



Achieving Success in the Least Restrictive Environment: Capitalizing on the District of Columbia's Accomplishments

White Paper

In Spring 2012, the District of Columbia's Office of the State Superintendent of Education- Division of Specialized Education (OSSE-DSE) recognized District local education agencies (LEAs) for demonstrating success in serving students with disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). OSSE recognized this progress through the distribution of LRE contract awards which totaled approximately \$5M. The awards, which were distributed based on the LEAs' LRE performance data, gave schools the opportunity to continue to build upon their good work and to showcase their best practices via a District-wide publication. Under the terms of each contract, OSSE required each participating LEA to submit a best practice brief at the end of the award period that addressed the LEA's specific practices in the following areas: systemic change, resource allocation, professional development, and the development of a continuum of alternative placements. This white paper is a synthesis of the submitted briefs.

Acknowledgements

This white paper could not have been developed without the participation of the following 14 local education agencies which submitted briefs:

AppleTree Public Charter School

Bridges Public Charter School

DC Bilingual Public Charter School

District of Columbia Public Schools

***DC Preparatory Academy Public
Charter School***

EL Haynes Public Charter School

***Latin American Montessori Bilingual
Public Charter School***

***Mary McLeod Bethune Day Academy
Public Charter School***

Mundo Verde Public Charter School

Options Public Charter School

Two Rivers Public Charter School

Washington Latin Public Charter School

***Washington Mathematics, Science and
Technology Public Charter School***

***Washington Yu Ying Public Charter
School***

The Division of Specialized Education (DSE) appreciates the LEAs' willingness to share their best practices so that, through dissemination, other LEAs may identify strategies to benefit the District's students and their families.

The Division also appreciates the internal cross-functional team that reviewed submission from participating LEAs and assisted in identifying unique and innovative practices worthy of dissemination and replication.

INTRODUCTION

Under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), all public schools are required to ensure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are educated with students who are non-disabled in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). In the United States, classrooms have become more diverse than ever. Students present with an array of skills, talents, interests and needs, and on a daily basis teachers and staff observe a variety of different learning styles all at one time. For that reason, it is vital that schools develop systematic approaches to applying the principles of differentiated teaching and learning when planning, managing, delivering, and evaluating instruction, so that all students can succeed academically.

In spring of 2012, the District of Columbia's Office of the State Superintendent of Education- Division of Specialized Education (OSSE-DSE) recognized District local education agencies (LEAs) for demonstrating success in serving students with disabilities in the LRE. Specifically, OSSE focused on those LEAs that showed significant progress in their ability to build capacity to serve students with high levels of need in the public school system, thereby diverting unnecessary placement into separate, non-public schools.

OSSE recognized this progress through the distribution of LRE contract awards which totaled approximately \$5M. The financial awards, which were distributed based on the LEAs' LRE performance data, gave schools the opportunity to continue to build upon their good work. Under the terms of each contract, recipients could use the funds for specialized staff training, additional curriculum materials, and direct services for students with disabilities. In addition, in order to support the dissemination of best practices in this arena, OSSE required each participating LEA to submit a best practice brief at the end of the award period (September 2012) that addressed the LEA's specific practices in the following areas: systemic change, resource allocation, professional development, and the development of a continuum of alternative placements. This white paper is a synthesis of the submitted best practice briefs.

To develop this white paper, DSE assembled a cross-functional team to review submissions from participating LEAs and identify unique and innovative practices worthy of dissemination and replication. This paper highlights what is working in fourteen District of Columbia LEAs: AppleTree Public Charter School, Bridges Public Charter School, DC Bilingual Public Charter School, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), DC Preparatory Academy Public Charter School, EL Haynes Public Charter School, Latin American Montessori Bilingual Public Charter School, Mary McLeod Bethune Day Academy Public Charter School, Mundo Verde Public Charter School, Options Public Charter School, Two Rivers Public Charter School, Washington Latin Public Charter School, Washington Mathematics, Science and Technology Public Charter School, and Washington Yu Ying Public Charter School. OSSE sincerely appreciates the great talent and commitment of the LEAs that contributed to this white paper. The purpose of this white paper is to provide education stakeholders everywhere with an understanding of what can work when talented individuals have the collective will to provide a high quality, inclusive education for the full range of diverse learners who exist in today's classrooms.

SECTION I. SYSTEMIC CHANGE THROUGH INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

In order to fully support a diverse range of learners, OSSE believes that LEAs must actively adopt and embrace a philosophy of inclusion. In its Least Restrictive Environment and Inclusion Policy, OSSE defines inclusive practices as practices which create "an environment in which all children, including those with significant disabilities, have an equal opportunity to receive high quality instruction in the

general education classroom, to the maximum extent possible, with the necessary supplementary aids and services the child needs to be successful in the general education curriculum.” In other words, inclusion involves bringing the support and services to the student rather than moving the student to the services. The following LEAs have demonstrated proficiency in the area of inclusive practice:

- **AppleTree Public Charter School.** AppleTree PCS’ best practice in this arena is showcased through its full inclusion model. As noted in their brief, AppleTree PCS operates a full continuum of services in the LRE including a full inclusion model at all of its campuses. Special education coordinators collaborate with classroom teachers to develop specialized support plans that align with students’ IEP goals. Classroom teachers then provide an extra layer of differentiated support to the student, in addition to the specialized instruction provided by the special education teacher. As much as possible, special education services are provided through a push-in model, where the related services provider or special education teacher works within the student’s regular classroom environment.

AppleTree PCS encourages family participation by hosting family events and workshops, engaging families in a parent planning organization (Parents at AppleTree), and providing academic resources to use at home. The school and teachers communicate with parents in a variety of formats, including:

- *Family Interview-* One way AppleTree PCS expects all families to be involved is by participating in an informal family interview. This casual meeting helps teachers gather information that help them to become better acquainted with students and their families.
- *Informal Communication-* The main method of communication is face to face. During the morning drop off period teachers and administrators intentionally make themselves available to greet families, provide updates, and answer questions. Another informal but important method of communication that many classrooms use occurs via parent-teacher communication logs. Teachers use these notebooks or folders on a daily basis to let parents know how their child’s day went.
- *Newsletters-* Two formal newsletters go home on a monthly basis as well. The first newsletter is teacher-generated and explains what concepts the students are working on with each new unit. The second newsletter is school-wide and provides helpful reminders, information about upcoming events, school-wide progress, and a summary of classroom activities.
- *Weekly Folders-* Each week on Monday, a homework folder is sent home with children for them to complete with their parents. Also included in this is important paperwork and reminders of upcoming events.
- *Family Events and Workshops-* AppleTree PCS hosts events and workshops. Every effort is made to schedule the events at times in which most families are able to attend. Event and workshop formats are diverse to meet the wide array of family needs. Events are focused on creating a sense of community and student celebration. Four literacy focuses events are held each year, containing explicit information on developing literacy skills at home. Workshops are focused on helping parents engage in the academic program and foster learning or healthy practices at home.
- *Family Resources-* All families receive a picture dictionary or picture encyclopedia to enjoy with their child and three other learning resources. Examples of other learning resources include high quality children’s books, both fiction and nonfiction, to share

with their child and to keep at home. The resources are to help them support their child's developing language and early literacy skills, and are accompanied by a letter detailing ways to use the resources at home. With each new unit a handout is sent home that outlines activities that can be done with the Picture Dictionary/Encyclopedia that correspond with the unit theme. Additionally, all students have the opportunity to choose a book from the Lending Library with their family.

- **Bridges Public Charter School.** For Bridges PCS, its strength exists with “a people first linguistic perspective.” Bridges PCS has made it a fundamental priority that every member of the LEA holds and execute its philosophy that “children with special needs are children first; their disability or special needs are only one piece of who they are.” As an example, on any given day one may hear a special education teacher refer to specific students, for a specific reason, as “the students with special needs or students who have IEPs” rather than “the special needs students.” Such approach not only encourages teachers and staff, on a school-wide level, to be mindful of how they plan, manage, deliver, and evaluate instruction, but it also creates a school-wide culture of respect, strengths-based planning, and full inclusion.
- **DC Bilingual Public Charter School.** For DC Bilingual PCS, its best practice in this arena is showcased via the following instructional supports/service model:
 - Full inclusion model in all grades for all classes (1 general education teacher, 1 special education teacher) - Level I
 - Inclusion and outside related service levels - Level I, II, III
 - Combination of inclusion and resource (decoding groups with Wilson Program, Reading comprehension, Math groups) - Level I, II, III, IV
 - Combination of inclusion, resource, BCBA support in inclusion and or aide, related services - Level I, II, III, IV
 - Outside of general education classes (no more than six (6) students in primary class K-2 and no more than 8 in class, BCBA, aide, related services) - Level IV.

As it pertains to supporting behavior in an inclusive environment, DC Bilingual PCS demonstrates its best practice through its LEAD System, premised upon Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), the Lee Canter's No Nonsense Nurturer Four Step Model, and home-visits. The following describes each support in more detail:

- “The LEAD System” as described by the LEA, is designed to teach and reward positive behavior based on DC Bilingual's values of Learn Languages, Earn Respect, Act Responsibility, and Do Your Best. It is a best practice to employ and communicate school-wide expectations that challenge students to emulate the school's mission and vision. Through careful instruction, consistent reinforcement and timely recognition, students can maximize their potential for achievement. Parents are an important component of the LEAD system. The LEA notes, “We ask that parents be willing to participate in the reinforcement and recognition of the LEAD system.”
- The Lee Canter's No Nonsense Nurturer Four Step Model is taught to all instructional staff to aid them in effectively managing classroom behavior.
- DC Bilingual has a partnership with an agency to support training in home-visits. DC Bilingual notes, “Home-visits are critical in building and nurturing the relationships with students, their families, teachers and the DC Bilingual School.”

- **DC Preparatory Academy Public Charter School.** Better known as the “Preppies,” DC Preparatory Academy PCS has demonstrated its strength in inclusive practice through its “Prep Session- Academic Intervention Classes.” First introduced in the fall of 2008, this initiative provides “intensive academic support for students who enter school significantly behind grade level or who have special learning needs.” While offering a diverse array of support to help ensure that students receive appropriate academic assistance, this approach also recognizes that “all students have individual learning styles and needs.” As noted in its brief, Prep Session classes are leveled, small group classes in which students are grouped and regrouped as appropriate based upon interim assessment results, classroom performance, and teacher observation and recommendations. Prep sessions are held twice daily at Edgewood Middle Campus with a 45-minute block each for math and English and Language Arts (ELA). Students who meet and/or exceed grade level standards participate in academic enrichment activities, while those who have demonstrated deficits in ELA and math receive targeted intervention around their specific needs. Teachers use student assessment data to determine which standards have not been mastered and need to be re-taught and plan their Prep Session classes accordingly, making sure to re-teach the material in a new, different, and customized way. Prep Sessions’ small, leveled groupings allow teachers to make optimal use of assessment data and deliver tailored instruction to ensure that all DC Prep students are provided the customized support they need to achieve mastery. Because of the success of the program at Edgewood Middle Campus, DC Prep introduced Prep Session Reading to its two elementary campuses at the start of the 2012-13 school year.
- **EL Haynes Public Charter School.** At EL Haynes PCS, its best practice is demonstrated through the development of its Race and Equity in Education Seminars (REES), which was developed as a response to the overrepresentation of students of color among students identified as students with disabilities. As EL Haynes describes in its brief, REES brings together EL Haynes teachers and staff to look at their own experience with race and how those experiences inform their work with students; to deepen their understanding of DC’s history and context around race, racism, and racial achievement disparities; and to develop and use a set of tools to ensure that all students have the opportunity and support to succeed.
- **Latin American Montessori Bilingual (LAMB) Public Charter School.** At LAMB PCS, its best practice in this arena is showcased through its Montessori approach. As LAMB PCS notes, Montessori lends itself to special education practices, but traditional schools and classrooms can incorporate aspects of the Montessori classroom that will benefit all children, especially those with special needs. According to LAMB PCS, there are several reasons that students with disabilities would thrive in a Montessori environment.
 - *Sensory Stimulation-* The Montessori Method is rife with sensory stimulation, which is one of the most important aspects of education for many students with special needs.
 - *Individualized Instruction-* The Montessori classroom is highly individualized, where teachers ‘follow the child’ in terms of their interests and readiness for lessons, providing one-on-one and small group lessons in a sequence that allows students to practice and master new content at their own pace.
 - *Multi-sensory Materials-* Most of the Montessori curriculum is delivered through materials that are very concrete and help children to visualize abstract concepts (mathematical operations, parts of a sentence, etc.). These materials are used with all

children, but are especially helpful to those who are kinesthetic, tactile, and /or visual learners.

- *Prepared Environment for Learning*- In the Montessori classroom, less is more. Everything in the environment has a purpose. There is nothing ‘extra’ that can be distracting to children. Even the colors used for the walls and shelves are meant to be calming.
 - *Multi-age Classrooms*- Montessori education is staged in three learning clusters: 3- to 6 year olds (Primary), 6-to 9 year-olds (Lower Elementary), and 9-to 12-year olds (Upper Elementary). This allows for peers to teach each other and for multi-age groupings to be a regular practice, so students attend lessons based on what they want or need to learn, rather than by their age.
- **Mary McLeod Bethune Day Academy Public Charter School (MMBDA).** At MMBDA PCS, students receive an education that meets their individual needs because supports and services are brought to the students, as appropriately needed. In addition, at MMBDA PCS, all students have two teachers in each classroom, helping to provide a small classroom environment with a 10 to 1 ratio. Some classrooms have a third teacher who provides specialized instruction to students and brings additional support to that classroom environment.
 - **Mundo Verde Public Charter School.** Mundo Verde PCS’ work in this arena is anchored in its core pedagogical model focused on Expeditionary Learning (EL). As Mundo Verde PCS shares in its brief, EL emphasizes empathy, collaboration, understanding of the natural world, service and compassion, and engages young learners to inquire, discover and be active participants in the learning process. Classrooms are designed upon the Responsive Classroom model, which consists of highly practical strategies for integrating social and academic learning throughout the school day. The major principles of this approach are:
 - The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum;
 - Children are active participants in the learning process and learn to make choices about their learning;
 - Children learn most by making meaningful connections when they engage and collaborate with other children;
 - Children are taught social skills like cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy and self-control;
 - Teachers are constantly observing to learn and understand children as individuals, their cultural and linguistic background and developmental growth;
 - Families are partners and an essential component of children’s education; and
 - All school members must model appropriate social skills, to make a positive impact in children’s interaction with others and develop good working relationships throughout the school/learning community.

Through the EL model, Mundo Verde PCS believes that all children with diverse learning needs experience a quality core instructional program. Students connect learning to real world issues through a curriculum focused on integrating student research gleaned from texts and experts in the field, in a manner that promotes authentic learning. Classrooms are alive with discovery, inquiry, critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration. All expeditions are founded on research and field study where students learn essential skills and knowledge hands on. Lessons in an expedition are guided by learning targets for which students take ownership and responsibility, and teachers provide instructional strategies to help excite, motivate and engage

learners of all backgrounds. Supports and accommodations occur in the child's inclusive environment to allow children with disabilities to reach learning targets. Teachers' differential instruction is based upon their ongoing assessment of students with varied needs, the use of the learning targets to frame instruction, ongoing assessment, and regular communication about student progress in academics to the student, parents, and other teachers of the student. Teachers are continuously mentoring progress of all children, particularly those at risk, to determine if they are benefitting from the instruction through a closely monitored system for Response to Intervention (RTI). Mundo Verde PCS also actively ensures that students are provided appropriate supports by focusing on best practices in evaluation. Mundo Verde PCS ensures that all of its students are evaluated using nondiscriminatory assessment measures.

- **Options Public Charter School.** Options Public Charter School fosters an inclusive environment by:
 - [Creating] a living mission of acceptance, inclusion and advancement of all students and an instructional philosophy that provides a least restrictive learning environment and equal educational opportunities for students of all abilities;
 - Providing heterogeneous classes where students with and without disabilities are paired;
 - Pairing a core subject teacher with a special education teacher in all core subjects where students with and without disabilities are learning together across the curriculum as a co-teaching model. This method ensures that students with special needs can receive academic rigor while also receiving direct specialized instruction;
 - Ensuring that all students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum and making sure to provide supports necessary to achieve the curriculum. The Options format for lesson planning provides for full inclusion strategies to be implemented throughout the lesson.
 - Using data to drive instructional planning and delivery. Specifically, Options PCS noted that:
 - All teachers receive baseline data from various forms of assessment in the first quarter of the school year. The data is used to place students in appropriate grouping in order to ensure targeted assistance for struggling students, students on grade level, and students above grade level in all content areas classes.
 - Prior to unit introduction and lesson planning, teachers administer pre-tests to determine areas of needs and strengths of content standards.
 - Following analysis of pre-test assessments, action plans are created on the classroom, content strand and student level to determine the best course of action to address each student's strengths and weaknesses.
 - Unit action plan outlines enable teachers to strategies to ensure that the needs of the students are met with each planned lesson.
 - In collaboration with various educators, student progress toward goals is assessed daily in the form of exit tickets, quizzes, student portfolios and rubrics for class projects and assessments.
 - Struggling students are identified for intervention based on daily data collection.
 - Student progress is visible to all students and the data team in the form of a data wall, in order to ensure that a culture of data-driven instruction exists in each class.

- Post assessments are administered; based on post assessment analysis, actions plans are created and implemented to ensure that the needs of all students are met and that lesson plans reflect those needs.
 - Teachers receive continuous support in assessment development, lesson planning and data analysis from the Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.
- **Two Rivers Public Charter School.** The best practice that represents inclusion and systems change at Two River’s PCS is its co-teaching approach. In the elementary school, every classroom has both a lead teacher and an assistant teacher. In the middle school, the “Expedition” block brings the teachers together to form teaching teams. As shared by Two Rivers PCS, by keeping the class sizes small and having at least two adults in the classroom, teachers can use flexible groups throughout the day to best meet the needs of all students. These groups are dynamic and can change depending on needs. Students with special needs taught in a smaller group, have more opportunities to ask questions and get individualized attention. In addition, each grade level has only two classrooms, allowing the special educator to work closely with the two general education teachers to plan instruction. Each week, the general education teachers and special educator for each grade level meet with an administrative partner during a designated common planning time. The common planning time is structured to ensure that general educators and special educators are developing curriculum, creating flexible groupings, and designing instruction with the needs of all learners in mind.
- **Washington Latin Public Charter School.** Washington Latin PCS has developed a full and innovative continuum of service options to meet specific needs. As noted by the LEA, “This [effort] has included a split schedule for students with severe reading disabilities with Kingsbury while maintaining involvement with our academic program, a full time in home tutor, with counseling support, a specific course of study that includes Cambridge based high school credit online courses with instructional support, of a home bound student with a rare disorder that prevents them from attending school. The programmatic support includes community based educational and recreational aspects to assist the student in re-integrating with peers, with plans for staged re-integration back into the general education population. The goal in every case is to maintain cohesion with our community and prepare for an eventual return to full general education instruction.”
- **Washington Yu Ying Public Charter School.** Known for its Chinese immersion program, this LEA has demonstrated best practices in this arena by ensuring family outreach through its array of established support and communication methods. Some of these methods include:
- Family events (e.g. gatherings and potlucks), in which families are invited to come together with the learning support staff and participate in social activities, while also receiving information regarding learning support at the charter school.
 - Regular electronic communication with parents through the school’s online family portal, and individual email communication with parents regarding their student(s). As a school, all educators are expected to communicate with each student’s parent(s) at least weekly via email and ensure that parents are updated on their student’s progress.
 - Clearly and explicitly publicizing on the school’s website and at events (i.e. Open House, Back to School Night, and in meetings with parents) the school’s special education contact information.

- Inviting the learning support coordinator to be in attendance at parent conferences in order to ensure that parents know how to access special education resources.

Washington Yu Ying PCS is also working on other opportunities to guarantee that families are fully supported. Some of these new initiatives include:

- “Parent information nights” in which the school team and parents can come together to discuss matters such as special education and home visits for families of students with disabilities.
- Development of a family handbook explaining the RTI framework and the special education process.
- Informational meetings to introduce and provide families with special education resources once their child has been identified with a disability.

SECTION II. EFFECTIVE RESOURCE ALLOCATION

The manner in which LEAs allocate resources has a significant impact on student outcomes. As resources are always finite, effective administrators and educators must continuously assess which activities and costs are the most “high yield,” and prioritize these activities over others that are less cost efficient in producing results. At the student level, the provision of appropriate supplemental supports, accommodations, and modifications is an integral part of planning the educational program for students with disabilities. With proper resource allocation, many students may require only minor modifications in the way they are taught and tested. The following LEAs demonstrated particularly impressive practices in their ability to assess student need and act with a responsive, flexible approach to resource allocation:

- **Bridges Public Charter School.** This LEA has created five (5) inclusion classrooms that use an array of supports, accommodations, and modifications to ensure the success of all students in the general education setting. The following describes the supports within each of the inclusion classroom:
 - All classrooms at Bridges PCS provide visual supports for students including visual schedules, a visual list of rules, and visual steps for completing task such as hand washing and toileting.
 - Sensory-based supports such as a cubed chairs, bumpy seats, and sensory breaks are used to assist students in sustaining their attention.
 - Lead teachers and assistant teachers as well as special education staff are trained in assessing the sensory needs of students and providing sensory supports. A variety of sensory tools are available for classroom use: fidgets, weighted vests, a swing, oral sensory tools, pencil grips, puddy, etc.
 - Bridges PCS uses a variety of approaches to facilitate communication with students including: PECS (picture, exchange communication system), sign language, visual behavioral supports (cues, schedules, token boards, and choice boards), and verbal behavioral vocalization training. All non-verbal strategies for communication are paired with vocal communication.
 - Students in special education program receive the same learning opportunities as their non-disabled peers. The curriculum used to facilitate the learning of the general education population is also used to facilitate the learning of students with special needs so that they included in every aspect of the school community.
 - For students with special needs who participate on the same level as their age appropriate peers, accommodations are made according to their individual needs. Accommodations are

often seen during large group activities. They include but are not limited to: extra wait time, repeated instructions, sensory supports to assist in sustaining attention, and preferential seating directly in front of the teacher or close to the teacher.

- **EL Haynes Public Charter School.** EL Haynes PCS has taken several steps to develop strong instructional improvement systems. One in particular is their development and implementation of a cloud-based educational data platform call School Force. This student information system allows EL Haynes to store and manipulate a wide variety of data (e.g. attendance student schedules, and behavior to GPAs, class grades, and mastery of standards) in one place. The system’s dynamic report and dashboards tools have transformed EL Haynes approach to collecting, analyzing and responding to data and in particular, their ability to narrow-in on students with disabilities.
- **Washington Yu Ying Public Charter School.** Washington Yu Ying PCS has created an internal monitoring system to improve compliance with IDEA. As described by the LEA, each student’s identity is protected within the spreadsheet, but it is shared between the case manager and special education coordinator to ensure compliance. For the eligibility process, dates are entered for when each phase of the eligibility is completed as well as when each document is released to the parent.

Frequent checks of the State’s Special Education Data System (SEDS) by the special education, coordinator to check for approaching deadlines, has ensured compliance with IDEA. Internal monitoring systems in the form of a uniform model of IEP binders and options for goal tracking methods have also helped to maintain IDEA compliance. The LEA also employs internal monitoring systems for related service providers, who are provided with explicit expectations for their timelines and work within the school. They are required to submit service logs weekly and print and fax logs monthly to ensure that service logs are kept up to date.

Special education teachers maintain shared calendars of meetings and also create individual meeting calendars with reminder notifications for sending out meeting invitations, reaching out to parents, and sending home draft IEPs. Special education teachers meet weekly as a team to review deadlines and troubleshoot any issues to improve compliance and avoid missing deadlines due to miscommunication or technical issues. All special education meetings are held on one weekday to ensure that all mandatory participants can attend and that all information can be distributed appropriately.

SECTION III. ENRICHING INSTRUCTION THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In today’s classrooms, teachers are expected to understand each student’s need and ensure that all students receive FAPE. This responsibility, though immense, is achievable when teachers receive the support and professional development necessary to sharpen their skills. The following LEAs have provided opportunities for their teachers to see, experience, and participate in guided practice with feedback on instructional strategies:

- **AppleTree Public Charter School.** At AppleTree PCS, its best practice in this arena is showcased through its professional development approaches. As noted in their brief, AppleTree has numerous feedback cycles that happen every day at each level of the organization. Coaches and principals provide ongoing feedback to teachers through the use of fidelity checklists

(embedded in the instructional program) and also through the Quality Indicators. The Quality Indicators are an observational tool created by AppleTree Institute that is aligned with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and the Early Language and Literacy Checklist Observation (ELLCO). Teachers are observed, at minimum, once per month and receive feedback on the quality and fidelity of their implementation. The special education coordinators and managers also provide ongoing feedback to teachers about best practices in working with students with disabilities.

Also, once per month there is a day dedicated to site-based professional development. No students are in attendance on these days and teachers participate in curriculum training and school-based professional development, and also have four hours of planning and collaboration time. The special education team including related service providers and social workers also meets for five full days prior to the beginning of school, and every month for a half day, professional development that is specially designed for delivering services to young children and their families in special education at AppleTree. Some topics have included, organic IEP meetings, partnering with parents, the special education coordinators many duties and how to prioritize them, navigating change in the special education milieu, *Transdisciplinary Play-Based Assessment*, and how to use the *HELP* materials throughout the early childhood special education process to maintain consistent quality developmentally appropriate practices.

- **Bridges Public Charter School.** Bridges PCS has created an internal professional development series specifically designed to address teachers' interests in supporting students with disabilities. These professional development series include topics such as quarterly curriculum reflections, behavioral management, language development, verbal-behavior training and approach to teaching, sign language and facilitating communication with non-verbal students, and student support systems. Additionally, the LEA has also created opportunities for community collaboration with other local LEAs in order for teachers to observe and experience innovative initiatives that exist within other schools. Bridges also encourages staff to attend local and national level professional development opportunities.
- **District of Columbia Public School (DCPS).** At DCPS, the LEA has hired a team of highly skilled professionals to coordinate the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI)/Student Support Teams in all schools. This team provides leadership in professional development to central office and school based staff on the identification of effective multi-tiered interventions, use of data to drive interventions, and development of a systematic process for data collection and monitoring. A Steering Committee has also been formed to oversee the district-wide implantation of RtI activities including identifying a robust data system that will track student interventions and progress.

In addition DCPS' Office of Special Education contracted with an external group to provide Life Skills Crisis Intervention (LSCI) training to staff working with students with behavioral disabilities. The LSCI training will be offered a minimum of three times annually and require five full days of participation for staff to be deemed certified. DCPS is in the process of also hiring three behavior coaches to assist local schools in addressing the needs of students with challenging behaviors as a means of preventing them from moving to more restrictive settings.

- **EL Haynes Public Charter School.** As noted in its brief, at EL Haynes teachers are the cornerstone of their students' development; their students get smarter when teachers get

smarter. Each year, the charter school provides its teachers with over 200 hours of professional development through Haynes University as well as ensures weekly planning time. Meeting weekly, Haynes University courses focus on specific instructional strategies, including those that target students with disabilities. For example, in Best Practices for Paraprofessionals, EL Haynes paraprofessionals learn skills and strategies for supporting their students across settings. And, in the course Inclusion Best Practices, general education instructors learn about serving students with special learning, language, or behavioral needs in the context of Haynes' inclusion program. Recently, the LEA also created the position of Response to Intervention Director to guide school-wide adoption.

- **Washington Mathematics, Science Technology Public Charter School (WMST).** At WMST, professional development for general and special education staff is linked to improved educational outcomes for students with disabilities. Teams use reflective practice strategies and structures to engage in job-embedded learning and professional growth, and general and special education educators attend professional development events together to better support all students.

SECTION IV. CREATING A CONTINUUM OF ALTERNATIVE PLACEMENTS

As mandated by IDEA, unless the student's IEP requires some other placement, a student with a disability should attend the school he/she would attend if not eligible for special education services. In addition, students classified with a disability must be afforded the opportunity to participate in nonacademic and extracurricular services and school activities along with their nondisabled peers in the general education settings. If a student's IEP Team determines that a student cannot be served in a general education classroom with supplementary aids and services, the IEP Team must consider a continuum of placement options such as resource rooms, special classes, special schools, etc. The LEAs showcased below have demonstrated a particular commitment to aligning their practices with the LRE requirements under IDEA:

- **District of Columbia Public School (DCPS).** DCPS notes its continued commitment to LRE through the assignment of additional special education teachers, particularly in areas of high demand, such as students with vision impairment, hard of hearing, deafness, autism and emotional disabilities.
 - In 2011-12, DCPS opened 32 district-wide classes in its efforts to accommodate student placement needs, with a goal to build capacity and effectively accommodate students returning from nonpublic settings.
 - DCPS noted excitement about the opening of 24 additional classes across the District wards during the 2012-2013 school year, furthering the goal of expanding full inclusion opportunities for students with disabilities.
 - In addition, for students returning from a more restrictive nonpublic school placement, DCPS developed a new program, the RISE program, which focuses on providing support for these students as they return to a public school setting and in lesser restrictive environment. As DCPS notes, "RISE classes are capped at 12 students in high school classes and 10 on the middle school level. Each classroom has 2 paraprofessional, one for instruction and one for behavior, as well as certified special education teachers. Teachers receive on-going training and support from PLATO on-line instructional coaches and DCPS behavior coaches."

- For those students are on the autistic spectrum and/or those with low-incidence disability, classes have been formed and are similarly staffed and supported like the RISE program to ensure success within DCPS.
 - These classroom designs ensure that all students have equal opportunities to engage with their non-disabled peers in both academic and extracurricular settings.
- **Options Public Charter School.** At Options Public Charter School, its mission is to “serve students in need of resources, including intensive academic and therapeutic supports.” In 2010, after experiencing a surge in students presenting with severe emotional and behavioral disabilities, Options addressed its population’s needs by developing an educational program that focused on providing support to students with high needs while reducing the over-reliance on nonpublic school placement. Known as the *Options Academy Therapeutic Public Placement (Rosedale Campus)*, the Academy is focused on providing intensive therapeutic and academic intervention outside of a general education setting for students whose needs are more acute which can be served in the general education setting. As Options PCS notes in its Brief, “this setting has a high staff to student ratio with 10 to 12 students per class, with one mental health clinician, special educator, and behavior support specialist assigned to each classroom.”

In addition, in July 2012, Options PCS was selected and awarded a grant by OSSE to develop a Co-Located Therapeutic Classroom (CLTM). This program, which is available for the use of other District independent charter LEAs, provides support and services for students with high levels of behavioral need, whose primary (or combined) disability includes Emotional Disturbance. The following are key highlights of the program:

- Small ratio, structured therapeutic classroom (no more than 10 students) with a teacher, clinician, and behavioral staff member.
- Emphasis on parent involvement, parent education, and cognitive-behavioral therapy, which focuses on problem-solving to address aggression.
- Use of the Individual Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) that is aimed at reducing behavioral concerns and prepares student for inclusion back into the general education setting.
- Implementation of Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) to teach and reinforce appropriate behaviors.
- Provision of individual and group psychological support and services, social skills and emotion regulation skill training, substance abuse education, and care management via wraparound support.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated by the best practices showcased in this white paper, the District of Columbia is fortunate to host a diverse range of evidence-based strategies and effective educational options for students with disabilities. OSSE would like to thank participating LEAs for both their contributions to this project and for the important work they do on a daily basis to ensure that all students are able to access an excellent education.