staff who are engaged in providing guidance and clinical treatment to students. Given the recent history of student at-risk behavior, it is crucial that there be clear, precise, documented procedures and steps in place by which treatment providers are to operate and function. There is a concern that even with a job description that clarifies roles and responsibilities, there needs to be a set of written treatment procedures which all staff members follow.
- Varied questions and issues need to be addressed, such as: What steps are to be taken when a provider has a concern about a student's safety? Who communicates to whom? What interventions are available and how are they accessed? What are the parameters that one functions under? Where are the boundaries and when does a case get referred to an outside agency or hospital? All these questions and issues must be fully understood by treatment providers and the providers must all function in a similar manner.
- There need to be strategies of intervention and support which should include the steps to follow when working with and consulting with parents. Strategies of intervention and support need to be given as examples so that staff members are consistent in their approaches to parents. It is necessary that they are communicating similar information and are consistent in their practices.
- Confidentiality is a major concern for treatment providers. Given the island's isolation, it becomes a more significant concern for residents, students and school personnel since they remain on the island for most of their time. This leads to potential abuses of confidentiality due to the close proximity of everyone to each other and the fact that "everyone knows everyone."
- The individuals charged with providing clinical support to students through a defined treatment approach need to have ongoing clinical supervision throughout the school year. This group of personnel, comprised of guidance counselors, behavioral specialists, social workers, school adjustment counselors, school nurses, and so on, must have the opportunity to receive ongoing clinical supervision. Given the complex needs of the students, it is unreasonable to assume that these individuals can make the appropriate clinical treatment decisions on their own without supervision from a clinical expert.

8) Ongoing professional development opportunities need to be available for all staff on the issues of at-risk behaviors and student mental health needs.

Explanation:

- It is imperative that all school based personnel have an opportunity to participate in professional development that will raise their awareness and appreciation for students with at-risk behaviors. Though attention has been given to the topic, there needs to be a sustained effort due to the seriousness of the needs of some of the student population.
- Ongoing training should be topic focused and in-depth in nature. This training can be diverse with more experienced staff requiring less training, while individuals new to the teaching field may require more training.
- Student Support personnel need ongoing training throughout the school year, especially on topics that are emerging from the needs of the students, such as attachment disorder, disruptive adoptions, PTSD, multiple hospitalizations, trauma, depression, anxiety disorder, etc.
- Paraprofessionals must receive training in CPI (crisis prevention intervention) and be renewed, as required, especially at the elementary level.
- Paraprofessionals need to have ongoing training in a variety of topics related to curriculum, instructional strategies and therapeutic and behavioral interventions.

9) A more uniformed district wide approach to addressing school climate and management of student behavior needs to be implemented.

Explanation:

- With the turnover in principals over the years, it is evident that the schools need to develop a building-based model such as the Positive Behavioral Support Intervention model. There is a need to unify the buildings with a consistent school wide approach in dealing with behavior management. There appear to be multiple strategies and styles with respect to how inappropriate behaviors are dealt with. In order to have an effective approach that provides all staff with the skills that they need, the approach has to be similarly practiced by all school personnel. This would then allow for a more successful maintenance of students in general education classes and provide greater continuity for all students.
- There was considerable concern articulated by interviewees that there were varied types and degrees of approaches being utilized by different staff on dealing with acting out and inappropriate behaviors. Different positions are charged with different responsibilities in dealing with behavioral issues. The function of all

staff should be aligned to a constant approach with steps that are consistently followed by all staff.

- The district needs to formulate “best practices” that will enable the schools to develop a school wide culture that is supportive of the efforts of all staff. Many of these research based programs can be found at the U.S. Office of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, or the Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support Documents, University of Oregon. (Email pbsi@oregon.uoregob.edu or see www.pbsi.org.)

10) An alternative program for middle and high school students with emotional disabilities and mental health needs, who are unable to effectively function in the middle and high schools, needs to be developed.

Explanation:

- The district has implemented services to address the mental health needs of students over the last several years. Due to the lack of collaborative and day school program availability on the island, the district is confronted with needing to move students off the island for necessary programs. It could benefit students and potentially be cost effective for the district to develop in-district programming.
- The program(s) should be started to enable students to receive psycho-educational services that may lead to their subsequent transition back into the general education programs.

11) Additional service components should be considered for building the capacity of serving students.

Explanation:

- Students have varied interests. It would be beneficial for some students to have the opportunity to receive a vocational assessment, by their junior year, in order to assist in determining their areas of strengths, interests, and aptitude for further skill development and career training. This formalized assessment would provide data to assist in future development of their programs of studies as well as after graduation plans.
- Consideration needs to be given to the introduction of a life skills application of study for some students. More emphasis on life skills activities that students may not have the opportunity to learn outside of the school environment needs to be offered.

- Emphasis needs to be placed on executive functioning skill development for students so that they know what they need to do in school to be successful. Students need to spend their daily support time learning how to accomplish the tasks that need to be mastered for scholastic improvement, and fulfill their course requirements as well as their treatment goals. They need to learn how to prepare for tests, how to complete long term projects, how to get and be organized, how to take tests, etc.
- Serious consideration needs to be given to the establishment of some form of “after school” and “extended year services” for students with mental health issues that will provide ongoing support for the students over extended breaks in the school year. Modified summer programming, job skill training, career counseling, employment search assistance, treatment intervention, parental support, and homework club are a few of the types of “after school” support services that could be very beneficial.

VII. Summary

The Superintendent of Schools requested that Walker Partnerships conduct a review of the Student Support Services for the district. This two day on-site review was conducted in June of 2009. The purpose of the review was to clarify roles and responsibilities of the various student support personnel, the organizational structure by which these positions function, leaderships and supervisory schema, and the focus and intent of the services, while identifying issues that are or may be creating obstacles that prevent the services from being more effective and efficient. The review has identified numerous Findings that have been addressed through a number of Recommendations with full explanation. The review consisted of on-site one-on-one and small group interviews of fifty-nine (59) individuals from a cross section of school based personnel, as well as principals, other district administrators, general education teachers, School Committee members and parents. Additionally, supporting documentation such as job descriptions, program and service descriptions, reporting data material for the various support services delivered by the Behavioral Specialists, various survey reports, the Behavioral Ad Hoc Report and the five year Strategic Plan for the district were reviewed and analyzed.

The review team is most grateful to the high school administration for all its assistance with the completion of this review process.