Norwalk Public Schools
Comprehensive Review of
Special Education
Processes, Supports, and Services

Els

Arizona State University

URBANCOLLABORATIVE
Leading Equitable & Inclusive Education

Report Organization

- Introduction
- CREC Report Status
- Observations & Recommendations
  - Collaborative Structures
  - Process & Systems
  - Staffing
  - Teaching & Learning
  - Family Engagement
  - Mindset

Introduction

- Mindset
- Drivers/Conditions
- Process

Mindset

Desired State

- **Equity & Inclusion**
  - Diversity of language, race, culture, disability status, SES, etc. are assets.
  - Decisions focused on equitable and inclusive practices for all students are evident throughout district.

- **Growth Mindset**
  - As students evolve, educators' work evolves.
  - There is always a focus on raising standards and student achievement.

- **Special Education**
  - The goal of special education is to minimize the impact of disability and maximize the opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in schooling and the community.
  - Special education is a service, not a place.
  - Shift from technical to adaptive change.
  - Special education does not exist in isolation; integrated into all of a school district, building, classroom.

Setting the Stage for Success

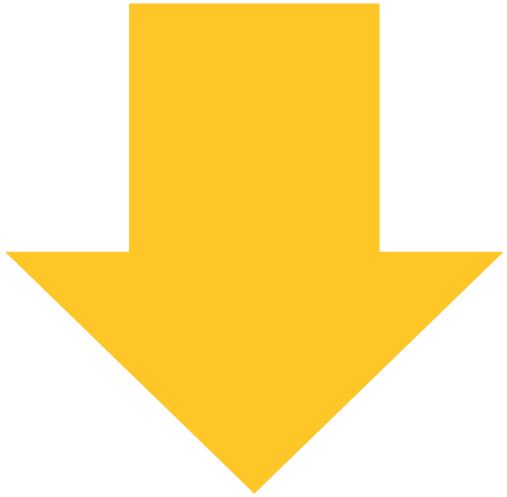
Drivers

- Equitable student achievement
- Integration of special education services throughout the district
- Full implementation of initiatives

Necessary Conditions

- Collaborative structures
- Processes/Systems
- Efficacious staff
- Universally designed curriculum

Setting the Stage for Success



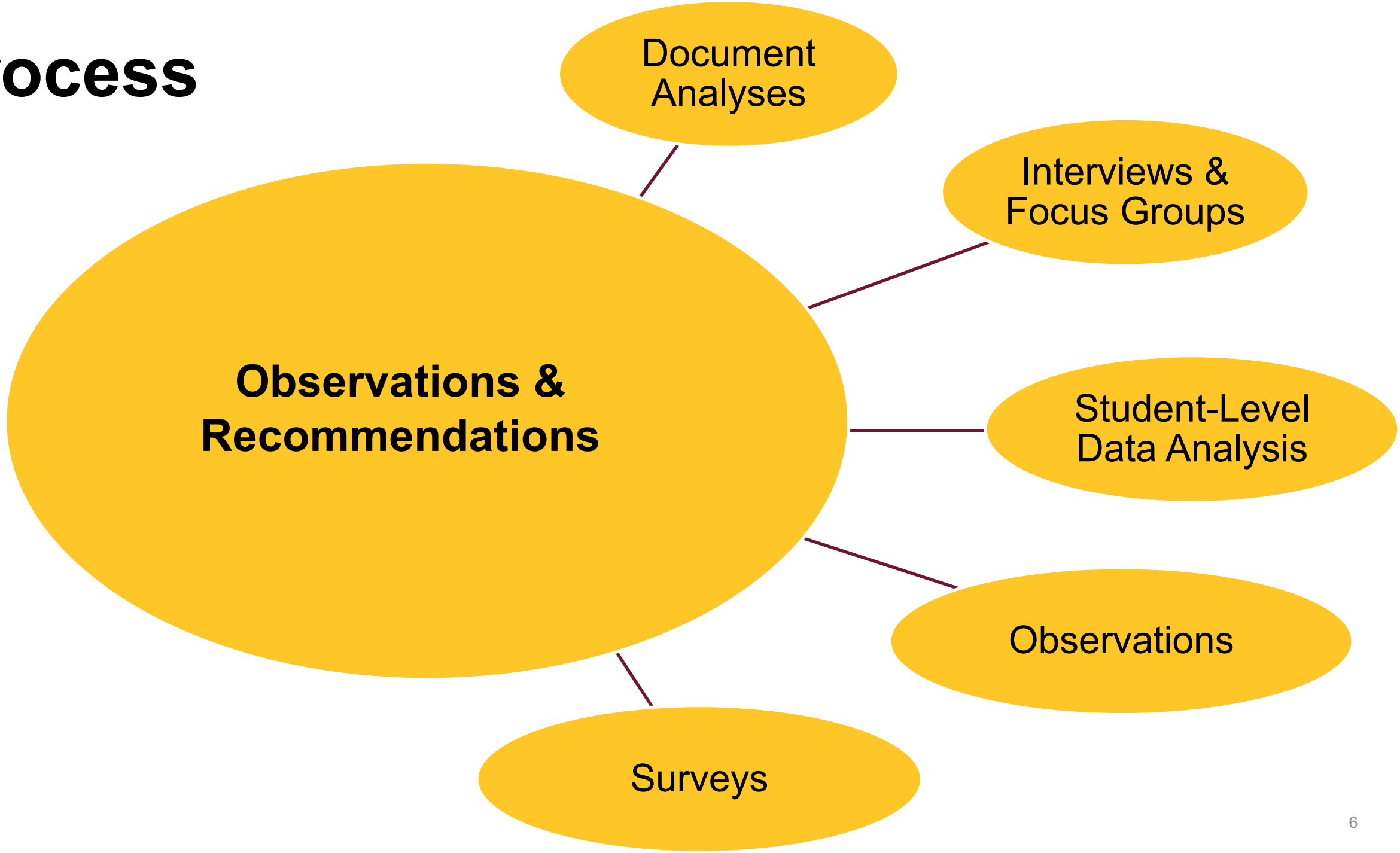
Technical

- Systems
- Technical issues are easy to identify
- Quick and easy solutions
- Can be solved by an authority or expert
- Requires change in just one or few places
- People are generally receptive
- Solutions can be implemented quickly

Adaptive

- Adaptive issues are difficult to identify
- Require changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships, and approaches to work
- Must be solved by people with the problem doing the work of solving it
- Requires change in numerous places
- People often resist
- Solutions require experiments and new discoveries

Process


Document Analyses
Interviews & Focus Groups
Observations & Recommendations
Student-Level Data Analysis
Observations
Surveys

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CREC Report Status

Goals	Objective	CREC 2015 Description	Priority
GOAL 1.1	*Staff recruitment, hiring, assignments and retention*	Elevate the Director of Pupil Services position to Chief Special Services Officer with authority to implement the Strategic Plan.	Required
GOAL 1.2	*Staff recruitment, hiring, assignments and retention*	Revise special education administrator job descriptions, extend their work year, assign them to school clusters (see organizational structure recommendations). Ensure all administrators have necessary experience and expertise to perform revised job descriptions.	Required
GOAL 1.3	*Staff recruitment, hiring, assignments and retention*	Hire one additional administrator by July 2016 to supervise special education preschool.	Required
GOAL 1.4	*Staff recruitment, hiring, assignments and retention*	Hire an Evaluation/Assessment Coordinator by February 2016 to monitor and coordinate evaluation and assessment services.	Required

Required Goals	
Completed	97%
Partially Completed/Ongoing	3%

City funds used to create:

- NEST Program
- LEAP Program
- Project Search
- PAES
- Literacy Clinic
- Assistive Technology
- Audiologist

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Overarching Positive Observations

- District level commitment to equity
- Improvements resulting from the 2015 CREC report
- School Board and the city of Norwalk commitment to improving special education
- Existing special education processes and programs provide solid foundation
- Stabilized special education budget
- Reduction of out-of-district placements
- Named focus on building internal capacity
- Named focus on building inclusive practices and co-teaching
- Staff with knowledge and skill to move district to next level
- Improved relationships with families

Collaborative Structures – Snapshot

Desired	*Present*	*Actions*
Connected Systems • Integrated teams exist at all levels of the organization. • Strategic priorities are evident from the boardroom to the classroom (coherence). **Communication** • All teachers and all leaders talk about the instruction and achievement of all learners. **Collaborative Teacher Teams** • Co-plan to co-serve.	**Connected Systems** • Special education and academic departments are siloed, creating separate systems for students. **Communication** • Building level communication is instruction- or student-focused. • Compliance prioritized over instruction and achievement. • Families with advocates get more. • Fear of retaliation. **Collaborative Teacher Teams** • Co-teaching is a named instructional strategy, yet without co-planning or co-serving.	**Connected Systems** • Continue to create integrated instructional decision-making teams at all levels of the organization focused on the same drivers and priorities. • Focus on accelerating achievement of students performing below target and the rigorous learning experience of all students. • Create systems of coherence around named instructional priorities. **Communication** • All staff and community members can speak to the priorities of the district. **Collaborative Teacher Teams** • Focus on co-planning to co-serving.

Process & Systems – Snapshot

Desired	*Present*	*Actions*
PPT Process • PPT is embedded within a fully developed SRBI process focused on universally designed high academic and SEL standards. • PPT evaluation process is diagnostic. • PPT meetings are data-driven and include families (and students where appropriate) as team members. • IEPs are developed by, understood and implemented by all educators (general and special) working with the student. • PPT meetings result in students getting the necessary supports and services, regardless of whether advocates or attorneys are present.	**PPT Process** • Lack of consistent guidance and practice related to special education supports and services in least restrictive educational placements. • Limited collaborative problem-solving outside of PPT meetings. • Reevaluations appear to be overly clinical. • Families with advocates/lawyers influence decision-making and receive services and placements; families without these resources appear to have more limited voice.	**PPT Process** • Create and implement clear guidance related to the provision of special education supports and services in a child's least restrictive educational environment. • Develop collaborative problem-solving structures as part of the district's SRBI system so that children can have their learning needs identified and met earlier and potentially outside of special education. • Return to basics of reevaluation process. • Assure that all students receive receive equitable resources, regardless of their family's ability to employ advocates and/or lawyers.

Process & Systems – Snapshot

Desired

Transitions

- Students transition from school or program smoothly, without interruption of services.
- Parents are partners in the transition process.

Implementation

- Instructional practices are clearly identified and organized according to the Phases of Change, whether they are initiated, implemented, or institutionalized and the preponderance of instructional practices are in the institutionalization phase before new practices are initiated.

Present

Transitions

- Processes developed to support students' transition from school and programs are not always followed.
- Parents site transitions as painful periods in their child's education experience.

Implementation

- Programs have been initiated (e.g. co-teaching, literacy clinic). However, there is limited focus on consistency of implementation across schools, building teacher capacity, and student outcomes.

Actions

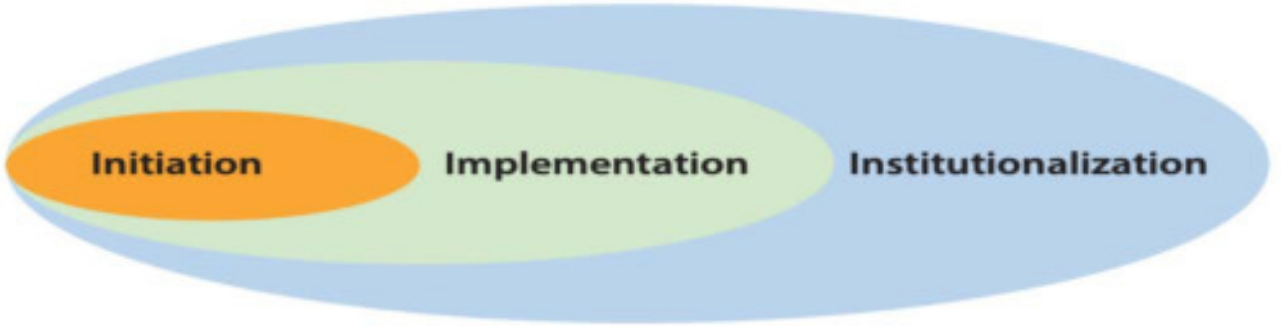
Transitions

- Implement a process for students to transition (from school or program**)** that incudes staff reviewing students' IEP, other necessary data, and the possibility of needed training to prepare for transition.

Implementation

- Plan implementation of district priorities in a way that supports capacity building and sustainability. Consider mapping initiatives using the *Phases of Change*.

Processes & Systems



INITIATION	IMPLEMENTATION	INSTITUTIONALIZATION
What Things need to be done to prepare for the initiative? Example of this include examining data, studying relevant research, building background, conducting a need assessment, establishing a knowledge base, creating shared vision, communicating, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and providing a clear model.	What support, learning opportunities, and professional development designs can be employed to meet the intended goal? Context, process, and content elements must all be in place if student learning is to be impacted. Maintaining the vision; involving stakeholders; and providing opportunities for dialogue, inquiry, and reflection warrant consideration.	What structures can be put into place to ensure that the initiative becomes a part of culture and is maintained? Examples of this include analyzing result, planning efforts to expand teacher leadership, providing continued support and assistance, and designing job embedded staff development.

Adapted from: Fullan, M. (2007). The new meaning of educational change (4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Process & Systems – Snapshot

Desired

Resources

- Clearly established high-leverage and evidence-based practices aligned to districtwide initiatives supported with resources, PD, and monitoring.
- Resources are equitably distributed to support all students.

Data

- Data is easily available to staff to be used in making decisions.
- Data that is collected and analyzed is relevant to district vision and is disaggregated by disability, race, ELs, etc.

Present

Resources

- Staff are not clear on what districtwide materials, supports or tools are available to them.

Data

- The district's student information system does not communicate with the district's special education data system. Data connected between the two are not always aligned.
- There are data not located in either system (e.g. which students are in particular programs).
- Data prioritized by special education is focused on compliance, rather than on student outcomes.

Actions

Resources

- Develop a process for distributing resources equitably to support all students.

Data

- Move special education data into the student information system.
- Establish districtwide data systems that support the use of student data to drive instruction at all levels of the SRBI system.

Staffing – Snapshot

Desired	*Present*	*Actions*
Roles & Responsibilities • Consistent collaborative planning period to support co-planning/co-serving. • Consistent case management period or another mechanism to complete parent communication, student assessment, report writing, materials preparation, paraprofessional support/direction, PPT meetings, etc. • Clearly defined roles and responsibilities.	**Roles & Responsibilities** • Commitment to PD • Special education supervisors support schools. • Responsibilities across departments and between central office and schools are siloed. • Pervasive feelings of being overwhelmed with the work and confused by roles and responsibilities. • Paraprofessionals hold too much responsibility for instruction • Common perception that staff caseloads and workloads were unreasonably high. • Related service providers are required to make up all missed services. • Redundancies in paperwork re: service tracking.	**Roles & Responsibilities** • Develop clear roles/responsibilities for all staff focused on student achievement, universally designed instructional practices, accessing the general education curriculum, and collaborative problem-solving, planning and teaching. – For special education teachers working as co-teachers, resource teachers, and district special education program teachers. – for special education supervisors that focus on alignment with district priorities and include increased decision-making abilities. • Require consistent districtwide time for collaboration. • Eliminate paperwork redundancies. • Provide coverage for special education staff when they attend meetings, PD, or are absent, or provide reasonable guidance for making up missed services.

Staffing – Snapshot

Desired	Present	Actions
Allocation • Caseload determinations account for workload and support district instructional priorities and allow each staff member to fulfill their role and carry out their responsibilities in accordance with district standards. **Retention** • Staff have the resources needed to fulfill professional expectations • Staff are clear on what instructional practices are fixed and what is flexible. • Staff are able to focus on work that matters. • Competitive compensation for hard to fill areas.	**Allocation** • Staff are not allocated in a manner that supports collaboration. • Staffing formulas do not account for workload. • Highly staffed programs appear to exist at the expense of other services and supports. • There is a large number of paraprofessionals. **Retention** • High caseloads and workloads appear to be one reason for high turnover. • Limited onboarding process. • Staff mentors are not always assigned to educators with their expertise. • Limited options for PD aligned with educator identified need. • Lack of process for use of exit interview data.	**Allocation** • Consider workload in addition to caseload. • Allocate staff to support collaboration. Shift to prioritize co-planning and co-serving over co-teaching. • Base staff allocations on a formula, however, infuse flexibility. • Consider moving towards employing more teachers than assigning paraprofessionals. **Retention** • Build collaborative teams. • Connect new special education staff with mentors in their field. • Use information from exit interview for continuous improvement.

Staffing

	Paraprofessionals		Special Education Teachers	
	#	Staff-to-Student	#	Staff-to-Student
Current	182	1:09	107	1:15

Paraprofessionals - The least qualified professional working with the most complex students.

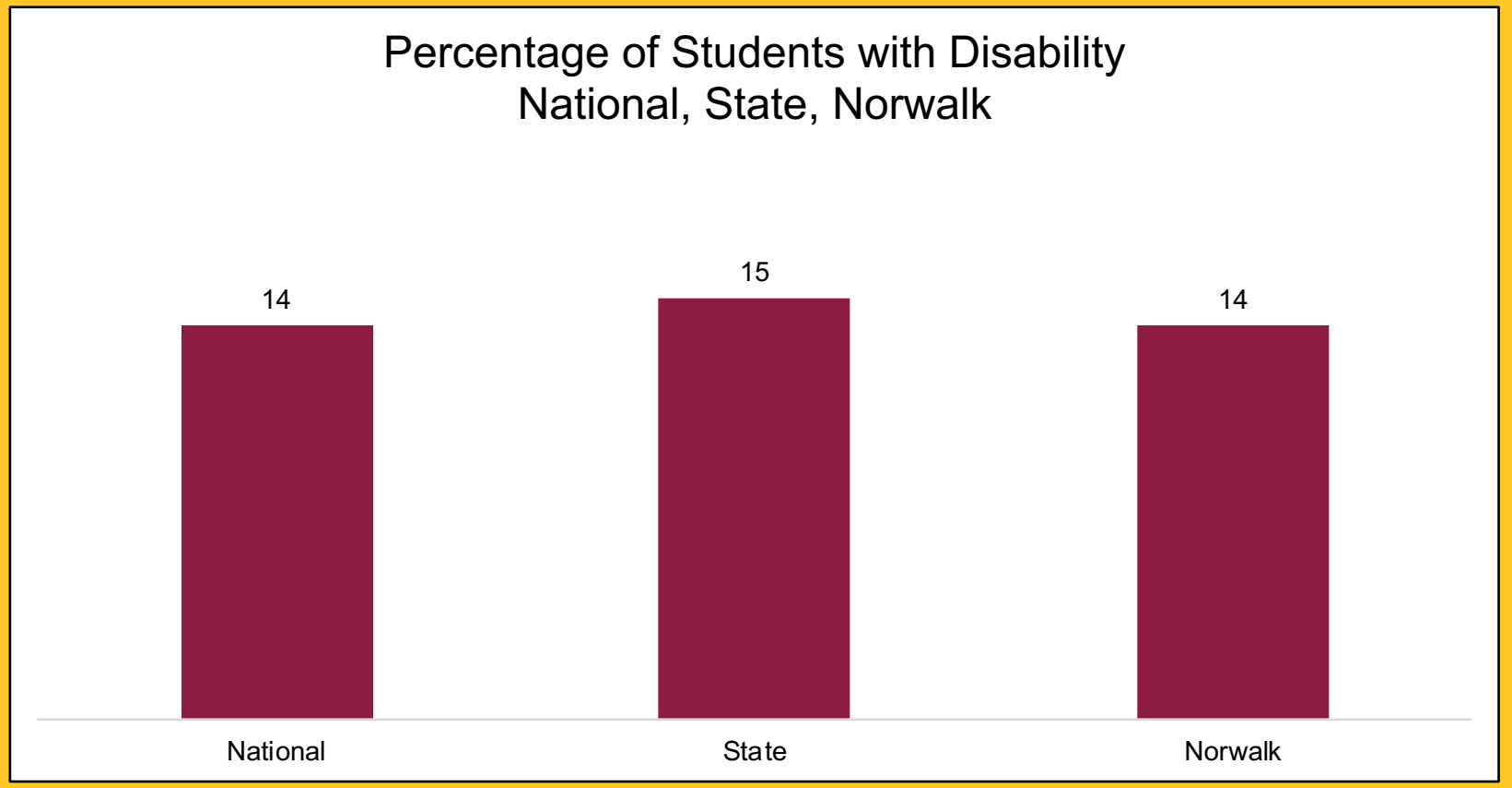
Giangreco, M. F., Doyle, M. B., & Suter, J. C. (2015). Precarious or Purposeful? Proactively Building Inclusive Special Education Service Delivery on Solid Ground. Inclusion, 3(3) 112-131.
Giangreco, M. F., Doyle, M. B., & Suter, J. C. (2012). Constructively responding to requests for paraprofessionals: We keep asking the wrong questions. Remedial and Special Education, 33(6) 362–373.

Teaching & Learning

Demographics, Academic Achievement

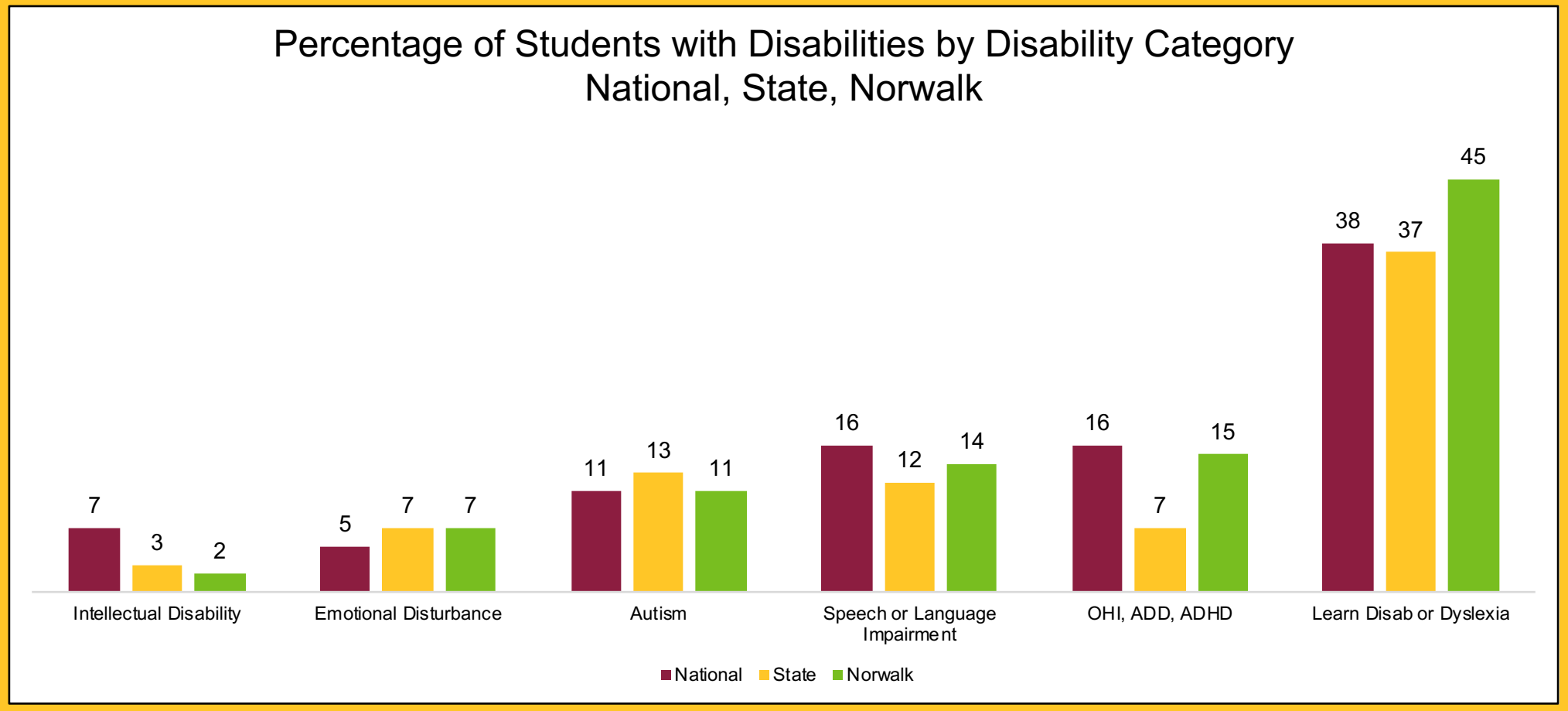
Students with Disabilities

Demographics



Students with Disabilities

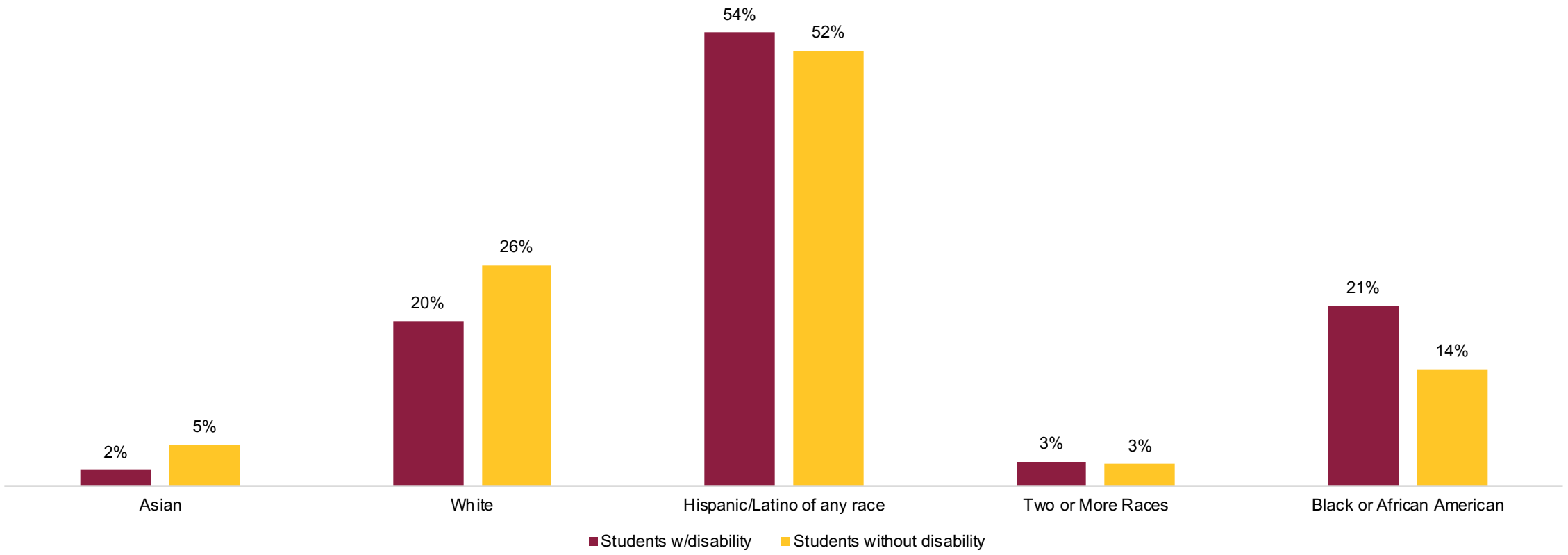
Demographics



Students with Disabilities

Demographics

Percentage of Students With/Without a Disability by Ethnicity and Race



NORWALK Public Schools

NPS Disproportionality Snapshot | Definition of Terms

Enrollment

of students in a classification (ex - 223 Hispanic students received discipline)

Risk Index

Percentage of students in a classification (# of students classified / total # of students enrolled) (ex - 223 Hispanic students / 6162 Hispanic students total)

Composition Index

Enrollment as a percentage of total number in classification (# of students classified / total # of students classified) (ex 223 Hispanic students received discipline / 425 total students that received discipline)

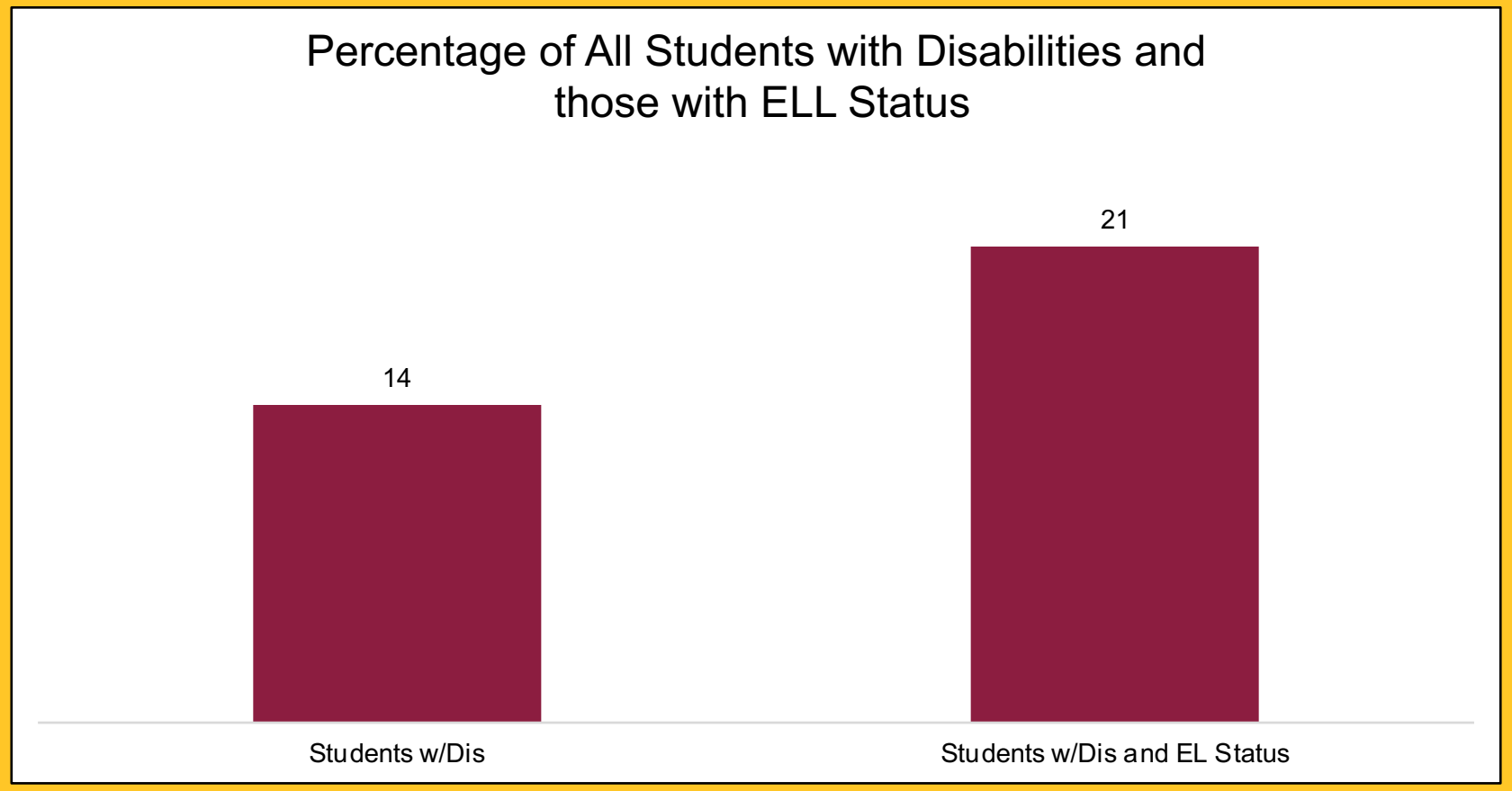
Relative Risk Ratio

Comparison of risk of one group in relation to risk for all other groups. 1.0 is equal risk. Above 1.0 - increased risk or over-representation (ex 2.7 = 170% more likely or 2.7 times more likely to be classified).

Below 1.0 - decreased risk or under-representation (.15 = 85% less likely to be classified)

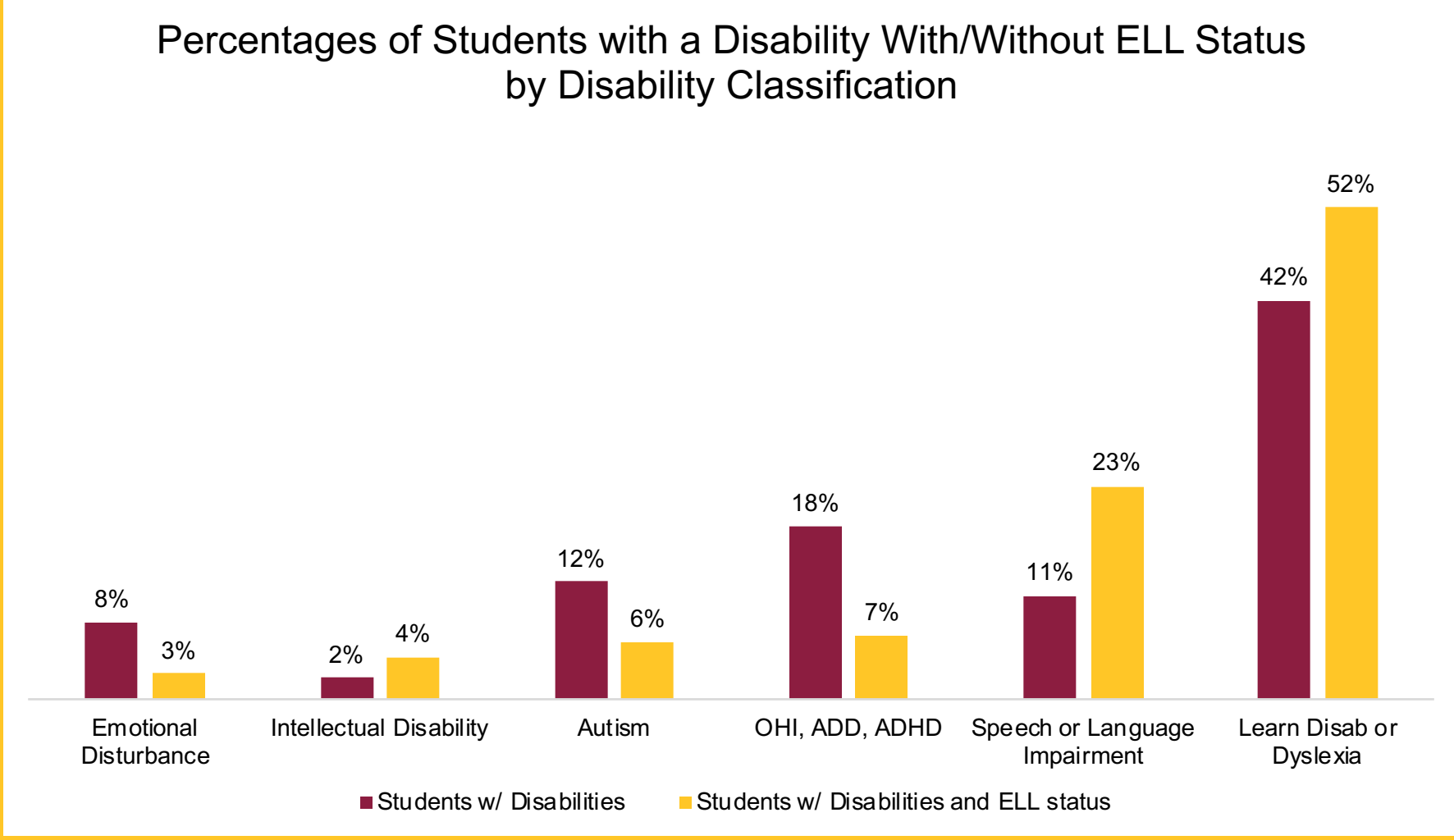
Students with Disabilities

Demographics



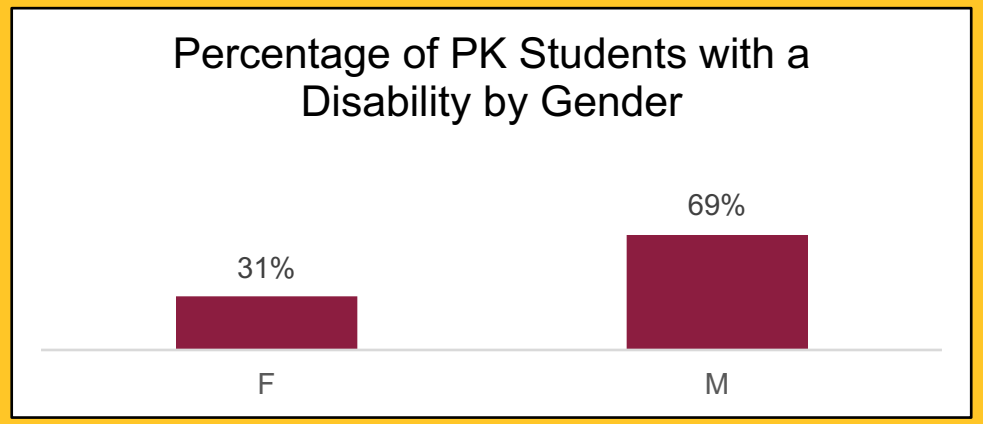
Students with Disabilities

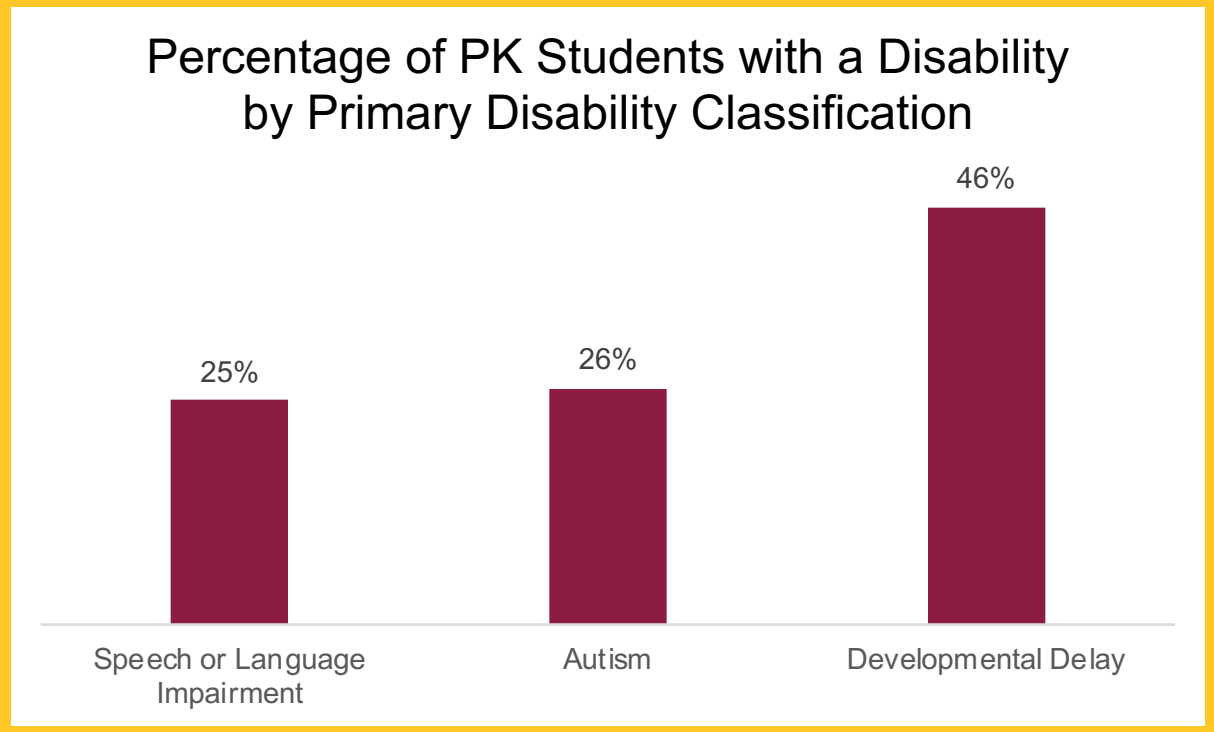
Demographics

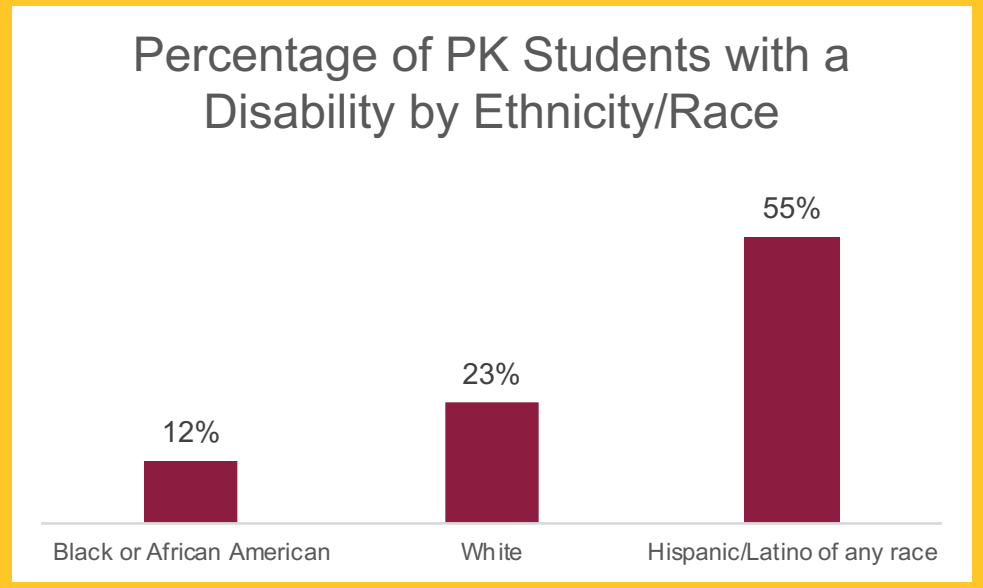


Students with Disabilities

Demographics

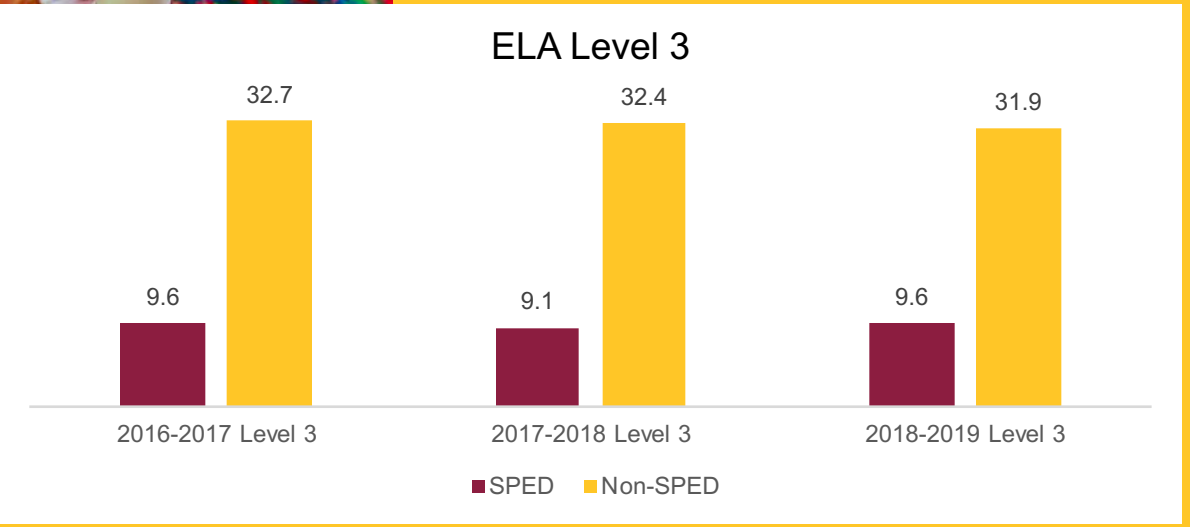


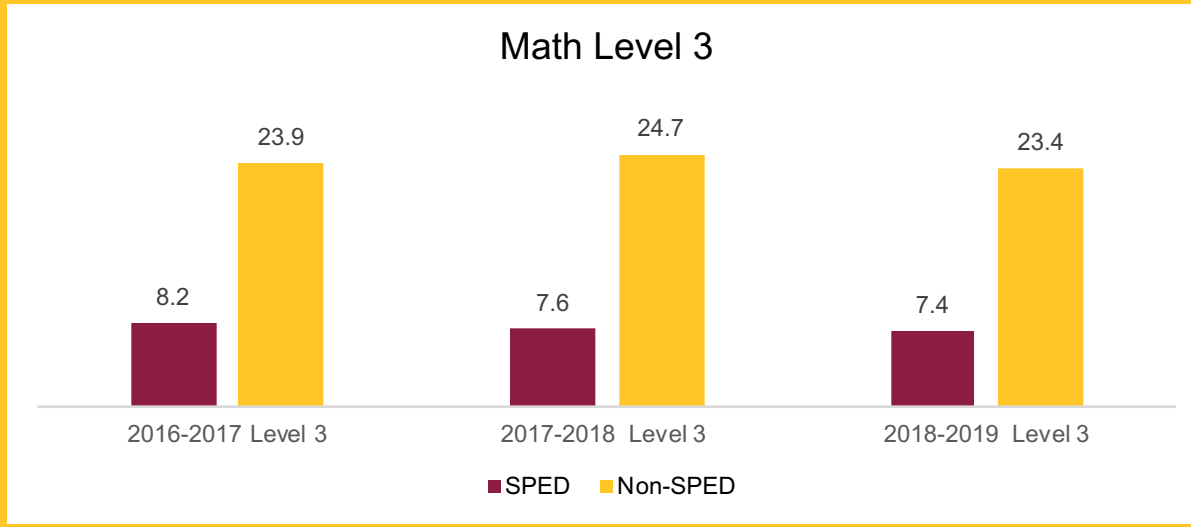


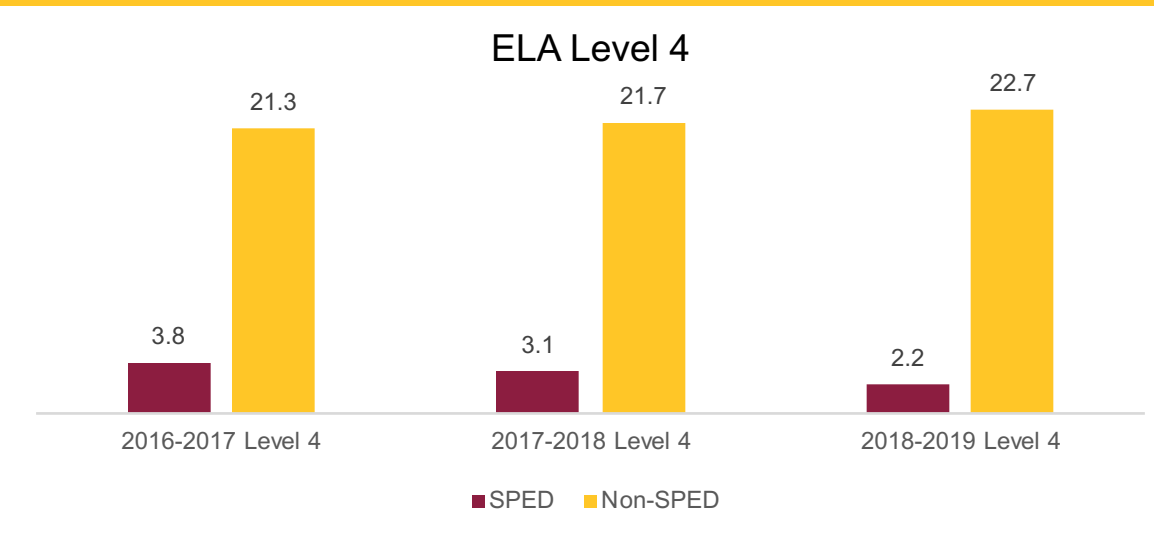


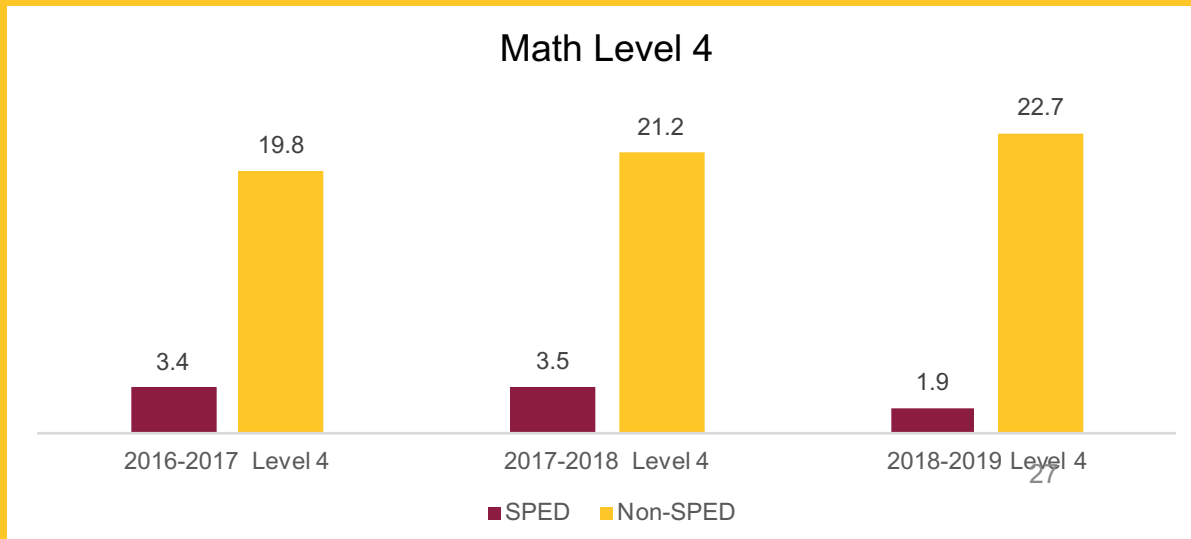
Students with Disabilities

Academic Achievement









Teaching & Learning - Snapshot

Desired	*Present*	*Actions*
Universal Instruction • All district structures are aligned to support student learning. • Instruction is universally designed and based on high academic standards for all students. • Instructional practices are co-designed, co-planned, and co-served by collaborative teacher teams.	**Universal Instruction** • Lack of confidence in Tier 1 instruction. • Initiation stages of SEL implementation. • Deficit mindset regarding the capacity of students with disabilities. • Special education seen as a place or a program, rather than individualized supports to reach high academic standards.	**Universal Instruction** • Continue to develop districtwide core academic and SEL curriculum and training of all staff. • Assure the expertise of special education is included in the development of universal instruction. • Provide professional development on how to collaborate and co-plan instructional practices. • Consider a focus on the language acquisition of English Learners as a districtwide practice that can support all students.

Teaching & Learning – Snapshot

Desired	*Present*	*Actions*
Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) • SRBI provides tiered interventions and supports to meet universally designed high academic and SEL standards using evidence-based practices and progress monitoring. • Special education supports and services are embedded in SRBI.	**Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI)** • Lack of consistent districtwide processes. • SRBI guide has been created, yet not shared, implemented, or have staff been trained. • Lack of intervention tools and progress monitoring guidance.	**Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI)** • Assure that the SRBI process includes academics and SEL. • Assure that the special education process, supports, and services are infused within the SRBI process. • Develop consistent districtwide processes, strategies and interventions focused on explicit skill development, and progress monitoring systems.

Teaching & Learning - Snapshot

Desired	*Present*	*Actions*
Special Education Supports and Services • Special education is implemented as services to students with disabilities to achieve high academic standards. • Special education supports and services embedded in the SRBI framework and focus on high-leverage instructional practices • Special education supports and services are focused on supporting students for post-secondary opportunities. • Student IEPs focus on providing specially designed instruction and access to the general education curriculum.	**Special Education Supports and Services** • Focus on compliance, limited focus on instruction. • Special education programs; resource, special class, Success, Leap, Nest. • Inclusive learning communities are at the initiation stage of development. • Staff with underdeveloped specialized instruction expertise and commitment to PD. • IEPs focused on student deficit, rather than developing skills and providing accommodations to access curriculum. • District has reduced the number of students placed out-of-district from 137-63. • Resource intensive programs leave other services understaffed. • Families with capital have more access. • Literacy Center has expertise and vision. • Transition services growing.	**Special Education Supports and Services** • Reimagine and plan for special education as services, rather than a place and as a system that reduces barriers and increases opportunities for students to succeed. • Develop special education supports and services with the explicit goal of improved student outcomes. • Focus the development of special education on skill development vs. program development. • Build capacity of principals to lead for the success of students with disabilities. • Consider the student experience and ask for student input when planning supports and services. • Focus IEPs on disability-related needs and meeting grade-level standards. • Continue to develop and expand transition services for students 18-22.

Teaching & Learning – Snapshot

Desired	*Present*	*Actions*
Educational Environment • Special education is a service, rather than a place. • The general education classroom is students' presumed placement. • General education classes are universally designed so all students can succeed. • The use of a separate classroom or school for some or all of the day is justified based on the knowledge that the service is best provided in a separate environment. The goal is always to provide students their education in the class and school they would attend if they did not have a disability. • Students are not missing instructional class time due to chronic absenteeism, suspensions, or expulsions.	**Educational Environment** • More students placed in substantially separate (less than 40% of the day in general education) programs in comparison to the state average. • Fewer students in partial inclusion (40%-79% of the day general education) programs than the state and national ave. Services are typically full inclusion to substantially separate. • More students placed in full inclusion (80% or more of their day in general education peers) than the state and national average. • Students with disabilities are suspended at higher rates than those without disabilities.	**Educational Environment** • Focus on providing more inclusive educational opportunities to students with disabilities. • Focus on decreasing suspensions of students with disabilities.

Teaching & Learning

Desired State

Educational Environment – Research

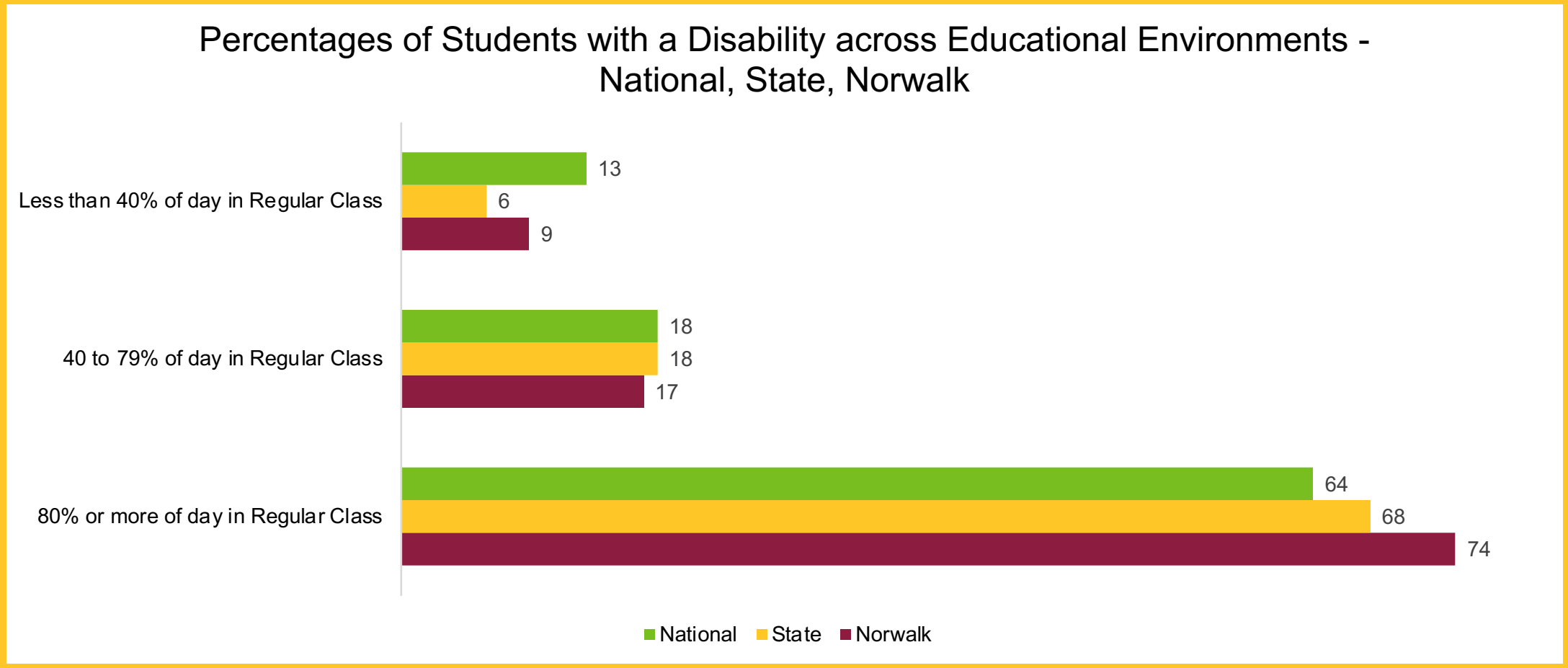
- The more time students with disabilities spend in a general education classroom, the:
  - higher their scores are on standardized tests of reading and math;
  - fewer absences they have from school;
  - fewer referrals they have for disruptive behavior; and
  - better outcomes they have after high school in the areas of employment and independent living.

- This was found for all students with disabilities, regardless of:
  - their disability label;
  - the severity of their disability;
  - their gender; or
  - their family's socio-economic status.

(Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006)

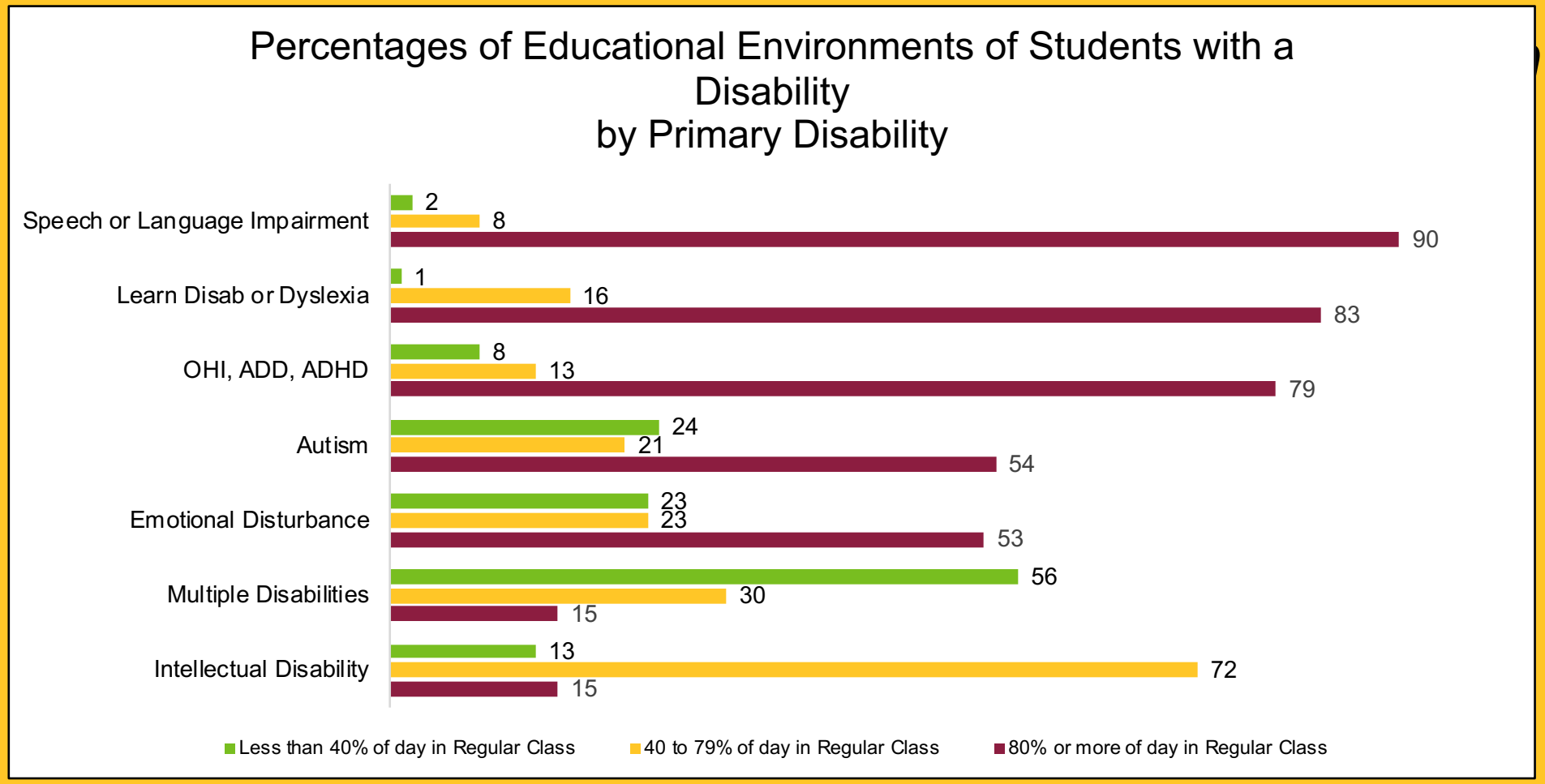
Students with Disabilities

Educational Environment



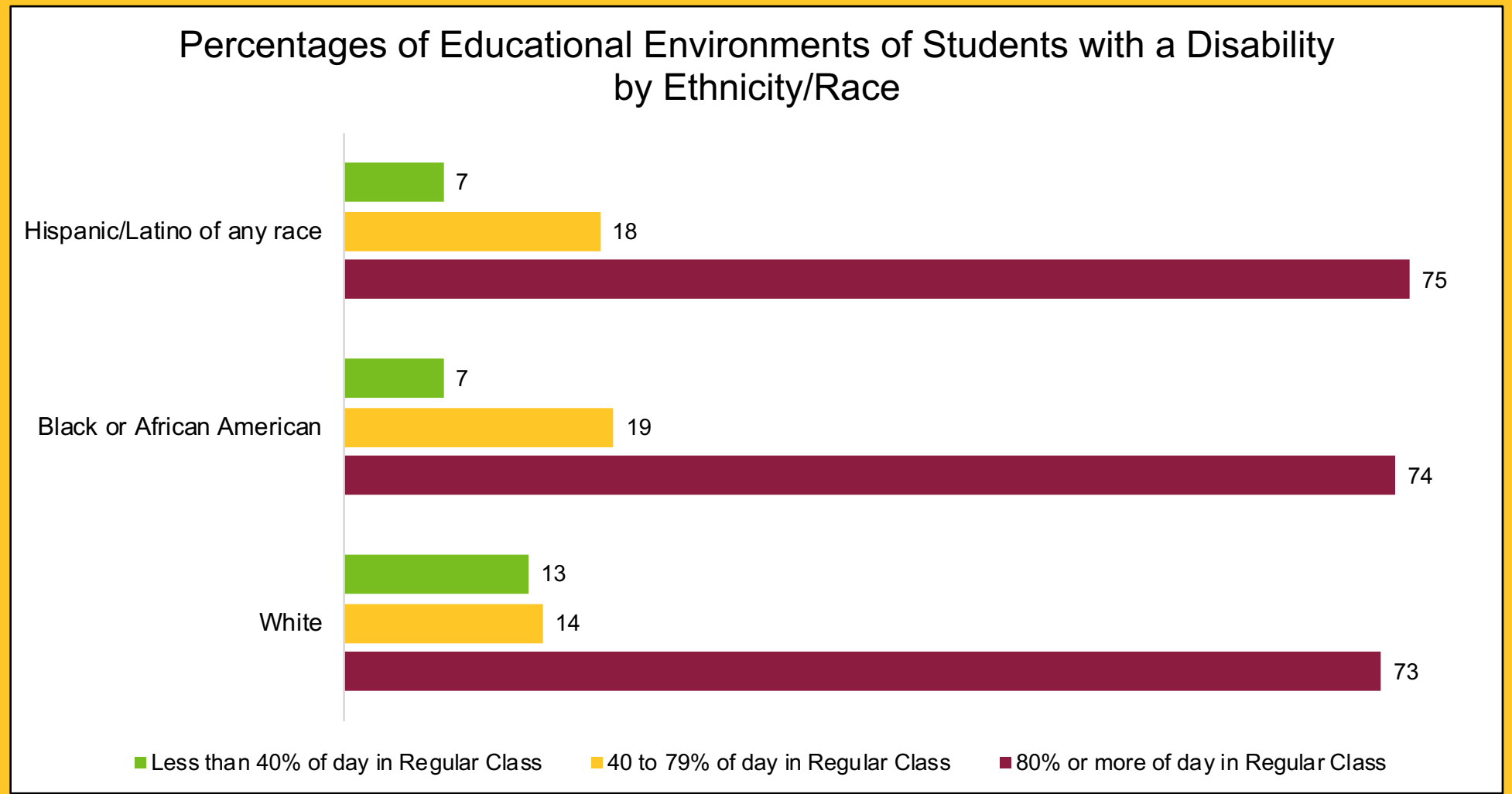
Students with Disabilities

Educational Environment



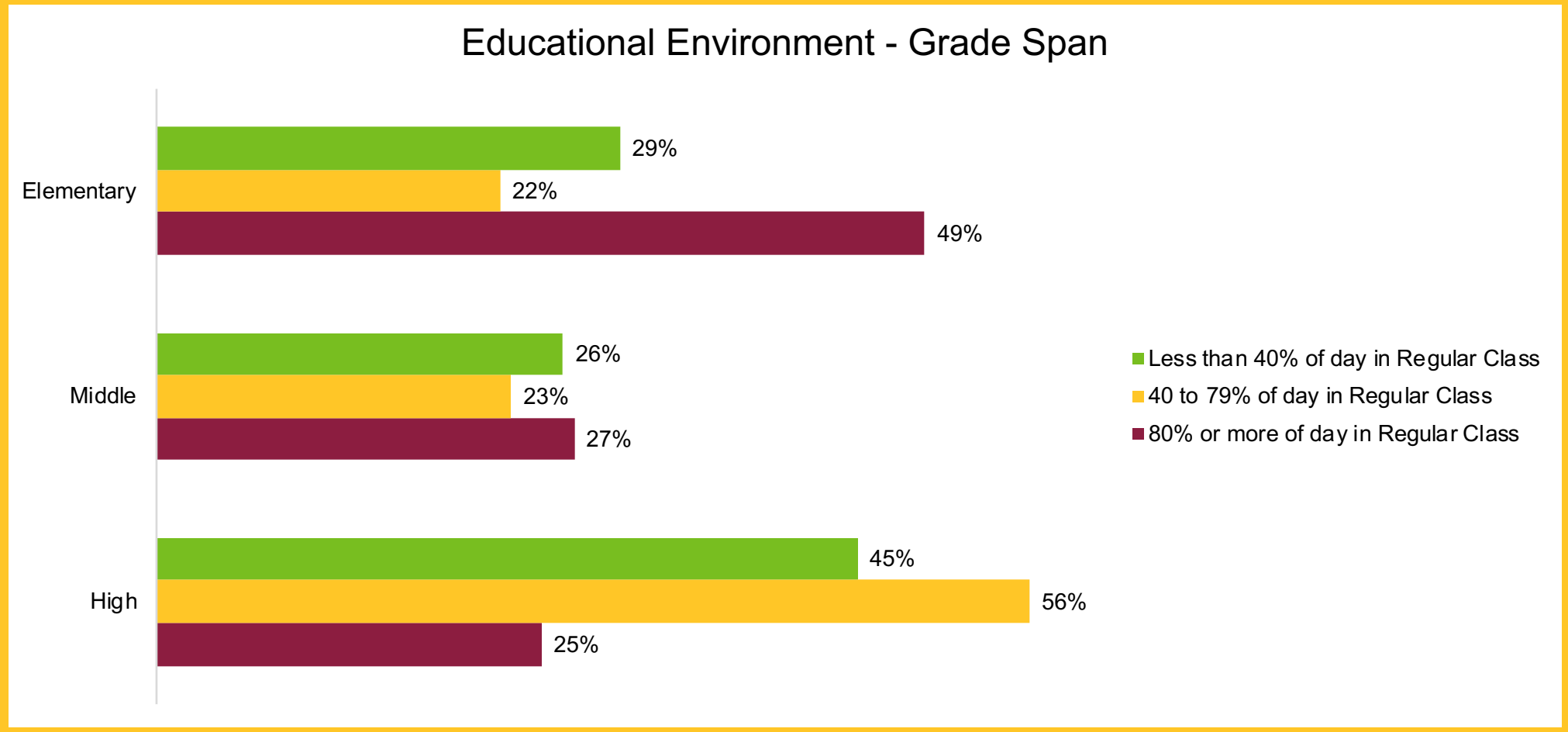
Students with Disabilities

Educational Environment



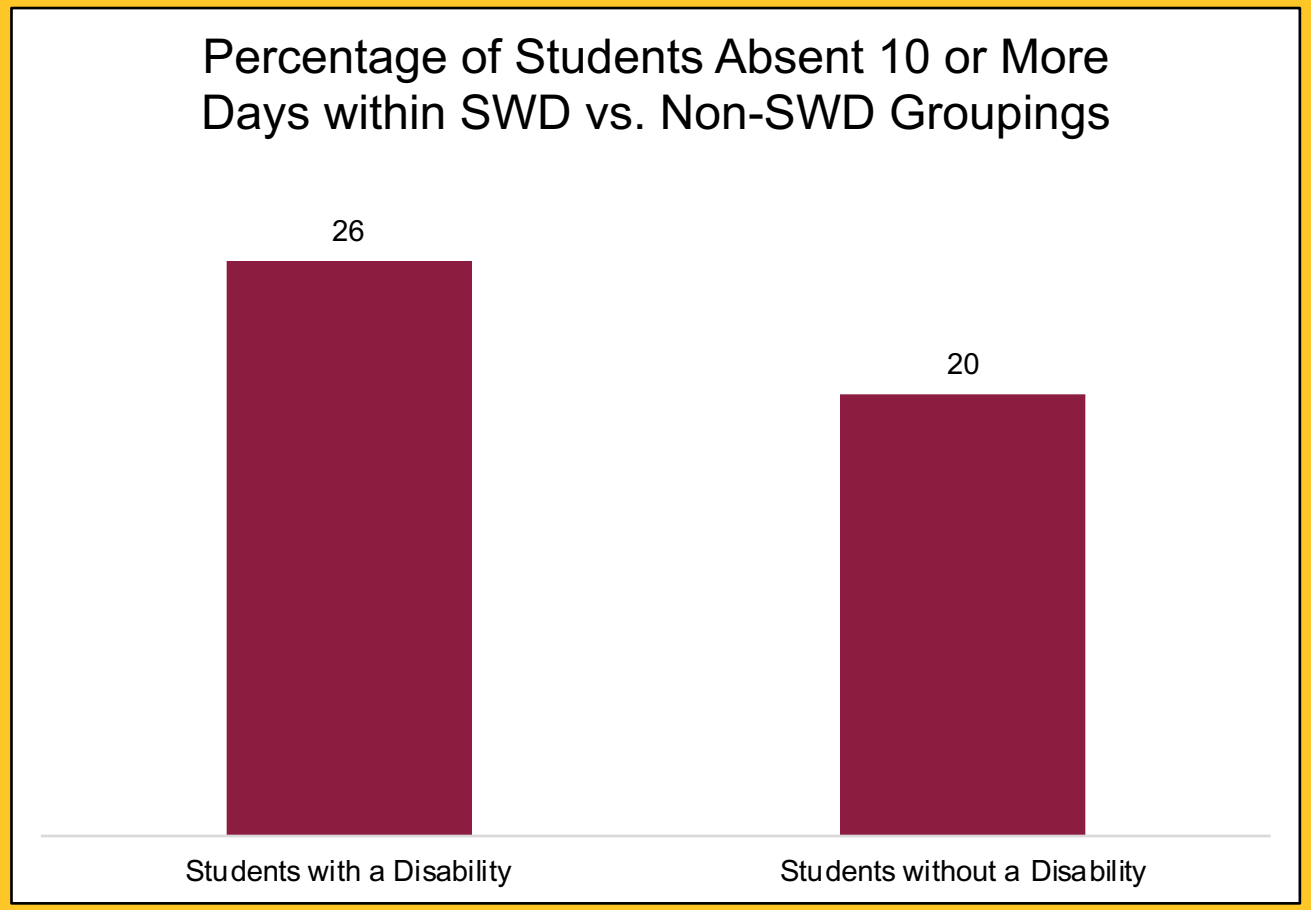
Students with Disabilities

Educational Environment



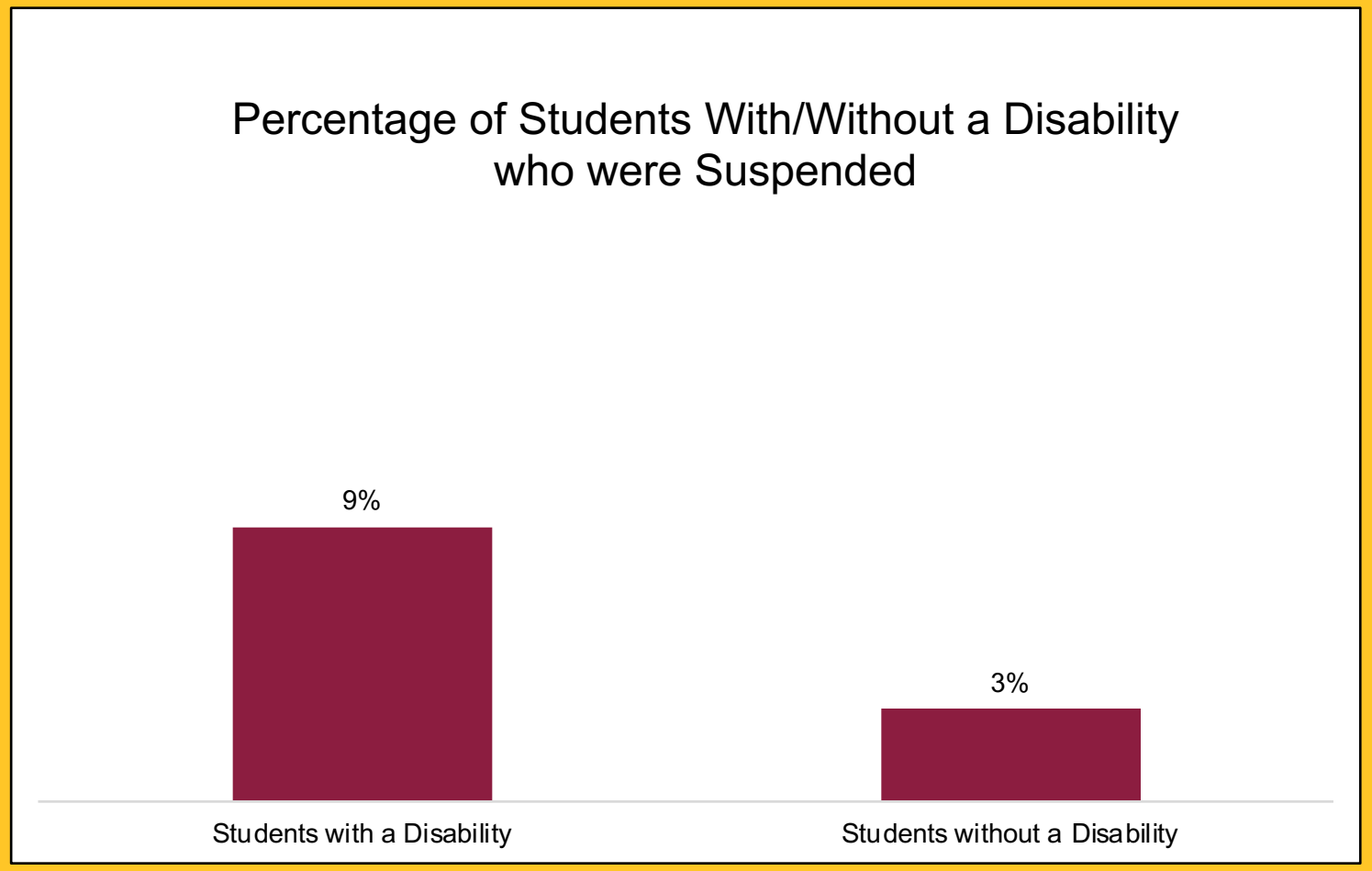
Students with Disabilities

Chronic Absenteeism



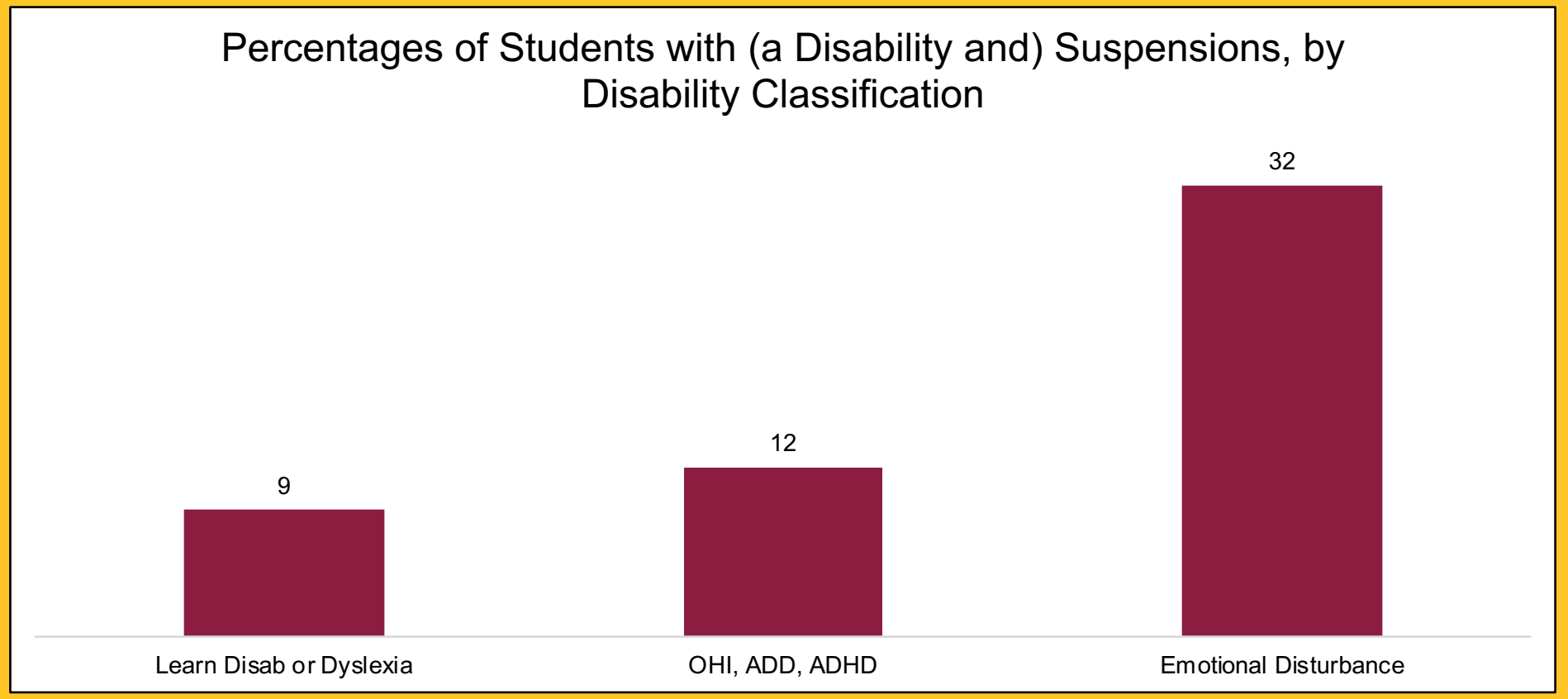
Students with Disabilities

Suspension



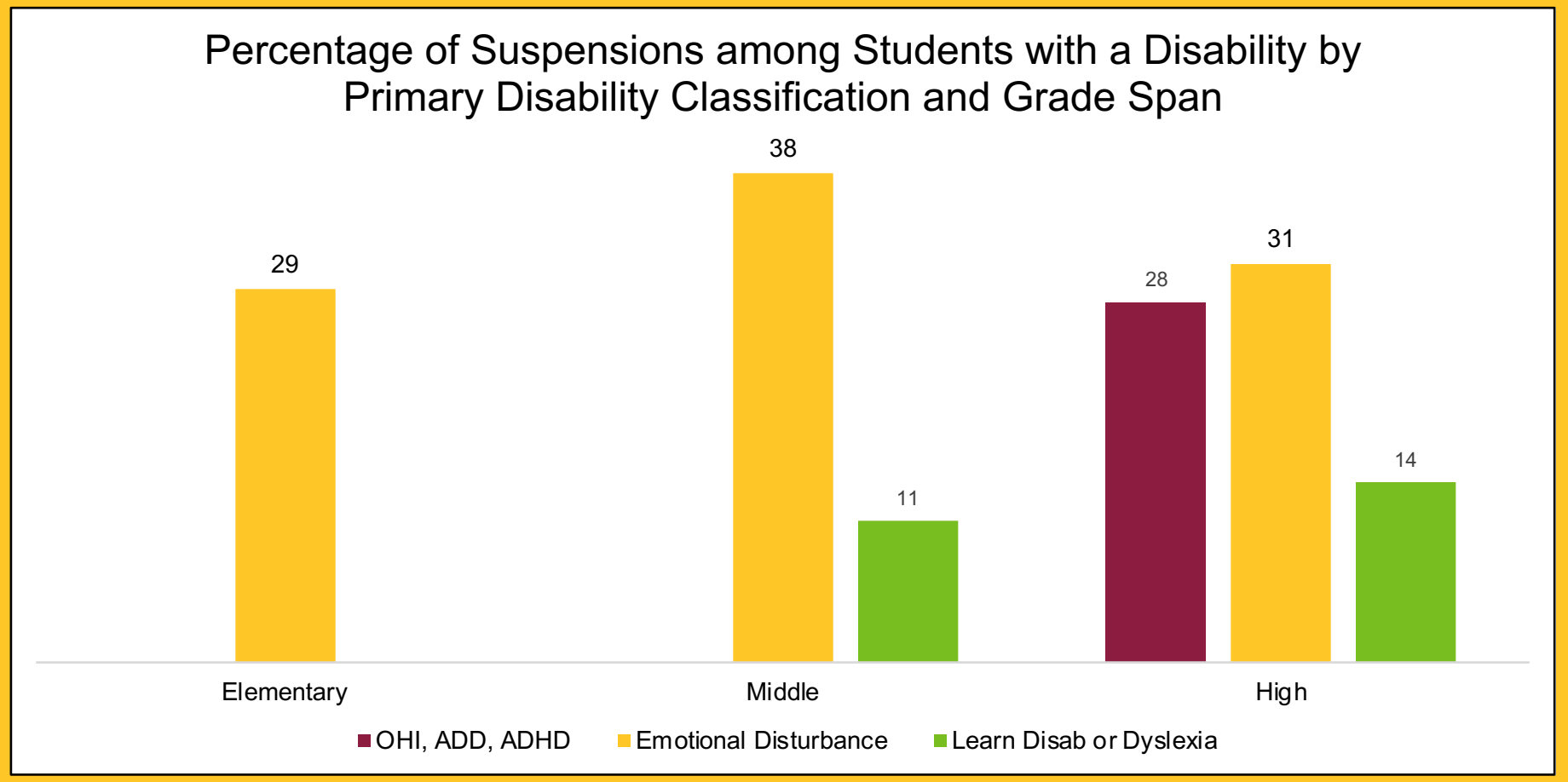
Students with Disabilities

Suspension



Students with Disabilities

Suspension



Family Engagement – Snapshot

Desired

Relationships

- Families are educational partners and speak with satisfaction and trust about the educational experience of their children.
- Families efficiently receive educational information in their dominant language.

Education

- Families understand the appropriate use of special education services.
- Families are made aware of their rights and responsibilities in the special education process.

Proactive Planning for Contentious Issues

- When disagreements arise, a neutral process exists to mediate/resolve.

Present

Relationships

- There have been significant actions taken to improve relationships with families and schools. With a history of distrust between families and the district, there remain frustrations.
- Families state that they have good relationships with their teachers.
- Families who are white and with the means to hire advocates/lawyers are able to secure wanted special education supports/ services.
- Families whose first language is not English are not receiving timely translations.

Education

- Opportunities for families to express concerns/collaborate through NSPEDPAC.
- Some members questioned purpose and who has a voice in meetings.

Proactive Planning for Contentious Issues

- Families stated that they have to monitor children's services and progress.

Actions

Relationships

- Continue to nurture relationships with ALL families. Target outreach to Latinx other families of color with a focus on building advocacy and leadership.
- Provide timely translations

Education

- Educate families on what special education supports and services provide; accessing the general education curriculum and student experience.
- Educate families on their rights and responsibilities.

Proactive Planning for Contentious Issues

- When effective services are provided, consistent processes are in place, and student outcomes improve, be ready to stand in support of the district.

Mindset – Snapshot

Desired	*Present*	*Actions*
Equity & Inclusion • Diversity is embraced • Decisions focused on equitable and inclusive practices **Growth Mindset** • As students evolve, educators' work evolves • There is always a focus on raising standards **Special Education** • Minimize the impact of disability and maximize the opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in schooling and the community • Special education is a service, not a place	**Equity & Inclusion** • Disability as diversity is not evident • There is a culture of "us vs. them" **Growth Mindset** • Low expectations for students with disabilities • Dis-ownership of students with disabilities and other underserved students • Little agency or empowered language heard from staff **Special Education** • Focused on compliance • Special education as a place, rather than a service	**Equity & Inclusion** • Build staffs' skills to teach, plan for, and embrace difference. • Create structures that focus decisions on equitable and inclusive practices. **Growth Mindset** • Clearly and publicly raise academic standards for students with disabilities. • Connect staff with the concept of presumed competence and least dangerous assumption. **Special Education** • Special education as a service, not a place. • Embrace disability as diversity and create opportunities for accessing the curriculum and the school experience all students in Norwalk should experience.

Mindset

Recommended Areas of Action

Presumed Competence
Least Dangerous Assumption

"The criterion of least dangerous assumption (LDA) holds that in the absence of conclusive data, educational decisions ought to be based on assumptions which, if incorrect, will have the least dangerous effect on the likelihood that students will be able to function independently as adults."

*Furthermor*e, "we should assume that poor performance is due to instructional inadequacy rather than to student deficits." (Anne Donnellan, 1984)

Conclusion

- CREC Report Status
- Observations & Recommendations
  - Collaborative Structures
  - Process & Systems
  - Staffing
  - Teaching & Learning
  - Family Engagement
  - Mindset

Special education is a service, not a place.

The goal of special education is to minimize the impact of disability and maximize the opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in schooling and the community.

Thank you!

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URBANCOLLABORATIVE
Leading Equitable & Inclusive Education

Data Collection

- Interviews/Focus Groups (80)
  - Board Members
  - Superintendent
  - District Leadership
  - Special Education Leadership
  - Principals
  - Teachers – Special Education
  - Teachers – General Education
  - Psychologists
  - SLPs
  - BCBAs
  - NSpedPAC
- Data Analysis
  - Student-level data
  - District-level data

- Observations (16)
  - NEST
  - LEAP
  - SUCCESS
  - Special Class
  - Project Search
  - Transition
  - Co-Teaching
  - Resource
  - Preschool
- Survey (289)
  - Families of students with disabilities
  - 218 English-speaking families
  - 71 Spanish speaking families

Observation Analysis

The educator will be…		
	• Providing options for student engagement, persistence, and self-regulation • Collaborating actively when other adults are in the room	Partial Partial - None
The classroom will…		
	• Support a variety of tasks and learning formats • Create a nonthreatening, positive, and academically rigorous atmosphere	Partial Partial
The student will be…		
	• Engaging in learning through a variety of approaches and developmentally appropriate tasks with a variety of resources	Partial
		(Scale – Clear & Consistent, Partial, None)

Family Survey – Questions

1. My child is in preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, or transition.
2. I am satisfied with my child's overall special education supports and services.
3. I have the opportunity to talk to my child's teachers on a regular basis to discuss my questions and concerns.
4. My child is accepted within the school community.
5. My child's IEP is meeting his or her educational needs.
6. All special education supports and services identified in my child's IEP have been provided.
7. At meetings to develop my child's IEP, I feel encouraged to give input and express my concerns.
8. I understand what is discussed at meetings to develop my child's IEP.
9. The school district proposed the regular classroom for my child as the first placement option.
10. When we implement my child's IEP, I am encouraged to be an equal partner with my child's teachers and other services providers.
11. If necessary, a translator was provided at the PPT meeting.

Responses for questions 2-11 were predominantly "strongly agree," the highest response possible.

Family Survey - Questions

In your opinion, what is working in Special Education for Norwalk Public Schools?

- School staff was #1 response for what is working for families of students with disabilities

In your opinion, what are the challenges in Special Education for Norwalk Public Schools? What are

- Communication was the #1 response for what are the challenges for families of students with disabilities