
LEONOR	ALCANTARA,	:	SUPERIOR COURT OF NEW JERSEY
individually and as guardian ad		:	APPELLATE DIVISION
litem for E.A.;	LESLIE	:	DOCKET NUMBER: A-2493-23
JOHNSON, individually and as		:	
guardian ad litem for D.J.;		:	<u>CIVIL ACTION</u>
JUANA PEREZ, individually		:	
and as guardian ad litem for		:	
Y.P.;	TATIANA ESCOBAR,	:	
individually;	and IRA	:	AGENCY DOCKET NO.: 156-6/14
SCHULMAN, individually and		:	
as guardian ad litem for A.S.,		:	
		:	
Appellants,		:	
		:	
v.		:	
		:	
ANGELICA	ALLEN-	:	
MCMILLAN,	Acting	:	
Commissioner of the New Jersey		:	
Department of Education; THE		:	
NEW JERSEY STATE BOARD		:	
OF EDUCATION; and THE		:	
NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT		:	
OF EDUCATION,		:	
		:	
Respondents.		:	
		:	

**APPENDIX ON BEHALF OF RESPONDENT KEVIN DEHMER,
ACTING COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION AND THE NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

VOLUME II of III (Ra151 to Ra300)

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APPENDIX TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME I

Leonor Alcantara, et al. v. N.J. Dept. of Educ., Docket No. A-3693-20 Ra1

March 1, 2021 Initial Decision..... Ra16

July 16, 2021 Final Decision of the Commissioner of Education Ra127

May 12, 2023 Letter from Commissioner of Education to Appellants Ra137

May 12, 2023 Order on Emergent Relief..... Ra139

June 8, 2023 Order on Motion for Leave to Appeal..... Ra142

August 22, 2023 Letter from Commissioner of Education to Appellants Ra143

November 22, 2023 Order on Motion to Enforce Litigants’ Rights..... Ra145

March 1, 2024 Comprehensive Review of the Lakewood Public School District..... Ra147

VOLUME II

March 1, 2024 Comprehensive Review of the Lakewood Public School District (Continued) Ra151

VOLUME III

March 1, 2024 Comprehensive Review of the Lakewood Public School District (Continued) Ra301

April 1, 2024 Final Decision of the Assistant Commissioner of Education Ra378

resources. These considerations should be evident throughout the curriculum documents and classroom instruction. Multiple areas were reviewed and analyzed as a part of this process: district curriculum, professional learning, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, Multilingual Learners, access to college and career coursework, classroom observations, assessment practices, and student outcomes.

- **Curriculum Development.** Lakewood uses a significant amount of material that is developed internally. Development is controlled by curriculum supervisors, requires frequent revisions, and represents a large expense to the District. Without an Assistant Superintendent whose responsibility would be oversight of the curriculum and its supervisors, each curriculum supervisor can make decisions about changes to their content area without keeping a balance with the other content areas.
- **Curriculum Differentiation.** The intense focus on pacing guides, instructional frameworks, and lesson scripts leaves little room for differentiation in the classrooms. Teachers reported limited time to pause to ensure mastery.
- **Walkthroughs and Observations.** The number of required walkthroughs and observations being completed by curriculum supervisors, instructional coaches, school administrators and the Superintendent are excessive. Required administrative team walkthroughs alone average 200-300 per month occurring within each school. This count does not include walkthroughs by curriculum supervisors or the required formal observation process.
- **Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS).** While Lakewood appears to have an intentional framework and intervention resources to support students with their academic and behavioral needs, there seem to be gaps in school-based staff's understanding of them, a consistent application of them across schools and classrooms, and clear documentation about expectations.
- **Career Pathways.** High school student participation in vocational education coursework is strong, but students are not engaged in career pathways programs offered by the District. Only five students participated in a full-time Career Academy Pathway in the 2022-2023 school year across three Pathway programs.
- **Advanced Placement (AP).** Student participation in and exam passage rates for Advanced Placement courses are low. Of the students taking AP exams in 2022-2023 for courses offered at Lakewood High School, more than half of the students did not pass in all courses except for Spanish Language and Culture. No students who took the AP US History course passed.
- **Student Engagement.** Students were not engaged in instruction as active learners during PCG observations. There was limited classroom discussion. At the upper elementary through high school levels, almost all observations were of students working independently on assignments. Students were observed to be compliant and orderly.
- **Instructional Practices.** Most instruction observed by PCG was teacher-directed, and classroom lesson structure was predictable. Students were not asked to apply higher level thinking skills such as application, analysis, or evaluation.
- **Graduation/Dropout rates.** Graduation rates are lower than the state average and comparable districts; dropout rates are higher.

Special Education:

The Special Education section concentrates on the evaluation of the LPSD's services and support systems for students with disabilities. The summary provided offers an initial overview,

which precedes a more exhaustive exploration in the Findings section, where we will delve into the intricacies of special education practices and propose recommendations for improvement.

- **State Performance Plan Indicators.** Of the indicators in which the District is not meeting targets, the most significant are Indicator 5, specifically including children with IEPs with typically developing peers 80% or more during the school day; Indicator 3B, specifically 4th grade ELA and math assessment; and Indicator 6, preschool children with disabilities in separate settings and the time spent during the day with typically developing peers.
- **Data Reporting.** There also appear to be significant data discrepancy and reporting issues for the SPP indicators and within categorizations of students by placement type.
- **Preschool Population.** Of the overall three-to-four-year-old student population of students with disabilities, 79.8% were White and 15.7% were Hispanic. This demographic distribution is not representative of the District's overall population.
- **Incidence Rates.** Over the past three years, Lakewood's special education public school incidence rate is on average ten percentage points higher than the state's incidence rate.
- **Significant Disproportionality.** The District has consistently been found to be significantly disproportionate in several identification and placement categories and is required to set aside 15% of its IDEA federal grant dollars for Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services.
- **Limited Continuum Options.** The District has limited programming for Emotional Regulation Impairment, Visual Impairment, and Intellectual Disabilities in its schools.
- **Out of District Tuition Costs.** Lakewood's out of district tuition costs totaled \$57.5M in 2021-2022 for 372 students, with comparable districts spending far less (from a low of \$4.7M for 62.5 students in one district to a high of \$20.5M for 129 students in another).
- **Access to the General Education Curriculum and Specially Designed Instruction (SDI).** There are several significant concerns regarding access to the general education curriculum and the overall implementation of SDI in Lakewood for students with disabilities, from the inability of teachers to modify curricular materials, to pacing concerns, to the implementation of parallel/co-teaching, to the fact that many IEPs reviewed do not align to grade level requirements.
- **Related Services Equipment.** The District has made substantial investments in state-of-the-art related therapy equipment; yet these resources appear to be underutilized given the District's population with significant disabilities is not educated within the public school buildings.
- **Families.** Lakewood has an active Special Education Parent Advisory Group (SEPAG), which meets monthly. Nearly three-quarters of parents surveyed were familiar with the SEPAG and the support it offers.
- **Nonpublic Schools.** The number of nonpublic students, ages 5-21, eligible to receive special education services increased by 1,606 students, from 8,171 in 2019-20 to 9,777 in 2021-22. This growth represents a 20% increase in eligible students. These increases have required the District to set aside an increasing allocation under its IDEA federal grant. The management of child find, eligibility, and service determination and provision are managed by an outside provider.

Financial Practices:

In the Finance section, the fiscal management and resource allocation within the LPSD, focusing on how financial stewardship influences the delivery of a Thorough and Efficient (T&E) education are critically examined. This analysis evaluates the effectiveness of financial practices and their impact on educational services. The insights presented here serve as a precursor to a more detailed examination in the Findings section, where financial strategies and their implications for the district's educational landscape are thoroughly unpacked.

A forensic analysis and discovery were conducted, in the following areas:

- **Financial Data Analytics** - These are financial analytics, using the Caseware IDEA Audit Tool by CaseWare International, that were run on the entire general ledger (GL) and were filtered by account.
- **Internal Controls Testing** – This analysis focused on:
 - Governance
 - Higher risk financial controls
 - Application controls that relate to supporting financial controls
 - Segregation of duties Service provider/vendor selection.

The auditors followed the Statements for Consulting Standards, from the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants (AICPA), for this analysis. The findings reported here did not constitute an audit or examination, the objective of which is the expression of an opinion on financial statements, on other subject matter or on management's assertion.

- **General Ledger.** There was no questionable activity noted in the General Ledger activity based off Caseware IDEA testing.
- **Vendor Management Controls.** There are significant deficiencies noted on the vendor management controls in the procure to pay cycle as internal controls related to vendor selection, review and retention are not operating effectively.
- **Payroll Processing Controls.** There are significant deficiencies noted on the payroll processing cycle, as internal controls related to review and completion of the payroll register and payroll processing checklist, respectively, are not operating effectively.
- **Financial Close Controls.** There are deficiencies noted on the finance close cycle, as internal controls related to completion of close process checklist are review of cash flow statements are not operating effectively.
- **Governance and IT Cycle Controls.** There are significant deficiencies noted on the Governance and IT cycle as internal controls related to completion of employee handbook acknowledgement, new hire training and approval of access, termination requests are not operating effectively.

Transportation:

In the Transportation summary, the logistical framework that supports student access to education within the District is assessed. The operational efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and safety of the transportation services provided are evaluated. The summary of findings outlined here lay the groundwork for an in-depth discussion in the main body of the report, where we will elaborate on the nuances of transportation policies and their effects on the district's educational objectives.

Several major observations regarding the Lakewood Public School District's transportation services were made:

- Lakewood is unique in that it serves more resident students (40,958) than all other districts in New Jersey due to a high number of nonpublic school students. The district serving the next closest number is Toms River, also in Ocean County, serving 14,097 students.
- The Lakewood Student Transportation Authority (LSTA) appears to be an innovative solution that effectively helps Lakewood meet its significant nonpublic school student transportation obligations while helping the town satisfy its desire to provide courtesy transportation.
- There is not sufficient separation between Lakewood Public School District as the contracting agency and the LSTA as vendor.
- There are potential opportunities to lower prices by bidding tiered routes as packages rather than individually. Some buses run four to eight routes a day at a total cost of over \$200,000 per bus.

Findings

The report delineates its key findings into five overarching themes - Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Special Education, Finance, and Transportation. Each of these critical areas is analyzed in depth, laying the foundation for a set of structured recommendations presented to the Commissioner. This comprehensive analysis serves as the bedrock for strategic improvements, aiming to bolster the operational efficacy of the Lakewood Public School District and its provision of a thorough and efficient education for all students.

Governance

The Governance findings shine a spotlight on the intricate dynamics of leadership and administrative oversight in the LPSD. Through an exhaustive examination, the efficacy of governance mechanisms, from board functionality to policy implementation, against the backdrop of educational objectives are scrutinized. This section unfolds a narrative that captures the essence of governance practices, weaving through the complexities of leadership decisions and their impact on the educational environment.

Climate and Culture

There is a district-wide culture of low expectations for students across the Lakewood Public School District. According to Exhibit A, "Rather than having a culture of Academic Optimism, many staff believe that poverty or lack of English proficiency contribute to the students' low academic performance, poor attendance, lack of motivation, and an overall poor attitude." Hoy's work on academic optimism is also referenced.² A school with high "academic optimism believes that faculty can make a difference, students can learn, and achieve high levels of academic performance.

Staff well-being is also an important part of district climate and culture. In the LPSD, teaching staff described a challenging environment characterized by being overloaded and a perception of understaffed conditions. Almost all teachers, noted the fear of job security consequences

² Hoy, W.K., Tarter, C.J., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2006). Academic optimism of schools: A force for student achievement. Working Paper – The Ohio State University.

related to the expectation of strict adherence to the pacing guides. There is some frustration due to frequent changes and new rules which create confusion and inconsistency.

It appears that unclear communication is also a contributor to this feeling of confusion. One example of the breakdown in communication was the movement of hundreds of students and staff with little notice, in one instance there was only one day's notice, or explanation due to a change to the configuration of schools. Principals did not have time to notify parents or plan transition activities. Teachers were notified through an email, and maintenance and facilities staff were not notified until a week before school. This meant added hours and manpower and unanticipated costs to the budget. This example, again, demonstrates how administrative decision-making critically impacts all areas of the District. Despite these issues, teachers noted that they work collaboratively and maintain constant communication, contributing to a positive aspect of teamwork.

The issues concerning clear communication do not just affect staff but parents as well. Translation services were listed as a challenge area for the District. The Enrollment Office does have parent liaisons in each building and translation apps available to parents. The website has Google translate to translate to Spanish; however, only 15% of the documents on the website are in Spanish let alone any of the other languages that are primarily spoken in the community. In addition, most of the documents on the website are PDFs which do not function with Google Translate.

The handling of staff non-renewals and transfers appears to be nontypical as well. According to staff, there is not a traditional system which is clearly outlined for non-renewals. Non-renewal decisions are made by District staff unlike other New Jersey districts where those decisions are made at the school level. The principals expressed an interest in having a more active role in these decisions. The administrator and teacher transfer process is atypical as well. Last Spring administrators were transferred to different schools before the end of the school year. Many moves are reported to happen on an annual basis. This affects consistency and continuity for all.

The example above of the sudden reconfiguration of schools speaks to the lack of intentional planning in the District. This new grade-span (elementary and middle) configuration has added more transitions for students. Students' academic, emotional, and physical development and well-being should be at the forefront of all decision-making. Under the new configuration, it is possible for a student to attend five LPSD schools throughout their academic career. And, under this new configuration, there are now families with children in four different elementary schools creating significant logistical challenges for these families.

Goal Setting and Planning:

Most public schools in New Jersey use strategic planning to structure goal setting and resource prioritization for the district. This multi-year plan combined with data serves as a guide for districts. Creating a district-wide strategic plan is usually done as a collaborative process. Multiple stakeholder groups are given the opportunity to provide input and insights into the goal setting process. The strategic plan is usually developed by a team consisting of the superintendent, executive leadership team, and board members. Most strategic plans contain 3-5 goals written in SMART goal format and are written to cover a 3-5-year timespan. Strategic plan development is led by the superintendent. The Lakewood Public School District (LPSD) does not have a strategic plan in place. The District does have goals posted annually by the

superintendent.³ This year's slides, which are shared on the District website, contain inconsistent focus and support on the 7 different goal areas (i.e.: 44 slides on Goal 1 – Student Achievement, a single slide on Fiscal Stability, and duplicate slides throughout from the 2022-2023 school year).

The District has a mission statement which was developed in 2007 posted on its website. The strategic planning period would be a perfect time to review the mission statement and develop a complementary vision statement to serve as a North Star for the strategic plan.

A strategic plan allows for alignment in all areas across the District. This would help the District with budgetary prioritization, curricular and academic resource selection, management and use of technology, facilities decisions, and other. With many competing priorities in a district all in competition for limited funds and time, a strategic plan can be just the answer. If the need is in direct alignment with the goals of the strategic plan, it helps the district decide which areas to apply its focus to first.

Structures and Systems

Boards of education in New Jersey follow Robert's Rules of Order when conducting meetings. These rules establish proper decorum for meeting structure. LPSD is not adhering to Robert's Rules of Order⁴ to conduct business meetings. In Part 3, Chapter 11 there is specific guidance as to the role of the Board Chair in conducting meetings. The guidance does not include the Board Attorney usurping the role of the Board Chair. The District also has their own policy, 0162 – Conduct of Board Meeting, which clearly states that the Board President will preside over the meetings. As stated in Exhibit A, this practice also does not align with Lakewood Policy 0164-*Conduct of Board Meeting*.⁵ The policy states that *"the President shall preside at all meetings of the Board. In the absence, disability, or disqualification of the President, the Vice President shall act in his/her place; if neither person is present, any member shall be designated by a plurality of those present to preside."* That policy is read at the beginning of each board meeting by the Interim Business Administrator but is not followed as read.

In addition, according to the New Jersey School Boards Association's Basic Parliamentary Procedures, the person presiding over a meeting is referred to as the chair or chairperson. Usually, that individual is the board president. The principal duties of the chair per the New Jersey School Board Association are to:

- open the meeting at the appointed time;
- announce in proper sequence the order of business or agenda;
- recognize members who are entitled to the floor;
- state and to put to vote all motions, and to announce the result of each vote;
- rule if a motion is made that is out of order; protect against obviously frivolous or dilatory motions;
- enforce the rules relating to debate and those relating to order and decorum;
- expedite business in every way compatible with the rights of members;
- decide all questions of order, subject to appeal;

³ Lakewood Public School District's Goals for the 2023-2024 School Year. (2023) Lakewood Public School District website.

⁴ Roberts Rules of Order

⁵ Lakewood School Board Policy Manual. Policy 0164 CONDUCT OF BOARD MEETING

- respond to inquiries of members relating to parliamentary procedure or factual information bearing on the business of the assembly; and
- declare the meeting adjourned when the assembly so votes or, when applicable, at the time prescribed in the program, or at any other time in the event of a sudden emergency affecting the safety of those present.

The LPSD board meetings are conducted with a consent agenda where agenda items are voted as a package without discussion unless a board member asks for removal of an item. Included within the consent agenda are the first and second readings of policies. There are no discussions of action items, no committee reports, no discussions, and very little public comment. Most school boards in New Jersey have a Policy Committee that meets to discuss changes and updates to existing policies and drafts of new policies. These policies are given first and second readings where this is open discussion among board members about these policies and the public is given time to comment as well.

In addition, board approval must happen at the time of vendor onboarding, and this does not appear to be happening in the LPSD. It appears the approval of the bill list on the consent agenda for making payment is considered the approval of the vendor. The vendor must be approved by the board before payment can be issued. In addition, Business Registration Certificates (BRC) and W-9s must be maintained for all vendors.

There are a series of financial systems that appear to be in place but not fully functioning. Rate changes and transfers are to be approved by the District Board of Education. The control is designed properly for this; however, there is no evidence that these approvals are taking place.

An employee handbook and code of conduct are maintained; however, there is no evidence that new staff members are signing the acknowledgement form stating that they have read and understood the handbook upon employment nor that existing employees are signing an acknowledgement form annually. Similarly, there is no evidence that new hires are receiving the required training programs including security awareness and general IT trainings upon onboarding and that all existing employees are completing these trainings annually. All new hires, once approved by the Superintendent and the Board of Education, must be reported by HR to IT to grant access. Likewise, all terminations approved by the Superintendent should be communicated to IT from HR and access revoked on their last day. There is no evidence to support that either process is happening.

Curriculum and Instruction

The Curriculum and Instruction findings delve into the heart of the educational experience, examining the substance and delivery of the District's educational programs. This section rigorously evaluates the alignment of the curriculum with educational standards, the effectiveness of instructional strategies, and the overall impact on student learning and achievement. Through detailed analysis, areas where enhancement is needed to meet the diverse needs of students are spotlighted. This examination illuminates the challenges within curriculum and instruction, emphasizing the critical role they play in shaping students' academic journeys and the urgent need for targeted improvements.

The first critical finding relates to the kindergarten entrance age of students in Lakewood Public School District. District Policy 5112: Entrance Age (2013)⁶ states, “A child whose fifth birthday occurs on or before December 31 of any year will be admitted to Kindergarten after September 1 of the same year, subject to established residency and registration requirements.” In a typical New Jersey kindergarten classroom, students entering kindergarten must turn five-years old by October 1st as per NJ Rev Stat § 18A:38-5 (2022) which is a statutory requirement. In this case students are only four-years old for the first month of school. In the LPSD, a four-year old can be in the classroom up to the first four months of school. This makes it possible for a kindergarten class to have four-, five-, and six-year-old students in the classroom simultaneously. This creates a potential ripple effect moving forward across the entire schooling of a child with the learning gaps widening year-after-year. As referenced in Exhibit A, there is also evidence that the age at which children begin school can change the likelihood that a child is placed in special education or diagnosed with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).⁷ This policy allowance potentially impacts every area of concern for the District: Curriculum and Instruction, Financial, Governance, Special Education, and Transportation.

The Lakewood Early Childhood Center (LECC) is housed in three modular-trailer classrooms. Two of the trailers are connected, and one is separate. The interconnected trailers have Physical Therapy equipment in a separate setting in a Snoezelen Multi-Sensory Room. The disconnected modular-trailer classroom does not have access to these resources. Again, the number of students in the LECC is higher than most districts due to its policy that extends past the October 1 cutoff date in preschool as well.

The overall organizational structure of the District is unique in comparison to other traditional public schools in New Jersey. The LPSD superintendent has 24 direct reports. There is no assistant superintendent. The board attorney reports directly to the Board of Education. In most districts in New Jersey, the only person who reports directly to the board of education is the superintendent. This structure may be contributing to issues in multiple areas across the district. Inefficiencies come into play when there is confusion among staff members as to which position has greater influence or is the decision-maker. Delegation can be difficult in a flat structure such as this where it is unclear who is responsible for what work and when and where decisions can be made without bringing everything to the superintendent for approval. This is not efficient, economical, or a best practice instructionally.

The curriculum in Lakewood Public Schools is developed by district staff: curriculum supervisors and instructional coaches. There is a lack of evidence, research-based, current resources to support the curriculum. A variety of curricular resources support English Language Arts/Literacy. At the Early Elementary level, there are some purchased materials. The resource being used beginning in Grade 3 is dated 2013 and the textbooks at the high school level are from 2015. The District just purchased a 3-year program for the high school which is digital only and being piloted in some of the high school classes. Further information is needed about how students without technology or connectivity access the materials from home. These materials are supplemented by the individual curriculum supervisors, of which there are 6. Without an Assistant Superintendent, each curriculum supervisor can make changes in their content area without a balance among recommendations between content areas. The implementation of an evidence-based, standard-aligned writing curricular resource does not seem to be a high priority for the district. With a large number of multi-lingual learners, language skills, grammar,

⁶ Lakewood School District Policy Manual. <https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/lboe/Board.nsf/Public>

⁷ Shapiro, A. (2020). Over Diagnosed or Over Looked? The Effect of Age at Time of School Entry on Students Receiving Special Education Services. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00144029221108735#tab->

linguistics, and learning to write is an equally critical skill to focus on simultaneously with reading development to support literacy development.

At the elementary and middle schools, the mathematics curricular support materials are all created within the District for all grade levels (i.e.: student workbooks, worksheets, and teacher guides). In high school, traditional textbooks are used. This is concerning as locally developed curricular resource are not researched backed or supported. Concern was also expressed about the alignment of lessons and materials to the NJSLS mathematics academic standards. Vertical alignment in mathematics is critical for developing standards (i.e.: Algebra) that develop over time from kindergarten through high school.

Scripts and pacing guides for the curriculum are designed by the District. The messaging around scripts is different from school to school. There is written guidance that the teachers must be within ten days of the pacing guide. Change is constant as curriculum supervisors are constantly reviewing and updating the pacing guides. This strict structure leaves little room for differentiating to support the needs of individual students.

Lastly, the building principal does not have any oversight or decision-making authority over curricular decisions. This relates back to the flat reporting structure with 24 leaders reporting to the superintendent. Principals are often not in traditional roles of leadership in their buildings.

There is a large amount of oversight for teachers. Walkthroughs are conducted regularly to a point that seems excessive. There are approximately 50-75 walkthroughs a week which could add up to as many as 200-300 a month. These numbers do not include required formal observations. Using the time of leaders this way does not allow much time for additional responsibilities that contribute to student success.

While the District adopted Policy 2417⁸: Student Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) in 2013 and updated the policy to reflect the adoption of New Jersey's Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) Framework in 2022, staff generally shared they either didn't know what it was or said their school doesn't use it. MTSS requires tiered levels of support for students moving from Tier 1, classroom support, to Tier 3, individual support. Staff felt due to the strict structure and pacing of the local curriculum, there is not time for scaffolding supports in this way. Tier 3 intervention stops in third grade so there is no Tier 3 reading intervention in grades 3-5. This is especially problematic given the local policy extending kindergarten cutoff date to December 31st. Many students in grade 3, are still developmentally young and are continuing to struggle with reading. Without tiered supports and structured intervention time, the gap will continue to expand for students.

The Lakewood Public School District has a high number of multi-lingual learners. It employs 36 English as a Second Language-certified (ESL) staff. Students coming into the district have various needs when it comes to language support. Some students come with gaps in formal education as well as and can be two or more grade levels behind. The District provides a variety of services for students: Bilingual classes, taught in the student's native language; Sheltered English Instruction classes taught with a variety of techniques; and Newcomer Program which is focused on those students with gaps in formal education. This report finds that while there are a great number of employees and offerings for multi-lingual learners across the district, all three

⁸ Note. Retrieved from "Lakewood Public School District Adopted Policy 2417" provided by Lakewood Public School District.

offerings are not available in all schools yet there are students who need the services not offered in each school. The breakdown for this finding can be found in Exhibit A, pp. 58-59.

The District offers multiple pathways and has allocated significant resources to support high school students on their journey toward college and career preparedness: Dual Enrollment, Vocational Education, Career Academy Pathways, and Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate. However, the number of students participating in most of these programs is low. Of the students participating in the AP program, 66% of students did not take the AP Exam which allows students entering college to place out of these courses and potentially receive credit for the course as well. Of the students taking the exam, few receive a passing score. In the 2022-2023 school year, only 5 students participated in the full-time Career Pathway program.

The District supports Professional Development (PD) for staff in a variety of ways. Curriculum supervisors and instructional coaches use data to determine professional development opportunities. There are three professional development days built into the calendar before the start of the school year. PD is also offered through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), staff meetings, and virtual options throughout the year. Staff expressed frustration because PD is often offered during their prep time and/or they are pulled from instructional time with their students.

Last findings in this area, but critically important, are in the areas of student engagement, instructional groupings and techniques, and student behaviors. Data shared in Exhibit A, pp. 69-73, shows that students were well behaved and on task, however, this seems to demonstrate compliance more than anything else. Students were spending a lot of time in whole class instruction: listening to a lecture, looking at a computer screen, or working on worksheets or in a workbook. There was very little discussion or interaction happening in the classrooms, particularly in the middle and high school classes. Best practices (small group instruction, turn and talk, creative grouping, and collaboration opportunities) for instruction were observed in a few classrooms but were largely missing in most. Most students were seated in desks that were arranged in rows. No multi-lingual services were being delivered in any of the classrooms visited. About 30% of the classrooms visited were either taking a test or preparing for one. High quality instruction, instructionally sound curriculum supported by research-based materials, and opportunities for students to participate as active learners are the best strategies for being prepared for a test.

Special Education

The Special Education findings within this comprehensive review carefully assess the district's approach to serving students with diverse learning needs. This section explores the adequacy, accessibility, and quality of special education services, probing into how well these services align with best practices and regulatory requirements. Through this in-depth investigation, significant gaps in the provision of special education are identified which highlight the importance of individualized support and inclusive practices. The insights gained reveal the complexities of delivering equitable and effective special education and underscore the necessity for strategic enhancements to ensure that all students receive the support they need to thrive academically and socially.

The United States Department of Education (ED), established State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) requirements that include 17 indicators:

- Indicator 1: Graduation Rate
- Indicator 2: Dropout Rate
- Indicator 3: Assessment (Participation and Performance)
- Indicator 4: Rates of Suspension
- Indicator 5: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Age 6-21
- Indicator 6: Preschool LRE, Age 3-5
- Indicator 7: Preschool Outcomes
- Indicator 8: Parent Involvement
- Indicators 9, 10: Disproportionate Representation Due to Inappropriate Identification
- Indicator 11: Timely Initial Evaluations
- Indicator 12: Early Childhood Transition
- Indicator 13: Secondary Transition
- Indicator 14: Post-School Outcomes
- Indicators 15, 16: Dispute Resolution
- Indicator 17: State Systemic Improvement Plan

Note. Retrieved from "IDEA Part B Indicators" by the US department of Education Results Driven Accountability website, (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda/index.html>)

Over the past three most current years, with the 2021-22 school year being the most current, Lakewood Public School District has not met targets in the following indicators:

- Indicator 1: Graduation
- Indicator 2: Dropout
- Indicator 3: Participation in Statewide Assessment and Proficiency
- Indicator 5: School Age Least Restrictive Environment
- Indicator 6: Preschool Least Restrictive Environment
- Indicator 11: Timely Initial Evaluations
- Indicator 12: Early Childhood Transition

Of the indicators in which the District is not meeting targets, the most significant are Indicator 5, specifically including children with IEPs with typically developing peers 80% or more during the school day; Indicator 3B, specifically 4th grade ELA and mathematics assessments; and Indicator 6, preschool children with disabilities in separate settings and the time spent during the day with typically developing peers.

In September 2023, Lakewood Public School District was notified that NJDOE determined the District to be significantly disproportionate in the following areas:

- White students eligible for special education and related services under the Autism category.
- White students eligible for special education and related services under the Intellectual Disability category.
- Hispanic students eligible for special education and related services placed in general education for less than 40% of the day.
- White students eligible for special education and related services placed in separate settings.

Districts that met the criteria for significant disproportionality and disproportionate representation of racial/ethnic groups in special education were required to complete a self-assessment in the fall of 2023. This is not the first time the District was found to be significantly disproportionate.

During the 2022-2023 school year, the District had 333 students in specialized out of district placements. Most students in these out of district placements across three years were those with speech or language impairment as a primary disability. It is unclear why there are so many students with this diagnosis in out of district placements. It could be that there are secondary and tertiary disabilities.

During the 2022-23 school year, the Child Study Team (CST) received 841 referrals for special education. As of November 2023, there were 319 referrals for the 2023-24 school year.⁹ General observations of these data show that the majority of referrals are from Early Intervention and parents, with far fewer coming from schools. The number of early childhood students with IEPs is concerning. This is typically a time when districts are slow to refer students for assessment due to difficulty discerning what is a potential learning disability and what is just normal differences in development and language acquisition.

For students with disabilities to improve their academic achievement and reduce the achievement gap with their nondisabled peers, they need to be included in the core curriculum and receive evidence-based interventions that are targeted and implemented with fidelity. Students can receive specially designed instruction (SDI) throughout a continuum of special education services which are provided in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), where, to the maximum extent appropriate, a student with a disability is educated with peers who are not disabled.¹⁰

Parallel teaching is a primary focus for the District this year. In parallel teaching, the class is divided between two teachers and taught the same content. This model of instruction does not allow the groups to switch. The District hired an outside provider to train the staff this year. According to contents within the training provided by the District for the 2023-24 school year, parallel teaching in Lakewood is the following: "The general education teacher provides instruction to the majority of students while the ICR teacher provides a parallel lesson to a small group of students, who are unable to participate in the whole group lesson as determined by the data." The training indicates: "This model should be used daily, across all subject areas." The training also defined team teaching as the following: "When the whole group lesson effectively meets the instructional needs of all students in the class, the ICR teacher co-teaches with the General Education teacher. This approach involves both teachers delivering instruction at the same time." This training notes that team teaching "...should be used sparingly (1-5% of the time)" and that it "...should only be used if all students' data shows that they can effectively participate in the whole class lesson."¹¹ The concern with this interpretation of parallel teaching is that it reverts to the model used decades ago where student with disabilities were pulled to the back of the classroom and taught in the room but separately from their peers. This is not the intention of this model today. This approach makes it clear to the students which teacher is supporting which students instead of a true co-teaching model where both teachers are supporting all students and students are not singled out within the classroom for their disability. Another problem staff are facing with this model is that the special education teacher is often getting pulled from instruction to attend meetings which means the parallel teaching cannot occur.

⁹ Referral Data provided by Lakewood Public School District.

¹⁰ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §1412(a)(5), retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/>

¹¹ The Power of 2: Refining the Inclusive Model to Promote LRE Power Point, Magnolia Consulting Group, 2023

During site visits to the District, it was noted that in the Autism Classes students appeared to be struggling to communicate. The team asked about Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems, and the teachers responded that none of the IEPs required AAC systems. There were inconsistent strategies to reinforce appropriate communication and engagement. There were no data sheets or evidence of data collection relative to academics or behavior. The consultants did observe examples of staff providing students with edible reinforcements (gummy bears, cookies) to induce alternate behaviors in a manner that did not appear to follow any established formal reinforcement protocol.

In classrooms where students were receiving special education services, teachers followed the general education curriculum using instructional materials provided to them such as worksheets and slide presentations; however, there were limited visible individualization, adaptation, differentiation, personalization, or use of modifications. These challenges coincided with apparent challenges in pacing, whereby the teachers were moving too fast relative to the students' understanding.

The Administrative Code¹² offers settings that require a maximum number of students and the number of teachers and aides that must be present. These include the following: Language and Learning Disability (LLD), Multiple Disabilities (MD), Emotional Regulation Impairment (ERI), Autism (AUT), and Visually Impaired (VI). The District offers some of these settings, but they are not offered consistently across the grades. In other words, a child in need of one of these settings may be able to attend a program in district, depending on the specifications of their IEP, however, it may be available in some years but not others causing the child to need an out of district placement. LPSD does not have settings for Emotional Regulation Impairment, Visual Impairment, or Intellectual Disabilities.

There are some concerns about the IEP process. In most IEPs only the teacher scale was included. The parental scale and parental input seemed to be missing. There were inconsistencies with IEP development, especially relating to measurable objectives relating to the goal. In some cases, the goals only focused on the academics and not student challenges with organization and attention. Goals and objectives did not seem to fully align with the student's needs. While goals were generally aligned to the PLAAFP areas, it would be hard to measure progress or understand how the students was going to improve in these areas based on how the goals are written. Assistive Technology was not a widely used consideration for students in the IEPs reviewed despite many of the students having more moderate disabilities. There were accommodations in some IEPs, mostly low-tech options, but this was not checked under Special Considerations. Progress reports were inconsistent, in that some were blank, some had only ratings for student progress, and others included ratings with supporting data as to how the teacher arrived at the rating. Progress reporting does not appear to have District-wide requirements to include both qualitative and quantitative data sources.

In the Lakewood Public School District, the Department of Special Services is managed by three lateral positions (1) Supervisor of Special Education; (2) Supervisor of Child Study Team; and (3) Supervisor of Related Services. All three roles report directly to the Superintendent of Schools. All special education teachers report to their respective building principals; however, their performance reviews are conducted by the building principal and the Supervisor of Special Education. All CST members are supervised by the Supervisor of Child Study Team, and all related service providers and contractors report to the Supervisor of Related Services. The department also recently added special education coaches to support special educators,

¹² New Jersey Code NJAC 6A:14-4.6, retrieved from <https://www.nj.gov/education/code/current/title6a/chap14.pdf>

especially with parallel teaching. There are two case managers assigned to students placed in out of district settings. An additional 24 case managers have both in-district and out of District students on their caseloads. Some of the challenges that come with these lateral positions it is leads to duplication of time and confusion about authority.

In the LPSD, in accordance with Public Law 2017, Chapter 103, which was enacted in July 2017, the NJDOE is required to make available on its website a full-text copy of each written decision rendered by an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) in a special education due process hearing. In New Jersey, a decision in a special education due process hearing is a final agency decision subject to the law requiring each decision to be made public.¹³

Data regarding decisions rendered by an ALJ are available by year on the NJDOE website. The following information was listed by year for Lakewood.

- 2018 – 3 cases
- 2019 – 0 cases
- 2020 – 0 cases
- 2021 – 0 cases
- 2022 – 0 cases
- 2023 – 0 cases

Data provided to the consultants from both the District and the NJDOE indicate a higher level of cases brought forward through the dispute resolution process by Lakewood families. While the data are difficult to interpret given the format provided and limited details, it is evident that there is a common approach to entering into settlement agreements before an ALJ issues a ruling.

The Lakewood Public School District has 170+ nonpublic schools in its boundaries. This has far reaching impacts on the district especially around special education.¹⁴ Of students parentally placed in nonpublic schools, nearly 9,700 of them are students identified with a disability.¹⁵ The number of students eligible for special education as consistently increased, according to data Lakewood Public School District provided on its IDEA funding application, from 7,683 on the FY 21 application to 9,698 in FY 24. The local education agency (LEA) that is the District of location (i.e., the District where the private school is located) is responsible for the identification and determination of eligibility for special education and related services for students parentally placed in private schools. Aside from citing that it consulted with the nonpublic school community, the District was not able to provide information about how it was determined that services would be provided in these select schools nor answer why only a fraction of those eligible were served. This funding, to the extent it was described, is used for teaching and paraeducator staffing in nonpublic schools.

Between the required nonpublic equitable services set-aside and the mandatory CCEIS set-aside because of the significant disproportionality findings in FY 24, the District has little, if any, IDEA funds to support students with disabilities in its public schools. While CCEIS funds can be spent to support initiatives for students with disabilities, these funds must be focused on

¹³ New Jersey Special Education Due Process Hearing Decisions, retrieved from <https://www.nj.gov/education/legal/specialized/>

¹⁴ List of 2022-2023 Nonpublic Schools provided by LPS.

¹⁵ As of the October 2022 child count, 9,686 students were identified as eligible for special education services.

preventative intervention measures, not to support programming, supplies, or staffing specifically for special education.

Finance

The Finance findings in this comprehensive review exam the fiscal management and resource allocation strategies of the District, aiming to uncover their effectiveness in supporting educational priorities. This section delves into budgeting practices, financial oversight, and the alignment of spending with improving educational outcomes for students. Through careful analysis, light is shed on areas where fiscal efficiency can be improved. The examination of financial practices is critical in revealing how financial decisions impact the quality of education provided to students and highlights the imperative for adopting more strategic and transparent financial management approaches to ensure the sustainability of high-quality educational services.

Looking at staffing inefficiencies, especially in the administrative organizational chart, surfaces questions about fiscal responsibility in this area. A reduction and/or reconfiguration of leadership positions, job descriptions and responsibilities, and reporting structure could potentially create a considerable cost savings for the District as well as increased productivity with clear ownership and responsibilities and work more clearly delineated.

The board attorney shared with the consultants in the district that he not only serves as the board attorney but also provides support around communications like a communication's director. Board attorneys go through an RFP process to be selected by a district. The LPSD attorney went through this process in 2017. However, board attorneys do not usually serve in multiple roles in the district, much less receive pay for such. It is unclear if the board attorney is receiving additional pay for his services supporting communications.

The Lakewood Public Schools has a high percentage of students with IEPs receiving services and support from out of district placements. This creates large financial stress on the district. According to the User-Friendly Budget, during the 2019-2020 school year, Lakewood spent \$48,755,738 for 402 students in out of district placements. The average per pupil tuition for that year was \$121,282.¹⁶ The tuition total amount increased to \$57,499,863 in 2021-2022, though the number of students decreased to 372. The average per pupil tuition for that year was \$154,569.52.

Last, the outside auditor addressed the lack of pre-payroll register and that the payroll checklist were not retained. The payroll manager was responsive and confirmed that evidence would be retained moving forward. It was noted in a discussion with the Lakewood Accounting Manager that the Close Process Checklist is not completed nor retained as evidence. Also, the State Monitor verbally reviews the cash flow statements monthly and evidence of the review is not maintained.

¹⁶ Comparable District User Friendly Budgets by Official Site of the State of New Jersey, retrieved from: <https://www.nj.gov/education/finance/fp/ufb/2022/17.html>

Transportation

The Transportation findings evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness, and safety of the District's student transportation services. This section navigates through the operational logistics, cost management, and policy adherence that underpin the District's ability to provide reliable and secure transportation for its students. Through this thorough examination, areas for significant enhancements were uncovered. The insights presented underscore the critical role that transportation plays in facilitating access to education and the necessity for strategic improvements to optimize service delivery, reduce costs, and ensure every student's safe passage to and from their educational settings.

Transportation expenses are a strain on the District. The comprehensive review surfaced efficiency issues with potential financial implications for the District. There are two busing services set up to meet the high demands for student bussing, both public and non-public: Lakewood does not have its own bus yard. It contracts with outside vendors through the bid process. The Lakewood Student Transportation Authority (LSTA) was started as a pilot in the 2016-2017 school year through Bill S2049¹⁷ to meet non-public school student transportation needs. The law provided that an eligible district would pay the consortium the aid in lieu amount for each nonpublic student who required transportation under state law. The consortium takes on responsibilities of the District. If the consortium has money available after transporting all required students, it may provide courtesy bussing. The consortium must refund any unused funds to the District. The updated, further codified legislation allows for other similar consortia to form, it drops the size requirement of participating districts, savings may no longer be used for courtesy bussing, and the consortium may assess up to a six percent administrative charge.¹⁸ It is unclear as all savings need to be returned to the District instead of allowing them to be applied to courtesy bussing.

The Lakewood Public School District buses appear to be less full than the LSTA routes. There are a variety of buses being used for different age groups of students which may be impacting the number of routes needed. Looking at factors such as cost per route and students transported per route are two measures to examine the efficiencies of the routes. Student ride time, empty miles, and empty/idle time are other common measures. A bus route analysis using the data from the Versatrans Systems in both the LPSD and the LSTA might provide greater insight. This information was not available at the time of the report.

Some vendors are using the same buses to do separate routes, taking advantage of tiered schedules and cooperation between the nonpublic schools to ensure transportation services are available but bidding as if the routes were stand-alone. Data entry errors were noted during the analysis. However, where those could be filtered out, significant examples remained of same plate number used for several routes. Many districts employ double or even triple tier routes to alleviate driver shortages, leverage capital resources, or to help drivers and aides get enough hours for full-time pay and benefits. Four or higher tiers per bus are not common but the database analysis showed as many as eight routes per plate in some cases. New Jersey double tier routes cost in the \$115,000 range; that number can be used as a reasonableness check in case routing practices are such that AM and PM routes are classified as separate routes. Special education routes can come with a higher-than-expected price tag per route, but then we

¹⁷ Bill S2049 session 2016-2017. Retrieved from <https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/bill-search/2016/S2049/bill-text?f=PL16&n=22>

¹⁸ (May 8, 2023). Assembly no. 5412 state of new jersey 220th legislature. Retrieved from https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2022/A5500/5412_R2.PDF

would expect to see fewer riders on such routes so a lower ridership number could indicate a bus transporting high-needs special education students (see Table 6 in Exhibit A for Top 20 Bus Plate Numbers by Sum of Route Cost).

Many nonpublic students do not have a student ID number in DRTRS. This presents a risk that students might be counted and funded in multiple counties.

The transportation staff receive high salaries which was evidenced in the analysis done by the consultants. More analysis is necessary to see how these salaries compare to similar operations in New Jersey. Comparable districts for transportation administration purposes should reflect the number of students transported (regular and special education), not just district enrollment, due to the difference in effort and overhead for administering transportation for the nonpublic students in addition to the public and public charter students.

The LPSD salaries were listed in the User-Friendly Budgets which contain the following narrative: "N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-5.3 requires that the user-friendly budgets contain detailed information on the salaries and benefits of each district superintendent, assistant superintendent, school business administrator and school district employee whose annual base salaries exceeds \$75,000, and who is not a member of a collective bargaining unit." However, the LPSD has two transportation managers for the 2023-2024 school year, neither of whom are listed on the list cited above and shown in detail under the section "Lakewood Public School District Transportation Administration" in Exhibit A. Per review of Board minutes, the two transportation managers were hourly employees of the district during the above time frame, both at a rate of \$100/hour. One transportation manager reported to the consultants that he works for Lakewood approximately 22 hours per week and does not receive benefits from Lakewood.¹⁹

The Lakewood Student Transportation Authority senior officer salaries over \$100,000 were listed in the IRS Form 990 for the LSTA.²⁰ A list of the senior officer's salaries can be found in Exhibit A under "Lakewood Student Transportation Authority Senior Officers." There was an observed possible dual employment of one of the senior staff members between the LPSD's transportation department and the LSTA's, both positions being reported as full time. This could be problematic for several reasons, most concerning of all potential for procurement issues, diminished incentive to return saved funds to Lakewood, and potential for conflicts in contract oversight of the LSTA as a vendor. The total compensation to this senior officer reported for FY 2022 from both sources is \$392,028. The FY 2023 IRS 990 for LSTA is not yet publicly available. Net position and expenditure data for transportation reported in Lakewood's latest available ACFR went down by roughly \$30 million from FY 2021 to FY 2022. This indicates a major change in funding source, accounting practices, or other issues to explore further.

The New Jersey Department of Education's manual on the student transportation contracting process states, "the bid process shall be designed to encourage free, open and competitive bidding. Bidding shall also be designed to prevent fraud, favoritism and extravagance, to

¹⁹ Meeting of the lakewood board of education held on Wednesday, May 12, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.lakewoodpiners.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=77&dataid=1590&FileName=May%2012%202021.pdf>

²⁰ Lakewood student transportation authority llc: propublica. Retrieved from <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/813531813>

safeguard the taxpayers, and protect the lowest responsible bidder.”²¹ The Lakewood Public School District’s Board of Education District Policy 1540, Administrator’s Code of Ethics, states that “no administrator or member of his/her immediate family shall have an interest in a business organization or engage in any business, transaction, or professional activity that is in substantial conflict with the proper discharge of his/her duties in the public interest.” Board Policy 6115.03, Federal Awards/Funds Internal Controls – Conflict of Interest contains the following statement affirming the need to avoid potential conflict of interest in using federal grants including ESSER: “No employee, officer, or agent of the Board of Education may participate in the selection, award, or administration of a contract supported by a Federal award if he or she has a real or apparent conflict of interest.”²²

Several state funding sources specifically for education were listed in the 2022 ACFR.

- State Categorical Aid \$3,052,174
- Nonpublic Transportation Aid \$1,500,000
- Chapter 192 Auxiliary Transportation Aid \$428,642

Municipal Transportation Aid of \$1.2 million was also noted in the 2022 ACFR. The balance of funding for transportation is likely to be local tax revenue or federal funds. The preliminary FY 2023 budget earmarked \$14,043,275 of ARP-ESSER III funds for nonpublic transportation.²³ PCG is not able to determine if ESSER III was spent on nonpublic transportation or if prior expenditures had been recoded to ESSER III. This raises a concern as to whether there may have been inappropriate use of \$14,043,275 of ARP-ESSER III funds for nonpublic transportation versus for learning initiatives.

Lastly, the contract renewal dated August 30, 2023, between Lakewood Public School District and the Lakewood Student Transportation Authority “Disclosure of Prohibited Investment Activities in Iran, Russia and Belarus” form carries the Township of Branchburg (a New Jersey town in Somerset County) rather than the Lakewood Public School District as the contracting unit. A spot-check of three RFPs on the Lakewood 2024-2025 RFPs/Bids/Proposals page revealed the same error. This could indicate a systematic lack of legal, procurement, and financial review and oversight of bid documents.

Recommendations

In light of the findings outlined in the preceding section, and considering the entirety of the comprehensive review conducted, this report proceeds to put forth a series of considered recommendations to the Commissioner. These recommendations are the culmination of a detailed analysis aimed at addressing the core issues identified across the five key areas: Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Special Education, Finance, and Transportation. The suggested actions are designed to steer strategic enhancements and promote a more effective and equitable educational environment.

²¹ (2014) Contracting student transportation services. New Jersey Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.nj.gov/education/finance/transportation/contracts/contracting.pdf>

²² Lakewood board of education. Retrieved from <https://www.straussesmay.com/seportal/Public/districtpolicyTOC.aspx?id=69d917eec73348b88ae66af620e165e5>

²³ (March 23, 2022) 2022-2023 Introduced budget presentation. Retrieved from <https://www.lakewoodpiners.org/cms/lib/NJ01001845/Centricity/Domain/4/2022-23%20Introduced%20Budget%20Presentation%20FINAL%203-23-22.pdf>

Recommendations for Governance:

It is imperative to underscore the pivotal role that effective governance plays in shaping an educational environment conducive to learning and growth. Drawing from the detailed findings, the recommendations aim to fortify the LPSD's governance structures, enhance board functionality, and ensure policy implementations are both strategic and student-centered. These suggestions are designed to address identified gaps and lay a solid foundation for sustained educational excellence. Through targeted reforms and a commitment to best practices, the District can cultivate a governance model that not only meets but exceeds the expectations of its stakeholders, driving forward the mission of delivering a high-quality education to every student.

The recommendations are as follows:

Communicate clearly and often with all stakeholder groups.

- Develop a process for notifying staff members about transfers and room/building reassignments in a timely manner prior to the beginning of the next school year.
 - Notify staff in person and not just through an email.
 - Where possible, provide this information during the summative review process at the end of the year.
- Internal and external communications should be clear, consistent, and transparent.
- Re-evaluate the translation services available to parents and staff to limit the use of staff and more importantly students to serve as translators.
- Ensure that documents posted on the website are not posted as PDFs, unless they have already been translated, so parents are able to use Google Translate to access information.

Develop a 3–5-year strategic plan and a process for tracking and reporting on completion of goals, interim benchmarks, and the creation of clear target metrics- that are publicly tracked and reported on at board meetings and on the website.

- Solicit feedback using a variety of vehicles from stakeholder groups.
- Create 3-5 Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART) Goals.
- Review the Mission Statement developed in 2007 and develop a complimentary Vision Statement.
- Share the final plan at the Board of Education meeting and adopt as a board.
- Clearly post the plan on the LPSD website.
- Align annual district and building based goals to the strategic plan.
- Ensure that decision-making and budget prioritization align with the goals of the plan.

Establish clear roles, processes, and procedures for board participation and structure.

- Follow Robert's Rules of Order and the Lakewood Public School District Policy 0164.
- The Board President, referred to as the chair or chairperson, shall run the meeting in alignment with the procedures stated in bullet 1 as well as the New Jersey School Board Association's (NJSBA) Parliamentary Procedures.

- Reconsider the use of a consent agenda to allow for meaningful board discussion on important issues being considered.
 - Board approvals need to happen at the time of vendor onboarding prior to submissions for approval on the bill list.
 - Rate changes and transfers need to be approved by the District Board of Education.
- Provide opportunities for the public to speak about action items and a second time for general comments.
- Ensure that board committees are meeting between board meetings and reporting out at meetings.
 - Committee members should be posted on the website along with meeting schedules and agendas, preferably in multiple languages or accessible via Google Translate.
- Make sure that policies are being given two public readings with updates from the Policy Committee chair and discussion among board members prior to voting.
 - Make sure all policies are updated.
- The Superintendent is the only person who reports directly to the board. This position should deliver a superintendent report at each board meeting and be called upon as needed for clarification or expertise, along with the Business Administrator, and the Board Attorney.
- Post all Board members and their contact information on the District website.
- The meeting schedule, agendas, minutes, and recordings of the board meetings should be posted on the District website.
- Ensure that all board members are attending the mandatory training for new board members and continuing board members.

Onboarding and exiting of staff members.

- Make sure that as part of the onboarding process for new staff members that they are receiving a copy of the LPSD Employee Handbook and Code of Conduct and that they are signing that they have read and understood the handbook and code of conduct. These acknowledgement forms must be kept as evidence. *Existing employees must sign an annual acknowledgement.
- Evidence must be kept that all new employees are receiving the required training programs including security awareness and general IT training. *All existing employees must complete these trainings annually and evidence must be kept.
- All new hires, once approved by the superintendent and the board of education, must be reported by HR to IT to grant access. Evidence must be kept of this process.
- Upon termination of a staff member with approval of the superintendent, HR must communicate with IT to revoke access on their last day of employment. Evidence must be kept of this process.

Recommendations for Curriculum and Instruction:

In the recommendations dedicated to Curriculum and Instruction, the cornerstone of educational success is emphasized: a robust, engaging, and inclusive curriculum delivered through effective instructional practices. Based on the comprehensive analysis, these recommendations are crafted to enhance curriculum relevance, foster instructional innovation, and ultimately elevate student achievement across the District. The goal is to provide actionable strategies that address the gaps identified while building upon the existing educational framework. By

prioritizing these areas, the LPSD can create a dynamic learning environment that not only meets diverse student needs but also prepares them for future academic and personal success.

The recommendations are as follows:

Adjust the kindergarten entrance age to align with the 2022 New Jersey Revised Statute 18A - Education Section 18A:38-5 - Admission of pupils underage.

- Move date a child must turn five years old from December 31 to October 1.
- Move the date for preschool admission up accordingly as well.

Adjust the administrative reporting structure to create efficiency and savings.

- Reduce the number of curriculum supervisors and instructional coaches and reduce the number of leaders reporting to the Superintendent (currently 24).
- Create an Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment along with two supervisors - one elementary and one secondary.
 - Streamlining the reporting structure and necessary personnel would assist with the large curriculum budget expenditure, most of which appears to be personnel.
- Create a Director of Pupil Services who reports to the Superintendent.
 - The three supervisors report to the Director.
 - Evaluate the number of staff and their roles and responsibilities in direct correlation to students' needs, particularly the use of special education coaches.

Ensure curriculum development is a team approach.

- This work should be done in small teams including teachers.
- Perform curriculum revisions, i.e., scripts, pacing guides, at the end of the school year to provide more consistency and continuity during the school year for the students and teachers.
- Implement a curriculum policy that aligns with the New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE) review cycle to ensure curriculum is aligned to the current New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS).

Perform a resource audit to ensure that materials being used to support the curriculum are current and evidence-based as well as research-aligned.

- Involve teachers in the selection and piloting of materials prior to purchasing.
- Ensure staff have thorough training throughout the implementation process to ensure that the materials are used to support student success.
- Elementary learners need strong foundational programming and support in literacy and numeracy.
- Students need to be reading print of all types: books, articles, graphs, pictures, and digital by way of example.
- Make sure resources are mapped appropriately aligned to the local curriculum to ensure proper coverage of the NJSLS.
- Evidence-based, research-aligned resources need to be purchased to support the District's mathematics curriculum.

Ensure that all district-developed curriculum is aligned to the current NJSLs.

- Differentiation for all learners, especially students with disabilities and multilingual learners should be present throughout the curriculum.
- Locally developed curriculum should include standards, essential questions, objectives in student-friendly language, skills, sequencing of instruction, assessment, and differentiation for all learners should be reflected throughout.

Messaging about scripts and pacing guides needs to be consistent across the District.

Review the walkthrough expectations and look for efficiencies.

- Reduce the number of walkthroughs conducted.
- Walkthroughs should be conducted by building principals, supervisors, and instructional coaches with the intention to collect data for professional development and to provide coaching for teachers. Walkthroughs should not be used evaluatively.

Perform a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) audit to assess the District's in analyzing the current state of differentiated support for students as well as make recommendations about administrator and teacher support and professional development.

- A universal design for learning will ensure that instruction and materials are culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate and implemented with fidelity for all students.
- This will also provide support for implementing the MTSS Framework and understanding the tiered systems of support.

Ensure that multilingual support techniques: bilingual classes, sheltered instruction, and Newcomer Programs are offered across all grade levels. Consider consolidation of programs at the elementary school level.

Ensure that Career Pathways include opportunities for knowledge and skill attainment to allow students to have choice upon graduation.

- Increase access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses to provide high level expectations and support for students to increase the number of students taking and passing the assessments. Consider opening APs to sophomores.
- Increase access and communication about the pathways that exist for high school students.
- Ensure students are being counseled about their high school and post-secondary planning.

Review the current professional development plan and delivery to ensure that it aligns with the Strategic Plan (once created) and limits teacher time out of the classroom.

- Build in additional professional development time and opportunities that do not pull teachers away from instructional time.
- Create time in the schedule for teachers to have Professional Learning Community (PLC) time.

- Use data from Professional Development Plans (PDPs)/Professional Growth Plans (PGPs), staff surveys, walkthrough data, and the Strategic Plan to drive the focus of professional development.
- Ensure that lesson scripts and pacing allow for opportunities for teachers to incorporate the practices they are being trained on in professional development into their classrooms.

Recommendations for Special Education:

The recommendations for the Special Education section of this report are designed with a singular focus: to significantly enhance the support and educational outcomes for students with disabilities within the District. Stemming from a thorough examination of current practices, services, and resources, these recommendations aim to bridge gaps, reinforce strengths, and introduce innovations that ensure a more inclusive, equitable, and effective special education framework. By advocating for targeted improvements in individualized support, teacher training, resource allocation, and parental engagement, the recommendations seek to create an educational environment where students with diverse learning needs are empowered to succeed.

The recommendations are as follows:

Revisit the self-assessment done in the fall of 2023 because of having significant disproportionality and disproportionate representation of racial/ethnic groups in special education to establish a clear plan for addressing these recurring issues.

Investigate and evaluate the costs associated with creating programming in District in comparison to the costs being spent on out-of-district placements.

- The district has state of the art equipment in place already.
- There is room in most of the buildings in the District.
- Re-evaluate staff schedules.
- This would increase the percentage of time that children with IEPs have with their typically developing peers.
- This could be a huge cost saver in the long run and best for students.
- The majority of students in out-of-district placements have speech or language impairment as their primary disability.

Evaluate and adjust the schedules at the building levels to ensure maximum participation for students with IEPs with their typically developing peers in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

Establish clear policies and procedures which are followed consistently for parental/guardian involvement in the IEP development and review process.

- Utilize rating scales for teachers and parents.
- Provide a parent input section in the IEP (required by IDEA).
- Provide translation services to ensure all parents can meaningfully participate in IEP meetings (required by IDEA).
- Make sure parents receive a copy of written notice, parental rights, and their child's written IEP in their native language (required by IDEA).

- Ensure parents receive evaluation follow up and verification of services as well as clear communication on how to best assist their child at home.

Ensure that IEP goals are specific, not generic, and are measurable and aligned to individual student needs.

- Goals should demonstrate clearly how students will show growth in these areas.

Strategically create accommodations and modifications that are prioritized to support the student.

- MTSS, practices aligned to Universal Design for Learning, and best practice implementation in the classroom should reduce the number of accommodations and modifications necessary to increase the probability that they are implemented fully because they are strategic and targeted.

Teaching strategies need to be implemented correctly in a least restrictive environment.

- Parallel Teaching is two teachers each teaching half the class at the same time. Groups do not have to be students with IEPs and students without IEPs. They can be mixed groups by need for instructional support on the skill(s) being taught.
- Intervention time is when students would receive remedial and/or foundational support in small group instruction.
- General education and special education teachers should teach together seamlessly when using a co-teaching model and are responsible for all students in the class.

Reduce the amount of time special education teachers are pulled from classrooms where they are providing services.

Ensure Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ACC) systems are in place in classrooms to support students who struggle with communication.

Teachers, general education and special education, must keep data sheets relative to academics and behavior.

- Example: Teachers who are supporting student on a behavior plan should be using data recording sheets to best support the student and the BCBA specialist.
- Use multiple strategies to reinforce behaviors for students on a plan. Food should be used sparingly.
- Provide professional development on NJ PBSIS. This will create a culture of support in the district and reduce reliance on counselors to solely support behavioral needs which will allow them to be maximized for student support in multiple areas.

Limit movement of administrators and teachers to provide consistency and continuity for students.

Review the use of consultants providing support in the special education space for potential redundancies, especially once staff are trained. This could provide another area of cost savings.

All students must be included in the enrollment counts for the District. Students should not be disenrolled from the district when placed in an out-of-district placement. There is an overall need for data integrity and accurate reporting.

Develop consistent policies and procedures for residency checks as well as a system for tracking and reporting.

Provide professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals.

- Teachers:
 - Best practices
 - Behavior management
 - Behavior plan support training from BCBAs
 - MTSS
 - Differentiation
 - Teaching models and examples of best use for each
 - NJ PBSIS training
- Paraprofessionals:
 - Behavior plan support training
 - NJ PBSIS training
 - Training specific to their role and how to best support students and teachers in the classroom.

Create a reporting and tracking system for nonpublic students being serviced across the 50 schools listed in Exhibit A and consider bringing the management of equitable services back into the district rather than outsourcing it.

- How is it decided that services will be provided in these schools?
- How is it decided which eligible students will be served through equitable services?

Recommendations for Finance:

In addressing the finance aspect of this report, the final recommendations are aimed at bolstering the LPSD's financial stewardship to ensure it aligns seamlessly with its educational mission and objectives. Through an extensive review of the District's fiscal policies, practices, and allocations, a series of strategic measures designed to enhance budgetary efficiency, transparency, and accountability are proposed. These recommendations are intended to optimize resource utilization, safeguard financial sustainability, and enable strategic investments in areas critical to student success. By adopting these financial management best practices, the District can ensure that every dollar is effectively channeled towards creating and maintaining an enriching educational environment for all students.

The recommendations are as follows:

Examine staffing inefficiencies and address accordingly to reduce costs.

Review expenditures for the board attorney to ensure he is not being paid as a board attorney and for his communication work.

Consider shifting to zero-based budgeting.

- Allows for reallocation of funds each year and consideration of spending in alignment with the strategic goals instead of automatically rolling over amounts and allocations year after year.
- Allows for examination of programs, services, and resources and provides the ability to realign and shift funding priorities.
- Include possible consequences of budget cuts when presenting and working on the budget.
- Avoid unanticipated costs.
- Board discussions of the budget should also include creating a plan, which is a part of the budget, to demonstrate how the District plans to repay the State.
- Allows for participation of leadership in a collaborative process.
- Demonstrate how the budget aligns to the priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan and supports student achievement.
- Create clear goals to lower the budget and/or cut spending.
- Include data to support decision-making.

Commit to transparency through posting of all budget documents and reports in a single place on the District website.

Maintain evidence of pre-payroll register and checklist.

Maintain evidence of the monthly reviews of the cash flow statements with the State Monitor.

Recommendations for Transportation:

The recommendations for the transportation section of this report aim to address the operational challenges and opportunities within the LPSD's student transportation system. Drawing from the in-depth analysis, these recommendations are crafted to improve efficiency, safety, and reliability in student transport services, ensuring every student has equitable access to educational opportunities. By implementing strategic adjustments and embracing innovative solutions, the District can overcome existing hurdles and set new standards for transportation excellence. These proposed changes are designed to optimize routing, enhance communication, and ensure fiscal responsibility, thereby supporting the broader educational goals by ensuring safe, efficient, and effective transportation for all students.

The recommendations are as follows:

Create a separation between the District and the LSTA.

Bid tiered-routes as packages rather than individually.

- Lower prices and save money.

Conduct a bus route analysis to identify inefficiencies and potential cost savings.

- *Example: smaller buses for younger students.*
- *Maximize bus capacity on routes.*

- *Higher utilization of seats, shorter routes, more students per stop, and fewer stops.*
- *Bus routes on file with dollar amounts but no students.*

Improve data quality and reporting systems in transportation management.

- *Ensure policies and procedures are being followed to ensure Versatrans data is current and entered correctly.*

Create a user-friendly budget.

Analyze transportation staff salaries in comparison with other in-district operations in New Jersey and compare LSTA salaries with salaries at CTSAs.

Add student ID numbers for all nonpublic students in DRTRS.

- *Reduce the risk that students might be counted and/or funded incorrectly.*

Create a systematic process for legal, procurement, and financial reviews to ensure that there are no errors when reviewing/processing bid documents.

Explore status of funding sources, accounting practices, and other issues related to transportation to highlight inefficiencies and to provide a focus for shifts in practice.

Investigate the use of ESSER funds (\$14,043,275) for nonpublic transportation vs. learning initiatives.

Ensure LSTA unused funds are being returned to the district and not used to offset salaries.

Maximize the potential school tax rates each year.

Conclusion

As this review concludes, it is essential to recognize that while the evaluation is organized into five distinct categories, these elements are deeply interconnected, each influencing and reinforcing the other. The ultimate beneficiaries of the nexus formed by Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Special Education, Finance, and Transportation are the students, who receive their education through this collective system of support. The findings detailed within this report unequivocally demonstrate that the students at the Lakewood Public School District are being underserved, not receiving the thorough and efficient education they are entitled to. The pervasive inefficiencies, deficiencies, and the apparent shortfall in oversight and strategic systemic action by the District have culminated in this inadequacy. The recommendations provided herein offer strategic pathways for the District to rectify these shortcomings and enhance educational outcomes for its children. To declare the SFRA unconstitutional in the context of this review, it must be established as the singular cause for the denial of a thorough and efficient education which this review did not find to be the case.

EXHIBIT A

Lakewood Public School District Review

Prepared for the NJ Department of Education

Public Consulting Group LLC

February 2024



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) would like to thank the many individuals who made this report possible. We would like to acknowledge the commitment and support of the Lakewood Public School District administrative staff who were responsive to our many questions throughout this process. This report would not have been possible without the support of Dr. Laura Winters, Superintendent, who met with PCG staff throughout the duration of the audit, provided all the documents and data in order to do conduct our analysis, and supported the logistics to conduct focus groups and interviews. In addition, we would like to thank all the Lakewood teachers, administrators, students, teachers, families, and board members who took the time to meet with PCG staff to offer their perspectives of district practices.

ABOUT PUBLIC CONSULTING GROUP LLC

Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) is a management consulting firm that offers technical assistance, strategic planning, professional development, financial management, systems development, and other management advisory services to public sector clients. Established in 1986, PCG has consistently delivered on its motto of "*Solutions that Matter.*" Our education practice is committed to helping schools, school districts, and state education agencies strengthen their performance, streamline their operations, and improve their programs and instruction so that all students have what they need to succeed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	0
About Public Consulting Group LLC	0
FIGURES	3
TABLES	4
INTRODUCTION	6
Background	6
District Context.....	7
District Financial Challenges.....	7
Lakewood Public School District Students	8
METHODOLOGY	10
Data & Documentation Analysis	10
Focus Groups & Interviews.....	10
Classroom Observations.....	11
General Education Classroom Observation Protocol.....	11
Special Education Classroom Observation Protocol.....	11
Facilities Review	12
Staff and Family Surveys	12
Board Meeting Observation	12
Student IEP FILE Analysis.....	12
Comparison Districts.....	12
Financial Practices Audit.....	14
Transportation Practices Audit.....	14
GOVERNANCE	15
Summary.....	15
Lakewood School Board Governance	16
Best Practices Framework	16
Analysis of Public School Board Meetings.....	17
Board Adherence to Governance Best Practices.....	24
Board of Education Policymaking Practices.....	26
School Board Governance Findings	29
Administrative Team Governance	30
Best Practices Framework	30
Leadership and District Culture.....	31
Communications and Community Relations	36

Organizational Management	37
Safety and Security	38
Human Resources Management	42
CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION	45
Summary	45
District Curriculum	46
Curriculum Development	46
Curriculum Analysis	47
Scripts and Pacing Guides	49
Instructional Framework	50
Curriculum Oversight	51
Curriculum Costs	52
Curriculum Findings	54
Multi-Tiered System of Supports	55
Multilingual Learners	59
College and Career Course Offerings	62
Professional Development	66
Classroom Observations	69
Classroom Visits Data	69
Assessment	74
Student Outcomes	75
SPECIAL EDUCATION	80
Summary	80
Characteristics of Students with Disabilities	81
State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report Indicators	82
Special Education Demographics	83
Teaching and Learning for Students with Disabilities	99
Eligibility and Evaluation	99
Early Childhood Special Education Services	103
School Age Special Education Services	104
IEP Development	115
Building Capacity and Materials	117
Staffing, Leadership, and Collaboration	120
Staffing Ratios	120
Recruitment and Retention	121
Leadership	121
Written Procedures and Policy	122
Mediation and Due Process	122
Family Engagement	123

Accessible Communication and Resources	123
Advocacy and Collaboration	124
Student Services	125
NonPublic Schools	126
Demographics	126
Chapters 192 and 193	128
Idea Equitable Services	131
FINANCIAL PRACTICES ANALYSIS	136
Summary	136
Financial Data Analytics – Caseware IDEA Testing	136
Internal Controls Testing	138
Procure to Pay Testing Cycle	138
HR and Payroll Testing Cycle	140
Financial Close Controls Testing Cycle	142
Governance and IT Testing Cycle	143
TRANSPORTATION	145
Summary	145
School Transportation in New Jersey	145
Public School Students	145
Nonpublic School Students	146
State Transportation Aid	146
Coordinated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA)	146
Lakewood Public School District Transportation	146
Lakewood Student Transportation Authority (LSTA)	148
Recent Legislation	149
Transportation Contract Vendor Analysis	149
Transportation Route Analysis	152
Staff Salaries	153
Transportation Funding	155
Findings	157
APPENDIX	158
A. Stakeholder Engagement	158
Interviews held with Lakewood Public School District Stakeholders	158
Focus groups held with Lakewood Public School District Stakeholders	158
Virtual follow-up conversations with Lakewood Public School District Stakeholders	158
Financial Controls Walkthrough Participants	159
B. Data and Documentation Received	159
Received from Lakewood Public School District	159

Data Received from New Jersey Department of Education	160
Data Received from “Everyone Alcantara” Listserv	161
C. Participation in State-Sponsored Professional Learning.....	165
D. Code List for Qualitative Analysis	168
Code List for Focus Groups and Interviews	168
E. Survey Results	171
Lakewood Public School District Staff Survey	171
Lakewood Public School District Parent & Family Survey	179
F. Golden Thread Framework.....	191
Quality Indicator Review	192
E. Board Meeting Evaluation Rubric.....	194
F. AUDIT Vendor Findings.....	196

FIGURES

FIGURE 1: ENROLLMENT DECLINE IN LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT	8
FIGURE 2: ENROLLMENT TRENDS IN LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT 2016-2023	9
FIGURE 3: LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT’S ENROLLMENT BY RACIAL SUBGROUP (2020-2022).....	9
FIGURE 4: TOTAL ENROLLMENT BY COMPARATIVE DISTRICT (2022-2023)	13
FIGURE 5: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS BY SCHOOL DISTRICT (2022-2023).....	14
FIGURE 6: LAKEWOOD BOARD OF EDUCATION 2023-2024 ORGANIZATIONAL CHART	32
FIGURE 7: LEGAL EXPENSE BY DISTRICT PER PUPIL BY YEAR.....	33
FIGURE 8: TOTAL LEGAL EXPENSE BY DISTRICT BY YEAR.....	34
FIGURE 9: COMPARATIVE SUSPENSION DATA BY DISTRICT (2022).....	40
FIGURE 10: AVERAGE SALARY BY YEARS FOR LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT (2022)	42
FIGURE 11: AVERAGE SALARY BY ROLE (2022).....	43
FIGURE 12: NUMBER OF TEACHERS NON-RENEWED BY YEAR	44
FIGURE 13: KINDERGARTEN ELA SCRIPT	50
FIGURE 14: INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK	51
FIGURE 15: NEW JERSEY TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT (NJTSS) PYRAMID, 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR	56
FIGURE 16: MTSS FRAMEWORK.....	58
FIGURE 17: 2023-2024 CTE PROGRAMS OFFERED AT LAKEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL	63
FIGURE 18: LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT AP ENROLLMENT BY SUBGROUP (2022-2023).....	64
FIGURE 19: AP EXAM OUTCOMES FOR LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT (2022-2023).....	65
FIGURE 20: AP PARTICIPATION AND OUTCOME ANALYSIS ACROSS DISTRICTS	66
FIGURE 21: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STAFF SURVEY RESPONSE	67
FIGURE 22: SAMPLE PROGRAM PLC CALENDAR.....	68
FIGURE 23: BLOOM’S TAXONOMY	74
FIGURE 24: FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT RESOURCES FIRST GRADE 2023-2024	75
FIGURE 25: GRADUATION RATES BY COMPARATIVE DISTRICT (2022)	76
FIGURE 26: DROPOUT RATES BY COMPARATIVE DISTRICTS (2022)	76
FIGURE 27: PROFICIENCY FOR GRADE 3 ELA	77
FIGURE 28: PROFICIENCY FOR GRADE 5 ELA	77
FIGURE 29: PROFICIENCY FOR GRADE 8 ELA	78

FIGURE 30: PROFICIENCY FOR GRADE 3 MATH 78

FIGURE 31: PROFICIENCY FOR GRADE 5 MATH 79

FIGURE 32: PROFICIENCY FOR GRADE 8 MATH 79

FIGURE 33: IDEA PART B INDICATORS 81

FIGURE 34: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT AN IDENTIFIED DISABILITY (AGES 3-4), 2022 84

FIGURE 35: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (AGE 3-4) BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2022.. 84

FIGURE 36: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (AGE 3-4) BY FREE/REDUCED LUNCH, 2022 85

FIGURE 37: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS WITH IEPs COMPARED TO STATE INCIDENCE RATES, 2019-2020 TO 2021-2022 85

FIGURE 38: LAKEWOOD’S IEP RATES COMPARED TO OTHER NEW JERSEY SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND STATE, 2022 86

FIGURE 39: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES DISABILITY AREA COMPARED TO STATE AND NATION (AGES 5-21), 2022 87

FIGURE 40: PERCENT OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS WITH IEPs (AGE 5-21) BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2022 88

FIGURE 41: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS (AGE 5-21) BY DISABILITY AREA AND RACE/ETHNICITY, 2022 88

FIGURE 42: RISK RATIO EQUATION 89

FIGURE 43: RISK RATIOS BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND DISABILITY, 2023 90

FIGURE 44: PERCENT OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS AGES 5-21 BY EL STATUS, 2022 93

FIGURE 45: EL STUDENTS BY DISABILITY, 2022..... 93

FIGURE 46: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES VS. STUDENTS WITHOUT DISABILITIES PARTICIPATING IN FREE AND/OR REDUCED LUNCH (AGES 5-21), 2022 94

FIGURE 47: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IDENTIFIED AS GIFTED BY DISABILITY ELIGIBILITY, 2022 94

FIGURE 48: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS (AGE 5-21) BY DISABILITY AREA AND EDUCATIONAL SETTING, 2022 95

FIGURE 49: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (AGE 5-21) BY RACE AND EDUCATIONAL SETTING, 2022 96

FIGURE 50: SPECIALIZED OUT OF DISTRICT PLACEMENTS, 2019-20 TO 2021-22 97

FIGURE 51: PERCENT OF SPECIALIZED OUT OF DISTRICT PLACEMENTS WITH IEPs (AGE 5-21) BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2020-2022..... 97

FIGURE 52: PERCENT OF SPECIALIZED OUT OF DISTRICT PLACEMENTS WITH IEPs (AGE 5-21) BY PRIMARY DISABILITY, 2020-2022..... 98

FIGURE 53: PERCENT OF SPECIALIZED OUT OF DISTRICT PLACEMENTS WITH IEPs (AGE 5-21) BY GRADE, 2020-2022 98

FIGURE 54: LAKEWOOD INTERVENTION TIERS **ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**

FIGURE 55: LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT HANDBOOK, SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES 101

FIGURE 56. OUT OF DISTRICT TUITION AMOUNTS FOR COMPARABLE DISTRICTS, 2020 TO 2022 108

FIGURE 57: NUMBER OF NONPUBLIC PLACEMENTS (AGES 5-21), 2020-22 127

FIGURE 58: PERCENT OF NONPUBLIC PLACEMENTS WITH IEPs (AGES 5-21) BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2022..... 127

FIGURE 59: NUMBER OF NONPUBLIC PLACEMENTS (AGES 3-4), 2020-2022 128

TABLES

TABLE 1: LAKEWOOD REGULAR BOARD MEETING, JULY 12, 2023 (VIDEO, AGENDA, AND MINUTES) 17

TABLE 2: LAKEWOOD REGULAR BOARD MEETING, AUGUST 9, 2023 (VIDEO, AGENDA, AND MINUTES) 18

TABLE 3: LAKEWOOD REGULAR BOARD MEETING, SEPTEMBER 20, 2023 (VIDEO, AGENDA, AND MINUTES)..... 19

TABLE 4: LAKEWOOD REGULAR BOARD MEETING, OCTOBER 18, 2023 (VIDEO, AGENDA, AND MINUTES) 19

TABLE 5: LAKEWOOD REGULAR BOARD MEETING, NOVEMBER 15, 2023 (VIDEO, AGENDA, AND MINUTES)..... 20

TABLE 6: REGULAR BOARD MEETING, DECEMBER 15, 2023 (IN-PERSON VIEWING AND AGENDA REVIEWED)..... 20

TABLE 7: LAKEWOOD AGGREGATED SCHOOL BOARD MEETING DATA FROM JULY-DECEMBER 2023..... 21

TABLE 8: AGGREGATED BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING DATA (DECEMBER 2023)..... 22

TABLE 9: AGE OF ENROLLED KINDERGARTENERS, 2023-2024 27

TABLE 10: ANALYSIS OF LAKEWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT'S GOALS FOR 2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR POWERPOINT37

TABLE 11: GRADE CONFIGURATION FOR LPSD SCHOOLS 41

TABLE 12: ELA AND MATH CURRICULUM MATERIALS- K-12 46

TABLE 13: 2ND GRADE MATH PACING 2023-2024 49

TABLE 14: LAKEWOOD MULTILINGUAL LEARNER TOTALS BY SCHOOL AND GRADE LEVEL (2023-2024)..... 60

TABLE 15: LPSD PROGRAM TYPES AND SERVICES FOR MLs **ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**

TABLE 16: MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS BY SCHOOL 61

TABLE 17: BILINGUAL AND ESL DEPARTMENTAL TEXTBOOKS AND RESOURCES..... 61

TABLE 18: LPSD VOCATIONAL COURSE ENROLLMENT 62

TABLE 19: CAREER ACADEMY PATHWAYS 63

TABLE 20: ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) STUDENT ENROLLMENT DATA (2023) 64

TABLE 21: ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) STUDENT ASSESSMENT DATA (2023) 64

TABLE 22: ADVANCED PLACEMENT CLASS ENROLLMENT VS. EXAM COMPLETION (2023)..... 65

TABLE 23: SAMPLE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER..... 67

TABLE 24: CLASSROOM VISIT DATA..... 69

TABLE 25: CLASSROOM VISIT DATA RECORDING TOOL FOCUS AREAS 69

TABLE 26: SIGNIFICANT DISPROPORTIONALITY RISK RATIOS **ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**

TABLE 27: SPECIAL EDUCATION CONTINUUM MAPPING, GRADES PK-6..... 105

TABLE 28: SPECIAL EDUCATION CONTINUUM MAPPING, GRADES 7-12..... 105

TABLE 29: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS BY TYPE AND NUMBER OF CLASSES PER SCHOOL..... 106

TABLE 30: CLASSROOMS/PROGRAMS VISITED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION 110

TABLE 31: TITLE HERE **ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**

TABLE 32: SPECIAL EDUCATION STAFFING RATIOS BY COMPARABLE DISTRICTS, 2021-22 (AGES 3-21)..... 120

TABLE 33: TITLE HERE 124

TABLE 34: TOTAL NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE NONPUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS (AGES 5-21), 2019-20 TO 2021-22 . 126

TABLE 35: TOTAL NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE NONPUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS (AGES 3-4), 2019-20 TO 2021-22 ... 127

TABLE 36: CHAPTERS 192 AND 193 AWARDS, LAKEWOOD FY21-24..... 130

TABLE 37: NONPUBLIC IDEA SCHOOL AGE STUDENTS ELIGIBLE AND SERVED UNDER IDEA, AGES 3-21, 2021-2024 131

TABLE 38: NONPUBLIC IDEA SCHOOL AGE STUDENTS ELIGIBLE AND SERVED UNDER IDEA, AGES 3-5, 2021-2024 132

TABLE 39: EXAMPLE OF REQUIRED IDEA GRANT APPLICATION NONPUBLIC STUDENT INFORMATION..... 132

TABLE 40: IDEA SCHOOL AGE BASIC GRANT FUNDING ALLOCATION COMPARISONS, 2021-2024 133

TABLE 41: IDEA PRESCHOOL BASIC GRANT FUNDING ALLOCATION COMPARISONS, 2021-2024 134

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG), under the direction of the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), performed a comprehensive organizational review of the Lakewood Public School District (Lakewood) pursuant to Acting Commissioner Angelica Allen-McMillan's May 12, 2023 executive order. The purpose of this review is to provide an updated educational record that will allow the Department to better identify the root causes that led to the educational deprivations within Lakewood Public School District identified by the Court and to determine appropriate responses.

PCG oversaw and conducted the data collection, data analysis, and writing of this findings report. PCG partnered with expert Jeremiah Ford to inform analysis related to transportation practices and with Certified Public Accounting firm AAFCPA for an audit of financial practices. This findings report will inform the final analysis and recommendations report to be developed by expert Dr. Kimberly Harrington Markus, former New Jersey Commissioner of Education. The contents of this report are considered draft and for internal review only.

The case history of Lakewood Public School District leading up to this request to conduct an external review of the District is complex and lengthy. In summary,

- In 2014, parents of children enrolled in Lakewood Public School District filed a petition alleging the District was not providing its public-school students a thorough and efficient education (T&E) as required by the New Jersey State's Constitution and that the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) is unconstitutional as applied to the District. The Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) found that Lakewood's students are not receiving T&E, but that the SFRA is not unconstitutional.
- The Commissioner then rejected ALJ's finding as to T&E, concluding that its students are receiving T&E; but recognizing that there are some problems in Lakewood Public School District, she ordered a comprehensive review of the District.
- In March 2023, the Appellate Division reversed the Commissioner's decision, and found that Lakewood's students are not receiving T&E. It then ordered the Commissioner to issue a decision on the petitioners' SFRA claim. Following the remand, the Commissioner issued a letter announcing that she would be expediting the comprehensive review prior to issuing a decision on the SFRA.¹

The New Jersey Constitution states that, "[t]he Legislature shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of free public schools for the instruction of all the children in the State between the ages of five and eighteen years."² Under the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC), school districts are evaluated in five key component areas of school district effectiveness — instruction and program, personnel, fiscal management, operations, and governance — to determine the extent to which school districts are providing a thorough and efficient education.³

¹ Leonor Alcantara, et al. v. Angelica Allen-McMillan, Commissioner of the Department of Education, et al., -- Agency Dkt. No. 156-6/14; Commissioner Decision No. 149-21 -- Appellate Dkt. No. A-3693-20

² N.J. Const. art. 8, § 4,1 (2012).

³ N.J.A.C. 6A:30, Evaluation of The Performance of School Districts. Retrieved from: <https://www.nj.gov/education/code/current/title6a/chap30.pdf>.

DISTRICT CONTEXT

Lakewood Public School District is located in Ocean County, New Jersey. There are approximately 4,371 public students enrolled across nine schools including:⁴

- Lakewood Early Child Center (PK)
- Piner Elementary School (PK and K)
- Spruce Street School (grade 1)
- Clifton Avenue Grade School (grades 2-6)
- Oak Street School (grades 2-6)
- Ella G. Clarke School (grades 3-6)
- Lakewood Middle School (grades 7-8)
- Lakewood High School (grades 9-12)
- Adult High School

Lakewood Public School District is overseen by a nine-member Board of Education. The Superintendent has led the District since 2012, briefly as interim Superintendent in 2017 until she was reinstated as Superintendent later that same year.⁵

DISTRICT FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Lakewood is an outlier among other New Jersey school districts, in which most of the students are enrolled in nonpublic schools. Lakewood Township has seen a significant population rise in recent decades, growing from a population of 92,843 in 2010 to an estimated 139,506 in 2023.⁶ Lakewood Township was the fastest growing New Jersey municipality in the 2020 census, and is the fifth largest city in New Jersey.⁷ This is due in large part to a thriving Orthodox Jewish community. As a result, of the Township's approximately 50,000 school-aged children, only about 4,600 are enrolled in the public school. The majority—84%—are enrolled in nonpublic schools, most of which are private religious schools. Testimony before the ALJ established that this demographic trend is likely to continue and accelerate.⁸

There are 170+ nonpublic schools located within Lakewood Township. The District must follow regulatory requirements for the transportation of nonpublic school students and the provision of equitable special education services for eligible students in nonpublic schools. Though these students are Lakewood residents, they are not counted in the per-pupil state aid awarded to the District.

A state monitor was appointed to the District in 2014 to supervise financial operations and to ensure accountability for the expenditure of public funds. At the time, the District's deficit was approximately \$6 million. Only districts with state monitors are eligible for advance aid, and state monitors cannot be removed unless, and until, a district repays the advance aid it receives. This structure has enabled the District to borrow funds annually to cover its deficit, in part due to the costs associated with nonpublic students.

Lakewood has borrowed a cumulative of \$215 million in School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) state aid advances since 2015. For FY24, Lakewood requested \$93 million in advance aid and was awarded \$50 million. At the end of FY23, the remaining balance owed was \$123 million. The projected remaining balance owed for FY24 is \$156 million.

⁴ Enrollment numbers provided by the District as of January 29th, 2004. Does not include Out of District or Charter School students.

⁵ Guion, Payton. "Lakewood isn't naming permanent school superintendent," Asbury Park Press online. June 21, 20017. <https://www.app.com/story/news/investigations/watchdog/education/2017/06/21/lakewood-schools-wont-name-permanent-superintendent/415635001/>

⁶ *Quick facts, Lakewood Township, Ocean County, NJ*. US Census Bureau. (n.d.).

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lakewoodtownshipoceancountynewjersey/PST045223>

⁷ Amanda Oglesby "Lakewood NJ sees highest population growth in state, 2020 Census results show", Community Change. (August 12, 2021) <https://www.app.com/story/news/local/communitychange/2021/08/12/lakewood-nj-population-2020-census-results/8112581002/>

⁸ New Jersey Appellate Court Decision, March 6, 2023, Docket No. A-3693-20, provided by the New Jersey Department of Education.

TABLE 1: SFRA ADVANCE AID RECEIVED BY LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

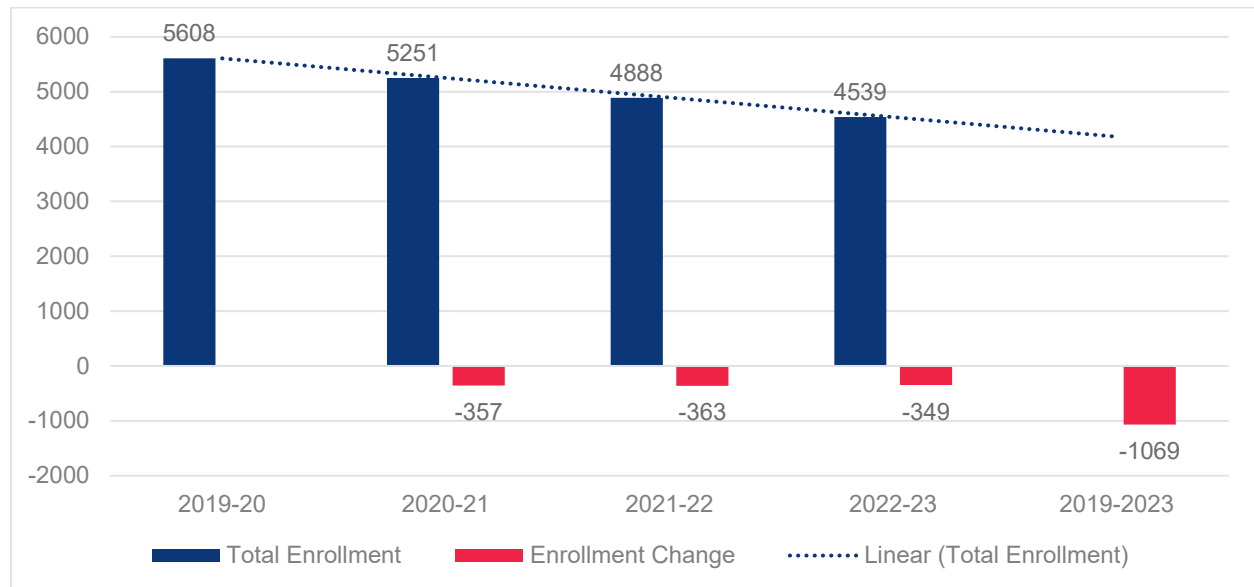
Fiscal Year	SFRA Advance Aid Received
FY15	\$4,500,000.00
FY16	\$5,640,183.00
FY18	\$8,522,678.00
FY19	\$28,182,090.00
FY20	\$36,033,862
FY21	\$54,541,711
FY23	\$27,704,046
FY24	\$50,000,000
Total	\$215,124,570

Note. Retrieved via email from Amanda Schultz, New Jersey Department of Education

LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT STUDENTS

At the same time as overall population growth has occurred in the larger community, Lakewood public school enrollment has seen significant declines. As shown in **Figure 1**, total public school student enrollment has decreased by 19% since the 2019-2020 school year.

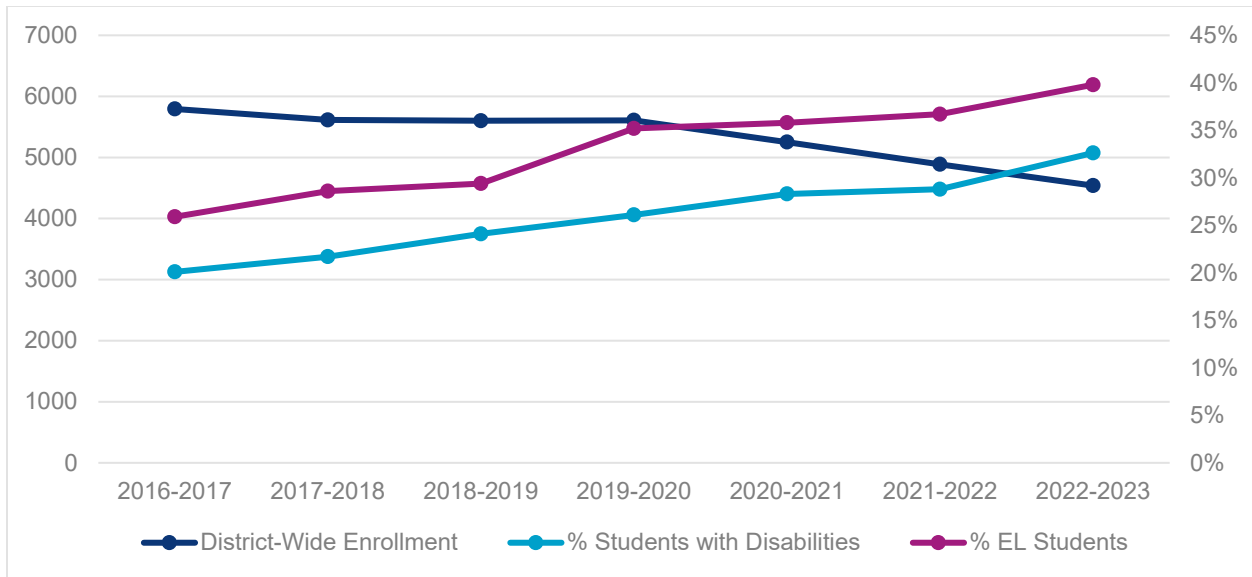
FIGURE 1: ENROLLMENT DECLINE IN LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT



Note. Retrieved from "Fall Enrollment Reports" provided by New Jersey Department of Education, 2023, <https://www.nj.gov/education/doedata/enr/index.shtml>

Figure 2 shows the total enrollment of public school students, percent of students with disabilities, and percent of English Learners (EL) in Lakewood across the last seven years. From 2016-2017 to 2022-2023, enrollment has declined by 1,255 students. While enrollment has declined in this seven-year span, the percent of students with disabilities has risen 12.5% and percent of EL students has risen 13.9%.

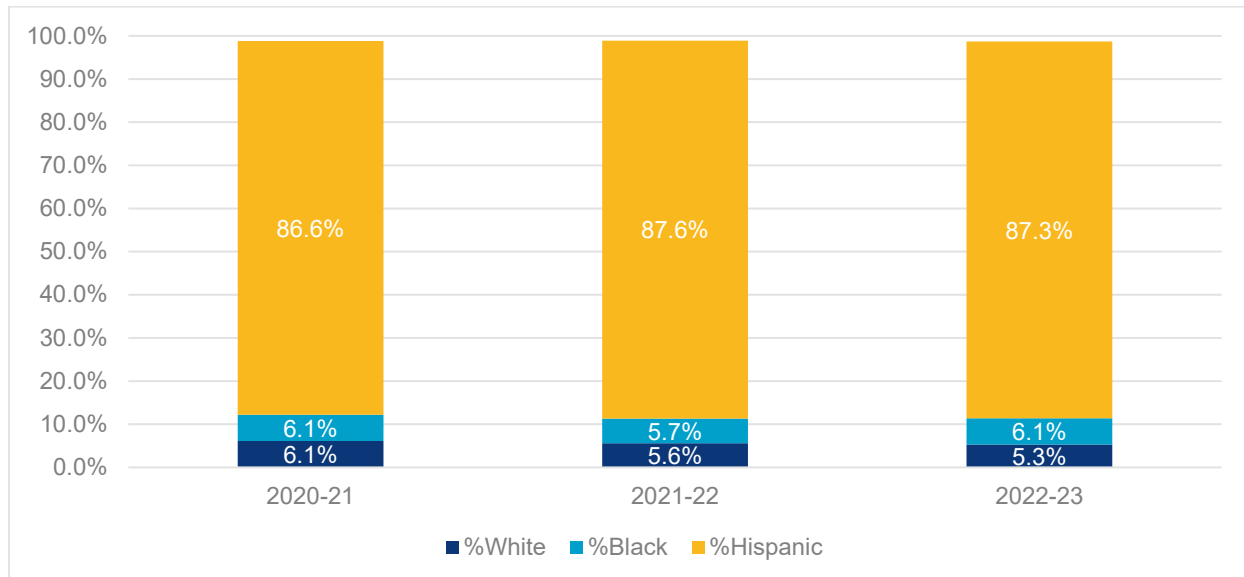
FIGURE 2: ENROLLMENT TRENDS IN LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT 2016-2023



Note: Data are from "Lakewood Township School District (29-2520) Performance Reports" provided by Official Site of the State of New Jersey, 2016-2023, (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/prioryearreport/2016-2017/29/2520/>) and "Lakewood township, Ocean County, New Jersey QuickFacts" provided by U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lakewoodtownshipoceancountynewjersey/RHI125222#RHI125222>).

The public-school student population in the Lakewood Public School District is majority Hispanic students. As shown in Figure 5, in 2022-2023, the District's student population was 87.3% Hispanic, 6.1% Black, and 5.3% White. This number has remained steady over the past three years. In comparison, Lakewood Township is 10% Hispanic, 2.4% Black and 85.4% White.

FIGURE 3: LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT'S ENROLLMENT BY RACIAL SUBGROUP (2020-2022)



Note. Retrieved from "District Data for Enrollment" provided by the New Jersey Department of Education Fall Enrollment Reports, 2023, <https://www.nj.gov/education/doedata/enr/index.shtml>

METHODOLOGY

PCG's analysis focuses on five domain areas including Governance, Curriculum & Instruction, Special Education, Financial Practices, and Transportation. To capture the unique nature of Lakewood Public School District and update the educational record to reflect the root causes of a lack of T&E, a comprehensive mixed-methods research approach was used. Data collection included extensive stakeholder outreach to District leadership, staff, and parents through surveys and focus groups, as well as thorough onsite school visits and deep data and policy analysis across both academics and operations.

Data to inform the Lakewood Public School District Review were drawn from the following primary sources:

- 1) Data and documentation requested from the NJDOE and Lakewood Public School District
- 2) Focus groups and interviews with NJDOE employees, Lakewood Public School District administrators, staff, teachers, students, families, and Board members
- 3) Observations of both general and special education classrooms
- 4) Review of school facilities
- 5) Surveys of Lakewood Public School District's school-based staff and families
- 6) Observation of Lakewood Board of Education meetings
- 7) Analysis of Student IEP files
- 8) Comparative analysis to select New Jersey Districts
- 9) Analysis of District financial practices
- 10) Analysis of District transportation practices

PCG spent a total of 13 days onsite in Lakewood to support our data collection, with multiple PCG team members present for each visit. PCG also spent one day onsite at the NJDOE to better understand the state level context. Throughout the process, PCG found Lakewood Public School District leadership to be responsive, collaborative, and actively engaged in this review.

DATA & DOCUMENTATION ANALYSIS

PCG reviewed documentation and data provided by the NJDOE and the Lakewood Public School District to gain a comprehensive understanding of governance, curriculum and instruction, special education, finance, and transportation in Lakewood. Both the NJDOE and the Lakewood Public School District fulfilled a request for data and documents (listed in Appendix B). In total, over 160 documents were collected and reviewed. PCG also collected and reviewed a large number of publicly available documents via the District website and internet research.

FOCUS GROUPS & INTERVIEWS

From September 2023 through January 2024, PCG facilitated a series of focus groups and interviews. A total of 26 focus groups and eight individual interviews were conducted onsite at Lakewood Public Schools. Approximately 229 district stakeholders attended a focus group or interview. Stakeholders included district staff, school-based staff, administrators, families, students, and Board members. Interviews lasted 30 minutes and focus groups lasted 60 minutes. Focus group participants were assigned to role-alike groups.

District and school-based focus group participants were randomly selected by PCG. Focus groups held for families were offered in both English and Spanish. All families in the District were invited to participate in a focus group via an email invitation by the District, but the participation rate for this stakeholder group was low. Additional follow up conversations were held virtually with eight Lakewood Public School District stakeholders and financial controls walkthroughs were conducted virtually with seven Lakewood stakeholders. A complete list of Lakewood stakeholders engaged is in Appendix A. Members of the NJDOE were also engaged in data collection conversations from the onset of the project.

All focus groups were conducted as anonymous meetings. Focus group and interview questions were developed by PCG. Each interview and focus group included general questions asked of all participants as well as questions specific to participants' roles. PCG staff took detailed notes during each focus group and

interview, which are maintained in separate documents. PCG systematically analyzed data from focus groups and interviews using *Atlas.ti*, a qualitative data coding tool. Notes from every focus group and interview were uploaded into *Atlas.ti* and sorted by domain area. Using deductive coding, PCG categorized quotations from focus groups and interviews into 68 code groups (see Appendix D) tailored to the domain areas of governance, curriculum and instruction, special education, finance, and transportation. All data are reported on an aggregate level, maintaining anonymity of participants.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

PCG conducted classroom observations across three days for general education and four days for special education.

- General education instruction was observed at Lakewood High School, Lakewood Middle School, Ella G. Clarke School, Oak Street School, Piner Elementary School, Spruce Street School, and Clifton Avenue Grade School.
- Special Education instruction was observed at Lakewood High School, Lakewood Middle School, Ella G. Clarke School, Oak Street School, Piner Elementary School, Spruce Street School, Clifton Avenue Grade School, and the Lakewood Early Childhood Center.

Classroom selection was generated randomly by PCG. The District did not inform classroom observation selection. Principals were aware of the week the team planned to visit but did not have teacher names, days, or times. PCG asked not to have an escort during the visits.

General Education Classroom Observation Protocol

- PCG visited classrooms across all schools and grade levels. PCG visited a total of 26 classrooms.
- Teachers who participated in a focus group were excluded from the selection process. Due to teacher absences, one teacher who participated in a focus group was included in the classroom visits.
- At the elementary level, the team focused on visiting classrooms focused on the content areas of English Language Arts (ELA)/literacy and Math. At the secondary level, the team visited ELA, Math, and Science classes.
- A PCG team of two observed the lesson and collected data. There were two exceptions (one middle school class and one elementary class) where there was only one observer.
- Elementary classes were observed for an average of 30 minutes. One exception was during a foundational literacy class, when the PCG team stayed approximately 50 minutes.
- Secondary classes were observed on average one half a class period, which is approximately 20-25 minutes. There were two exceptions where the PCG observers stayed for the entire 40-minute class period.
- The PCG team met with a principal or designee at each school where they were presented by the PCG team with a list of classrooms to be visited. Staff checked to ensure that teachers were present. If not, substitutions were made where possible.
- The PCG team did not interact with District staff during school visits, except in one instance where a Curriculum Supervisor was subbing for a school principal during their absence.

Special Education Classroom Observation Protocol

- PCG visited classrooms where students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are receiving their special education services.
- In total, PCG visited all subject areas across all grade-levels and range of special education services.
- PCG visited a total of 33 classrooms where instruction was provided by at least one special education teacher. Classroom visits were 20-25 minutes each.
- PCG made every effort to visit a representative sampling of Lakewood's continuum of special education services across the District. PCG only experienced limitations in classroom visits at

Lakewood Middle School, where PCG was planning to visit six classrooms; however, a fire drill and school assembly allowed us to only visit two.

- A PCG team of two observed the lesson and collected data.
- The PCG team met with a principal or designee at each school where they were presented with the list of classrooms to be visited. Staff checked to ensure that teachers were present. If not, substitutions were made where possible.
- In addition to the classrooms visited, PCG also visited related service spaces.

FACILITIES REVIEW

PCG conducted facilities tours at each public school building guided by the Director of Facilities. PCG also visited The Center for Education and School for Students with Hidden Intelligence (SCHI) at the request of the Superintendent. A team of two participated in these tours.

STAFF AND FAMILY SURVEYS

PCG conducted two surveys to support this report. Each survey was distributed by the Superintendent through school email channels and family distribution lists. Both surveys were open to participants for three weeks. The target audience of the first survey was all school-based staff in Lakewood Public Schools. There were 141 complete responses and 28 partial responses. The target audience of the second survey was parents and guardians of students currently attending Lakewood Public School District. There were 84 complete responses and 56 partial responses. Only complete responses were analyzed across both surveys. The family survey was administered in English, Spanish, and Russian. 74 out of the 140 respondents who took the family survey completed it in a language other than English. Both surveys contained Likert Scale questions and open-ended questions. Survey data are located in the appendix of this report.

BOARD MEETING OBSERVATION

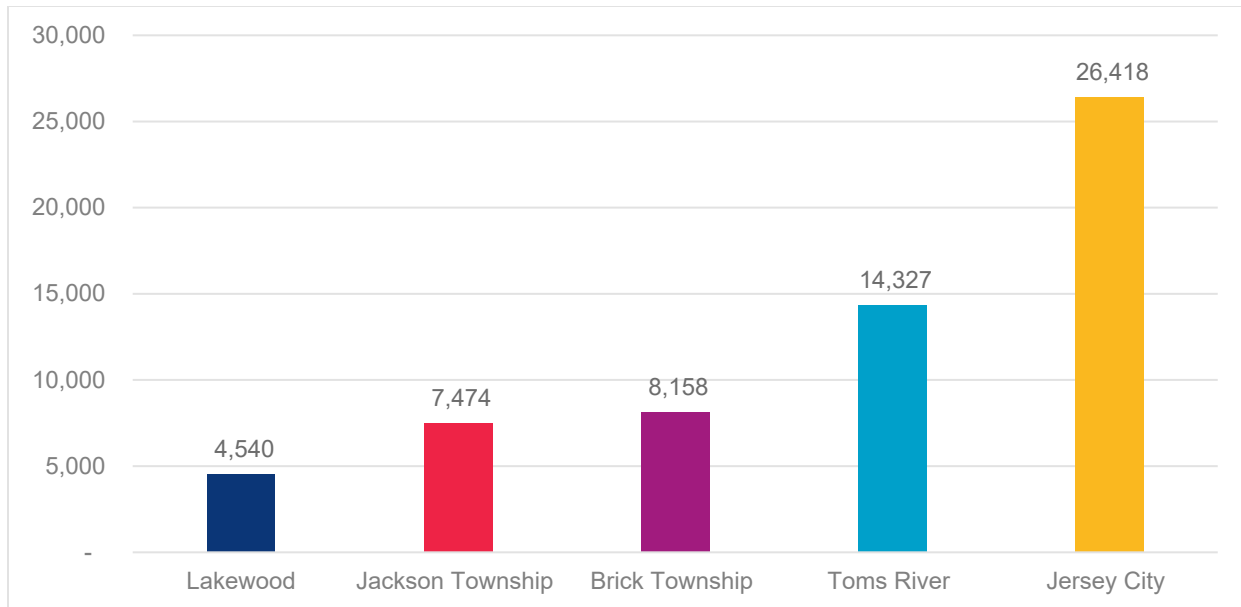
PCG used an adapted rubric titled *Meeting Management Assessment: Board of Distinction* to determine the Board of Education's level of adherence to effective practices for school board meetings. The rubric was used to observe the public portion of the Lakewood Public School District's Board Meetings from July 12, 2023 to December 13, 2023. The rubric was also used to observe the December 2023 board meetings of comparable school Districts. PCG received videos of the Lakewood Public School District's Board meetings from the District. The rubric and analysis are available in the Governance chapter of this report under *Analysis of Public Board Meetings*. The full rubric is also included in the appendix.

STUDENT IEP FILE ANALYSIS

PCG randomly selected and reviewed approximately 25 student IEP files to assess the overall quality of the content of IEPs developed by Lakewood Public School District. Files reviewed were a representative sample of preschool, general education, and specialized programming IEPs throughout the District. PCG used the Golden Thread framework and Quality Indicator Review protocol to conduct this review. More information about the Golden Thread Framework and the indicators used for the evaluation can be found in the Appendix.

COMPARISON DISTRICTS

Four school districts were selected by the NJDOE to be used for comparative analysis. The districts were selected based on proximity to Lakewood, size of district, socioeconomic makeup of district, and/or financial status. The districts selected and used for comparison were Toms River Regional School District, Brick Township Public Schools, Jackson Township School District, and Jersey City Public Schools. **Figure 4** shows the 2022-2023 total enrollment for the comparison districts. It should be noted that given the unique nature of Lakewood's student population, no school district in New Jersey serves as an ideal comparison district.

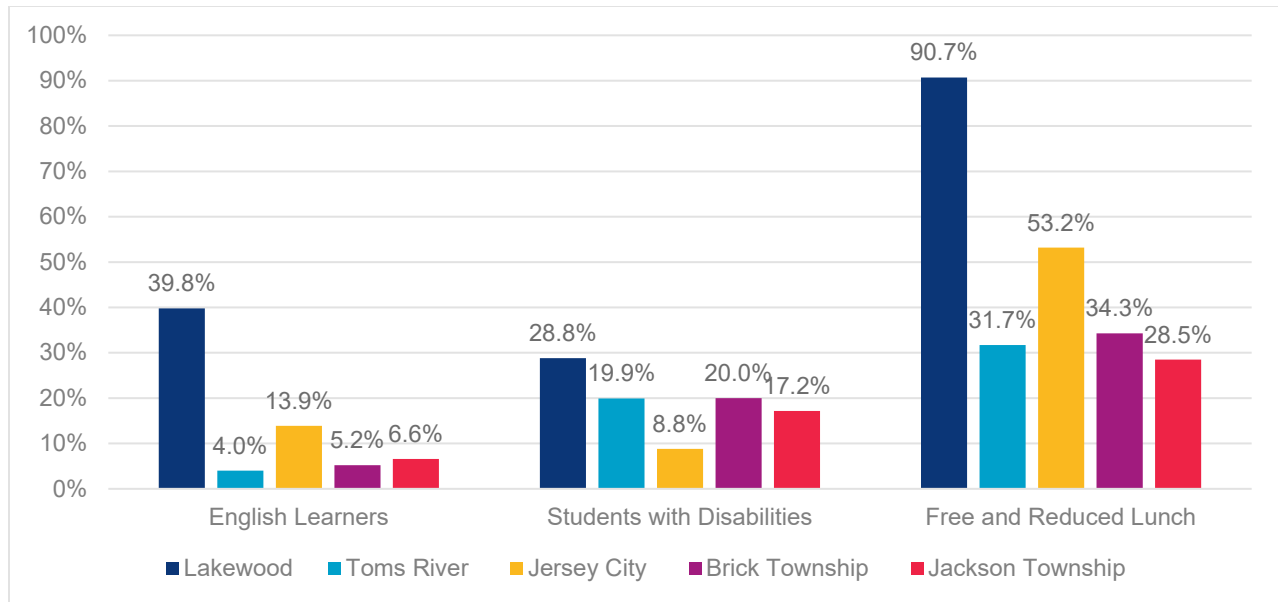
FIGURE 4: TOTAL ENROLLMENT BY COMPARATIVE DISTRICT (2022-2023)

Note. Data are from "NJDOE Data & Reports – Fall Enrollment" by New Jersey Department of Education, 2023, (<https://www.nj.gov/education/doedata/enr/index.shtml>) and "IDEA Public Data Report" by New Jersey Department of Education, 2023, (<https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/monitor/ideapublicdata/index.shtml>)

Figure 5 shows a comparison across selected districts of percentage of students receiving free lunch, percentage of Multi-lingual learners, and percentage of students with disabilities.

- Lakewood Public School District more than triples each comparable district in number of English Learners.
- In Lakewood Public School District, 28.8% of students are classified as students with disabilities, with the next greatest percentage being 20% in Brick Township.
- Lakewood Public School District also exceeds comparable districts in the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. In Lakewood, 90.7% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch compared to Jersey City (53.2%), Brick Township (34.3%), Toms River (31.7%) and Jackson Township (28.5%).

FIGURE 5: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS BY SCHOOL DISTRICT (2022-2023)



Note. Data are from “NJDOE Data & Reports – Fall Enrollment” by New Jersey Department of Education, 2023, (<https://www.nj.gov/education/doedata/enr/index.shtml>) and “IDEA Public Data Report” by New Jersey Department of Education, 2023, (<https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/monitor/ideapublicdata/index.shtml>)

FINANCIAL PRACTICES AUDIT

PCG partnered with AAFCPA to conduct a forensic analysis and discovery in the following areas:

- **Financial Data Analytics** - These are financial analytics, using the Caseware IDEA Audit Tool by CaseWare International, that were run on the entire general ledger (GL) and were filtered by account.
- **Internal Controls Testing** – This analysis focused on:
 - Governance
 - Higher risk financial controls
 - Application controls that relate to supporting financial controls
 - Segregation of duties Service provider/vendor selection.

AAFCPA followed the Statements for Consulting Standards, from the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants (AICPA), for this analysis. The findings reported here did not constitute an audit or examination, the objective of which is the expression of an opinion on financial statements, on other subject matter or on management’s assertion.

TRANSPORTATION PRACTICES AUDIT

PCG worked in collaboration with expert Jeremiah Ford to conduct an audit of District transportation practices. Mr. Ford is a recognized expert in New Jersey transportation regulations, policies, and best practices. PCG analyzed the distribution of routes between contractors, per pupil cost, and courtesy versus mandated transportation. PCG also explored the organizations supporting transportation in Lakewood Public School District.

GOVERNANCE

This chapter reviews the governance and policy practices of the Lakewood Public School District. The first part of this chapter focuses on the policy-setting and oversight practices of the Lakewood Board of Education. The second half of chapter focuses on the leadership and decision-making practices of the District administration. Throughout the chapter, we seek to understand how these practices may impact the overall efficacy of the District.

SUMMARY

- **Board Meetings.** Public Board meetings practices do not align with practices of comparable districts or follow recommendations from the New Jersey School Boards Association.
- **Board Policies.** Board meeting agendas contained policy updates and new policies; however, there was no policy discussion during any of the observed meetings. PCG found outdated and/or ill-informed policies that directly impact student learning.
- **Financial Transparency.** Board involvement with budget development was reported to be minimal. There were no observed board meetings that discussed financial issues or presented detailed information regarding budgets. There appears to be no urgency or accountability for the District's financial situation by leadership.
- **Culture.** PCG observed a culture of low expectations for students, and high levels of distrust between central office administration and school-based staff.
- **Communication.** There are communication gaps from the central office administration with both internal and external stakeholders.
- **Strategic Plan.** The organizational management of the District is not based on a coherent system focused on a District strategic plan. Without a strategic plan, the District relies on a series of annual goals that lack accountability as they do not have metrics that can determine how successful the District is in meeting their goals. Several annual goals are duplicated from previous years.
- **Reporting Structure.** The organization's reporting structure does not follow typical practice, as it is designed with a large number of administrators reporting directly to the Superintendent. The Superintendent has 24 direct reports, including all curriculum supervisors, and there is no Assistant Superintendent.
- **Board Attorney.** The Lakewood Board of Education attorney plays a far more active role than the typical board attorney in District business. The Board Attorney stated that his role is not only Board Attorney, but he also provides the District a service similar to a Communications Director. Lakewood's legal expenses per pupil are significantly higher than comparison districts.
- **Decision-making.** Large-scale district planning appears to occur behind closed doors. For example, the District changed the configuration of schools for elementary and middle schools this school year. The grade configuration consisted of moving hundreds of students and staff with little notice or explanation as to why the decision was made. There was no discussion at Board meetings or opportunity to provide public input.
- **Human Resources Practices.** The District reports struggling to hire staff to fill all their vacancies each year. Lack of competitive salaries with neighboring districts was cited as a key barrier, yet several current practices may impact staff morale. New staff are hired at a higher pay rate than veterans and 77 teacher contracts have been non-renewed in the past five years. School administrators reported frequent building reassignments, with limited communication or notice.
- **Morale.** Staff stated multiple times that the District has a morale issue. Staff reported not feeling respected and fear retaliation from the administration if they speak out in a critical way. Instances of unresponsiveness or unclear communication from the District contribute to a perception of inadequate support.

LAKWOOD SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE

School board governance creates a structure for how District decisions are made through the adoption of policies throughout the year. Board governance includes defining expectations and creating school board roles and responsibilities. It also addresses financial and people resources, including documentation, as outlined, for school Districts in New Jersey, in the *New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC)* reports.⁹ The NJQSAC provides a level of transparency and accountability to the District's stakeholders. This section focuses on Governance components of the NJSQAC.

Best Practices Framework

Adopting an effective governance model includes implementing proper practices to ensure that the District is well-run, and where student achievement is the main focus. There are five school board governance research best practices that while different that NJQSAC, should guide school boards and school Districts towards success.¹⁰

These five practices are:

- **Create a Shared Vision.** A shared vision aligns decision-making. A shared vision guides decisions made at the full board level or even within committees as well as policy development. Board members must be committed to and invested in their vision.
- **Define Goals.** A clear shared vision can help the board identify the path forward, developing concrete goals that are measurable will help the Board attain their vision. Additionally, NJ State School Boards Association suggests that school boards must determine Districts' long-range (strategic) educational goals for a five-year period, the financial implications of those goals, and the appropriate financial strategies to reach those goals including the community impact.¹¹
- **Develop Policies.** Developing policies for the school District is a key responsibility for school boards. Policies create a structure for the school District in which the superintendent and other District staff can work. Policy is one way the board communicates what it expects of their administration. Policies should clearly define what the board intends or requires, leaving the "how" of implementation and administration to the superintendent or their designees.¹² Whether the policies come from a committee or the board, the decision-makers should always ask themselves whether or not the policy will further student success.
- **Build Relationships.** Though governance models originate with the board, for governance to be its most effective, all stakeholders must be on board, from the superintendent to the teachers. The board-administrator relationship is critical to the success of a school District. In a study commissioned by the National School Boards Association, the Center for Public Education¹³ found effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving District goals.
- **Monitor the Budget.** Lacking funds can significantly impact a school board's priorities regardless of its governance practices. Whether the board has a finance committee or a treasurer, it should constantly monitor the budget to ensure the District has enough funds to operate and bring about change identified during goal setting. The New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) states that school board members should:

⁹ *New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC)*. (n.d). Official Site of The State Of New Jersey. <https://www.nj.gov/education/qsac/>

¹⁰ *School board governance models and best practices*. (2022, August). Diligent. <https://www.diligent.com/resources/blog/school-board-governance-model>

¹¹ *Board's Role in Finance and Budget Development*. (n.d). NJ State School Boards Association. <https://www.njsba.org>.

¹² *School Board Policy versus Regulation: What's the Difference?* <https://www.tasb.org/members/enhance-district/school-board-policy-and-regulation.aspx#:~:text=Policies%20define%20the%20purposes%20and,what%20it%20wants%20of%20administration>.

¹³ Dervarics, C & O'Brien, E. (2019). *Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards*. Center for Public Education. <https://www.nsba.org/-/media/NSBA/File/cpe-eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards-report-december-2019.pdf>

- Set budget parameters and priorities for budget development process in accordance with policy
- Understand proposed budget implications, programs, and changes
- Reach consensus on a budget appropriate for students and taxpayers that support student achievement
- Assist in explaining the budget to the general public in accordance with policy and indicate how it supports student achievement
- Evaluate on an on-going basis the implementation of the budget
- Review and approve the monthly Board Secretary and Treasurer’s financial reports.¹⁴

Analysis of Public School Board Meetings

School board meetings provide the community with the opportunity to observe and inform school district policy formation and decision making. PCG used an adapted rubric titled, *Meeting Management Assessment: Board of Distinction* to determine the Lakewood Public School District’s Board of Education’s level of adherence to effective practices for school board meetings.¹⁵ The rubric was used to observe the public portion of the meetings from July 12, 2023 to December 13, 2023. The rubric was also used to observe the December 2023 board meetings of comparable school Districts.

PCG received videos of the Lakewood Public School District Board of Education meetings provided by the District. Recordings of previous School Board meetings are not publicly available on the Lakewood Public School District’s website, YouTube, or other publicly accessible channels. Lakewood Board of Education’s minutes and agendas are publicly posted on Board Docs,¹⁶ a software tool used by the District to store board meeting information. The Board held two meetings in August 2023, but PCG received only one video from the Board meeting on August 9, 2023. Therefore, we did not include the August 23, 2023 meeting in the data analysis. PCG attended the December 13, 2023 board meeting in person.

All meeting videos from comparable Districts were publicly available. PCG aggregated the data from the four separate District meetings to use as a comparison with the aggregated meeting data from the Lakewood Board of Education.

The data collection rubric is divided into three categories:

1. Agenda
2. Operation of the Meeting by the Trustee President
3. Trustee Member Participation

Tables were color coded as follows:

- **Yellow:** Governance Indicator being observed during meeting
- **Green:** Yes, Indicator observed during meeting
- **Purple:** No, Indicator not observed during meeting

TABLE 2: LAKEWOOD REGULAR BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING, JULY 12, 2023

Agenda		Operation of Mtg by Board President		Board Member Participation	
Indicators	Yes/No	Indicators	Yes/No	Indicators	Yes/No
Well-organized meeting agenda supported by necessary documentation	Yes. The agenda contained items and information to support the items	All Board Members were present	No. 5 Present (in-person) 4 Not Present	Board members kept their comments or questions focused on the agenda items	No. There were no agenda items discussed

¹⁴ *Boards Role in Finance & Budget Development* School Board’s Association. Board’s Role in Finance and *Budget Development*. (2018). New Jersey School Boards Association. https://www.njsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/SFC_BOARDSROLEINFINANCEANDBUDGDEV.pdf.

¹⁵ *Tennessee School Board Association (TSBA)*. (n.d.). Meeting Management Assessment. Board of Distinction.

¹⁶ *Lakewood Board Documents*. (n.d.). <https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/lboe/Board.nsf/Public>.

Only agenda items were discussed	No. There was no discussion of any agenda items	The Board President guided the meeting effectively	No. The meeting was guided by the Board Secretary (Interim Business Administrator) and the Board Attorney, not Board president	Board president made certain all members had equal opportunity to present their views	No. There were no members who presented views
Board members made informed comments and asked appropriate questions regarding agenda items	No. There were no comments or questions by board members	Whenever possible, the Board withheld definite Board action until after the Supt's recommendations were presented	No. There was no action that needed the Supt to make recommendations.	Board members used the Board meeting time for genuine discussion and problem solving.	No. There was no Board discussion or problem solving.
Public Comment time available during meeting	Yes. Although provided with an opportunity, there were no public comments made during the meeting	When decisions were made, it was clear who should carry it out and when	No. There were no decisions made during the meeting	Trustees avoided negative, disrespectful or derogatory remarks to other Board members or presenters	Yes. The meeting was respectful
Public Board Meeting Approximate Time: 5 minutes					

Note. Retrieved from "Lakewood BOE video" provided by Lakewood Public School District, 2023, (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pD8FK77rq26XQ6p06XWXITaq4i_PXYgL/view?usp=sharing) and Retrieved from, "Lakewood Board Docs" provided by Lakewood Public School District, 2023, (<https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/lboe/Board.nsf/Public.>)

TABLE 3: LAKEWOOD REGULAR BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING, AUGUST 9, 2023

Agenda		Operation of Mtg by Board President		Board Member Participation	
Indicators	Yes/No	Indicators	Yes/No	Indicators	Yes/No
Well-organized meeting agenda supported by necessary documentation	Yes. The agenda contained items and information to support the items	All Board Members were present	No. 4 Present (in-person) 1 Present (via Zoom) 4 Not Present	Board members kept their comments or questions focused on the agenda items	No. There were no agenda items discussed
Only agenda items were discussed	No. There was no discussion of any agenda items	The Board President guided the meeting effectively	No. The meeting was guided by the Board Secretary (Interim Business Administrator) and the Board Attorney, not Board president	Board president made certain all members had equal opportunity to present their views	No. There were no members who presented views
Board members made informed comments and asked appropriate questions regarding agenda items	No. There were no comments or questions by board members	Whenever possible, the Board withheld definite Board action until after the Supt's recommendations were presented	No. There was no action that needed the Supt to make recommendations.	Board members used the Board meeting time for genuine discussion and problem solving.	No. There was no Board discussion or problem solving.
Public Comment time available during meeting	Yes. Although provided with an opportunity, there were no public comments made during the meeting	When decisions were made, it was clear who should carry it out and when	No. There were no decisions made during the meeting	Trustees avoided negative, disrespectful or derogatory remarks to other Board members or presenters	Yes. The meeting was respectful
Public Board Meeting Approximate Time: 45 minutes					

Note. Data are from "Lakewood BOE video" https://drive.google.com/file/d/1u1y7ZlMxAp5HLGwyOIEJK-a_-DQCX3w/view?usp=sharing) and "Lakewood Board Docs", 2023 (<https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/lboe/Board.nsf/Public.>) provided by Lakewood Public School District, 2023

TABLE 4: LAKEWOOD REGULAR BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING, SEPTEMBER 20, 2023

Agenda		Operation of Mtg by Board President		Board Member Participation	
Indicators	Yes/No	Indicators	Yes/No	Indicators	Yes/No
Well-organized meeting agenda supported by necessary documentation	Yes. The agenda contained items and information to support the items	All Board Members were present	No. 3 Present (in-person) 2 Present (via Zoom) 4 Not Present	Board members kept their comments or questions focused on the agenda items	No. There were no agenda items discussed
Only agenda items were discussed	No. There was no discussion of any agenda items	The Board President guided the meeting effectively	No. The meeting was guided by the Board Secretary (Interim Business Administrator) and the Board Attorney, not Board president	Board president made certain all members had equal opportunity to present their views	No. There were no members who presented views
Board members made informed comments and asked appropriate questions regarding agenda items	No. There were no comments or questions by board members	Whenever possible, the Board withheld definite Board action until after the Supt's recommendations were presented	No. There was no action that needed the Supt to make recommendations.	Board members used the Board meeting time for genuine discussion and problem solving.	No. There was no Board discussion or problem solving.
Public Comment time available during meeting	Yes. Although provided with an opportunity, there were no public comments made during the meeting	When decisions were made, it was clear who should carry it out and when	No. There were no decisions made during the meeting	Trustees avoided negative, disrespectful or derogatory remarks to other Board members or presenters	Yes. The meeting was respectful
Public Board Meeting Approximate Time: 11 minutes					

Note. Data are from "Lakewood BOE video" (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kuest93WmGHfZ6JGGnJX03t17ZeEGYPw/view?usp=drive_link) and "Lakewood Board Docs", 2023, (<https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/lboe/Board.nsf/Public.>) provided by Lakewood Public School District

TABLE 5: LAKEWOOD REGULAR BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING, OCTOBER 18, 2023

Agenda		Operation of Mtg by Board President		Board Member Participation	
Indicators	Yes/No	Indicators	Yes/No	Indicators	Yes/No
Well-organized meeting agenda supported by necessary documentation	Yes. The agenda contained items and information to support the items	All Board Members were present	No. 5 Present (in-person) 4 Not Present	Board members kept their comments or questions focused on the agenda items	No. There were no agenda items discussed
Only agenda items were discussed	No. There was no discussion of any agenda items	The Board President guided the meeting effectively	No. The meeting was guided by the Board Secretary (Interim Business Administrator) and the Board Attorney, not Board president	Board president made certain all members had equal opportunity to present their views	No. There were no members who presented views
Board members made informed comments and asked appropriate questions regarding agenda items	No. There were no comments or questions by board members	Whenever possible, the Board withheld definite Board action until after the Supt's recommendations were presented	No. There was no action that needed the Supt to make recommendations.	Board members used the Board meeting time for genuine discussion and problem solving.	No. There was no Board discussion or problem solving.

Public Comment time available during meeting	Yes. Although provided with an opportunity, there were no public comments made during the meeting	When decisions were made, it was clear who should carry it out and when	No. There were no decisions made during the meeting	Trustees avoided negative, disrespectful or derogatory remarks to other Board members or presenters	Yes. The meeting was respectful
Public Board Meeting Approximate Time: 1 hour 10 minutes					

Note. Data are from "Lakewood BOE video" provided by Lakewood Public School District, 2023, (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mFC29EJM-s5fgwY1ukYq8Bu1Aawh3Ana/view>) and "Lakewood Board Docs" provided by Lakewood Public School District, 2023, (<https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/lboe/Board.nsf/Public>)

TABLE 6: LAKEWOOD REGULAR BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING, NOVEMBER 15, 2023

Agenda		Operation of Mtg by Board President		Board Member Participation	
Indicators	Yes/No	Indicators	Yes/No	Indicators	Yes/No
Well-organized meeting agenda supported by necessary documentation	Yes. The agenda contained items and information to support the items	All Board Members were present	No. 5 Present (in-person) 1 Present (via Zoom) 3 Not Present	Board members kept their comments or questions focused on the agenda items	No. There were no agenda items discussed
Only agenda items were discussed	No. There was no discussion of any agenda items	The Board President guided the meeting effectively	No. The meeting was guided by the Board Secretary (Interim Business Administrator) and the Board Attorney, not Board president	Board president made certain all members had equal opportunity to present their views	No. There were no members who presented views
Board members made informed comments and asked appropriate questions regarding agenda items	No. There were no comments or questions by board members	Whenever possible, the Board withheld definite Board action until after the Supt's recommendations were presented	No. There was no action that needed the Supt to make recommendations.	Board members used the Board meeting time for genuine discussion and problem solving.	No. There was no Board discussion or problem solving.
Public Comment time available during meeting	Yes. Although provided with an opportunity, there were no public comments made during the meeting	When decisions were made, it was clear who should carry it out and when	No. There were no decisions made during the meeting	Trustees avoided negative, disrespectful or derogatory remarks to other Board members or presenters	Yes. The meeting was respectful
Public Board Meeting Approximate Time: 1 hour 33 minutes					

Note: Data are from "Lakewood BOE video.", 2023 (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CmsxoPdUdtWVKZfDXfRvUmrg1HmsNqQ/view>) and "Lakewood Board Docs", 2023, (<https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/lboe/Board.nsf/Public>.) provided by Lakewood Public School District

TABLE 7: REGULAR BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING, DECEMBER 15, 2023

Agenda		Operation of Mtg by Board President		Board Member Participation	
Indicators	Yes/No	Indicators	Yes/No	Indicators	Yes/No
Well-organized meeting agenda supported by necessary documentation	Yes. The agenda contained items and information to support the items	All Board Members were present	No. 7 Present (in-person) 1 Present (late arrival) 1 Not Present	Board members kept their comments or questions focused on the agenda items	No. There were no agenda items discussed
Only agenda items were discussed	No. There was no discussion of any agenda items	The Board President guided the meeting effectively	No. The meeting was guided by the Board Secretary (Interim Business	Board president made certain all members had equal opportunity to present their views	No. There were no members who presented views

			Administrator) and the Board Attorney, not Board president		
Board members made informed comments and asked appropriate questions regarding agenda items	No. There were no comments or questions by board members	Whenever possible, the Board withheld definite Board action until after the Supt's recommendations were presented	No. There was no action that needed the Supt to make recommendations.	Board members used the Board meeting time for genuine discussion and problem solving.	No. There was no Board discussion or problem solving.
Public Comment time available during meeting	Yes. Although provided with an opportunity, there were no public comments made during the meeting	When decisions were made, it was clear who should carry it out and when	No. There were no decisions made during the meeting	Trustees avoided negative, disrespectful or derogatory remarks to other Board members or presenters	Yes. The meeting was respectful
Public Board Meeting Approximate Time: 30 minutes					

Note. Retrieved from "Lakewood Board Docs", provided by Lakewood Public School District (<https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/lboe/Board.nsf/Public>)

TABLE 8: LAKEWOOD AGGREGATED BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING DATA FROM JULY-DECEMBER 2023

Agenda		Operation of Mtg by Board President		Board Member Participation	
Indicators	Percentage of Meetings Adhering to Indicator	Indicators	Percentage of Meetings Adhering to Indicator	Indicators	Percentage of Meetings Adhering to Indicator
Well-organized meeting agenda supported by necessary documentation	100%	All Board Members were present	0%	Board members kept their comments or questions focused on the agenda items	0% <i>(no comment or questions were made)</i>
Only agenda items were discussed	100%	The Board President guided the meeting effectively	0%	Board president made certain all members had equal opportunity to present their views	0%
Board members made informed comments and asked appropriate questions regarding agenda items	0%	Whenever possible, the Board withheld definite Board action until after the Supt's recommendations were presented	0%	Board members used the Board meeting time for genuine discussion and problem solving.	0%
Public Comment time available during meeting	100%	When decisions were made, it was clear who should carry it out and when	0%	Trustees avoided negative, disrespectful or derogatory remarks to other Board members or presenters	100%
Average Public Board Meeting Approximate Time: 42 minutes (range: 5 minutes to 1 hour 33 minutes)					

Note. Retrieved from "Lakewood Board Docs", provided by Lakewood Public School District (<https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/lboe/Board.nsf/Public>)

Overall:

- All meetings had well-organized meeting agendas supported by necessary documentation.
- Board members were not observed making comments or asking questions at any meeting.
- While public comment was available at every meeting, PCG only observed one public comment from a local reporter asking a question.
- No board meeting had all members present.
- The Board President did not facilitate/lead any board meetings observed by PCG
- There were no Board actions that required the Superintendent's input.
- There was no Board discussion, problem-solving or decision-making observed.
- PCG did not observe any negative, disrespectful or derogatory remarks by Board members.

Comparable Districts' Board of Education Meetings- December 2023

Aggregated Data Collected from Jersey City, Jackson, Toms River, and Brick Boards of Education Regular Meetings held during December 2023 (video and agenda reviewed for each Board meeting)

TABLE 9: AGGREGATED BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING DATA (DECEMBER 2023)

Agenda		Operation of Mtg by Board President		Board Member Participation	
Indicators	Percentage of Boards Adhering to Indicator	Indicators	Percentage of Boards Adhering to Indicator	Indicators	Percentage of Boards Adhering to Indicator
Well-organized meeting agenda supported by necessary documentation	75%	All Board Members were present	50%	Board members kept their comments or questions focused on the agenda items	75%
Only agenda items were discussed	75%	The Board President guided the meeting effectively	75%	Board president made certain all members had equal opportunity to present their views	75%
Board members made informed comments and asked appropriate questions regarding agenda items	100%	Whenever possible, the Board withheld definite Board action until after the Supt's recommendations were presented	100%	Board members used the Board meeting time for genuine discussion and problem solving.	75%
Public Comment time available during meeting	100%	When decisions were made, it was clear who should carry it out and when	75%	Trustees avoided negative, disrespectful or derogatory remarks to other Board members or presenters	75%
Average Public Board Meeting Approximate Time: 2 hours					

Note. Retrieved from "Brick Township Public Schools BOE" by Board Meeting Video, 2023, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r63kDiVv1E&t=5715s>); "Agenda" by Brick Township Public Schools (<https://www.brickschools.org/our-district/board-of-education/mms/>); "Jackson Public Schools BOE" Board Meeting Video, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/@BrickBOEAgenda>; Agenda, <https://www.jacksonsd.org/Page/7367>; "Jersey City Public Schools BOE" Board Meeting Video, Dec 14, 2023, https://www.jcboe.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1577781&type=d&pREC_ID=1705346; Agenda, <https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/jcps/Board.nsf/Public?open&id=policies#>; "Toms River Regional Schools BOE" Board Meeting Video, Dec 20, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-luzA3f3EQ>; Agenda, https://www.trschools.com/administration/docs/2023/12/_01-Agenda-December-20,-2023.pdf.

Lakewood Board of Education Meetings Data Analysis

The Lakewood Board of Education meetings had very little data to analyze. The meetings were short, focused more on presentations and less on discussion and action regarding important Board business. The following items were observed that did not align with practices of comparable Districts or recommendations from the New Jersey School Boards Association:

- **Board Attendance.** Board attendance was under 50% at most meetings. The outlier was the Board meeting that PCG attended on December 15, 2023, of which the District was informed in advance of PCG's attendance. That meeting had only one Board member not in attendance. Of all the meetings observed from July 2023 to December 2023, it was the only meeting that 8 out of 9 Board members attended a regular Board meeting.
- **Board Meeting Operations.** In all observed meetings, the Lakewood Board of Education meetings were not led by the Board president, but rather the Interim Business Administrator and the Board's Attorney. This practice does not align with Lakewood Policy 0164-Conduct of Board Meeting.¹⁷ The policy states that *"the President shall preside at all meetings of the Board. In the absence, disability, or disqualification of the President, the Vice President shall act in his/her place; if neither person is*

¹⁷ Lakewood School Board Policy Manual. (n.d). Policy 0164 CONDUCT OF BOARD MEETING

present, any member shall be designated by a plurality of those present to preside.” That policy is read at the beginning of each board meeting by the Interim Business Administrator but is not followed as read. Moreover, according to the New Jersey School Boards Association’s Basic Parliamentary Procedures, the person presiding over a meeting is referred to as the chair or chairperson. Usually, that individual is the board president. The principle duties of the chair per the New Jersey School Board Association are to:

- open the meeting at the appointed time;
- announce in proper sequence the order of business or agenda;
- recognize members who are entitled to the floor;
- state and to put to vote all motions, and to announce the result of each vote;
- rule if a motion is made that is out of order; protect against obviously frivolous or dilatory motions;
- enforce the rules relating to debate and those relating to order and decorum;
- expedite business in every way compatible with the rights of members;
- decide all questions of order, subject to appeal;
- respond to inquiries of members relating to parliamentary procedure or factual information bearing on the business of the assembly; and
- declare the meeting adjourned when the assembly so votes or, when applicable, at the time prescribed in the program, or at any other time in the event of a sudden emergency affecting the safety of those present.

During portions of some Lakewood Board of Education meetings the Superintendent participated in discussion on presentations or awards; however, the Superintendent did not take an active role in Board meetings, but rather deferred to the Board Attorney. This behavior was a sharp contrast to all other comparable Districts. In all comparable Districts, the board presidents and superintendents led the meetings in accordance with Roberts Rules of Order.¹⁸

- **Board Meeting Business.** Board meetings lacked action items, discussion on any agenda items such as presentations from staff, or any old or new board meetings. That was not true of the comparable school boards where old and new business were presented and discussed, action items were voted on, and the Board actively participated.
- **Board Committee Meetings.** There have been no committee reports during public board meetings for at least the past six months. The Board Committee assignments currently posted on the Lakewood School District website is dated February 28, 2022.¹⁹ Additionally, there were no committee meetings dates posted or agenda/minutes publicly available. All other comparable school boards shared committee meeting business and minutes during the public session of the school board.
- **Consent Agenda.** The consent agenda was used throughout the board agenda. Typically, all items in a consent agenda are voted as an entire package without discussion unless a board member requests the removal of an item. Because no questions or comments are held on the consent agenda content, this procedure saves time.²⁰ With most agenda items within the consent agenda, the board meetings are much shorter than the comparable school board meetings. The average public meeting time for the observed Lakewood School Board meeting was 42 minutes while comparable Districts, who do not use consent agendas in the same way, if at all, averaged two hours per board meeting.
- **Financial Business.** There were no observed board meetings that discussed financial issues or presented detailed information regarding budgets. All budget information was placed on the consent agenda and did not have any details or discussion by board members. In contrast, the

¹⁸ Robert, R.M., Honemann, D., Balch, T. & all. (2020). *Roberts Rules of Order*, Newly Revised, 12th Edition. NY. Public Affairs.

¹⁹ *Board Committee Structure*. (2022). Lakewood School District Website

²⁰ *Consent Agendas*. (2023). Board Source. <https://boardsource.org/resources/consent-agendas/>

comparable Districts reported on financial/business, prepared presentations, or participated in discussions focused on finances in 100% of the board meetings observed by PCG.

- **Policy Discussions.** There were no policy discussions held during any meeting since both the first and second readings of policies were placed on the consent agenda. Some boards may utilize a committee structure, where certain members of the board typically collaborate with the superintendent or other administrators to work on policy development and make recommendations to the full board for a vote. That is the process used by all the comparable school Districts, but it was not visible in Lakewood. Both the first and second readings of policies were on the consent agenda and never discussed. During the comparable board meetings, if new or revised policies were on the agenda, the policy was read and discussed if requested.

Board Adherence to Governance Best Practices

In addition to the Board of Education meetings, PCG collected data from focus groups, interviews, and document reviews to provide an overall analysis of the Lakewood Board Governance. PCG used the five best practice categories described earlier in the chapter to frame our analysis.

- **Create a Shared Vision.** The Lakewood Board of Education has a mission developed in 2007. The mission states, *“Lakewood Public Schools is a diverse educational community of students, staff and parents who work cooperatively to create a positive and safe environment where all students learn and reach their full potential through an academic emphasis on the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards.... We modify programs and offer supports as necessary to assure access and progress for students with disabilities in the general education programs; help students reach their full potential; and promote intellectual, physical, moral social and cultural growth through curricular and co-curricular programs available to all.”*

This mission statement is posted on a Board webpage on the District’s website. There is no vision statement or goals on the District’s website. As a comparison, all comparable Districts have posted mission statements, and most have vision and goals that were accessible on their school District website.

- **Define Goals.** The Lakewood Public School District website, including the School Board page, does not define goals for the District. PCG asked school board members focus group participants about the *Board’s* vision and goals for student success. Responses were not aligned and appeared to be personal thoughts rather than clearly articulated goals and objectives that the Board had developed as a governance group.

The Superintendent reportedly presented a PowerPoint²¹ on District goals annually at a Board Meeting. The District goals for the 2023-2024 school year include:

- Goal 1: Improve Student Achievement
- Goal 2: Student Wellness
- Goal 3: Student & Staff Attendance
- Goal 4: Fiscal Stability
- Goal 5: Strengthen Community Relations
- Goal 6: Safety & Security
- Goal 7: Increase the Graduation Rate & Decrease the Dropout Rate

Although some of the board answers during focus groups mentioned attendance and school discipline as goals, not one Board member spoke about the Superintendent’s yearly presentation. It is difficult to conclude if that lack of information was just forgotten by each board member, or if the goals belong to the Superintendent and are not directly connected to the board members.

²¹ *Lakewood Public School District’s Goals for the 2023-2024 School Year.* (2023). Lakewood Public School District website.

- **Develop Policies.** The School Board agenda and minutes reviewed for this analysis provided the titles of new or updated policies placed on the agenda. However, in no instance were Board policies read, reviewed, discussed, or questioned by any board member in a public meeting. In other comparable Districts, when policies were on the Board agenda, a member of the Policy Committee would read and review the policy and open the item to other Board members for discussion. In two Lakewood Board of Education meetings, October 18 and November 15, there were a significant number of new and revised policies placed on the agenda (25 policies and 13 regulations combined between the two meetings). Such a large quantity of policies requires a significant amount of time to review, write and/or revise. It is unclear as to the level of involvement of school board policy committee members, as there are no policy committee meetings reported during the full Board meeting. There were no policy committee minutes publicly available or any policy committee business discussed at Board meetings. Additionally, without reading and discussing policies (first and second readings), Board members are not able to inform the public about changes and additions to policies that will require adherence from members of the school District community. Policy practices are discussed in further detail later in this chapter.
- **Build Relationships.** Both school board members and the Superintendent shared during interviews and focus groups that they had a productive, professional relationship. School board members took pride in their efforts to build relationships within the community but admitted that it was difficult at times when so many families were native Spanish speakers. However, Board members were proud that meetings, both virtually and in-person, are translated in real time. They shared they do not often hear from parents and rarely receive emails or calls even though they said their numbers and emails are published on the District website. However, PCG was not able to locate Board contact information such as email addresses, phone numbers, or other contact information on the website. Most written Board materials (minutes, agendas, etc.) are not translated into Spanish.
- **Monitor the Budget.** Board of Education members have responsibilities monitoring the budget according to the New Jersey School Boards Association. The requirement of oversight is clearly documented by the NJSBA in the *Boards Role in Finance & Budget Development* guidance previously referenced. During every Lakewood Board Meeting reviewed between July 2023 and December 2023, there was never a forum, discussion, or questions regarding the budget. There may have been discussion at some other time in a non-public setting. However, Lakewood does not use a 'pre-meeting' structure to review the items on the agenda and, as reported during interviews and focus groups, some Board members never open their Board packet mailed to them until the day of the Board meeting. In all four comparison Districts' Board meetings, discussions were held on the lack of adequate funds due to the continuation of the NJ S2²² school funding formula and the required cuts needed in their budgets. The cuts discussed by comparable Districts included staffing, which would lead to increased class size, after school activities, and other programs.

During interviews and focus groups, it was stated that Board involvement with budget development is minimal. Budget development is based on a formula of adding a percentage to the prior year's budget and making additional adjustments when necessary. During more than one interview, it was stated that the District would not be able to develop a balanced budget without the additional funds from the New Jersey Department of Education as that additional revenue kept the District open. When asked if there was a plan to pay the money back to the state, it was confirmed that the District had no plan developed to repay the funds.

When Board members were questioned about District finances, the response heard from multiple members was that the New Jersey state monitor shared with them that "Lakewood has a revenue

²² NJ S2. (2018). <https://pub.njleg.gov/bills/2018/>.

issue, not a spending issue.” Additionally, when further asked about the budget, some responses included:

- Board members are aware of the numbers in the budget but not entirely familiar with the details, given the complicated nature of the school budgets.
- Not cutting staff is a budget priority.
- The state monitor has never found anything that is not needed in the budget.
- Lakewood Township provides substantial financial support on items that the District cannot afford such as courtesy busing.

When reviewing comparable Districts, most meetings included board and superintendent discussion focused on current funding as well as next year’s funding. There was information provided for the board and public of possible consequences due to the final revenue cuts from New Jersey’s S2 funding bill. Parents attended the board meetings and spoke about their concerns during public input. In Lakewood, there was little, if any, public input during meetings. However, there were a few meetings where the Board Attorney solicited parents from the audience to speak to the Board about the positive experiences their students had participating in different school sponsored activities.

Board of Education Policymaking Practices

Policymaking is one of the school board’s most important roles. Through policymaking, a school board defines its vision for the District, the structure for accomplishing its goal — including the allocation of resources, and the system of accountability for achieving those goals. Board of Education policies also establish a legal record for the school District. How a school board approaches its policymaking responsibility is a strong indicator of whether it is an effective board in a high-achieving District.²³ According to the National School Boards Association, policy governance is not just updating the policy manual, but rather it is an opportunity to shape and modify the school District’s future through discussion, debate and consideration of important issues contained in board policy. Boards that understand the importance of policy development and implementation can be more effective as a school board.²⁴

In Lakewood, school board policies are consistently on the Board’s consent agenda for updating. Some meetings have many policies and regulations listed. However, as previously noted, there is no public discussion regarding the policy additions or updates to inform the public as to the direction and vision of the board. Some board policies are mandated by the state due to changes in the laws and regulations, however many are developed by the board to set expectations and align to their vision and goals. Unfortunately, without reviewing and updating policies with open discussions and questions, the public, including families and staff, do not build an understanding of the board’s direction and the outcomes attained through changes in policy.

PCG has highlighted three sample policies that have a big impact on the school District and its operations as an example of how the policy or regulation changes may have long term impact on the District.

Policy 5112: Entrance Age²⁵

Policy 5112, Entrance Age was mentioned multiple times as a concern during school-based staff focus groups. The policy states, “A child whose fifth birthday occurs on or before December 31 of any year will be admitted to Kindergarten after September 1 of the same year, subject to established residency and registration requirements”.²⁶ This policy was created in 2013.

²³ Ashley, J.H. (2014). *Policymaking is the Work of School Boards*. Viewpoint. https://wasb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/viewpoint_dec_2014.pdf.

²⁴ *The Key Work of School Boards Guidebook*. (2011). National School Boards Association. <https://tsba.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Key-Work-Cover-and-Text-20Jan15.pdf>.

²⁵ *Lakewood School District Policy Manual*. (n.d.). Lakewood Board of Education. <https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/lboe/Board.nsf/Public>

²⁶ Ibid

The concern regarding the policy is that in a typical New Jersey classroom, students entering kindergarten must turn five-years old by October 1st of that given school year, which means four-year old students are only present during the first month of school. In a Lakewood classroom, where the Board policy admits students who will not turn five-years old until December 31st, the difference is even greater. It is not unusual in any given school year to have a Lakewood kindergarten classroom consisting of four-, five-, and six-year-old students for the first four months of the school year. All comparable New Jersey Districts had a student's entrance age dependent on the October 1st birthdate.

Table 10 shows the number of students enrolling in Kindergarten before the New Jersey state cut off recommended date October 1st and students who turned five between October 1st through December 31st during the 2023-2024 school year. Students who turned five after October 1st account for 16% of the kindergarten student body.

TABLE 10: AGE OF ENROLLED KINDERGARTENERS, 2023-2024

	Turned 5 before October 1 st	Turned 5 between Oct 1 st and Dec31 st	Turned 5 after December 31 st
Total Grade K Enrollment	478	89	1

Note. Retrieved from "NJ SMART Data Extract, 2023" provided by Lakewood Public School District

Focus group participants reported how this policy impacts other grades. For example, a 3rd grade teacher shared that students in her class range from seven to ten years old. A 4th grade teacher noted the age range for her class is eight to eleven years old.

Studies have shown that in the early stages of school age children development, there is a significant difference in terms of maturity, behavior, and cognitive abilities between children during those stages of development.²⁷ Cognitive development for students that may be enrolled in a Lakewood kindergarten classroom can be substantially different. The gaps in literacy development can be only able to recognize a few letters as a four-year old to spelling their first name and other words as a six-year old. The same gaps are present in math as well. Those gaps continue as the student moves into upper grades.

A study from the National Bureau of Economics focused on the entry age for students found that children who start school at an older age do better than their younger classmates and have better odds of attending college.²⁸ The study suggests that if one looks at standardized test scores, the achievement gap could be equivalent to about 40 points on the 1600-point SAT.

Additionally, there is also evidence that the age at which children begin school can change the likelihood that a child is placed in special education or diagnosed with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).²⁹ This large body of work provides consistent evidence that the youngest students in a grade cohort are more likely to receive both ADHD diagnoses and special education placements than are the oldest students. The study used a regression discontinuity design, which found that the youngest students in a kindergarten cohort are 40% more likely to be placed in special education than are the oldest students, and that this effect persists through eighth grade. Moreover, the author suggests that this effect is largest

²⁷Kuntsi, J. (2021). *Younger children in a school class at greater risk of long-term negative outcomes like low educational achievement and substance misuse*. Kings College London. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/younger-children-in-a-school-class-at-greater-risk-of-long-term-negative-outcomes-like-low-educational-achievement-and-substance-misuse>.

²⁸Dhuey, E., Figlio, D., Karbownik, K., & Roth, J. (2019). *School Starting Age and Cognitive Development*. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pam.22135>

²⁹Shapiro, J. (2022, June 19). *Exceptional Children. Over Diagnosed or Over Looked? The Effect of Age at Time of School Entry on Students Receiving Special Education Services*. Exceptional Children. Sage Journal. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00144029221108735#tab->

in schools with kindergarten cohorts that vary widely in age similar to Lakewood where the student school age entry can be as late as December 31st of a school year.

This policy seems particularly problematic when coupled with the higher rates of students with disabilities within the Lakewood Public School District. This policy is one example of the need for robust and public policy discussions and the potential long-range impact of policy decisions made by the school board.

Policy 2330: Homework and Policy 7523 - School District Provided Technology Devices to Pupils³⁰

PCG also identified a number of outdated policies. Some outdated policies directly impact teaching and learning practices and require a thoughtful approach by the Board to address the issues. The current Policy 2330-Homework and Policy 7523 - School District Provided Technology Devices to Pupils are two outdated policies that are intertwined for students, especially at the middle and high school level.

The Technology Device Policy (7523) was written in 2013 and does not address the instructional approach in 2024. Part of the outdated policy states:

A technology device made available to pupils will not be considered a textbook or supply, as defined in N.J.S.A. 18A:34-1, mandatory to a successful completion of the classroom curriculum. Therefore, because a technology device defined in this Policy is not mandatory to a successful completion of a pupil's classroom curriculum, a pupil will not be required to obtain a technology device provided by the school District as defined in this Policy. In the event the school District provides a technology device that is deemed mandatory to a successful completion of the classroom curriculum, the District will provide pupils with such a technology device consistent with its textbook or supply policies. Nothing in this Policy prohibits a pupil from using their personal technology device in accordance with school rules and regulations.

Most instruction at Lakewood High uses a SMART Board, a District provided PowerPoint and a Chromebook with Google Classroom installed. Technology is a primary resource for student learning. In many instances, students do not have traditional textbooks, but rather digital textbooks or supplemental instructional materials on their Chromebooks. Additionally, most assignments are completed and turned in through a student assigned Google Classroom account. During classrooms observations, PCG computers to be an integral part of the curriculum in nearly all classrooms.

In addition to in-class assignments, homework is assigned using the personalized Google Classroom accounts. The *Homework Policy* (2330) was also last updated in 2013 and states that in most cases students do not require a computer to complete their assignments. Historically, that may have been true, but now, at both the elementary and secondary level, a computer is needed to complete assignments. However, many high school students focus group shared that they do not have a computer in their home. Without equitable access to appropriate technology, students reported using their personal cell phones to complete homework assignments, which may not be conducive to producing quality work, or just not completing computer-based assignments. Some teacher focus group participants shared they assign minimal homework or only paper-based homework for this reason. The District does not allow students to take home district-purchased devices.

It is difficult to understand how much the school board is aware of their policy impact on student achievement since there is no public discussion as to the content of policies or even the process for bringing policies for review and revision to the classroom. However, PCG observed its direct impact. In one classroom that PCG observed, a teacher spoke to her students about missing assignments and low grades. Many students requested "extra credit" to prevent from failing.

³⁰ *Lakewood School District Policy Manual*. (n.d.). Lakewood Board of Education. <https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/lboe/Board.nsf/Public>

There does not appear to be a standard revision timeline or process for identifying school board policies that need a substantive review, or that may present barriers to improved student achievement.

Policy 5536: Random Testing for Student Alcohol or Other Drug Use³¹

The Random Testing for Student Alcohol or Other Drug Use policy was adopted in April 2021 after the New Jersey Legislature passed legislation for the random testing of school District students from grades six through twelve who:

- participate in the school District's interscholastic athletic program
- participate in the school District's extra-curricular program,
- receive a school District authorized parking permit to park a personal vehicle on school district property, and
- voluntarily elect to participate in the program with parental consent

The Board's policy allows the District to randomly test up to 10 percent of the students participating in the program on a monthly basis. The District's random drug and alcohol testing program tests for the use of controlled dangerous substances including alcohol, and anabolic steroids. This information is provided to each parent and student with a required consent form. If parents do not sign a consent form, or do not allow their student to be tested after they have been randomly selected, the student is no longer able to participate in any District program. None of the comparable Districts have adopted this policy. With the movement of sixth grade students out of middle school and into elementary schools, there is now a possibility of elementary students being drug tested.

PCG reviewed the process for adopting the policy. In communication to parents, it was stated that the Board held a public hearing on the adoption of Policy 5536- Random Drug and Alcohol Testing. PCG reviewed the minutes of the April 21, 2021 board meeting, when the policy was passed under the Superintendent's consent agenda. There were no public hearing minutes available. The minutes also stated there was no public comment made at the meeting. Therefore, it is unclear as to how the public was able to provide input on a policy that could directly impact their children.

School Board Governance Findings

- **Public Access.** Board meetings were only shown live to the public on Board meeting night. There are no Board meetings posted on the District website or other virtual platforms. The District shared recorded board meeting videos through a Google Drive account upon PCG's request. When viewed live, there is a staff member providing translation services throughout the Board meeting, however the recording PCG received was only in English. Additionally, one of the board meeting videos consisted of only "highlights" rather than the full board meeting. Not providing access to board meetings 'on demand' limits public knowledge and understanding of Lakewood initiatives and creates a gap in communication between the District and the community it serves.
- **Board Meeting Procedures.** Board meetings are not led by the Board President or Vice President in the President's absence in accordance with Roberts' Rules of Order, which is outlined in Policy 0164, Conduct of Board.^{32, 33} The School Board Attorney leads most of the meetings and directs the Board members and Superintendent throughout the meeting. The level of control the Board Attorney assumes during Board meetings was not observed in the comparable Districts. Additionally, the Lakewood Superintendent did not take an active role during the Board meetings and was deferential to the Board Attorney. This behavior was not observed in the comparable Districts, all of which were better aligned with the recommended New Jersey Parliamentary Procedures.

³¹ *Lakewood School District Policy Manual*. (n.d.). Lakewood Board of Education. <https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/lboe/Board.nsf/Public>

³² *Roberts Rules of Order*. (2020)

³³ *Lakewood Board Policy*. (n.d.). 0164- CONDUCT OF BOARD MEETING

- **Communication:** Board business was not discussed during public meetings observed by PCG. Between July 9 through December 13, 2023, 0% of the Regular Board meetings included Old Business, New Business, Committee Reports, or Communication reports. There was no discussion on any substantive item during any Board meeting from July 9, 2023 to December 13, 2023.
- **Action Items:** All action items were bundled into two consent agendas, approval of the minutes, and a motion to dismiss. In the six months of board meetings observed, there were no individual action items on other board business such as polices, finance reports, new programs, etc. Since most of the action items fell under the consent agenda, there was no discussion to inform the public on board business. All comparable Districts took action and engaged in discussion.
- **Board Committees:** Board Committee agendas and/or minutes are not posted, discussed during Board meetings, or recorded for public viewing. Since there were no meeting minutes, it was unclear if any Board committee meetings were held during the previous six months.
- **Financial Reporting:** No financial reporting or discussion occurred during any observed Board meeting. The financial report is approved within the consent agenda with no comments from the administration or questions by Board members.
- **Policy Development:** Board meeting agendas contained policy updates and new policies; however, there was no policy discussion (either first or second readings) during any of the observed meetings. PCG found outdated and/or ill-informed policies that directly impact student learning.

ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM GOVERNANCE

The role of governance is the responsibility of the local school board; however, the Superintendent and the administrative team are tasked with guiding the school board and implementing their decisions.

Best Practices Framework

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) Superintendent Standards outlines the critical knowledge and skills that superintendents must employ to be effective leaders within their Districts.³⁴ PCG used these standards to determine how strong the alignment is between the current practice of the Lakewood Superintendent and the administrative team and the best practices highlighted by the AASA.

The Standards include:

- **Leadership and District Culture.** The superintendent works in a collegial and collaborative manner with school personnel and the community to promote and support the mission and goals of the school District while creating an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect with staff and community.
- **Policy and Governance.** The superintendent develops procedures for working with the board of education that define mutual expectations, working relationships and strategies for formulating District policies.
- **Communications and Community Relations.** The superintendent promotes effective communication and interpersonal relations within the District. In addition, works collaboratively with staff, families, and community members to secure resources and to support the success of a diverse student population.

³⁴ DiPaola, M. F. (2010). *Evaluating the Superintendent*. A White paper from the American Association of School Administrators. <https://www.aasa.org/docs/default-source/resources/reports/Evaluating-the-Superintendent>.

- **Organizational Management.** The superintendent effectively manages human, material, and financial resources to ensure student learning and to comply with the state mandates.
- **Curriculum Planning and Development.** The superintendent plans, implements, supports and assesses instructional programs that enhance teaching and student achievement of the state educational standards.
- **Instructional Management.** The superintendent functions as the primary instructional leader for the District, relying on support from staff as necessary when advising the school board.
- **Human Resources Management.** The superintendent implements sound personnel procedures in recruiting, employing and retaining the best-qualified and most competent teachers, administrators and other personnel.
- **Values and Ethics of Leadership.** The superintendent models professional, moral, and ethical standards as well as personal integrity in all interactions.

PCG collected and analyzed data based on the following standards. Not all standards were reviewed here as the focus areas are being addressed in other sections of the report.

Leadership and District Culture

District leaders, from principal supervisors to superintendents, play a critical role in establishing a culture of growth, satisfaction, and impact. School culture is the foundation on which effective schools are built. The same is true for Districts. The key ingredients, of a positive school and District culture includes:

- Establishing a shared school mission, values and behaviors focused on academic and social-emotional success for every student.
- Building and maintaining meaningful relationships among teachers and staff and creating an environment where all members feel safe, valued, and seen.
- Purposefully engaging families and communities in mutual partnerships that promote the well-being of students, families, and the community.³⁵

Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of the Lakewood Public School District is shown in Figure 6. The organization's reporting structure is designed with many administrators reporting directly to the Superintendent.

- The superintendent has 24 direct reports.
- There is no Assistant Superintendent.
- Direct reports include nine principals that are represented by one box within the organizational chart.
- The Board of Education Attorney reports directly to the Board of Education. Typically, in most Districts, including the comparable Districts, the only position that reports to the Board is the Superintendent. If they have a Board Attorney on staff, that person reports to the Superintendent.
- The number of direct reports to the Superintendent is much higher than other Districts. For example, in Toms River, the direct reports of the superintendent is seven.³⁶ In Brick, there are five direct reports.³⁷ Both of those Districts show that the only staff position reporting to the school board is the superintendent.

³⁵ *Innovative Ways to Create A Positive School (and District) Culture.* (n.d.). New Leaders, Leadership Changes Everything. <https://www.newleaders.org/blog/innovative-ways-to-create-a-positive-school-and-district-culture>

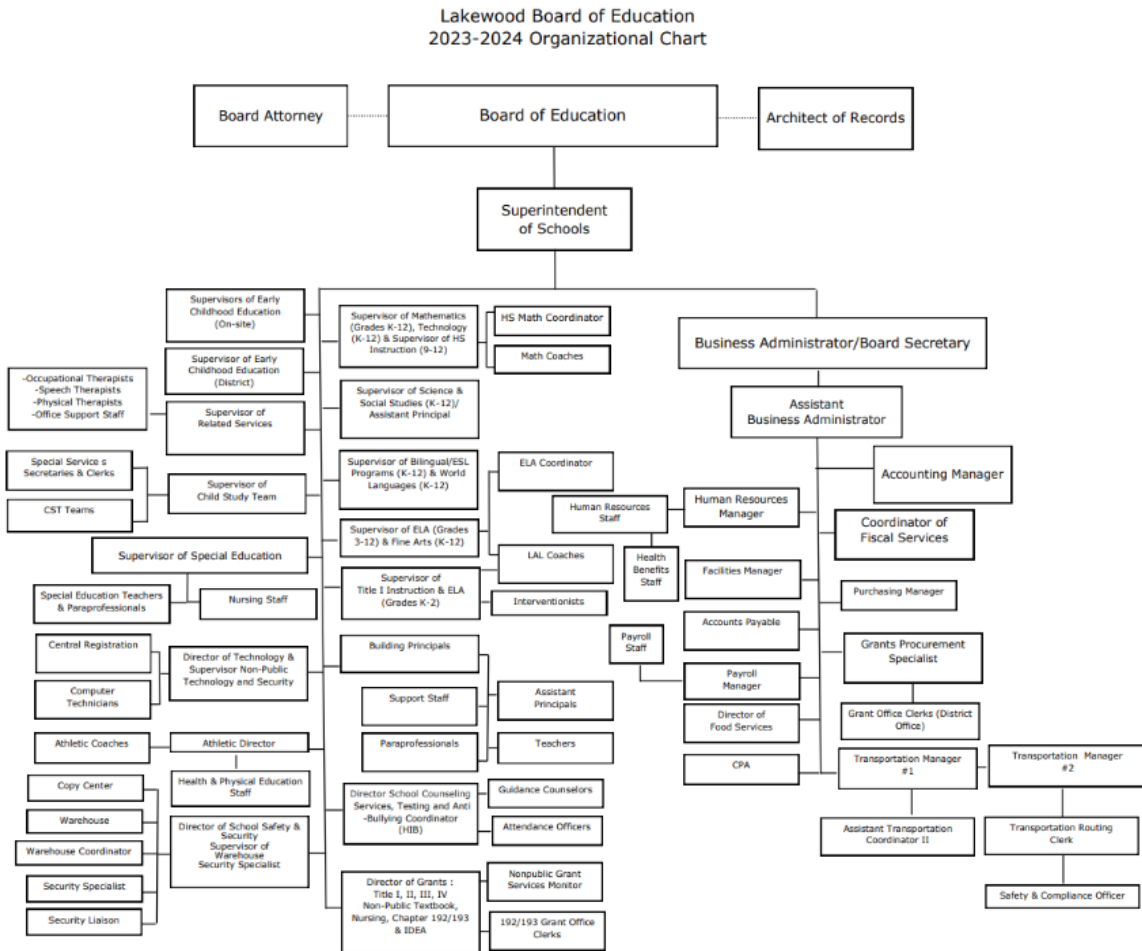
³⁶ *Toms River Organization Flow Chart.* (2023). Toms River Regional Schools. https://www.trschools.com/administration/docs/2023/08/_Organizational-Flow-Chart-TRRS-2023_2024.pdf

³⁷ *Brick Township Public Schools Organizational Chart* (2021). Brick Township Board of Education, Brick, New Jersey <https://www.nj.gov/education/finance/fp/acfr/search/21/0530.pdf>

- All comparable Districts had at least one assistant superintendent.

When meeting in focus groups and interviews with Central Office staff, there seemed to be confusion about which positions had more influence. The principals reported that the curriculum supervisors hold more influential positions than principals, which impacts their decision-making authority. However, the curriculum supervisors believed the principals were at a higher level, even though they need to ask curriculum supervisors' permission to make changes to their school's instructional schedule. The Superintendent reported that both groups were at the same level in the organization as they were in the same collective bargaining unit.

FIGURE 6: LAKEWOOD BOARD OF EDUCATION 2023-2024 ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



Revised & Board Approved: August 23, 2023

Note. Retrieved from "Lakewood Organizational Chart", 2024, provided by Lakewood Public School District

Role of Board of Education's Attorney

School board attorneys are employed by school boards to represent their Districts in legal matters. Their job duties include offering advice on legal and policy matters, researching legal issues, and representing the school District in litigation matters.³⁸ The Lakewood Board of Education Attorney's duties encompass legal and policy matters, as well as litigation. However, the Lakewood Board of Education attorney plays a

³⁸ *Advisors Guiding School Boards on Legal Matters*. (n.d.). National Schools Board Association. <https://www.nsba.org/Services/Council-of-School-Attorneys/What-School-Lawyers-Do>.

far more active role than the typical board attorney in District business. The Board Attorney stated that his role is not only Board Attorney, but he also provides the District a service similar to a Communications Director. He speaks with the press, conducts video presentations, and ensures the messages coming from the District are similar. In most Districts, these duties are the role of a Communications Director or the Superintendent.

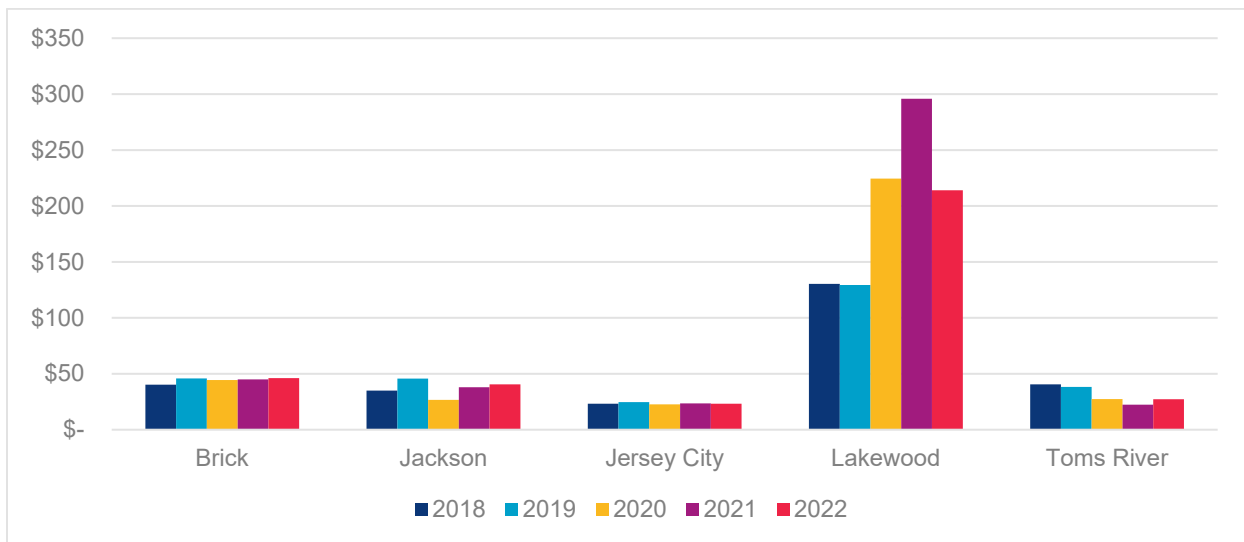
Moreover, when viewing the District’s board meetings, the Board of Education Attorney leads much of the board sessions. He engages with the public providing additional information about the students presenting and oversees the flow of the meeting, which is typically the Board chair’s role.

Legal Expenses

For the Financial Practices Analysis, PCG partnered with accounting firm AAFCPA to analyze expenditures that were out of the expected norm for a category. AAFCPA used the Budgetary Comparison Schedule’s from Exhibit C-1 in the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) to determine Legal services line items and used the Actual amounts to compare the expense over a 5-year period for Lakewood and the comparison districts, as shown in Figure 7: Legal Expense By District Per Pupil By Year. AAFCPAs used the actual expense during the given school year and divided by cost per pupil. Lakewood’s legal expenses per pupil are significantly higher than the comparison districts. It is further noted that there was a significant increase in expenses between 2019 - 2020 and 2020 - 2021. This increase is not consistent with any of the other comparison districts.

AAFCPAs noted there is a decrease between 2021 - 2022, but the legal cost per pupil is still over four times the amount of the next highest district. Looking at the table below, that compares total legal expenses from C-1, Lakewood still has the highest legal expenses among all the districts in the analysis.³⁹

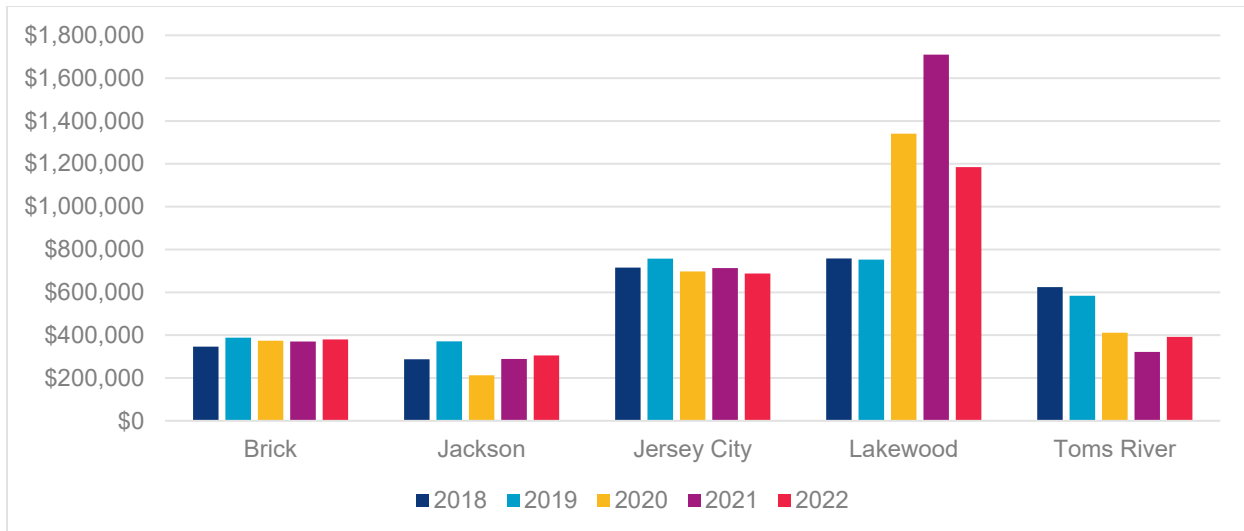
FIGURE 7: LEGAL EXPENSE BY DISTRICT PER PUPIL BY YEAR



Note. Retrieved from “Budgetary Comparison Schedule from Exhibit C-1 in the ACFR” provided by Lakewood Public School District

³⁹ Only Lakewood public school student numbers were included in this analysis.

FIGURE 8: TOTAL LEGAL EXPENSE BY DISTRICT BY YEAR



Note. Retrieved from "Budgetary Comparison Schedule from Exhibit C-1 in the ACFR" provided by Lakewood Public School District

State Monitor

The District currently has a state monitor assigned by the State of New Jersey. A District qualifies for a monitor subsequent to specific fiscal characteristics as specified in *N.J.S.A.18A:7A-55*. During PCG's review, there was a transition from one state monitor to another. In PCG's interviews, both state monitors were empathetic to the District and its financial issues. The first monitor shared that under his authority he can overturn any decision that the Board of Education and Superintendent make, but he had not had to do so. He saw his job as helping to develop the decision-making capacity of the District on their own. The current state monitor is a former Business Administrator for the District and has extensive knowledge of Lakewood's financial situation. His former relationship with the District may present some barriers to the impartiality required for his current position.

Culture of Low Expectations

PCG observed a districtwide culture of low expectations for students in interviews, focus groups, survey responses, and classroom observations. Comments were made by nearly all levels of staff that their job is more difficult because of students' backgrounds, economic status, or attitude. Rather than having a culture of Academic Optimism, many staff believe that poverty or lack of English proficiency contribute to the students' low academic performance, poor attendance, lack of motivation, and an overall poor attitude.

Research on an educational construct, Academic Optimism, by Dr. Wayne Hoy and his colleagues suggest that connecting three important characteristics of schools can produce a potent and positive influence on academic achievement, even in the face of low socioeconomic status, previous performance, and other demographic variables such as school size or minority enrollment.⁴⁰

Hoy's definition of "academic optimism" is grounded in social cognitive theory and positive psychology. It embraces the following characteristics:

- *Academic emphasis* – the extent to which a school is driven by a belief system that includes high expectations for students to achieve academically.
- *Collective efficacy of the faculty* – the belief that the faculty can make a positive difference in student learning.

⁴⁰ Hoy, W. K., Tarter, C. J., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2006). *Academic optimism of schools: A force for student achievement*. Working Paper – The Ohio State University.

- *Faculty's trust in parents and students* – faculty, administrators, parents, and students cooperate to improve student learning; trust and cooperation among parents, teachers and students influence student attendance, persistent learning, and faculty experimentation with new practices.

A school with high “academic optimism” believes that faculty can make a difference, students can learn, and achieve high levels of academic performance. Findings from research showed that there was a significant positive relationship between teachers’ academic optimism and students’ academic achievement.⁴¹

The lack of a culture of Academic Optimism is evidenced through the sample statements made in focus groups and in open ended staff survey responses as follows:⁴²

- *The low academic ability of students makes it challenging to have higher-level conversations and ask thought-producing questions. Students need to have more trips and experiences outside of the classroom to enhance their understanding and depth of learning.*
- *A great portion of the student population comes from low-income families which can hinder students from being ready to learn.*
- *For me, the financial needs of families play a huge impact on the performance of their children at school. Many students are late to school, miss school, and are dealing with family, cultural, financial, and living conditions issues that they bring to school or interfere with their learning. Making money for them is more important than getting a high school diploma.*
- *Many students struggle because of their bilingual background, sometimes the language is what hinders their potential.*
- *The amount of stress that is put on teachers and the unrealistic expectations for students to perform at levels that are beyond their capabilities when they are struggling English Language Learners.*
- *The language barrier with parents and their lack of accountability at home is a challenge.*
- *Many students have an apathetic attitude toward school because many of them are exhausted from working jobs until very late.*
- *The cultural diversity makes it difficult to teach to the student's needs. The students are all on different levels depending on where they came from.*

Staff Wellness and Morale

Teaching staff describe a challenging environment characterized by being overloaded and a perception of understaffed conditions. They noted that meeting the diverse needs of students is daunting, and the work can be defeating and deflating. Despite these challenges, several shared their commitment to students remains a driving force that keeps teachers committed.

Across the District, many believe preschool teachers receive more emotional support than their counterparts in other grades, fostering strong relationships with master teachers. However, it is believed the level of support is not consistent across grade levels, as instructional coaches are less accessible for other teachers. Teaching staff also shared concerns about having a lack of time, especially for basic activities like lunch.

Several teachers cite frequent changes and new rules from the District which create confusion and inconsistency, contributing to the overall sense of overwhelm. Teachers noted they feel more appreciated by their colleagues than by administrators, and instances of unresponsiveness or unclear communication from the District contribute to a perception of inadequate support.

Despite challenges, teachers noted they work collaboratively and maintain constant communication, contributing to a positive aspect of teamwork. However, almost all teachers noted the fear of job security consequences for not strictly adhering to pacing guides adds to the stress.

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Survey open response data are direct quotes. Focus groups quotes may have been paraphrased during notetaking.

Communications and Community Relations

Effective communication is a key strategy for superintendents as they lead their districts. District communication was one of the most identified deficiencies within the District both internally and externally. Effective strategies for communicating with stakeholders include using multiple communication methods and tools, individualizing communications to families, and ensuring communications are accessible to culturally and linguistically diverse stakeholders.⁴³ District and school staff may need to take additional steps to enable better communication with culturally and linguistically diverse families.

The only group that believed the District was doing well in communication with all stakeholder groups was the Lakewood School Board. Most other focus groups and survey results shared that the lack of communication from the central office as well as the inability to communicate with their culturally diverse and multi-lingual students and their families are barriers to successful outcomes.

Communication with Internal Staff

Communication with internal staff was repeatedly cited as an area of weakness across all stakeholder groups including school administrators, teachers, professional staff, paraeducators, and support staff.

Reported communication gaps examples include:

- In Summer 2023, there was the transfer of over 300 staff by the central office and the reorganization of grade levels at the middle school and some elementary schools. The changes reportedly were communicated only weeks before the start of the school year. Lack of sufficient communication was cited as an issue by District staff, school-based administrators, school-based staff, and parents. The Superintendent confirmed she was not fully forthcoming or transparent about the rationale for this move, so as to not raise staff concerns about predicted student enrollment declines in the coming years.
- School administrators reported frequent administrative reassignments to new buildings with limited notice or rationale, and with the communication of the reassignment most frequently occurring only via written communication.
- Several long-standing afterschool programs were cut or reduced for the 2023-2024 school year. There was significant speculation and conflicting information provided to PCG during focus groups on the rationale for these cuts.
- School administrators reported receiving information related to policy or personnel changes at the same time as their staff, with no background context or information that would allow them to ease staff concerns.

Communication with Students and Families

There are several structures in place to support communication within the District, including the Family Enrollment Office. There are also parent liaisons in each building to provide outreach and translation apps available to parents during a phone conversation. Schools reported they communicate to parents through newsletters from librarian and principals, home visits if warranted, emails, flyers, and letters.

The website was cited in focus groups and interviews as an important way of communication, including the Board agenda and school activities. On the District website, under the Information tab, there is access to Google translate to change the text to Spanish on the website. Yet, when looking at the documents under each heading, only 15% of the documents are in Spanish. Most are PDFs that were only written in English, so do not function with Google Translate.

Translation services were referenced frequently as a challenge area for the District. Multiple focus group members mentioned the limited number of translators in Lakewood. Both students and staff focus group participants talked about students having to serve as translators for parent conferences and teacher visits.

⁴³ Kornegay, S. (2023, November 14). *Five Essential Skills for Superintendents*. NEAG School of Education. University of Connecticut. <https://today.uconn.edu/2023/11/five-essential-skills-for-school-superintendents/>

There are Spanish speakers in both the Family Enrollment Office and the Transportation Office who are available and accessible to Spanish-speaking families.

According to data provided by the District, approximately 5% of all staff speak Spanish. 77.2% of students report Spanish as their home language, making the need for translation services in the District high.

Organizational Management

An effective superintendent must have knowledge of best practices regarding management of the District including organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment. District leaders must have the skills to manage resources that keep the focus on improving student outcomes. Organizational management also includes knowing the importance of creating systems that focus school staff and other resources on common goals and creating processes that facilitate effective teaching and learning.⁴⁴

Strategic Plan

There is no District strategic plan that guides decision-making.

Annual Goals

The Lakewood Superintendent presented District annual goals to the School Board in August 2023. An annual goals PowerPoint is provided in both English and Spanish. Goals are:

- Goal 1: Improve Student Achievement
- Goal 2: Student Wellness
- Goal 3: Student & Staff Attendance
- Goal 4: Fiscal Stability
- Goal 5: Strengthen Community Relations
- Goal 6: Safety & Security
- Goal 7: Increase the Graduation Rate & Decrease the Dropout Rate

Per PCG’s review of the *Lakewood School District’s Goals for the 2023-2024 School Year* PowerPoint,⁴⁵ it was difficult to gain a clear picture of District key priorities. The PowerPoint took a ‘laundry list approach’ to the communication of annual goals. Furthermore, there were no metrics presented to the Board as to how the District would measure the goals and actions that would be taken if the District was not showing growth in meeting the goals.

TABLE 11: ANALYSIS OF LAKEWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT’S GOALS FOR 2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR POWERPOINT

Annual Goals	Analysis
<p>Goal 1: Student Achievement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consisted of a goal statement that included, “<i>The Lakewood School District will improve academic achievement for all students by ensuring the delivery of high-quality instruction in all areas through the implementation of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards.</i>” • The slide deck had 44 slides in support of this goal. • Slides began with curricular and instructional content such as Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction, PLCs, Science of Reading, and Math curriculum, but also shared information about parking lot pavement, high school library renovation, band equipment, auditorium renovation, high school track completion, new bleachers, etc.

⁴⁴ *Educational Leadership Program Standards*. (2011). National Policy Board for Educational Administration. <https://www.npbea.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ELCC-District-Level-Standards-2011.pdf>

⁴⁵ *Lakewood Public School District’s Goals for the 2023-2024 School Year*. (2023) Lakewood Public School District website.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of these slides did not align to the goal statement of “the delivery of high-quality instruction in all areas through the implementation of the NJ Learning Standards.” Most of the slides not related to facilities upgrades were duplicates from the 2022-2023 annual goals slide deck.
Goal 2: Student Wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slides included detailed information about social-emotional and mental health offering the District is providing to students.
Goal 3: Student and Staff Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duplicate, single slide from the 2022-2023 presentation.
Goal 4: Fiscal Stability to Support Student Learning and Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single slide The slide included their goal statement, <i>“The Lakewood School District will ensure that the budget provides for the achievement of all students in the District while maintaining fiscal responsibility. The maintenance of safe, healthy and clean facilities will reflect high standards for student learning and foster District pride.”</i> The three strategies for this goal are: 1) Prioritize resources to support academic programs, student achievement and effective staff; 2) Meet applicable state and federal audit standards and 3) Maintain and improve school facilities to enhance instruction, ensure safety and protect the investment of taxpayers. There is no mention of goals or strategies to lower the budget or cut spending as observed in the documentation of comparable Districts. Slide is a duplicate from the 2022-2023 presentation.
Goal 5: Strengthen Community Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duplicate, single slide from the 2022-2023 presentation.
Goal 6: Safety & Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slides include new safety procedures such as a Weapons Detection System, color-coded hallways, and classroom key daily check-out procedures Slide includes a new See Something, Say Something reporting system that is offered in English and Spanish
Goal 7: Increase the Graduation Rate & Decrease the Dropout Rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slide includes the same strategies as the 2022-2023 presentation but did not include trend data that had been previously provided. Strategies are vague and not tied to outcomes. They are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offering Engaging Lessons The implementation of new courses and programs Close monitoring of students Meeting the needs of individual students Improving the Climate and Culture Improved family support

Note. Retrieved from "Lakewood Public School District's Goals for the 2023-2024 School Year", provided by Lakewood Public School District.

Safety and Security

School Safety

School safety is multifaceted in Lakewood Public Schools. The District has a large security staff represented at each building. At the high school students are “wanded” before entering the building while metal detectors are used in other buildings. All students from kindergarten through high school are required to use clear backpacks. High school students noted that the clear backpacks are not that strong and often have to be replaced as they crack or tear, which is a hardship for many families. There are also security cameras placed in all schools as well as ID checks by security staff when entering any school facility. In most schools,

especially elementary schools, the security check is typically done by the school secretaries after being let into the school. In Lakewood, the school office is the third stop. The first stop is the metal detector, and the second stop is the security desk.

Security staff reported that there is top notch security within the District, and it is very safe. There are \$200k scanning devices that are state of the art. No one is in the building without an armed security guard. In addition, a new advanced threat detection service and tool was purchased by the District to monitor at-risk students. The system includes risk of assessment of self-harm, depression, grooming, sexual content, bullying and school violence. Anything a student types into a District chrome book or computer is tracked.

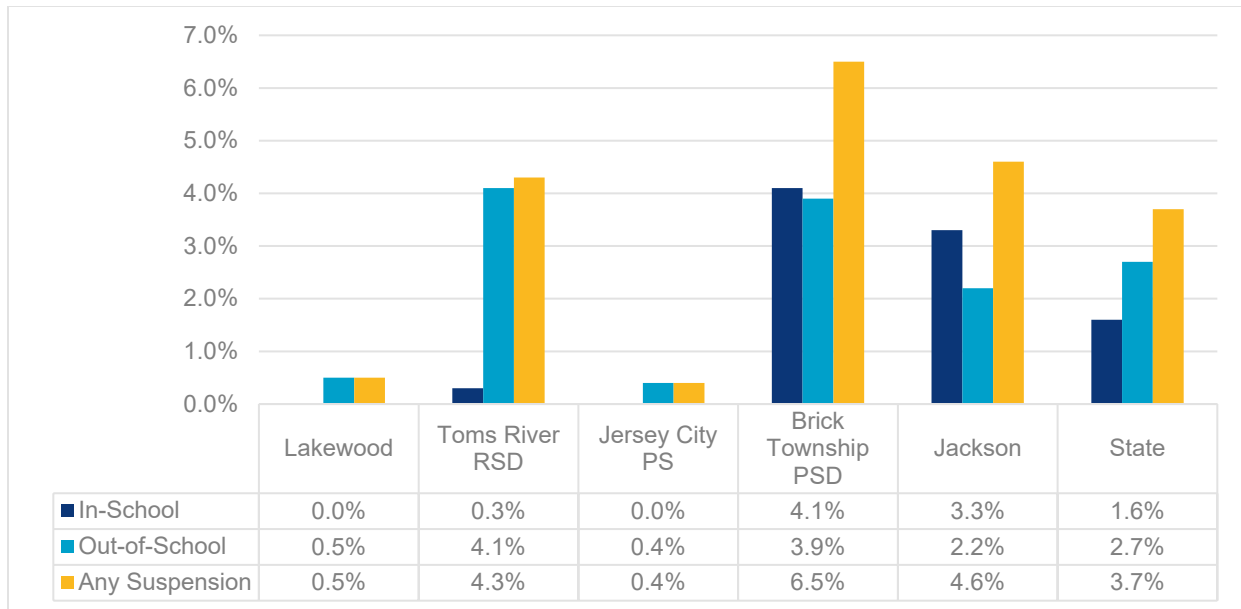
However, with all the security in place some students commented that security checks make one feel less trusted. One student high school student recalled something that happened years ago in Lakewood is the reason there is now so much security. Staff focus group participants stated that they are told to call security and then an administrator if a behavioral issue is escalating in their classroom. Teachers also reported that there is a lot of security within their schools, but some of the security staff are rough on kids. Staff suggested that more de-escalation training for both teachers and security staff would be beneficial.

Discipline

During the 2021-2022 school year, the Lakewood Public School District implemented an Academic & Behavioral Intervention Program for students in Kindergarten through grade 12.⁴⁶ The goal of the program is to keep every student in school, every day. This approach, therefore, led to eliminating the traditional suspension program within the District. Lakewood's Academic & Behavioral Intervention Program states that sending students home as a punitive measure does not address or solve the root problem. Students need the opportunity to learn and grow from their behavior. In addition to a new policy, staff were assigned to the intervention program including two substance abuse counselors (SAC); bilingual social worker; Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA); behavior therapy associates (Psychologist/BCBA-D); guidance counselors; and teachers. While receiving their academic and behavioral interventions, students will continue their academic program/schedule, and students with an IEP will continue to receive all of their mandated services. Figure 9 depicts suspension data of all four comparable schools as well as the state. With the new Academic and Behavioral Intervention Program, Lakewood has seen the suspension rates drop compared with other school districts.

⁴⁶ *Academic & Behavioral Supports/Code-of-Conduct*. (2021-2022). Lakewood Public School District.
<https://www.lakewoodpiners.org>

FIGURE 9: COMPARATIVE SUSPENSION DATA BY DISTRICT (2022)



Note. Retrieved from "NJ Performance Reports by NJDOE", 2024, (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>)

Although the student suspension rate has been lowered, the new discipline program has not been well received in schools. Teachers stated the perception that student discipline issues are growing since there are no "real consequences" for negative behavior. High school teachers perceive that there are more fights than ever before. Students also say that bathrooms can feel unsafe at times, and they see students vaping and smoking during the school day. PCG did not observe any discipline concerns during school observations and found schools to be orderly and calm.

School Configuration

In the spring/summer of 2023, the District changed the configuration of schools for elementary and middle schools. The grade configuration consisted of moving hundreds of students and staff with little notice or explanation as to why the decision was made. There was no public discussion at the School Board meetings, or much notice provided. Principals shared that they did not have time to let parents know and plan for some student/family activities to aid in the transition. School leaders were given very little notice, in one instance a day to pack up and move. Parents shared with their schools that they did not understand why the decision was made, but that it was a very anxious time for their family. Teachers were told they were moving to a new school and for some a new grade level through an email from District administration. Furthermore, maintenance and facilities staff were not notified of the reconfigurations of almost every school, which meant added hours and manpower needed to complete the move before the fall opening of school, which was an unanticipated additional cost to their budget.

In addition to the lack of notice for students and staff, the new grade-span configurations have added more school transitions for students. The grade-span configuration of a school district determines the number of school-to-school transitions students experience. Research suggests that multiple school transitions may have an impact on students' sense of belonging, the continuity of curriculum and instruction, and student academic achievement.⁴⁷ **Table 12** shows the grade configuration of each school in SY 2022-2023 and SY 2023-2024.

⁴⁷ Anderson, P. F. (2012). *Grade-Span Configurations and School to School Transitions*. Florham Park, NJ. College of St. Elizabeths. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED549733>

TABLE 12: GRADE CONFIGURATION FOR LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

School	SY 2022-2023	Enrollment	SY 2023-2024	Enrollment
LECC (Early Childhood Center) <i>Building Capacity: N/A</i>	Pre-K to Kindergarten	499	Pre-K to Kindergarten	268
Piner Elementary School <i>Building Capacity: N/A</i>	Pre-K to Grade 2	503	Pre-K to Kindergarten	391
Spruce Street School <i>Building Capacity: 799</i>	Pre-K to Grade 1	448	Grade 1 (only)	258
Clifton Avenue Grade School <i>Building Capacity: 782</i>	Grade 2 to Grade 5	402	Grade 2 to Grade 6	492
Oak Street School <i>Building Capacity: 799</i>	Grade 2 to Grade 5	608	Grade 2 to Grade 6	652
Ella G. Clarke School <i>Building Capacity: 432</i>	Grade 3 to Grade 5	295	Grade 3 to Grade 6	347
Lakewood Middle School <i>Building Capacity: 537</i>	Grade 6 to Grade 8	1,101	Grade 7 to Grade 8	586
Lakewood High School <i>Building Capacity: 714</i>	Grade 9 to Grade 12	1,607	Grade 9 to Grade 12	1,335

Note. Data are from "2022-2023 Lakewood Grade Configuration Data" extracted from Lakewood Public School District NJ Smart Data and "2023-2024 Lakewood Grade Configuration Data" extracted from Lakewood Public School District Enrollment Numbers (January, 2024). Building capacity data are from Lakewood Township School District Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ended in June 30, 2021.

There are no changes at Lakewood High School or the Lakewood Early Childhood Center (LECC) for the current school year. However, every other District school changed grade-span configurations. Both Piner Elementary School and Spruce Street Schools have limited elementary grade levels. For a student entering kindergarten at Piner Elementary School, it's possible, under the current configuration, to attend five Lakewood schools throughout their academic career. The schools include:



Schools with a small number of grade levels such as Spruce Street School have an additional challenge for staff, students, and families to overcome. Since Spruce Street School consists of only one grade level, each year the entire school will have a new group of young students who are unfamiliar with the school. There are no older students to act as role models for the first-grade students, and relationships with families have not been established. The staff has a short period of time to create a sense of belonging for students and families that will lead to students feeling safe and working towards academic success. Additionally, they also must spend the last part of the school year preparing for another transition (their third in three years) to attend a different elementary school that includes second grade. Through open-ended survey comments and in focus groups staff and families shared their concerns:

- The switch of schools was very sudden and did not allow families time to plan for the transition.
- Parents of younger students reported transition to be emotionally challenging to their children. It was reported feeling as the if the District *"was not considering the students and what they had to go through."*
- Students left at the end of the school year without prior discussion about restructuring.
- Schools experienced staff turnover due to restructuring and reconfiguring grade levels.
- Due to the reconfiguration, there now are families with children in four different elementary schools. This creates significant logistical challenges for families and may hinder parental involvement in each school.

Principals reported they designed a plan to help acclimate staff including reaching out to staff immediately and personally welcome them to the building; providing materials for teachers to read and become familiar with the goals and objectives; and facilitating grade-level meetings with the new teams to ensure alignment.

Building capacity data in **Table 12** are based on the data reported in the Lakewood Township School District Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ended in June 30, 2021. Based on these numbers, it appears that the elementary schools all have substantial excess capacity, while the middle and high schools are over capacity. The middle school cafeteria was expanded prior to the start of the 2023-2024 school year, using \$2.6 million in ESSER funds, to help with capacity concerns. PCG submitted a request for the building capacity numbers used by the District. The Superintendent shared that she was not aware if these numbers existed, and building capacity needs were based on personal observation.

Human Resources Management

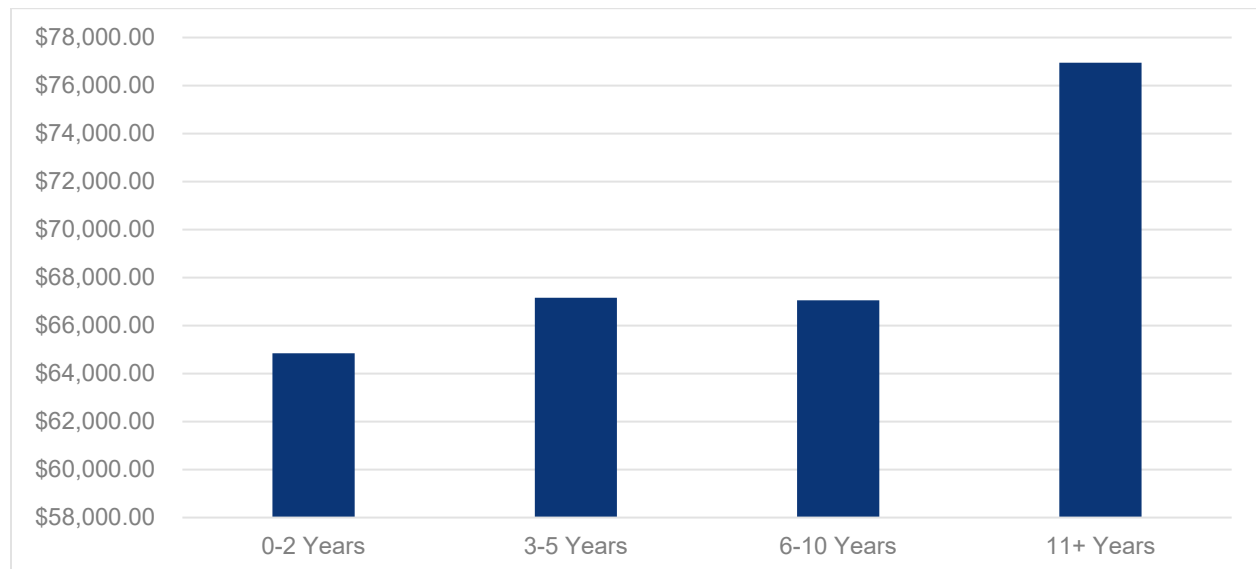
To ensure staff are valued and supported, effective superintendents plan and direct a comprehensive human resources program, including recruitment, selection, wage and salary administration, employee relations and collective bargaining.

Recruitment and Retention

Information gathered from interviews and focus groups raised the following themes on recruitment and retention. During the 2022-2023 school year, 133 staff exited the District, resulting in a retention rate of 93%. This rate aligns to the average statewide district retention rate, which was 92.4% in 2020-2021.⁴⁸

The Lakewood Public School District reportedly struggles to hire staff to fill all their vacancies each year. Finding and retaining suitable staff is a significant area for improvement. Lack of competitive salaries with neighboring districts was cited as a key barrier. Critical staffing needs, such as Learning Disabilities Teaching Consultants (LDTC) and bilingual school psychologists, was cited as a particular challenge due to the limited pool of qualified candidates.

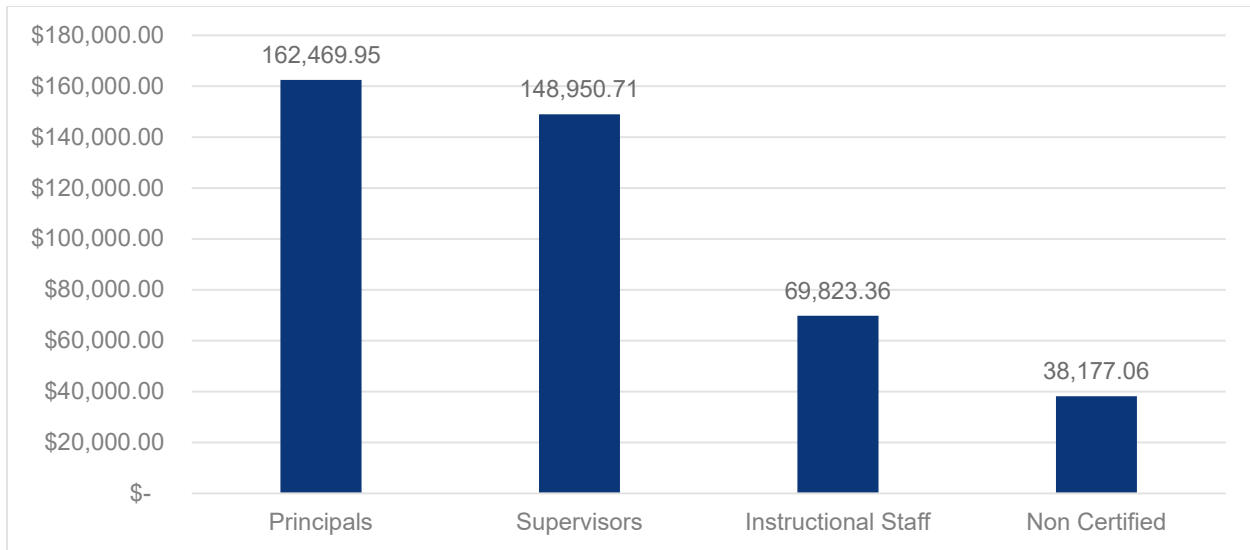
FIGURE 10: AVERAGE SALARY BY YEARS FOR LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT (2022)



Note. Retrieved from "Average Salary By Years, 2022" provided by New Jersey Data Extract

⁴⁸ *Initial Recommendations from Members of the Task Force on Public School Staff Shortages In New Jersey*. (2023, February). Task Force Report. <https://www.nj.gov/education/docs/TaskForceReport.pdf>

FIGURE 11: AVERAGE SALARY BY ROLE (2022)

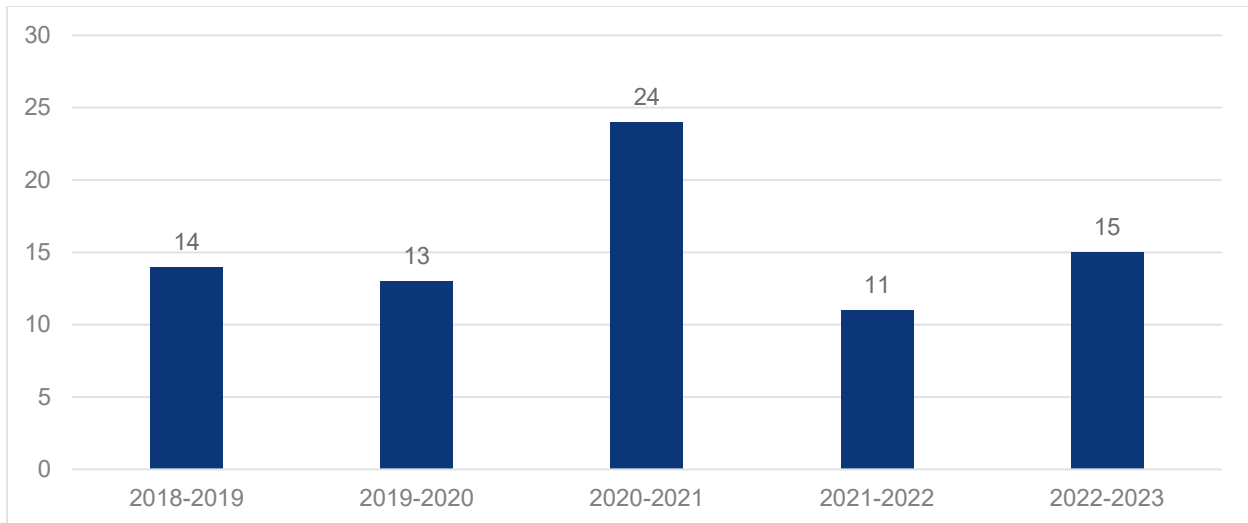


Note. Retrieved from "Average Salary by Role, 2022" provided by New Jersey Data Extract

- The average salary for principals is *higher than* the state average of \$137,250.
- The average salary for supervisors is *higher than* the state average salary of \$135,133.
- The average teacher salary is *lower than* the state average of \$77,619.
- The Superintendent also receives a salary *higher than* the state average of \$185,658.
- The Superintendent's salary in 2023-2024 is \$238,000, an increase of 42% since 2017.

Some feel the inconsistency in staff and high turnover rates, especially among counselors, pose challenges. While some teachers leave due to relocation, turnover in middle and high schools remains a concern. There is a desire for more training, especially among new hires. Staff shared concerns about changes in leadership within buildings, and how this creates instability that could potentially impact retention. In addition, they noted a re-shuffling of teachers between buildings, annually, and its impact on stability and a desire to stay in the District.

There appears to be a high rate of non-renewals in the District. 77 teacher contracts have been non-renewed in the past five years. The Superintendent shared that they do not always get the best candidates, so they have to non-renew more than other Districts. Additionally, based on interviews and focus groups, there seems to be a lack of a traditional system for non-renewing staff. Based on multiple accounts, unlike many Districts, non-renewal final decisions are made by District staff rather than school-based staff. Rather, the curriculum supervisors meet with the Superintendent to make the final decisions based on the walkthrough data they generate. Principals said they want to have a more active role and have shared that with the Superintendent but there have been no changes made.

FIGURE 12: NUMBER OF TEACHERS NON-RENEWED BY YEAR

Note: Data are from "Number of teachers non-renewed each year for the past five years, Nov 2023" provided by Lakewood Public School District

The promotion and training of paraeducators was also referenced as a source of pride, emphasizing their importance in the educational system. Yet, some staff reported they believe the District may be considering a reduction in paraeducators, raising concerns. Some staff also believe there are disparities in paraeducator salaries also need attention, with some new hires earning more than experienced counterparts.

The teacher and administrator transfer process is atypical. Last spring many leaders were transferred to different schools before the end of the school year. Principals were told that they would be moving with little time to share the decision with their staff, students, or families. Additionally, it was disconcerting to staff as well, almost 300, who were transferred at the end of the year without a discussion with the Superintendent, but rather an email with their transfer notification. Staff were surprised by the decision and had little recourse except to move to a new school and for many to a new grade level.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

This chapter reviews the curriculum and instruction practices of the Lakewood Public School District and covers the following analysis areas:

- District curriculum
- Professional learning
- Multi-tiered Systems of Supports
- Multilingual Learners
- Access to college and career coursework
- Classroom observations analysis
- Assessment practices
- Student outcomes

SUMMARY

- **Curriculum Development.** Lakewood uses a significant amount of material that is developed internally. Development is controlled by curriculum supervisors, requires frequent revisions, and represents a large expense to the District. Without an Assistant Superintendent whose responsibility would be oversight of the curriculum and its supervisors, each curriculum supervisor can make decisions about changes to their content area without keeping a balance with the other content areas.
- **Curriculum Differentiation.** The intense focus on pacing guides, instructional frameworks, and lesson scripts leaves little room for differentiation in the classrooms. Teachers reported limited time to pause to ensure mastery.
- **Walkthroughs and Observations.** The number of required walkthroughs and observations being completed by curriculum supervisors, instructional coaches, school administrators and the Superintendent are excessive. Required administrative team walkthroughs alone average 200-300 per month occurring within each school. This count does not include walkthroughs by curriculum supervisors or the required formal observation process.
- **Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS).** While Lakewood appears to have an intentional framework and intervention resources to support students with their academic and behavioral needs, there seem to be gaps in school-based staff's understanding of them, a consistent application of them across schools and classrooms, and clear documentation about expectations.
- **Career Pathways.** High school student participation in vocational education coursework is strong, but students are not engaged in career pathways programs offered by the District. Only five students participated in a full-time Career Academy Pathway in the 2022-2023 school year across three Pathway programs.
- **Advanced Placement (AP).** Student participation in and exam passage rates for Advanced Placement courses are low. Of the students taking AP exams in 2022-2023 for courses offered at Lakewood High School, more than half of the students did not pass in all courses except for Spanish Language and Culture. No students who took the AP US History course passed.
- **Student Engagement.** Students were not engaged in instruction as active learners during PCG observations. There was limited classroom discussion. At the upper elementary through high school levels, almost all observations were of students working independently on assignments. Students were observed to be compliant and orderly.
- **Instructional Practices.** Most instruction observed by PCG was teacher-directed, and classroom lesson structure was predictable. Students were not asked to apply higher level thinking skills such as application, analysis, or evaluation.
- **Graduation/Dropout rates.** Graduation rates are lower than the state average and comparable districts; dropout rates are higher.

DISTRICT CURRICULUM

PCG conducted a review of Lakewood's curriculum. The review focused on the English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics curriculum as they are the most tested content areas in the State of New Jersey. Documents used for the curriculum review consisted of textbooks currently adopted by the District, available pacing guides, scripted lessons, unit plans, and other curricular material made accessible.

Curriculum Development

Much of the curriculum is developed by the curriculum supervisors and instructional coaches within the District.

In ELA/literacy, at the early elementary level there are some purchased materials such as the Letterland or ReadBright programs focused on the Science of Reading. Beginning in Grade 3, the curriculum adds an older version (2013) of the Core Knowledge Reading Program for elementary grades. At the secondary level the District has introduced CommonLit 360, a subscription based digital literacy program, that is supplemented by older versions (2015) of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) textbooks. Commonlit is a digital literacy program. All grade levels supplement the curriculum with additional texts such as decodable readers or novels are purchased for each grade level. These decisions are made at the curriculum supervisor level.

At the elementary and middle school levels, math curriculum is solely developed by the curriculum supervisors and the instructional coaches. There are teacher guides and student workbooks/worksheets created within the District for all grade levels. Beginning at the high school level, more traditional high school math textbooks are used.

Table 13 lists of all ELA and Math Resources used within the Lakewood classrooms.

TABLE 13: ELA AND MATH CURRICULUM MATERIALS- K-12

GRADES	ELA RESOURCES	MATH RESOURCES
Kindergarten	Letterland Copyright 2015 Letterland Phonics Workbooks Copyright 2022 ReadBright Teacher's Guides, Student Workbook, Homework Book, Handwriting Book, Decodable Texts (Copyright 2017- 2023)	K Math Ready Classroom Teacher Guide & Student Workbook 2021 iReady Intervention Program
Grade 1	Letterland Teacher Manual Copyright 2015 ReadBright Teacher's Guides & Student Materials Copyright 2023	Grade 1 Math Ready Classroom Teacher Guide & Student Workbook 2021 iReady Intervention Program
Grade 2	Letterland Teacher Manual (Copyright 2015) Letterland Phonics Workbooks (Copyright 2022)	Grade 2 Math Teacher Guide & Student Workbook iReady Intervention Program
Grade 3	Core Knowledge Language Arts - 2013 Letterland Teacher Manual	Grade 3 Math Teacher Guide & Student Workbook iReady Intervention Program
Grade 4	Core Knowledge Language Arts 2013	Grade 4 Math Teacher Guide & Student Workbook iReady Intervention Program
Grade 5	Core Knowledge Language Arts 2013	Grade 5 Math Teacher Guide & Student Workbook iReady Intervention Program
Grade 6	CommonLit Texts & Resources, 360 Curriculum, 3-year subscription	Grade 6 Math Teacher Guide & Student Workbook iReady Intervention Program
Grade 7	CommonLit Texts & Resources, 360 Curriculum, 3-year subscription	Grade 7 Math Teacher Guide iReady Intervention Program

Grade 8	CommonLit Texts & Resources, 360 Curriculum, 3-year subscription	Grade 8 Math Teacher Guide iReady Intervention Program
Grade 9	CommonLit Texts & Resources, 360 Curriculum, 3-year subscription Textbook: HMH Collections, Grade 9 – 2015	Algebra 1, Big Ideas Learning, 2022
Grade 10	CommonLit Texts & Resources, 360 Curriculum, 3-year subscription Textbook: HMH Collections, Grade 10 – 2015	Reveal Geometry, McGraw Hill, 2020
Grade 11	CommonLit Texts & Resources, 360 Curriculum, 3-year subscription Textbook: HMH Collections, Grade 11 – 2015	Algebra 2, Big Ideas Learning, 2022
Grade 12	CommonLit Texts & Resources, 360 Curriculum, 3-year subscription Textbook: HMH Collections, Grade 12 - 2015	The Practice of Statistics, BFW, 2020 A Graphical Approach to PreCalculus with Limits, Pearson, 2019

Note. Retrieved from "2023-2024 Textbook Inventory, Kindergarten - Grade 12" provided by Lakewood Public School District

Curriculum Analysis

K-2 ELA Analysis

- The ELA curriculum at the K-2 level is highly focused on the Science of Reading (SoR). Both Letterland and ReadBright follow the tenants of the SoR and focus on Foundational Reading skills and targeted instruction.
- K-2 classrooms are well resourced with material that supports the SoR including decodable books, sound walls, etc.
- Resources are standardized for each classroom. There are similar anchor charts, wall posters, and support materials for each grade level.
- Classroom schedules show a 2-hour literacy block that includes foundational skills, targeted instruction, language and comprehension, and writing, which occurs in an additional 40-minute writing block. The classroom schedules and focus on reading skill development align with current best practices in reading.

3-5 ELA Analysis

- Third grade is a transitional year. There is a shift that begins from using Letterland as a key component of the curriculum to materials with more of a focus on building comprehension skills using the Core Knowledge reading textbook, with novels to supplement the instruction.
- Core Knowledge with its partnership with Amplify is a well-known resource that has a heavy focus on non-fiction text.
- Lakewood is not using the newest version of Core Knowledge ELA, but rather an older version published in 2013, making the textbook eleven years old.
- iReady is used support math intervention within the classroom.
- EdReports⁴⁹ rated a 2015 version of the Core Knowledge textbook 'Meets Expectations'. It is difficult to determine if the 2013 version would receive the same rating using the same measurements.
- In addition to the Core Knowledge series, teachers incorporate novels at each grade level to teach the standards as well. There were teacher concerns that some of the non-fiction stories included in the reading textbook were not relatable to their students. Topics range from the Middle Ages to Astronomy to Animals.

Secondary ELA Curriculum

- Secondary ELA curriculum has been transitioning to CommonLit 360 over the past two years.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ed Reports. (n.d.). Core Knowledge ELA.

⁵⁰ Common Lit 360, Program Guide. (n.d.) Commonlit. <https://www.commonlit.org/en>

- This is the first year for some of the high school classes to adopt the program. The program is digital and there are some free resources as well as a subscription-based service with resources. The District has purchased a 3-year license for the program.
- In each unit, students examine a series of texts that focus on a central theme or topic. Throughout the unit, lessons and activities support students in developing a core understanding of the knowledge and skills presented. At the end of each unit, students complete a culminating task which serves as the unit's summative assessment.
- During the focus groups, participants shared that the transition to CommonLit 360 for both students and staff has been difficult. There is a lot of content in each lesson and the reading level is a challenge for some of their students who are English Learners and/or below grade level in reading.
- All ELA classes at the middle school are 80 minutes long. At the high school level, English 1 is a double block lasting 80 minutes. All other English classes, with the exception of AP English, are a single 40-minute period. AP English is a double block that lasts 80 minutes.

Elementary and Middle School Math

- Math curricular materials in Grades K-8 have been fully designed and developed by the math curriculum supervisor and the instructional coaches. The teacher's guide, lesson guide PowerPoint, and the worksheets are provided to the teachers each year.
- There are manipulative materials purchased as well for classrooms use as part of their instruction.
- There are approximately 80 minutes allocated for math instruction at the elementary level.
- In the middle school, there are two periods designated for math which is approximately 80 minutes.
- Focus group participants questioned how well the lessons and materials are aligned to the standards, even if there is a standard referenced in the pacing guide. There were more concerns regarding the math curriculum by teachers than the reading curriculum at the elementary level.

Table 14 shows a sample of a second-grade math pacing guide, unit content, and NJSLS alignment.

TABLE 14: 2ND GRADE MATH PACING 2023-2024

Unit	Pacing	NJSLS
Beginning of the Year Assessment		
Unit 1 – Addition within 20 (12 activities) iReady Diagnostic – 1	September 7 – October 13 (25 days)	2.OA.2 2.MD.6
Unit 2 – Subtraction within 20 (6 activities)	October 16 – November 3 (15 days)	2.OA.2 2.MD.6
Unit 3 – Understanding Place Value to 1000 (19 activities)	November 6 – December 15 (26 days)	2.NBT.1 2.NBT.2 2.NBT.3 2.NBT.4 2.NBT.8
Unit 4 – Properties of Operations within 100: Addition and Missing Addend (6 activities)	December 18 – January 19 (17 days)	2.OA.1 2.NBT.5 2.NBT.6 2.NBT.9 2.MD.6
Unit 5 – Properties of Operations within 100: Subtraction and Comparison Word Problems (7 activities) iReady Diagnostic – 2	January 22 – February 13 (17 days)	2.OA.1 2.NBT.5 2.NBT.6 2.NBT.9 2.MD.6

Note. Retrieved from “Math Pacing Guides”. Folder #38. Curriculum Map and/or Pacing Guide provided by Lakewood Public Schools.

High School Math

- The high school has a more traditional approach to using math textbooks to teach the content for Algebra I & II, Geometry, Statistics, and Pre-Calculus. The books have been recently purchased with copyrights ranging from 2020-2022.
- There is a pacing guide and scripts developed for teachers.⁵¹
- All math classes except for Algebra I are single blocks of 40 minutes. All Algebra I classes are double periods comprised of two 40-minute blocks.

Scripts and Pacing Guides

The Lakewood School District has made a strong commitment to the use of scripts and pacing guides at every grade level and within each content area. The scripts and pacing guides are created by the District, and updated at least annually, with the expectation they will be used by teachers whether the curriculum is created internally or by an outside company such as LetterLand or CommonLit 360.

Scripts are considered “soft scripts” by the administration and are intended to be used as a guide when delivering instruction. However, at the teacher level, the messaging around scripts varies depending on the school. During focus groups, it was shared that some teachers were given a poor evaluation from their curriculum supervisor’s walkthrough if they not following the script verbatim. Focus group participants indicated there is the greatest emphasis on reading from scripts in grades K-2. Written guidance notes that teachers must be within ten days of the pacing guides expectations. There are three days set aside within the pacing guide to provide review instruction to support students who have not mastered previously taught skills or to catch up on instructional pacing.

⁵¹ *Math Pacing Guides*. (Retrieved, 2024). Folder #38. Curriculum Map and/or Pacing Guide. Lakewood Public Schools.

FIGURE 13: KINDERGARTEN ELA SCRIPT

October 24th: Immersion**Materials:** [List Examples \(Mrs. Packet\)](#)

Connection: Writers, we have been learning about Lists. Remember, a list helps organize information or items that fit within the category or topic. The title is the topic or category you are writing about. We discussed two examples of lists yesterday. We looked at and discussed a grocery list and a birthday list. We also discussed that we have lists in our classroom such as birthday lists, bus lists, lunch lists, and school supply lists. These lists can be helpful in our everyday lives.

Teach: Today we will look at Mrs. Packet to see what some additional lists look like. Mrs. Packet will help us a lot this year!

Model: Display [List Examples \(Mrs. Packet\)](#)

Note: It is important to refer to Mrs. Packet often. Each student should have their own Mrs. Packet in their folder so they can easily access the samples and use them as a tool when they get stuck.

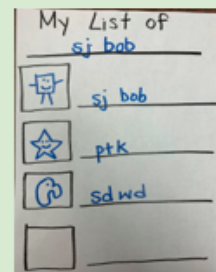
This is a list. [List Examples \(Mrs. Packet\)](#) Mrs. Packet can help me when I am stuck writing on my own. I am going to look at the sample which will be in your folder as a tool for you to use. The title of this list is- **My List of Spongebob** (point to the title). Underneath the title, I see there are three items listed. I am going to look at the first picture (point to the picture with the character). On the line next to this picture, I see the label **Spongebob**. The author of this list drew a picture and used a label to describe that picture.

The next picture is in a star shape. It is another character from the show **Spongebob**. The label on this line says, Patrick. Since Patrick is a character on the show **Spongebob**, I can confirm that he belongs on this list!

The last picture on the list looks like another character. The label says- Squidward. He is another character from the TV show **Spongebob**. So now that I have read this list I can see the author gave the list a title-**Spongebob**. Underneath the title, there are three characters listed from that same show.

I am going to show you another example of a list. The title of this list is- My Favorite Superheroes (point to the title).

In the first box, I see that the author of this list drew a picture of a superhero. I am going to look at the label to help me figure out what the picture is of. The label says Superman (point to the label). Superman is a superhero. The author of this list wants us to know their favorite superheroes.



Note. Retrieved from "Kindergarten Unit Plans, Soft Scripts & Materials". Folder #39. K-2 Instructional Resources, provided by Lakewood Public Schools.

The pacing guides and scripts are detailed documents that provide the teacher with the words they should say while teaching the lesson, an example of the student visuals, and examples of displays for the classroom. There are active links embedded in the document that provide examples of what the teacher and their students should produce. Each script is found in the unit plan, which also consists of a pacing guide, sample wall posters, anchor charts, assessments, and other curricular materials that should be used during the lessons. In addition to each lesson, a PowerPoint deck is provided to guide the instruction as well. Teachers show the slides on the SMART board and the slide deck is used as a student and teacher guide for each lesson. The PowerPoint decks are branded in similar ways and are expected to be used in each lesson. The District discourages adding material that is not developed by the District and included within the unit plan, pacing guide, script or PPT decks.

Instructional Framework

In addition to a unit pacing guide and lesson scripts, teachers receive an instructional framework for each lesson. The instructional framework provides an overview of how the lesson should be instructed as well as the amount of time needed for each part of the lesson. The instructional strategy used by Lakewood is the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (I do, We do, You do). Teachers need to stay within the pacing

guidelines of the lesson, which teachers who participated in focus groups repeatedly shared is very stressful.

The instructional framework provides detailed information regarding the lesson design. In **Figure 14**, the second-grade math lesson depicts an example of the instructional framework that teachers should use throughout the lesson. It is broken out into a problem of the day, teacher modeling (I do), guided practice, which is highlighted in the lesson (We do) and the independent practice/small group instruction (You do) component of the lesson. In addition, the instructional framework also includes a review section with number talk/mental math, and fact fluency. Lastly, there is a section to provide information on additional strategies for the EL students in the classroom. Lesson times are also part of the instructional framework to keep teachers on pace with the unit pacing guide.

FIGURE 14: INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Grade 2 Math Framework	Review
<p>The math block in second grade will be comprised of 3 parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Content • Review • iReady Intervention (45 minutes weekly) <p>New Content</p> <p>During this portion of the block students will learn, explore and practice new content. Components include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem of the Day: (3-5 minutes) The Problem of the Day is an introductory problem that either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o reviews the previous day's skill OR o introduces the current day's objective. <p>If the PoD addresses the previous day's skill, the teacher should review the problem upon students' completion of the problem. If the PoD is an introductory problem, students should work on the problem but should save their answers until the lesson has been taught when they will be given an opportunity to revise their answers or share their thinking/strategies.</p> • Teacher Model: (5-7 minutes) During this portion of the lesson the teacher presents a problem to the students and uses a "think aloud" approach to model the strategies and thought processes involved in solving the problem. Teacher should ask and answer questions that address the underlying mathematical concepts and use manipulatives to build students' conceptual understanding. The teacher should solve the problem completely and without input from the students. • Guided Practice: (15-20 minutes) During this portion of the lesson, the teacher guides students in solving each problem. The teacher should ask the same questions presented during the "Teacher Model" to guide students' thinking through each step in the process. During this portion of the lesson, however, the students themselves should answer the teacher's questions. Student involvement in this portion of the lesson should follow a gradual release model: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Type 1: For Type 1 problems, the teacher presents 1-2 problems and poses questions addressing each step in the process. All students respond to each question on their communicators and the teacher then records that step in the process on the board. Students are not recording/solving the problem on their communicators at this point. o Type 2: For Type 2 problems, the teacher continues to present problems and pose questions addressing each step in the process. All students record the problem on one side of their communicators and complete it as prompted by the teacher, while responding to the teacher's individual questions on the other side of the communicator. During this time, the teacher may pose higher order questions and ask individual students to explain their thinking. o Check for Understanding/DOL: The last Guided Practice problems should be completed independently. The teacher uses this problem as a formative assessment (DOL) to gauge whether or not students are ready to move ahead to the independent practice portion of the lesson. If students are not ready to move ahead continue with more Guided Practice problems. • Independent Practice/Small Group Instruction: (15-20 minutes) Students work independently on assigned problems that address the lesson objective. (Continued use of manipulatives until students are ready to transition to representation/symbolic.) During this time, the teacher should check for individual students' levels of understanding or provide small group instruction. Teacher should select specific problems to review with the students. 	<p>During this portion of the block students will have an opportunity practice previously learned content.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily Spiral: (15 minutes) 3-5 unrelated practice problems including 1 word problem. Selected problems should address previously taught grade level skills and strategies as well as prepare students for coming units. • Number Talks/Mental Math: (5-10 minutes) Classroom discussion centered on purposefully chosen computation problem(s) that can be solved mentally. (Selected problems may not be on grade level.) • Fact Fluency (5 minutes) Students are provided an opportunity to practice their addition and subtraction facts within 20. <p>Intervention (40 minutes per week)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier 2 Intervention/iReady (40 minutes per week) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Once a week, the entire class should log on to iReady to work on assignments on "My Path." During this time the teacher should plan to sit with 3 - 4 students to watch as the students navigate the program, after 20 min. the teacher can plan to sit with another group of students while they work on their path. <p>Math and ELLs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mathematics instruction for ELLs should follow the general recommendations for high quality mathematics instruction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Focus on mathematical concepts and the connections among these concepts o Use and maintain high-cognitive-demand mathematical tasks (i.e. encourage students to explain their problem solving and reasoning) • Vocabulary/Visual models: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o When introducing new vocabulary it is useful for students to first have a successful and engaging experience discussing their mathematical reasoning and engaging experience discussing their mathematical reasoning and developing their conceptual understanding, then label, discuss, and review the vocabulary, grounding meanings in the students' mathematical work. o Explanations and justifications need not always include words. Instruction should support students in learning to develop oral and written explanations, but students can also show conceptual understanding by using diagrams and other representations. o Focus on language in context, not language as single words or definitions. Emphasize subtleties in mathematical terms by exposing students to similar phrases with corresponding visuals. • Mathematical Texts (i.e. word problems): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The goal of instruction should not necessarily be to "reduce language demands" but instead to provide support and scaffolding for ELLs to learn how to manage complex text in mathematics. o Be mindful NOT to adapt the language of a task as changing the language can change the mathematical sense of the task.

Note. Retrieved from "Math Frameworks". Folder #38. Curriculum Map and/or Pacing Guide, provided by Lakewood Public Schools.

Curriculum Oversight

There is no Deputy or Assistant Superintendent in Lakewood for Curriculum and Instruction, unlike in the comparative Districts and typical practice. Curriculum development and oversight is the responsibility of the Curriculum Supervisors. The Curriculum Supervisors' responsibilities include curriculum development, pacing guide and script development, lesson PPTs, professional development including PLC content, supervision of instructional coaches, and instructional observations of all classroom teachers within their content area. There are six Curriculum Supervisors, and they are responsible for the following content areas:

- Supervisor of Math (K-12); Technology (K-12); and High School Instruction
- Supervisor of Science (K-12); Social Studies (K-12); and Assistant Principals

- Supervisor of Bilingual and ESL (K-12); and World Languages (K-12)
- Supervisor of ELA (3-12); and Fine Arts (K-12)
- Supervisor of Title I Instruction and ELA (K-2)
- Supervisor of School Counseling Services, Testing and Anti- Bullying Coordinator (more limited responsibilities than content coaches)

Curriculum supervisors and instructional coaches continuously review and edit pacing guides and 'tweak' curriculum to keep them updated regularly throughout the school year, therefore change is constant. Each summer changes are made in the curriculum, pacing guides, and scripts which means that teachers are relearning the curriculum and often familiarizing themselves with a new selection of novels. For elementary teachers, curriculum changes happen in both ELA/literacy as well as math. Without an Assistant Superintendent whose responsibility would be oversight of the curriculum and its supervisors, each curriculum supervisor can make decisions about changes to their content area without keeping a balance with the other content areas.

Teacher focus group participants reported that there are times they would like to make modifications in either the content or materials used in lessons based on the needs of their students. However, changes cannot be made to any part of the pacing guide or content unless the curriculum supervisor gives permission. The school principal does not have any oversight or decision-making authority over curriculum decisions.

To ensure that all the materials are being used as directed by the curriculum supervisors, there is significant teacher oversight. Each supervisor conducts classroom walkthroughs and observations each week for their content area. In addition, the instructional coaches, who are direct reports to the curriculum supervisors are in classrooms weekly supporting teachers but are required to report to curriculum supervisors when they observe struggling teachers. Furthermore, principals are directed by the Superintendent to complete 3-5 walkthroughs per day (15-25 per week). Assistant principals also must complete the same number of classroom walkthroughs and observations per day. At the end of each week, the walkthrough forms from both the principal and the assistant principals, which could be as many as 50-75, are sent to the Superintendent's office for review by the curriculum supervisors. Finally, every month the curriculum supervisors and the Superintendent conduct classroom walkthroughs together.

The walkthroughs are in addition to the teacher's evaluation program which is aligned to the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching model.⁵² The level of oversight is excessive and has had negative on school-based staff. During a walkthrough if a curriculum supervisor observes a teacher and the lesson is not aligned with the pacing guide or the teacher is using unapproved material, they are "written up" for the offense. One focus group participant said she makes her early elementary students throw away their breakfast if it gets past 8:03 in the morning as it will lead to her not meeting her lesson pacing goals and she never knows when someone will be in to observe her classroom.

Curriculum Costs

Lakewood uses the general fund and federal funds from title appropriations to pay for curriculum costs. Additionally, Lakewood used ESSER monies to make needed purchases of goods and services to support the schools. In the first part of the 2023-2024 fiscal year, Lakewood spent \$11,200,181 for materials, supplies, equipment, training, and staff time for curricular related items as recorded in the Lakewood School Board minutes.

Staff Survey & Focus Group Comments

Below are sample comments provided during focus groups and in the staff survey:

⁵² Danielson, C. (2022). *The Framework for Teaching*. The Danielson Group. <https://danielsongroup.org/the-framework-for-teaching>

CURRICULUM

- *There is pressure of keeping to the extensive curriculum, including the need for students to be doing a set amount of computer work per week.*
- *Lakewood doesn't use high quality curriculum to meet the needs of students. Curriculum created "in house" lacks the materials and resources to reach all students.*
- *The curriculum provided for math is awful, and not aligned properly with the state standards. The District curriculum is not aligned with the textbooks provided to us for math.*
- *The curriculum is not appropriate for the population of students I teach, specifically the ELA curriculum. It's heavy in content which provides a barrier for students to succeed and learn the standards. A full curriculum should be purchased from a company that writes and edits curriculum.*
- *The idea of implementing a writing curriculum that is effective in the development of writing skills is not a priority of the District. Writing is an interdisciplinary skill. Put that on top of the majority of students in the District are learning a second language, therefore grammar and linguistics of the English language is even more important to be learned and mastered. Young students, specifically K-2, need to learn and master grammar skills prior to learning to write paragraphs.*
- *We are not allowed to do fun activities within the math lessons that would actually connect the math to real world situations.*
- *We change a lot of programs each year, we switch programs too often. We need to pick a program and stick with it.*
- *The curriculum is overwhelming for teachers and students. We are never given enough time to successfully implement it. We need a lot more interventions to address gaps and deficits students are having in all areas but especially in phonemic awareness and phonics.*

PACING GUIDES AND SCRIPTS

- *A "one size fits all approach" when it comes to lesson structure is not conducive to all subject matter.*
- *The pacing guide must be followed exactly. The framework within the pacing guide must be followed word for word.*
- *The curriculum pacing is very fast paced. I would like to see more time to review skills taught to the mastery level.*
- *Expectations are very high, which is good. However, as teachers, we need to be able to get our students there. The District is highly focused on staying on pace with the curriculum and following it to the exact point. This doesn't allow teachers time to teach what is needed to get the students to meet the high expectations and really take ownership over the content within the curriculum.*
- *If teachers were permitted to make adjustments to the curriculum to fill gaps in the students' education, then it would make sense.*
- *Our curriculum in both math and ELA is riddled with mistakes that affect student growth.*
- *The lack of flexibility in expectations hinders the quality of work. Teachable moments are rich opportunities for learning. Being locked into a time schedule which is set in stone greatly and negatively affects student learning.*
- *For ELL students, it is clear that students are not always getting the material. When I was able to pull the kids into smaller groups and go deeper into the material it worked well, but there is no time to do that.*
- *In science classes, there are several students who are ELL. Those students need time to digest the material and vocabulary that is so specialized, but there is no time.*

CURRICULUM SUPERVISION

- *Teachers are extremely stressed out by the constant walkthroughs with negative feedback and observations that are extremely critical and make them feel terrible about themselves.*
- *The walk throughs are a challenge as well as not being able to have freedom to teach what my students need vs what the supervisors are telling me they need.*
- *The math supervisors expect all teachers to teach the same lesson the same exact way regardless of if some students have IEPs or are bilingual.*

- *There is mental anxiety of not being good enough in the eyes of the administration.*
- *Sometimes curriculum supervisors can have a lot of influence in our building. They keep jamming a lot in and teachers are not sure how they will finish everything.*
- *The curriculum supervisors are not connected to the classrooms.*
- *Curriculum supervisors have an important role in non-renewals. Teachers feel targeted based on their opinion of their use of scripts and pacing guides.*

Curriculum Findings

- **Curriculum Development.** Lakewood uses a significant amount of material that is developed internally. The model used for curriculum development and adoption empowers a small group of staff the responsibility to make all the curriculum decisions without input from other stakeholders. In most Districts, there are 'multiple layers' of the development process where there is a high level of teacher involvement and a pilot of materials before anything is finalized and approved at the Board level.
- **Curriculum Differentiation.** The focus on pacing guides, instructional frameworks, and lesson scripts leaves little room for differentiation in the classrooms. Teachers reported that even if their students are struggling, they have to move on to keep up with the pacing guide. There is no time to pause to ensure mastery. Additionally, even though some scripts and instructional frameworks may have suggestions for differentiating for their ELL student, there is no time to incorporate those ideas as they have to rush through their lessons to ensure they are on track. In multiple classrooms, PCG observed teachers telling their students that they had to move along during their lessons.
- **Scripts and Pacing Guides.** The scripts and pacing guides are full of rich information, resources, and teacher materials to support lesson planning and instruction. There are a lot of details and are useful for teachers. However, the anxiety shared by school-based staff from all levels during focus groups was very real. Staff shared that they are fearful that they will be "caught" when someone shows up unannounced for a walkthrough and the teacher is using something different than the script, pacing guide, or unit planner assigned for that day. In one classroom observed by PCG, the teacher shared that the lesson was not designed by a curriculum supervisor, but her students needed a break from a scripted lesson which included "staring at their computers." During the observed lesson, the students were highly engaged, and the lesson was well designed and delivered.
- **Walkthroughs and Observations.** The number of required walkthroughs and observations being completed by curriculum supervisors, instructional coaches, school administrators and the Superintendent are excessive. If each administrative team conducts five walkthroughs per day, there would be 200-300 walkthroughs per month occurring within each school. This count does not include walkthroughs by curriculum supervisors. It also does not include the required formal observation process. The number of walkthroughs is likely disruptive to classroom instruction and has not resulted in increased student gains.
- **Frequent Revision Process.** Scripts, pacing guides, and unit planners are constantly being updated due to mistakes that teachers find and report. Some pacing guides are being developed during the school year due to the various changes needed.
- **Change in Schedules.** At the high school level, bell schedules have reportedly changed each year for the past several years, including most recently shortening the time allotted per period for most core classes. These changes directly impact the curriculum and pacing guides. This year the schedule is a traditional 40-minute class period for most classes. Teachers shared that they did not have enough time to teach their lessons compared with the AB block schedule that was at the high school during the 22-23 school year.

- **Curriculum Budget.** The curriculum budget is a large expenditure for the Lakewood School District, as it is for most Districts. However, with a curriculum that is mostly developed by the District, there are numerous added expenses such as new materials, professional development, curriculum writing staff costs, etc. that may not be found in other Districts.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports

New Jersey Framework

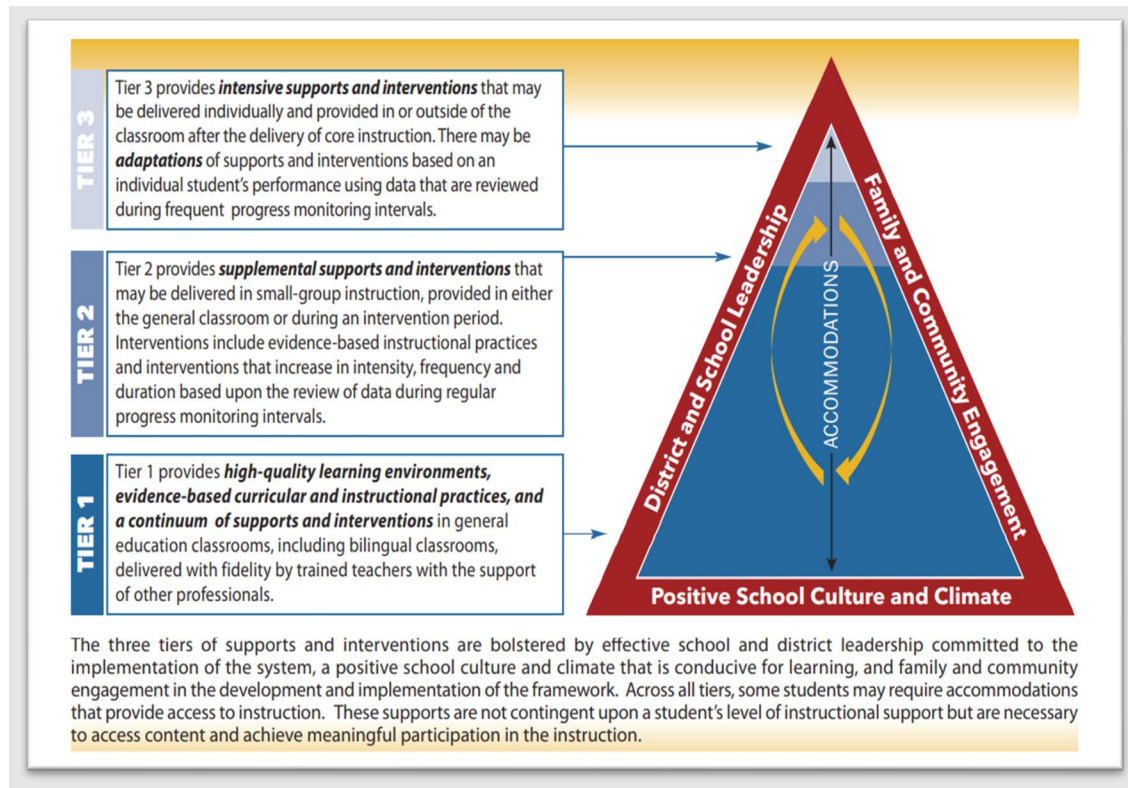
Under the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, core instruction is evidence-based, rigorous and of high quality. By utilizing a universal design for learning system, learning differences are considered proactively rather than reactively. The instruction is culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate and is implemented with integrity for all students. The framework is based on a presumption that some students require additional instruction in order to achieve grade level standards. Increasingly intensive tiers of academic and social/emotional support are targeted to meet student needs based on data-based problem-solving and decision-making; instruction is adjusted to continually improve both student performance and the rate at which it progresses. Furthermore, the process is used to assess (using student responses to the instruction) the effectiveness of the tiered instruction/interventions being implemented. Many states have established intervention systems that align to the core tenets of the MTSS process and branded them accordingly. In New Jersey, MTSS has been adopted as the New Jersey Tiered System of Support (NJTSS) as shown in **Figure 15**.

NJTSS is a framework of academic and behavioral supports and interventions to improve student achievement based on the core components of MTSS and the three-tier prevention logic of Response to Intervention (RtI). It builds upon the I&RS model and gives schools a structure to meet the academic, health, enrichment, and social emotional needs of all students. The tiered system involves the systematic development of nine essential components in schools for the effective implementation of the framework with fidelity and sustainability. Those components include:

- Effective District and school leadership;
- Family and community engagement;
- Positive school culture and climate;
- High-quality learning environments, curricula, and instructional practices;
- Universal screening;
- Data-based decision making;
- Collaborative problem-solving teams
- Progress monitoring; and
- Staff professional development.⁵³

⁵³ New Jersey Tiered System of Supports. (n.d.). <https://www.state.nj.us/education/njtss/brief.pdf>

FIGURE 15: NEW JERSEY TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT (NJTSS) PYRAMID, 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR



Note. Data retrieved from "New Jersey Tiered System of Supports", by New Jersey Tiered System of Support (<https://www.state.nj.us/education/njtss/brief.pdf>)

Intervention and Related Services (I&RS)

In New Jersey, when it is first identified that a child is struggling, Districts first engage the support of its Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) team. I&RS regulations in New Jersey pre-date the national movement toward a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework.⁵⁴ However, the intent of the work is aligned: to provide a "coordinated, formal, and well-articulated system of supportive activities and services for staff who have identified student difficulties and those who will be involved in the amelioration of the identified educational concerns."⁵⁵ The requirements set forth in these regulations are intended to provide schools with direction in formulating coordinated services and team delivery systems to address the full range of student learning, behavior, and health problems in the general education program. I&RS is designed to be a student support service approach that helps school-based staff and parents address "early identification and intervention of problems at the elementary, middle and high school levels."⁵⁶ According to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-8.1.,8.2, the goal of the committee is to see measurable student improvement in the identified targeted areas. Under these regulations, New Jersey schools have the flexibility to choose the

⁵⁴ RTI is a systemic, multi-tier approach to help support students with learning and behavior needs and seeks to prevent academic failure through early identification, frequent progress monitoring, and increasingly intensive research-based instructional interventions for children who continue to struggle. The RTI method was developed as an alternative to the discrepancy-model, which requires children to exhibit a discrepancy between their ability (as measured by their IQ) and their demonstrated academic achievement (<http://www.rtinetwork.org/>).

⁵⁵ *Resource Manual for Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS)*. (n.d.). Official Site of the State of New Jersey. <https://www.nj.gov/education/njtss/resources/irs/manual/>

⁵⁶ Ibid. In February 2014, the New Jersey State Board of Education re-adopted N.J.A.C. 6A:16, with amendment to the regulations at N.J.A.C. 6A:16-8 that establish intervention and referral services (I&RS). The 2008 I&RS manual is being updated to reflect these changes and will be posted to the state's website upon completion.

most appropriate team configuration to perform I&RS services for their buildings. In addition, they have the flexibility to choose appropriate interventions.

District Practices

Lakewood Public School District adopted Policy 2417 – Student Intervention and Referral Services originally in 2013, followed by an edited version in 2022. This policy establishes the requirement that each school building operate an intervention and referral services team to assist students who are experiencing learning, behavior, or health difficulties and that the District utilize the appropriate multidisciplinary team approach, such as Multi-Tiered System of Supports, for planning and delivering intervention supports.

*District Policy*⁵⁷

2417 - STUDENT INTERVENTION AND REFERRAL SERVICES (M)

Section: Program

Date Created: October 2013

Date Edited: May 2022

The Board of Education directs the establishment and implementation in each school building in which general education students are served, a coordinated system for planning and delivering intervention and referral services designed to assist students who are experiencing learning, behavior, or health difficulties, and to assist staff who have difficulties in addressing students' learning, behavior, or health needs in accordance with the requirements of N.J.A.C. 6A:16-8.1 and 6A:16-8.2. The Board of Education shall choose the appropriate multidisciplinary team approach, such as the Response to Intervention (RTI) or a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) model for planning and delivering the services required under N.J.A.C. 6A:16-8.

Students who are experiencing learning, behavior, or health difficulties shall be referred to the school's Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) Team. The intervention and referral services shall be provided to support students in the general education program and may be provided for students who have been determined to need special education programs and services pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-8.1(a). The intervention and referral services provided for students who have been determined to need special education programs and services shall be coordinated with the student's Individualized Education Program Team, as appropriate. Child Study Team members and, to the extent appropriate, specialists in the area of disability may participate on intervention and referral services teams, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.1(d)6.

The functions of the system of intervention and referral services in each school building which general education students are served shall be pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-8.2(a) and as outlined in Regulation 2417.

Records of all requests for assistance, all intervention and referral services action plans, and all related student information shall be maintained in accordance with Federal and State laws and regulations and New Jersey administrative code pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-8.2(a)9.

The I&RS Team in each school building shall review and assess the effectiveness of each intervention and referral services action plan in achieving the identified outcomes, and modify each action plan to achieve the outcomes, as appropriate.

At a minimum, the I&RS Team shall annually review the intervention and referral services action plans and the actions taken as a result of the building's system of intervention and referral services, and make recommendations to the Principal for improving school programs and services, as appropriate.

At the end of the school year, the Principal shall, in consultation with the I&RS Team, develop a report on the concerns and issues identified by the I&RS Team and the effectiveness of the services provided in achieving the outcomes identified in the intervention and referral services action plans. This report shall be provided to the Superintendent of Schools.

N.J.A.C. 6A:14; 6A:16-8.1; 6A:16-8.2

Adopted: 17 October 2013

Revised: 10 December 2014

Revised: 27 May 2022

⁵⁷ Lakewood Public School District Adopted Policy 2417. (n.d.). Lakewood Public School District

Despite the reference to employing an MTSS framework in this policy and other supporting documents, focus group participants generally either did not know what MTSS was or said that their school does not use it. It was reported by multiple focus group participants that there was recent professional development for tiered level of instruction, but also that “*our curriculum is not set up to allow teachers to implement*” this model.

School-based staff did, however, describe what interventions occur at Tiers 2 and 3. There were a wide variety of descriptions regarding how interventions are used to support students, what staff believe to be available, and how I&RS intersects, specifically, staff report that:

- Teachers struggle to meet the needs of students, when often almost the entire classroom requires Tier 2 intervention.
- Younger students are not cognitively ready to learn what they are being taught. Tier 2 in 2nd grade is spent on students learning first grade skills, so the gap continues to widen. Many students who are assigned Tier 2 interventions on iReady are unable to sit and work independently on it.
- Tier 3 stops at grade 3, with no Tier 3 reading intervention in grades 3-5.
- Some teachers are reportedly unaware of what Tier 3 means and do not know about I&RS.
- School-staff can recommend students for I&RS but in the past few years this has not been brought up at their schools.
- At the high school level, students are more frequently referred for I&RS for absences and behaviors, not for suspected disability.

There were also expressed concerns that students in middle school are far behind in reading, functioning at the 3rd or 4th grade reading level. They may be able to read words, but their comprehension is lacking.

The 2023-24 Lakewood Public School District goals noted a focus on improving student achievement through improving Tier 1 universal instruction through “giving teachers the resources and supports needed to teach more efficiently and effectively,” and improving Tier 2 small group through “intensive, purposeful instruction based on the individual needs of students (data driven).”⁵⁸ The power point includes the graphic shown here, as a means to explain the tiers of intervention.

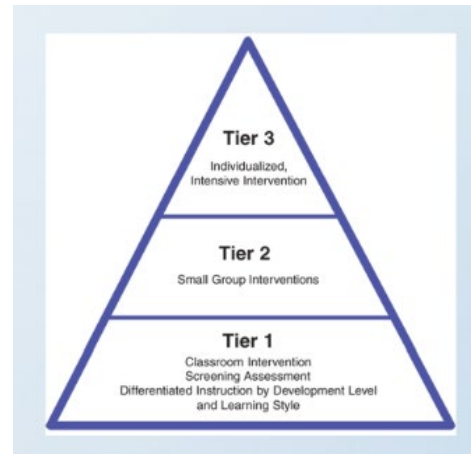


FIGURE 16: MTSS FRAMEWORK

For the 2023-24 school year, the K-1 Math Intervention Program is in its second year of implementation. Two Math Interventionists have been assigned to Piner Elementary School and Spruce Street School. Eligible students will receive individualized, intensive math instruction in order to close gaps before they widen.

The K-2 Reading Intervention Program will continue to provide individualized, intensive reading instruction to students in grades K-2 at Piner, Spruce, Oak and Clifton Avenue Elementary Schools. Maintaining student data is required in order to measure/monitor progress.

While Lakewood appears to have an intentional framework and intervention resources to support students with their academic and behavioral needs, there seem to be gaps in school-based staff’s understanding of them, a consistent application of them across schools and classrooms, and clear documentation about expectations.

⁵⁸ Lakewood School District’s Goals for the 2023-24 School Year. (n.d.). Lakewood Public School District.

Multilingual Learners

The Lakewood Public Schools Multilingual Learners (ML) program services approximately 1,735 students from kindergarten through grade 12. The majority are Spanish speaking. The second highest population is Ukrainian, with approximately 20 students. The District also services students from a variety of other language backgrounds, including Mandarin, Gujarati, Georgian, Lithuanian, Russian, and Polish. It was reported that roughly 95% of students need a language placement test when they register for schools.

There are 36 English as a Second Language-certified (ESL) staff across the District, according to District-provided data.

The District's ML program is primarily a combination of Bilingual classes taught in the student's native language and Sheltered English Instruction classes. In addition, the District has established a Newcomer Program at all levels (elementary, middle school and high school) for newly arrived ML students who have significant gaps in their formal education and/or are a minimum of two grade levels behind. The Newcomer Program is designed to meet the academic and linguistic needs of these students in an accelerated and individualized instructional setting.⁵⁹ Bilingual and Newcomer instruction is offered in Spanish. **Table 15** lists the types of programs and ESL support services within the District.

TABLE 15: LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT PROGRAM TYPES AND SERVICES FOR MLs

Program Type	Description	ESL Support
Bilingual Tier 1-2 Classes	For students at ELP levels 1 and 2. Bilingual certified teacher. Spanish instruction while acquiring BICS in English	Two period minimum of ESL
Bilingual Tier 3 Classes	For students at high ELP level 2 or low 3s. Bilingual certified teacher. Dual language instruction.	Two period minimum of ESL
SEI (Sheltered English Instruction) Classes	For students at ELP level high 3s to 4.4. Classroom teacher who has received a minimum of 15 hours SEI training. Instruction in English	A minimum of one period of ESL
3 Newcomer Classes	Bilingual certified teacher. Instruction in Spanish. Small class sizes. For newcomer students who have significant gaps in their education	Two periods of ESL An additional period of Rosetta Stone at the High School

Table 16 displays the programs for multilingual learners in each building and their enrollment by grade. The bilingual program at Ella G. Clarke is only currently available in Grade 4 and has an enrollment of only 16 students. The bilingual program at Oak Street is only currently available in Grade 2 and Grade 3. The only elementary Newcomer is at Oak Street in Grade 2. There is a gap in newcomer program availability in grades 3 through 6. There are no newcomer programs before 2nd grade or after 10th grade.

⁵⁹ *Bilingual ESL Manual*. (n.d.). Lakewood Public Schools

TABLE 16: LAKEWOOD MULTILINGUAL LEARNER TOTALS BY SCHOOL AND GRADE LEVEL (2023-2024)

School	Program	Grade	Number of Students	Total
LECC	Sheltered English	PreK (3)	28	128
		PreK (4)	84	
		Kindergarten	16	
Piner Elementary School	Sheltered English	PreK (3)	15	231
		PreK (4)	59	
		Kindergarten	76	
	Bilingual	Kindergarten	81	
Spruce Street School	Sheltered English	Grade 1	100	163
	Bilingual	Grade 1	63	
Ella G Clarke School	Sheltered English	Grade 3	28	139
		Grade 4	31	
		Grade 5	37	
		Grade 6	27	
	Bilingual	Grade 4	16	
Clifton Avenue Grade School	Sheltered English	Grade 2	64	307
		Grade 3	50	
		Grade 4	35	
		Grade 5	19	
		Grade 6	14	
	Bilingual	Grade 2	24	
		Grade 3	29	
		Grade 4	16	
		Grade 5	25	
		Grade 6	31	
Oak Street School	Sheltered English	Grade 2	71	313
		Grade 3	62	
		Grade 4	64	
		Grade 5	29	
		Grade 6	22	
	Bilingual	Grade 2	21	
		Grade 3	26	
Newcomer	Grade 2	18		
Lakewood Middle School	Sheltered English	Grade 7	46	145
		Grade 8	30	
	Bilingual	Grade 7	28	
		Grade 8	26	
	Newcomer	Grade 7	10	
		Grade 8	5	
Lakewood High School	Sheltered English	Grade 9	31	266
		Grade 10	28	
		Grade 11	30	
		Grade 12	42	
	Bilingual	Grade 9	39	
		Grade 10	44	
		Grade 11	32	

		Grade 12	8	
	Newcomer	Grade 9	9	
		Grade 10	3	
Adult High School	Sheltered English	N/A	10	10

Highlighted cells indicate programs that do not exist across all grade levels in the given school

Note. Data are from "Lakewood ML Totals by School and Grade Level 2023-2024" provided by Lakewood Public School District

Table 17 shows the percentage of students attending each school who are multilingual learners. In some schools, over half of the students require multilingual services.

TABLE 17: MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS BY SCHOOL

School/Location	Number of ML Students	Student Enrollment	Total Percentage of the School Population
LECC	125	268	46%
Spruce Street School	159	258	62%
Piner Elementary School	222	391	57%
Oak Street School	314	652	48%
Clifton Avenue Grade School	288	492	59%
Ella G Clarke School	149	347	43%
Lakewood Middle School	182	586	31%
Lakewood High School	296	1,335	22%
Total	1,735	4,329	40%

Note. Data are from "Lakewood ML Totals by School and Grade Level 2023-2024" provided by Lakewood Public School District

Table 18 outlines the bilingual and ESL textbooks and resources used in the District K-12. Some of the resources are used in the general education classrooms, while others are focused on specialized instruction for Multilingual Learners.

TABLE 18: BILINGUAL AND ESL DEPARTMENTAL TEXTBOOKS AND RESOURCES

Course/Grade	Textbook and Resource Titles
Bilingual K-6	Amplify mClass Lectura Estrellita, Lunita, Fugaces Decodable Readers: La Familia Alegria, ¡Hola! Decodable Readers: Just Right Reader Palabras a su Paso Heggerty iStation and iReady en Español Core Knowledge

	CKLA CommonLit
ESL K-6	Spotlight on English Lexia English National Geographic Cengage: Exploring Science Social Studies: myWorld Interactive Scholastic: Let's Find Out CommonLit
ESL Grades 7-8	Inside Level A Inside Level B Inside the USA
ESL Grades 9-12	Side by Side (Newcomer) Q-Skills for Success Achieve 3000
English for ELLs	Inside the USA (Newcomer) Edge
7 th Grade	Math: Built to the Common Core-Course 2 ALEXS Online Program
8 th Grade	Math: Built to the Common Core-Course 3 ALEXS Online Program
High School Newcomer Program	Rosetta Stone
High School Content Area Textbooks in Spanish for Bilingual Classes	
Algebra	Revela el Algebra ALEKS online program
World History	Historia del Mundo Newsela
US History/	Historia de Estados Unidos Newsela

Note: Data are from "2023-2024 Bilingual Textbook Inventory, Kindergarten - Grade 12" provided by Lakewood Public School District

College and Career Course Offerings

Dual Enrollment

Lakewood High School offers access to 18 dual enrollment courses through a partnership with Ocean County College. Approximately 125 students participated in the Dual Enrollment program during the 2023-2024 School Year per District data. This program is offered free of charge to students and allows students to graduate with an Associate’s degree in their respective field of study.

Vocational Education

There are a number of career-focused options for students offered at Lakewood High School, such as Army Junior ROTC, Perkins Pathways coursework and other career-focused course offerings. Students can also enroll in a large number of vocational courses through the Ocean County Vocational Technical High School.

139 high school students participated in vocational courses during the 2022-2023 school year according to District provided data.

TABLE 19: LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT VOCATIONAL COURSE ENROLLMENT

Year	Total VOC Students	Applied Arts	Engineering Computers & Design	Construction Trades	Health Technologies	Service Occupations	Transportation Technologies
2017-2018	97	6	3	7	34	31	16
2018-2019	91	13	1	9	26	30	12
2019-2020	112	16	5	15	30	34	12
2020-2021	131	17	12	16	36	25	25
2021-2022	152	21	9	15	40	38	29

2022-2023	139	20	4	10	43	46	16
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Note: Data retrieved from Lakewood Public School District file, "2017-2023 Alcantara Data March 25, 2023"

FIGURE 17: 2023-2024 CTE PROGRAMS OFFERED AT LAKEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

<p>JROTC- 280301</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leadership Education Training 1 2. Leadership Education Training 2 3. Leadership Education Training 3 4. Leadership Education Training 4 <p>Culinary- 120500</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hospitality & Culinary 1: Food & Beverage Commercial Foods 2. Hospitality & Culinary 2: Culinary Arts 3. Hospitality & Culinary 3: Catering and Restaurant Service <p>Fashion- 500407</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fashion & Design 1 2. Fashion & Design 2 3. Fashion & Design 3 <p>TV & Production- 100201</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Television Production 1 2. Television Broadcast Journalism 2 3. Advanced Television Broadcast Journalism 3 <p>Recording Arts- 100203</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recording Arts 1 2. Recording Arts 2 3. Recording Arts 3 4. Recording Arts 4 	<p>Business- 520201</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Level 1 (2.5 credits) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Communications for Business Administration b. Entrepreneurship c. (will be changing the level 1 class to Marketing in future application) 2. Accounting 3. Business Management <p>Biomedical Science- 510000</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Principles of Biomedical Science 2. Human Body Systems 3. Medical Interventions <p>Engineering- 140101</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Intro to Engineering Design 2. Principles of Engineering 3. Engineering Design & Development <p>Visual Arts- 500409 at</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Foundations of Art 2. Visual Media (Photography) 3. Commercial Art & Design
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Note: Data retrieved from Lakewood Public School District file "2023-2024 CTE Programs at Lakewood High School", Dec 2023

The high school offers ten Career Academy Pathways according to the LHS 2023-2024 Program of Studies Handbook. Five students participated in a full-time Career Academy Pathway in the 2022-2023 school year across three Pathway programs based on District provided data. Full-time Pathway program participation has ranged between three to six students each year since the 2017-2018 school year.

TABLE 20: CAREER ACADEMY PATHWAYS

Year	Total VOC Students Career Academies Full-time	MATES Marine Academy of Technology & Environmental Science	GPAA Grunin Performing Arts Academy	ALPS Academy of Law & Public Safety
2017-2018	6	1	3	2
2018-2019	5	2	1	2
2019-2020	5	2	1	2
2020-2021	3	1	1	1
2021-2022	4	2	1	1
2022-2023	5	2	1	2

Note: Data retrieved from Lakewood Public School District file, "2017-2023 Alcantara Data March 25, 2023"

World Languages

Lakewood High School offers Spanish as a world language, including Spanish as a Native/Heritage language. Students can also take up to two years of American Sign Language. For students wishing to take an alternative world language, it may be taken as an independent study through an online learning platform Edmentum (German, French, Latin). Students who proficiently speak a language other than English may

also receive world language credits through the STAMP assessment. Students are required to take at least two years of world languages. These requirements meet the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for World Languages.

Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate

Advancement Placement (AP) classes are offered at Lakewood High School to students in their junior or senior year. Many AP courses are listed as dual enrollment through Ocean County College in the LHS 2023-2024 Program of Studies Handbook. Nine AP courses were offered in the 2023-2024 school year per the Program of Studies Handbook. Students were enrolled in six of these courses during the 2022-2023 school year. AP enrollment and exam data are represented in the charts below.

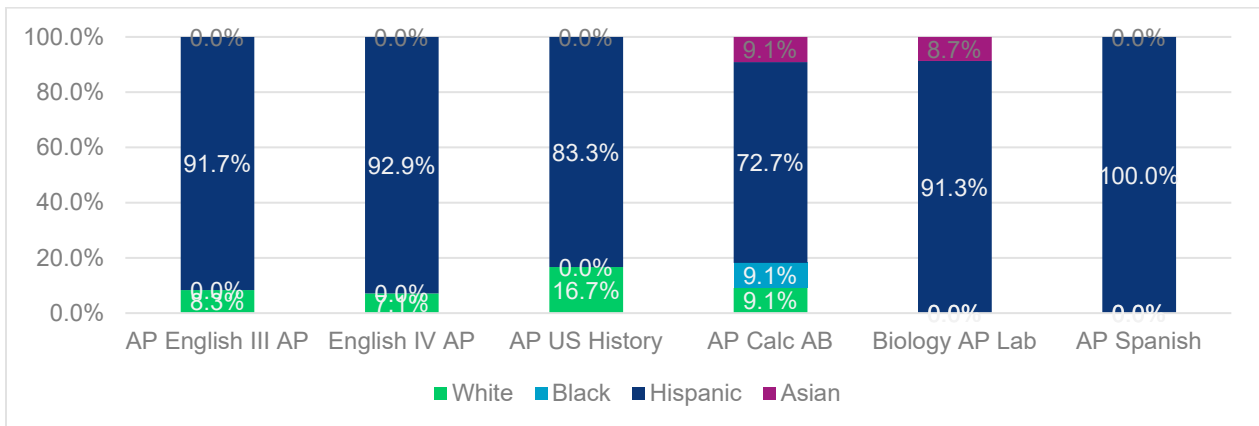
TABLE 21: ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) STUDENT ENROLLMENT DATA (2023)

Class	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian
AP English III	12	1		11		8.3%	0.0%	91.7%	0.0%
English IV AP	14	1		13		7.1%	0.0%	92.9%	0.0%
AP US History	6	1		5		16.7%	0.0%	83.3%	0.0%
AP Calc AB	11	1	1	8	1	9.1%	9.1%	72.7%	9.1%
Biology AP Lab	23			21	2	0.0%	0.0%	91.3%	8.7%
AP Spanish	14			14		0.0%	0.0%	100%	0.0%

Note: Data retrieved from Lakewood Public School District file "#57 AP Student Demographics", Dec 2023

Each AP course offered at Lakewood High School enrolls majority Hispanic students, with the percentage ranging from 72.7% in AP Calculus AB to 100% in AP Spanish (**Figure 18**).

FIGURE 18: LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT AP ENROLLMENT BY SUBGROUP (2022-2023)



Note: Data retrieved from Lakewood Public School District file "#57 AP Student Demographics", Dec 2023

TABLE 22: ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) STUDENT ASSESSMENT DATA (2023)

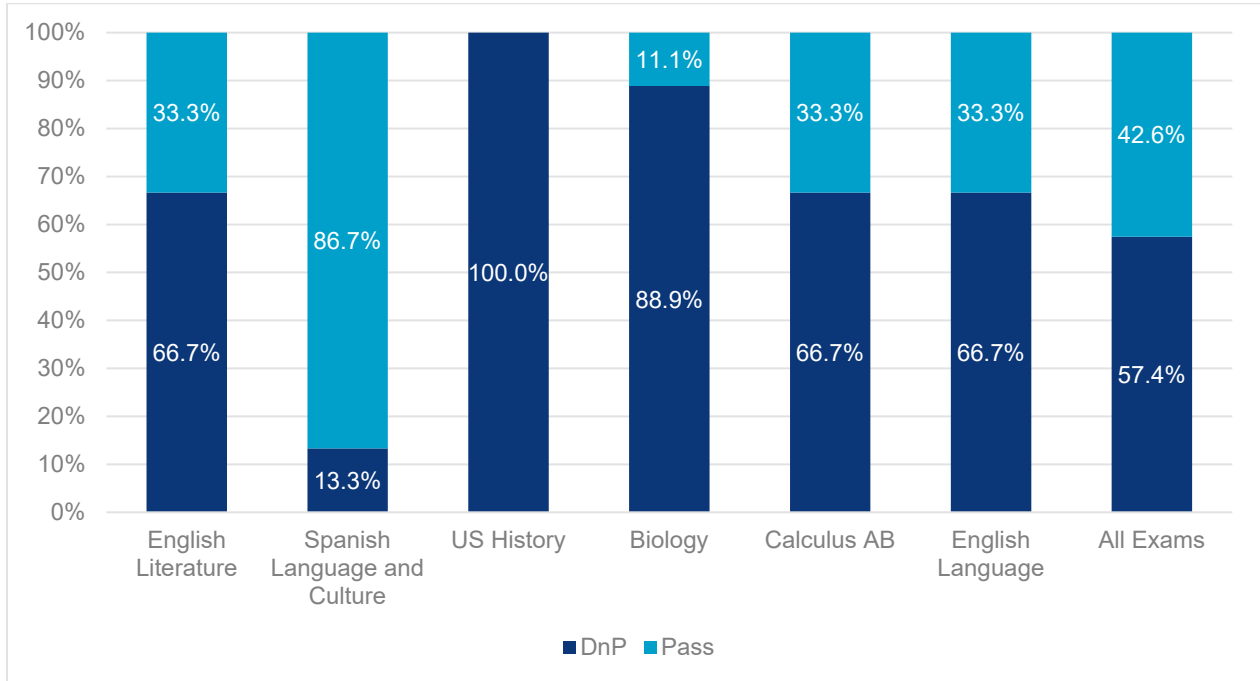
Exam	Attempted	#Did Not Pass	#Pass	Did Not Pass	Pass
English Literature	3	2	1	66.7%	33.3%
Spanish Language and Culture	15	2	13	13.3%	86.7%
US History	5	5	0	100.0%	0.0%
Biology	9	8	1	88.9%	11.1%
Calculus AB	9	6	3	66.7%	33.3%
English Language	6	4	2	66.7%	33.3%
All Exams	47	27	20	57.4%	42.6%

Passing score is a 3 and above.

Note: Data retrieved from Lakewood Public School District file "#58 - AP Scores 2023", Dec 2023.

As shown in **Figure 19**, of the students taking AP exams for courses offered at Lakewood High School, more than half of the students did not pass in all courses except for Spanish Language and Culture. In 2022-2023, no students who took the AP US History course passed and only 11.1% of students taking Biology passed.

FIGURE 19: AP EXAM OUTCOMES FOR LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT (2022-2023)



Note: Data retrieved from Lakewood Public School District file "#58 - AP Scores 2023", Dec 2023.

TABLE 23: ADVANCED PLACEMENT CLASS ENROLLMENT VS. EXAM COMPLETION (2023)

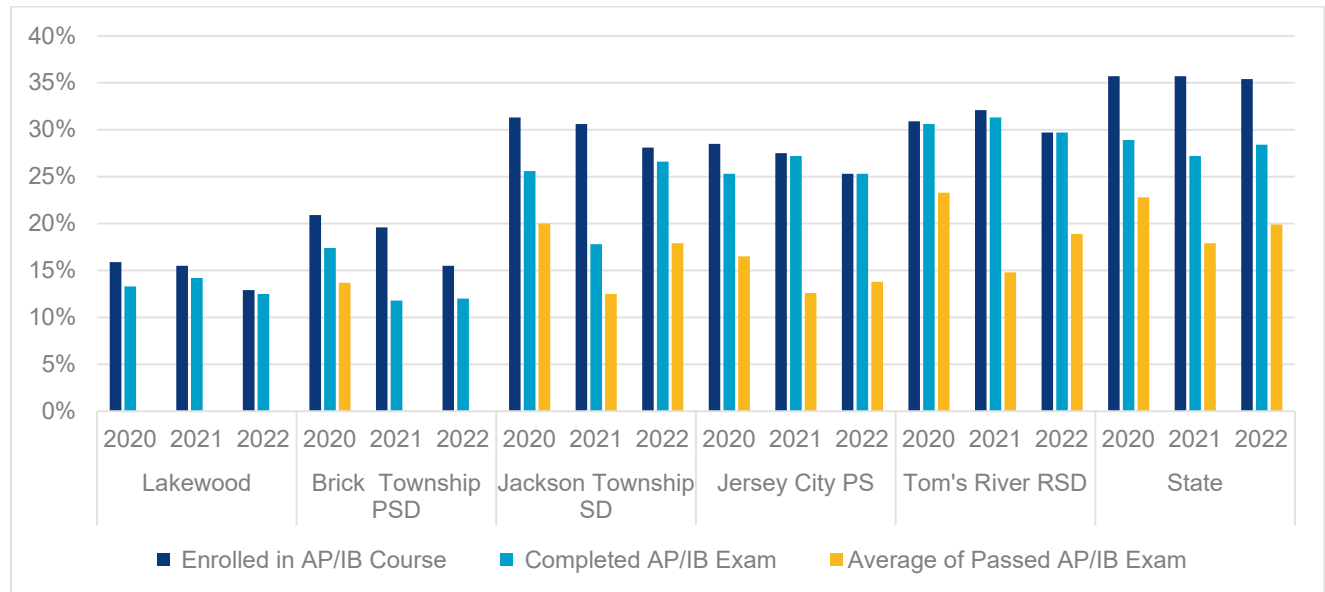
Class	Total # Student Enrollment	Total # Students Taking AP Exam	% Difference
AP English III	12	8	40%
English IV	14	9	44%
AP US History	6	5	18%
AP Calc AB	11	11	0%
Biology AP Lab	23	9	87.5%
AP Spanish	14	14	0%

Note: Data retrieved from Lakewood Public School District file "#57 AP Student Demographics", Dec 2023

- In 66% of AP classes, all students enrolled in the class did not take the AP exam.
- The largest differential of student enrollment and students taking the exam was in AP Biology Lab. While the class had 23 students enrolled in the class, the largest number of students in any AP class, only 9 students took the exam.
- The lowest performance results were in AP US History, which had the lowest enrollment of 5 students and 0% of students passing the exam.
- The highest percentage of students earning a passing score of 3+ was in AP Spanish. All students in the class were Hispanic and may have had previous Spanish language proficiency.

Figure 20 compares enrollment in AP/IB courses, completion of AP/IB exams, and average pass rates of AP/IB exams across comparison Districts and at the state level from 2020-2021 to 2022-2023. Lakewood’s enrollment in AP/IB courses is below each of the comparable Districts and the state average. Lakewood’s completion of AP/IB exams is lower than all Districts and the state average except for Brick Township. The NJ Performance Reports require 20 or more students to complete the AP exam for performance data to be reported. Therefore, there is no average pass rate provided for Lakewood across this timeframe.

FIGURE 20: AP PARTICIPATION AND OUTCOME ANALYSIS ACROSS DISTRICTS



Note: AP/IB Data retrieved from New Jersey Department of Education “NJ Performance Reports 2021-2022”, access Jan 2024, <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>.

The Lakewood Public School District does not offer an International Baccalaureate Program.

Professional Development

Professional development is a major component of the curriculum supervisor’s role.

- Curriculum supervisors and the instructional coaches use data collected from classroom walkthroughs, coaching sessions, and student assessment data (both internal assessments as well as mandated state assessments) to determine what professional development will be offered each year.
- There are three professional development days before the start of school, but the District does not have early release days or many teacher workshop days to provide a time that teachers from the same grade levels or content areas can work together.
- There is a high use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) where training is planned on the units being taught or on questions that teachers have regarding instruction.
- The District also relies on instructional coaches, especially at the elementary level, to work with struggling teachers and model lessons for them to grow their expertise.
- Teachers have many opportunities to participate in professional development virtually, in the District, or through outside conferences and courses.

Survey data results in **Figure 21** shows that not all teachers value the professional development or the ability to meet the needs of their students.

- 56% of teachers agreed with the statement that the “professional development opportunities offered by Lakewood Public School District help me monitor student progress.”

- 70% of teachers agreed with the statement that “I have the professional development I need to implement the NJLS effectively.

FIGURE 21: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STAFF SURVEY RESPONSE

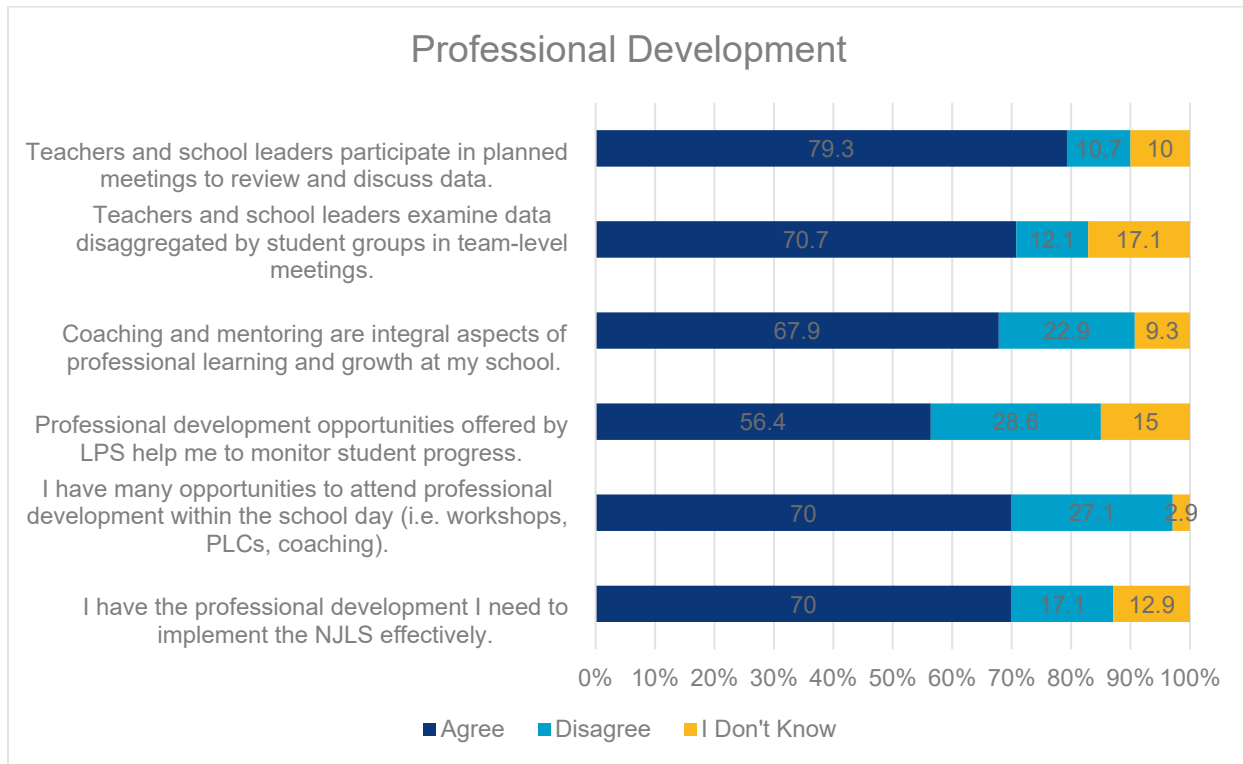


Table 24 provides a sample of a professional development calendar for September. There were similar calendars provided to PCG for every month including the summer. Figure 22 shows a sample monthly PLC calendar. PLC calendars are created for each school’s grade levels as well as District programs.

TABLE 24: SAMPLE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER

September
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEU PD Goal Book Training for all Teachers, Supporting all Students in the classroom - All Paraprofessionals by Kirby Jones Devorie- First 3 Days of School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SE Expectations - Training for all SE Teachers - Lakewood Special Education 23 24
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3-5 LLD Training ,ELA Modifications LLD 3-5 Math Modifications LLD 3-5 Training for Paras in the Autistic Classes, (Piner, Spruce, and Oak) Paraprofessional training , Nurse Meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Meeting with Alicia.. - Meeting with Julian O’Neil , visit to all the Classes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CST Training with Chrisite CST Training PowerPoint
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarke Team Teaching Training In Class Resource PowerPoint, Sign in Sheet for Clarke 9/11 and LHS PLC All Day. 9/11/ 23
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sonday PD for Teachers that have not been trained, Visit to spruce SE Classes, Follow up with K. Elias and R. Erreich

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SE Meeting , Meeting with Oak MD, Meeting with Gina, Visit to LMS LLD classes, Linda S. Tara C and Sylvia F.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarke - SPED Coaching Sped and Clifton Team Teaching- CAGS ICR Training 9.14.23.pdf. Clifton Team Teaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Threat Assessment Team Mandatory Training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarke - SPED Coaching, Oak After School Inclusion Training sign in sheet for after school PLC by D.S Sign in Sheet LMS Inclusion Training PLC In Class Resource /LRE Special Education 23 24 Monday September 18th- MS PLC's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clifton - SPED Coaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spruce - SPED Coaching Spruce Team Meeting Schedule
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Piner - SPED Coaching

Note. Adapted " Professional Development Training Calendar for Special Education " provided by Lakewood Public Schools.

FIGURE 22: SAMPLE PROGRAM PLC CALENDAR

<h2 style="text-align: center;">PLCs for Bilingual K-2 Tier 1/2 Classes</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">(These will be in lieu of the K-2 ELA PLCs with Mrs. Feifer)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For grades 3-6, it is preferred that you attend PLCs with your grade level. However, should a topic NOT pertain to you, feel free to access one of the on-demand trainings below instead.</p>								
MONTHS	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May
ELA Grade Level Curriculum Bilingual PLC	3-6 - PLC WIDA ELD Standards Framework: A Collaborative Approach (self-paced; 4 hours; WIDA will provide certificate of completion)	K-2 - PLC Spanish Sound Wall and Phoneme-Mapping Grapheme Slides / Videos Complete this Form 3-6 - PLC Google Sites: MLLs Resources / Videos (explore and get familiar with the website) Complete this Form CEU	3-6 - PLC Developing Language for Learning in Mathematics (self-paced; 4 hours; WIDA will provide certificate of completion)	K-2 - PLC Exploring the WIDA PreK-3 Essential Actions (self-paced; 2 hours; WIDA will provide certificate of completion)	3-6 - PLC Engaging MLLs in Science: Making Sense of Phenomena (self-paced; 4 hours; WIDA will provide certificate of completion)	3-6 - PLC Social Studies: Engaging MLLs Through Inquiry (self-paced; 4 hours; WIDA will provide certificate of completion)	3-6 - PLC Making Language Visible in the Classroom: Explore the Key Language Uses (self-paced; 1 hour; WIDA will provide certificate of completion)	K-2 - PLC Bilingual K-2 Summer Learning Initiative Slides
	Bilingual ELA Data Meeting	K-6 - Data Dual Language Report from mCLASS /DIBELS		K-5 - Data Istation and/or Istation Español Report Watch this webinar.		K-6 - Data Dual Language Report from mCLASS /DIBELS		

Note: Retrieved from "PLC Calendars". Folder #14. Professional Development, Provided by Lakewood Public Schools.

There is the perception that more things are added each year and that more time is taken during the day because professional development is typically offered during prep time. Some teachers feel that they are frequently pulled away for Professional Development and departmental obligations, and they express a desire for more uninterrupted time for instruction. Examples of professional learning at individual schools include:

- Staff meetings are after school the first three Mondays of every month, sometimes these include professional development.
- Once a month there is a data mining PLC to help teachers understand how to use data and look at data to better instruction for their students.

- When a new curriculum is rolled out there is a 2-hour “unpacking” time block for teachers followed up by lesson demos.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

A PCG team conducted classroom observations from December 11 to December 14, 2023. The data provided in this chapter only includes the general education focused visits. The Special Education data and analysis is located in the Special Education chapter of this report.

TABLE 25: CLASSROOM VISIT DATA

Classrooms Visited	Elementary (K-6)	Secondary (7-12)	Total
General Education Classrooms Visits	11	15	26
Content Area Focus	Elementary (K-6)	Secondary (7-12)	Total
ELA Focus	6	6	12
Math Focus	4	5	9
Science Focus	0	4	4
Intervention	1	0	1

TABLE 26: CLASSROOM VISIT DATA RECORDING TOOL FOCUS AREAS

Area I: Focus on Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Engagement • Student Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Whole Class ○ Small Groups or Paired ○ Individual
Area II: Focus on Instructional Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson Design • Checks for Learning/Understanding • Level(s) of Student Work • Instructional Materials
Area III: Focus on Classroom Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom Appearance • Classroom Management • Classroom Culture

Classroom Visits Data

The data outlined below are a summary of classroom visits based on the methodology previously described. The data provide a snapshot of instructional practices within the observed classrooms.

Focus on Learners

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: ALL CLASSROOMS

The three areas under student engagement that the PCG team observed included whether students were **on-task, disengaged, and disruptive**. The following analysis and conclusions in this area included:

- **On-task**
 - Most students were on-task in both the elementary and secondary classrooms that PCG visited. There were very few students (less than 5%) who did not have their materials out, that included their laptops or packets, to complete the assignments.
 - In early grades, K-1, there was more student movement which made redirection necessary to ensure students were on-task. Nearly all students complied when reminded.

- At the high school level, students sat at their desks quietly while the teacher used the PowerPoint to teach the lesson or showed problems on the board.
- **Disengagement**
 - While students were on-task, it was difficult to determine the level of engagement versus compliance. This distinction was most difficult to discern when the whole class was using their computers at some point during 80% of the observed lessons. There were very few opportunities for students to work without their computers or engage with other students or in a classroom discussion.
 - At the high school level, students stared at their computer screen while the teacher lectured or went through the slide deck of the PPT for the lesson.
- **Disruptive**
 - Out of all the classrooms observed, the PCG team only viewed one incident of a disruptive student who required redirection. This student was in an early elementary classroom.
 - When visiting both the middle school and high school, there were no disruptive or disrespectful students in the observed classrooms. PCG noted this absence as highly atypical.

STUDENT ACTIVITY

- **Whole Class**
 - The majority of instruction was at the whole class level.
 - Whole class instruction appeared as follows:
 - Teachers asked the entire group questions and students responded. Teachers typically called on students with their hand raised and did not often cold call or randomly select students.
 - At the high school, most students sat quietly and unresponsive when teachers asked questions.
 - In some classrooms, mainly at the elementary level, teachers used white boards (communicators) where students would write answers to questions or math problems and raise them up to show to the teacher their answers. In every observed classroom, there were students who did not show their white board, but the teachers did not address the student(s).
 - Whole class lesson design typically began with a short assignment posted on the PPT slide. Students worked independently before the lesson began.
 - Teachers used the gradual release of responsibility framework during instruction, including 'I do, We do, and You do.'
 - During the general education/special education co-teaching or parallel teaching classroom visits, the following data were collected:⁶⁰
 - In one instance, a general education teacher was alone in her room with students. There was not a special education teacher or paraprofessional present.
 - In one elementary classroom, there was a literacy block co-taught by two teachers, general education and special education. Both the general education teacher and the special education teacher were active in teaching the lesson. The students appeared comfortable with the routine.
 - In one of the secondary classes, there was a special education and general education teacher. The teachers' worked as a team to engage students and it was difficult to know which role the teachers' held. The teachers used technology but more as a support tool, but not as the only strategy to teach the concepts.

⁶⁰ Additional data specific to classroom visits for special education are provided in the Special Education section of this report.

- **Small Groups or Paired**
 - There was one example observed by the PCG team of small groups or paired students.
 - There was one example observed of the “turn and talk” strategy used in an elementary classroom.
 - At the secondary level, there were some classes that were set up with tables rather than rows. These classes appeared to have an easier time working in pairs or small groups.
 - In some of the freshman classes, tight classrooms due to a large number of desks inhibited student collaboration.
- **Individual**
 - Individual work was the most common student activity observed.
 - Most classes were set up in rows made up of single desks or rows with desks pushed together to create horizontal rows. While Even when the classroom desk set up was conducive for students working together, teachers still required students to complete individual assignments.
 - At the high school level, there was a lot of individual work time at the end of the classes. That was particularly true for the smaller class sizes. In those classrooms, teachers finished their teaching early and students worked independently or talked quietly with another student.

Focus on Instructional Practices

LESSON DESIGN

- **Learning Objectives**
 - In most classrooms learning objectives were posted. At times, it was difficult to see how the lesson connected to the learning objective. Most teachers did not reference the learning objective during the lesson.
 - The PowerPoint deck included the learning goal. In some classes, the learning goal was in student friendly language.
- **Student Interaction**
 - Most instruction focused on the whole group. There was little interaction between students.
 - In the classrooms where there was not a computer assisted lesson (~27%), students engaged with the teacher in discussions or with their classmates.
 - Students interacted with each other in both English and Spanish. This was more frequently observed at the high school level.
- **Explicit Instruction**
 - Lakewood’s Instructional Framework was evident in all classes.
 - Every classroom had a PowerPoint on the SMART board for the teachers to use to instruct the lesson.
 - In every math class PCG observed, all instruction was teacher-led. There was no student engagement during the explicit instruction part of the lesson.
- **Lesson Scripts and Pacing Guides**
 - The PCG team observed no teachers reading directly from scripts.
 - Teachers moved quickly through lessons to keep up with the timing of the lesson.
 - In three classrooms, teachers mentioned that they had to move on to complete their lesson during the designated class time even when students were not ready for the transition.
 - Time checks and timers were used in classes where students were doing independent work. Students were given a set amount of time to complete the assignment and most teachers were good at keeping to their time.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

- **Strategies to Check Student Understanding**
 - Teachers used verbal questioning to check for understanding. However, students were reluctant to respond and mostly sat quietly. This lack of participation was most prevalent at the high school level. It was unclear if this was due to lack of understanding, disengagement, or both.
 - The most used strategy to check for understanding was the communicators (small white boards) at both the elementary and middle school level.
 - PCG did not observe ML support services in any classroom.

LEVELS OF STUDENT WORK

- The levels of student work the PCG team observed included remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.
 - In nearly all classrooms, there was a lot of teacher talk.
 - Most classes focused on lower-level skills, such as remembering and understanding, through the use of worksheets or computer-based practice.
 - In one classroom students applied their knowledge and one where they created original work in a team. Students were highly engaged.
 - All opportunities to work at higher level were observed in science classrooms.
 - ELA/literacy and math instruction was at the bottom of the skill level tiers. Students completed assignments/tasks on computers, with limited opportunity to move to a higher level. In one class, students watch movie clips in lieu of reading the assigned novel. While watching the clip, the teacher explained that what was happening in the movie was not in the novel. Students stared blankly at the screen.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

- There was a lack of instructional materials used as part of the lesson, even though the classrooms had a variety of instructional materials around the room. Instructional materials used centered on computers, PowerPoint slides, worksheets/workbooks, and communicators (white boards) only.
- There was significant technology (laptop) use at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.
- There was a high level of similarity/predictability from class to class and between content.

Focus on Classroom Environment

CLASSROOM APPEARANCE

- Schools are clean and appear to be well maintained. There was a welcoming environment within the schools.
- Classrooms are filled with visuals to support students in their learning. As is typical, elementary schools have the most decorated and welcoming classrooms and at the high school level, classrooms do not have as much on the walls. It was holiday time so there were holiday displays at all levels.
- Anchor charts were present in all elementary classrooms. The anchor charts were used as part of the lesson's instruction in some observed lessons. It was noted that the charts were in English only. If a student was a native Spanish speaker, there were little written supports for them unless they were in an Multilingual classroom.
- Student work was more often seen in the hallways than in the classrooms.
- Most classrooms were orderly and safe. There were posters on the wall to show the "safe space" where students would congregate in case of an intruder.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

- Observed classrooms were well managed, systems and routines were in place at both elementary and secondary levels.
- The PCG team did not observe disruptions in the classroom or in the hallways during transitions.

- All whole class management strategies observed were effective.
- PBIS was not apparent during class instruction time.
- Students were respectful to the adults and to their peers.
- At the high school level, it was observed that students did not know the names of other class members.
- Safety measures were observed in all schools.
- At elementary and middle schools, students entered the school by going through a metal detector, which was overseen by the safety staff stationed at the front entrance of all schools. In addition, all students carried a clear backpack.
- High schools used both metal detectors and a wand which they used on all students before entering the building. School safety staff patrolled the hallways and were stationed during class transitions. There were also cameras placed throughout the school.

CLASSROOM CULTURE

- Respectful relationships between students and staff were observed throughout the classroom observations. Teachers used respectful language when redirecting off-task students and the team did not observe classroom teachers raising their voices with students in their classroom.
- There was some display of enthusiasm and energy by staff, but there were many classes observed where teachers were low energy and did not show enthusiasm for the subject matter being taught. The only enthusiastic moments observed by both students and staff were in the classroom where the teacher did not follow the pacing guide to provide students with a lesson that allowed them to engage with each other.
- There was a noticeable lack of joy and student interest, especially in the upper elementary and secondary classrooms observed.
- The observed classrooms did not take time out to celebrate when students correctly answered questions or accurately solved a problem.

Classroom Observation Analysis

AREA I: FOCUS ON LEARNERS

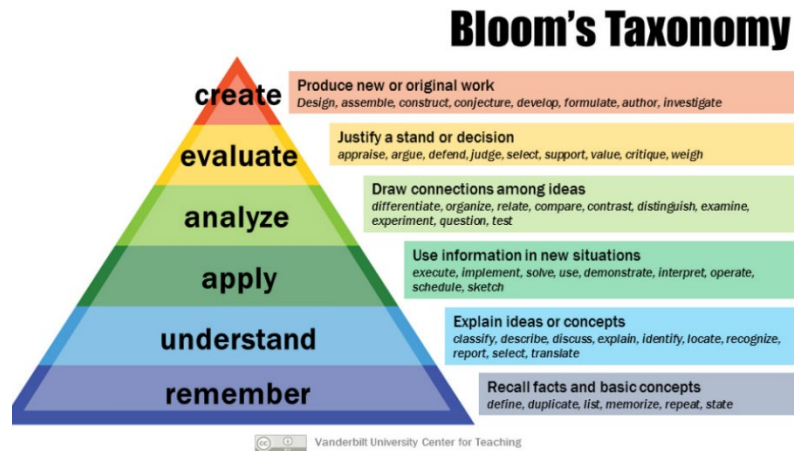
- Students were not engaged in instruction as active learners.
- Students were very quiet. There was limited classroom discussion.
- At the upper elementary through high school levels, almost all observations were of students working independently on assignments.

AREA II: FOCUS ON INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

- Most instruction was teacher-directed.
- Classroom lesson structure was predictable. As the team moved from class to class and school to school, similar lesson design and structure was observed.
- There were opportunities for student practice, but only independent practice. There was limited opportunity for any student collaboration or peer teaching.
- There were no ML support services in the general education classrooms observed.
- Lessons focused on lower part of Bloom's Taxonomy.⁶¹ Students were typically asked to remember or understand the concepts that they were being taught, but not apply them in a new situation. Nor were they asked to analyze, evaluate or create.

⁶¹ Armstrong, P. (2010). *Bloom's Taxonomy*. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>

FIGURE 23: BLOOM'S TAXONOMY



Note. Retrieved from "Bloom's Taxonomy" by Vanderbilt University's Center for Teaching, 2010, (<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>.)

AREA III: FOCUS ON CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

- The classroom environment appeared safe and orderly. Students were compliant and behaved appropriately when asked by teachers, including during transitions.
- Teachers and students had respectful relationships in the classrooms that were observed, but not many classrooms had a feeling of warmth and connection. Classrooms felt business-like. This was more prevalent as the grade levels increased from elementary through secondary.

ASSESSMENT

Students are assessed often. When PCG observed classrooms ~30% of classes were either taking an assessment or prepping to take one the following day. Data are collected from the assessments and analyzed to make changes to the curriculum or pacing guide. Assessments used in the District for ELA/literacy include District-developed end of unit assessments, Dibels, iStation, mCLASS, and Foundational Skills Assessment (aligned with Letterland). Common Lit assessments are also used at the secondary level. **Figure 24** shows a sample assessment schedule for first grade literacy, which outlines the weekly foundational skills assessments.

FIGURE 24: FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT RESOURCES FIRST GRADE 2023-2024

Foundational Skills Assessment Resources First Grade 2023-2024

The following document outlines the Review Words, Unit Words, Diagnostic Words, and Sentences along with the points per Weekly Assessment for the Foundational Skills Block. These assessments will all be put into LinkIt! under Foundational Skills (Letterland/ ReadBright). Please use this chart to ensure that the data entered is accurate and the same throughout the district. Please note that this is the plan that the K-2 ELA Department has laid out based on stakeholder feedback and it's mission to continuously grow our students.

Scoring: Set up a ratio to figure out what this score is out of 100. For example, if there were a total of 17 unit words (10 spelling pattern words + 4 review/challenge words + # of High Frequency Words) on the assessment and the student got 14/17 correct, divide 14 by 17 and the score is 82%.

- The letter sounds portion of the assessment does **NOT** count towards the total score but should be used for instructional purposes.
- The diagnostic words are **not** included in the percentage score. They are scored separately. There are four diagnostic words in each unit. Each word counts for one point so scores will range between 0-4.
- In order to achieve **mastery** in each unit, the students should score **at least 80%** on the unit words, review words, and High Frequency Words and **at least 3/4** on the diagnostic words.

	DATE	Skill (s) Covered	Letterland Unit	ReadBright Unit	Review Words/Challenge Words	Words	Diagnostic Words	Sentences	Points	
	Sept. 7 -11	Review of Letterlanders	Unit A	Administer the Letter Sounds Assessment						
	Sept. 12-15 Short a	CVC Short a /ă/	Units 1 and 2	Unit 1	mat bat lap map	cat hat nap sat mad can am jam back sack	fan ham tack man	A tag is on a rag. The man ran.	18	
	Sept. 18-20 Short i	CVC Short i /î/	Unit 3	Unit 2	hat nap back sack	win big with fix pin thin six pick kick thick	mix fin lick it	I have a hat and a mitt. It is a can of jam.	18	
	Sept. 21-26 Short o	CVC Short o /ô/	Unit 4	Unit 3	win six pick thick	top got hop lot mom not shop hot rock lock	mop dot sock ship	You can hop. The ship has a dock.	16	
	Sept. 27-29 Short u	CVC Short u /û/ Suffix s	Unit 6	Unit 4	top shop rock lock	fun but run cut sun shut bug hug rugs hugs	bun hut cups bugs	Do not run to the bus. His dad sat down.	18	
MP 1 Nov. 14th	Oct. 2-4 Short e	CVC Short e /ê/	Unit 5	Unit 5	fun hug rugs hugs	wet yet then hen yes get tell well red jet	let pet net bed	I went to get a net. The pen was for you.	17	

Note. Retrieved from "Math First Grade Assessments". Folder #39. K-2 Instructional Resources, Math. Lakewood Public Schools.

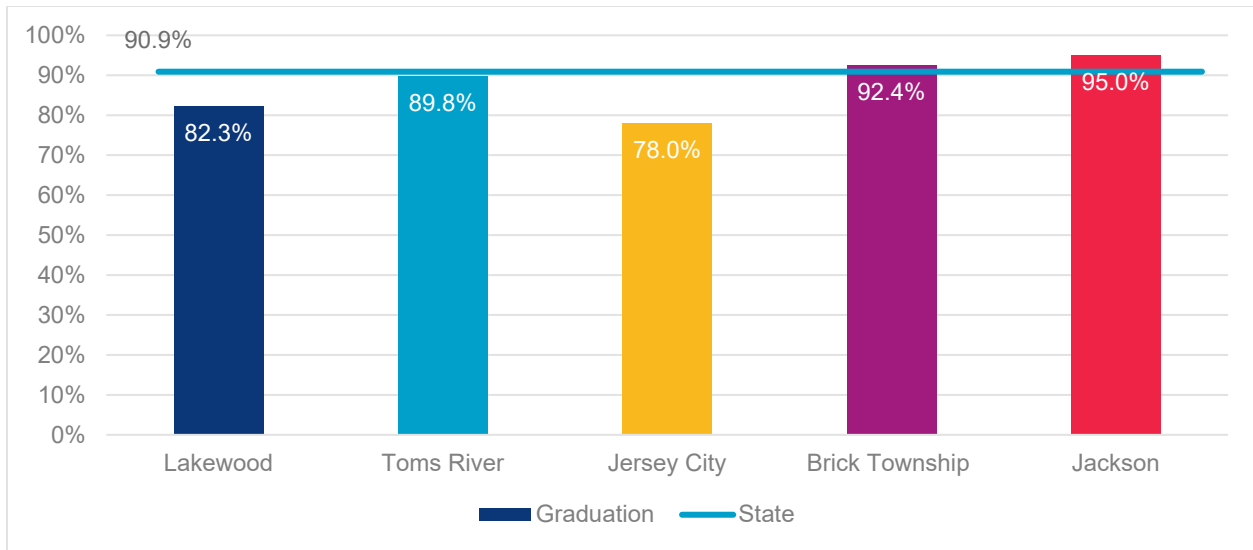
Math assessments are all District-developed. Since the K-8 math curriculum is developed in District, the assessments align to the units. At the elementary level, benchmark assessments include a beginning and end of year test in both English and Spanish. There are also District developed end of unit exams. Per sample pacing guides, students are given multiple quizzes and exams weekly or bi-weekly. At the secondary level, the District has developed unit 'mini tests', quizzes, and end of unit exams. There is also a frequent quiz and exam schedule for secondary students.

Student Outcomes

Graduation and Dropout Rates

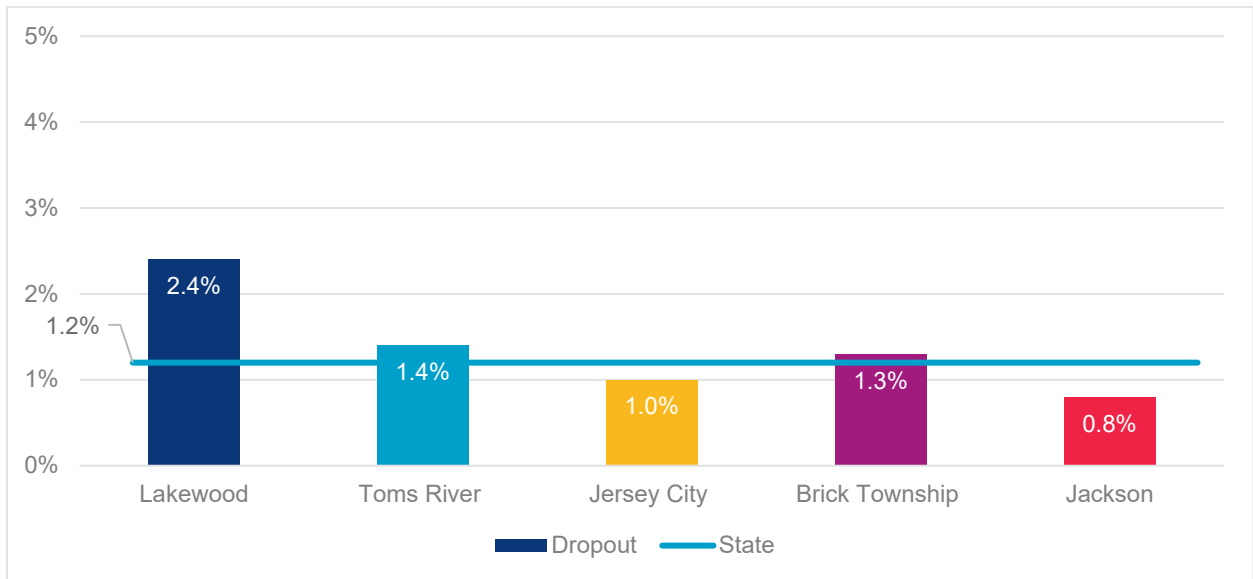
Figure 25 and Figure 26 display graduation rates and dropout rates compared across comparison districts and the state average. In 2022-2023, Lakewood Public School District had a graduation rate of 82.3%, 8.6% below NJ state average, and a dropout rate of 2.4%, which is double the state average.

FIGURE 25: GRADUATION RATES BY COMPARATIVE DISTRICT (2022)⁶²



Note. Retrieved from “Fall Enrollment Reports” by New Jersey Department of Education, 2022, (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>)

FIGURE 26: DROPOUT RATES BY COMPARATIVE DISTRICTS (2022)



Note. Retrieved from “Fall Enrollment Reports” by New Jersey Department of Education, 2022, (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>)

State Testing

The charts below display ELA and Math proficiency in state testing across Lakewood Public School District students in grades three, five, and eight from 2022 to 2023.⁶³ Note that subgroups without trend lines are due to lack of data for a given year.

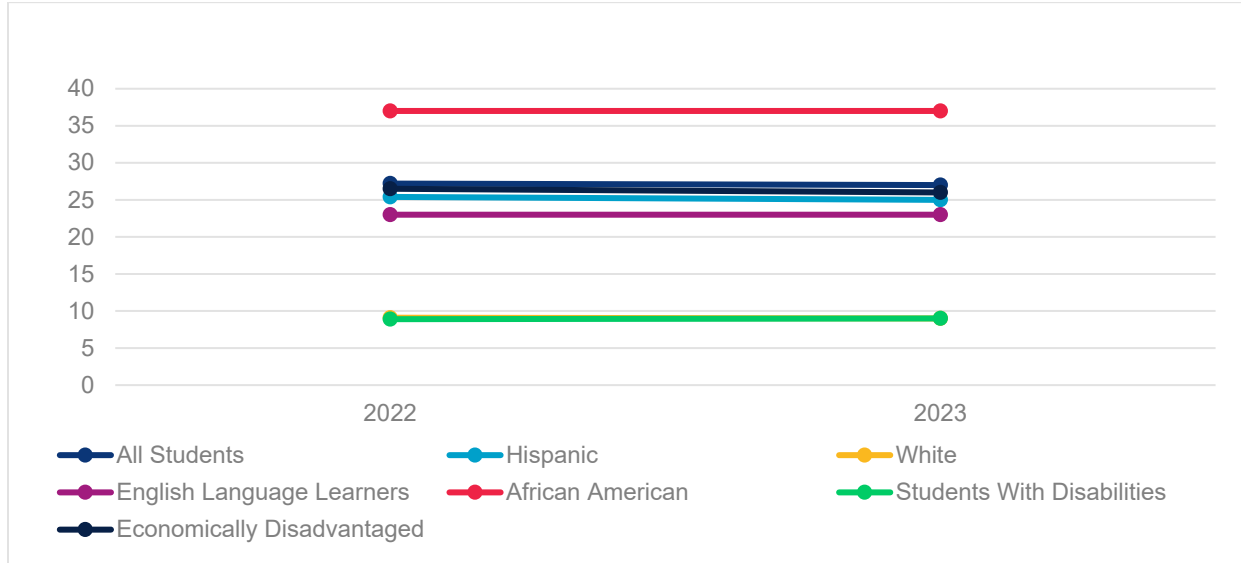
From 2022 to 2023, ELA proficiency for all students, increased in grade five and grade eight (**Figure 27**). For third grade students, all proficiency levels remained the same from 2022 to 2023, with the exception of

⁶² NJ School Performance Report. (2023). Official Site of the State of New Jersey. <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>

⁶³ Lakewood Township School District (29-2520) Performance Reports. (2017). Official Site of the State of New Jersey. <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/prioryearreport/2016-2017/29/2520/>

economically disadvantaged students, which dropped by one point. In 2023, English Language Learner, economically disadvantaged, and African American students in Lakewood performed above state proficiency levels. Students with disabilities, White students, and Hispanic students performed below state proficiency levels.

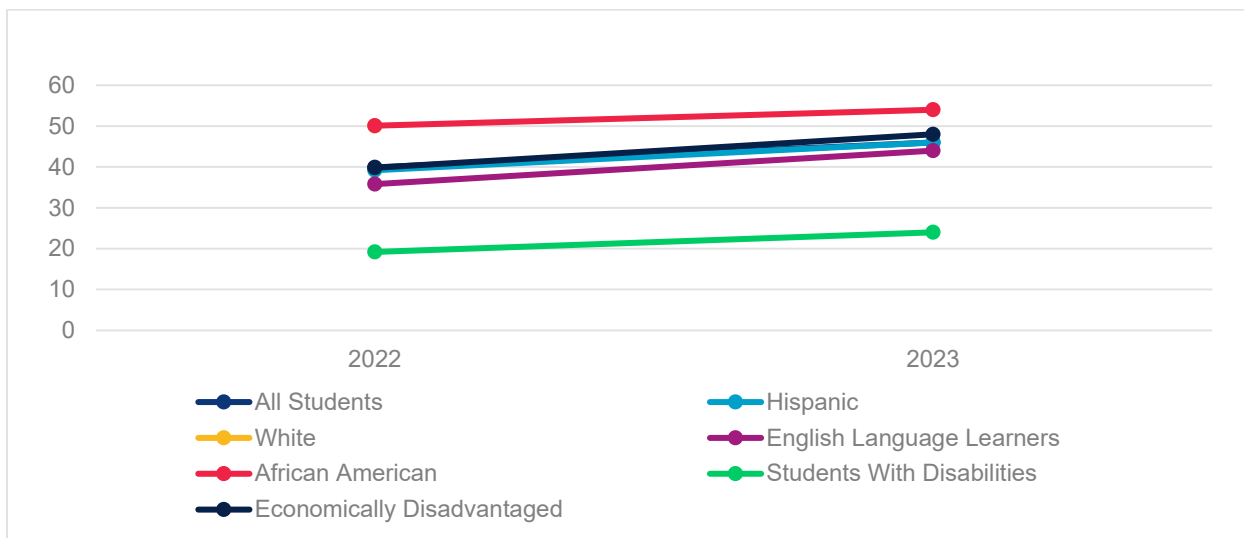
FIGURE 27: PROFICIENCY FOR GRADE 3 ELA



Note. Retrieved from "Lakewood Township School District (29-2520) Performance Reports" by Official Site of the State of New Jersey, (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/prioryearreport/2016-2017/29/2520/>)

For fifth grade students, ELA proficiency increased across all subgroups (**Figure 28**). There are no data for white students' ELA proficiency in fifth grade for 2023. In 2023, all subgroups of students in Lakewood performed higher than the state proficiency level.

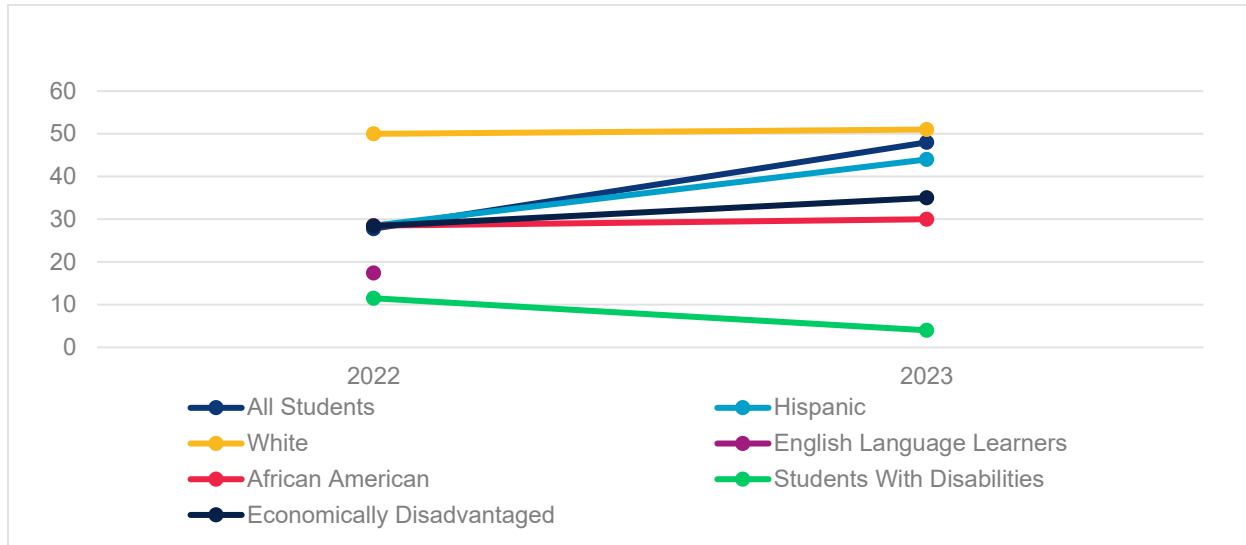
FIGURE 28: PROFICIENCY FOR GRADE 5 ELA



Note. Retrieved from "Lakewood Township School District (29-2520) Performance Reports" by Official Site of the State of New Jersey, (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/prioryearreport/2016-2017/29/2520/>)

For eighth grade students, ELA proficiency increased across all subgroups except for students with disabilities, which decreased from 12% proficient in 2022 to 4% proficient in 2023 (Figure 29). There are no data for English Language Learner ELA proficiency in eighth grade for 2023. In 2023, Hispanic students in Lakewood were above state proficiency levels. All other student subgroups fell below state proficiency levels.

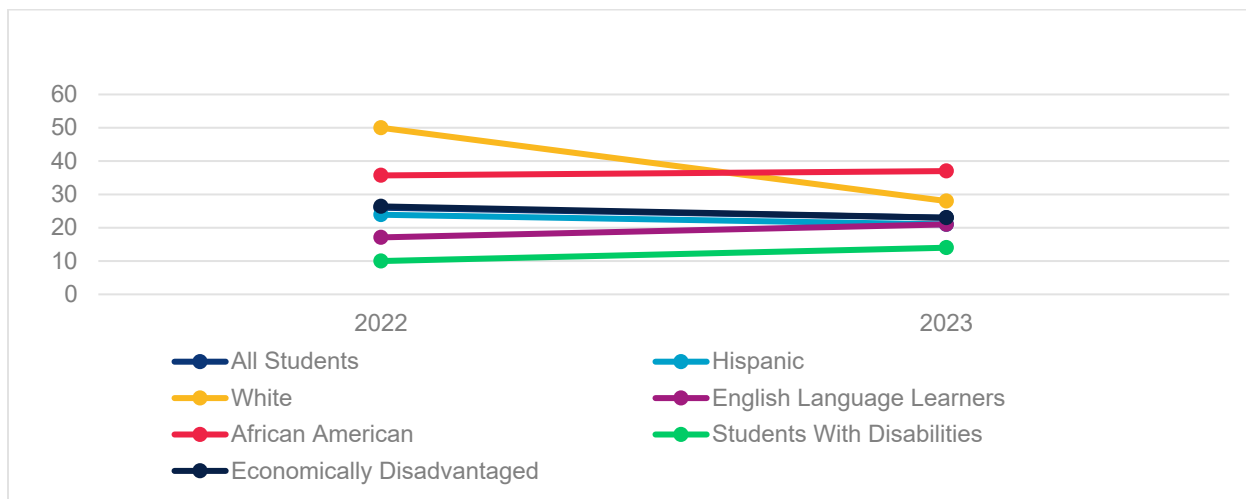
FIGURE 29: PROFICIENCY FOR GRADE 8 ELA



Note. Retrieved from “Lakewood Township School District (29-2520) Performance Reports” by Official Site of the State of New Jersey, (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/prioryearreport/2016-2017/29/2520/>)

Across 2022 to 2023, math proficiency for all students decreased in grade three, increased in grade five, and increased in grade eight. For third grade students, math proficiency decreased for economically disadvantaged students, White students, and Hispanic students from 2022 to 2023 (Figure 30). Math proficiency increased for African American students, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities. In 2023, all subgroups except for African American students in Lakewood performed below state proficiency levels for third grade math.

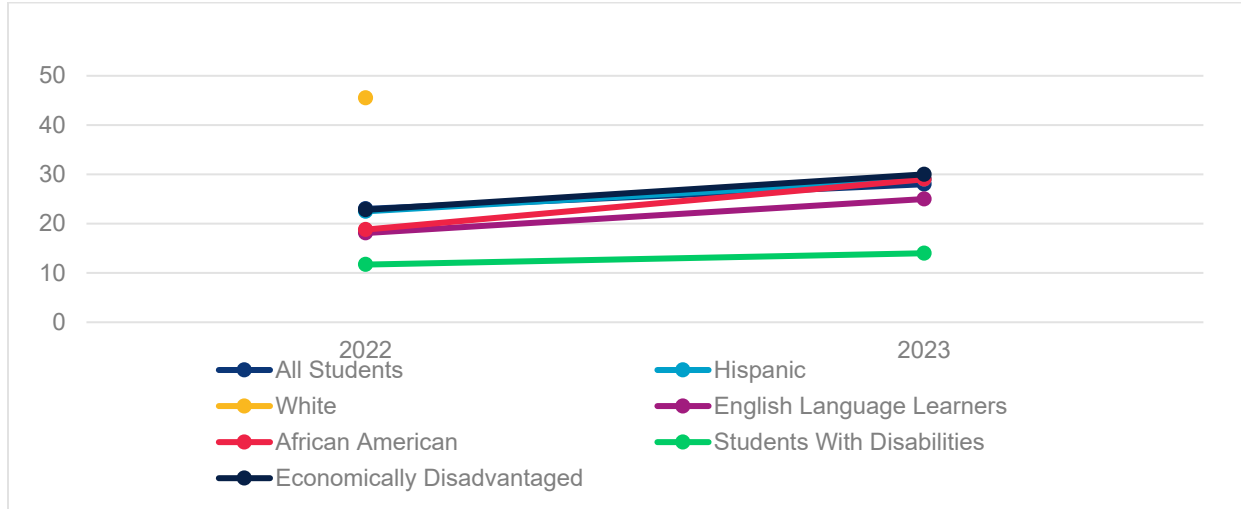
FIGURE 30: PROFICIENCY FOR GRADE 3 MATH



Note. Retrieved from “Lakewood Township School District (29-2520) Performance Reports” by Official Site of the State of New Jersey (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/prioryearreport/2016-2017/29/2520/>)

For fifth grade students, math proficiency increased across all subgroups (**Figure 31**). There are no data for White students' math proficiency in fifth grade for 2023. In 2023, all Lakewood student subgroups performed above state proficiency levels for grade five math except for students with disabilities.

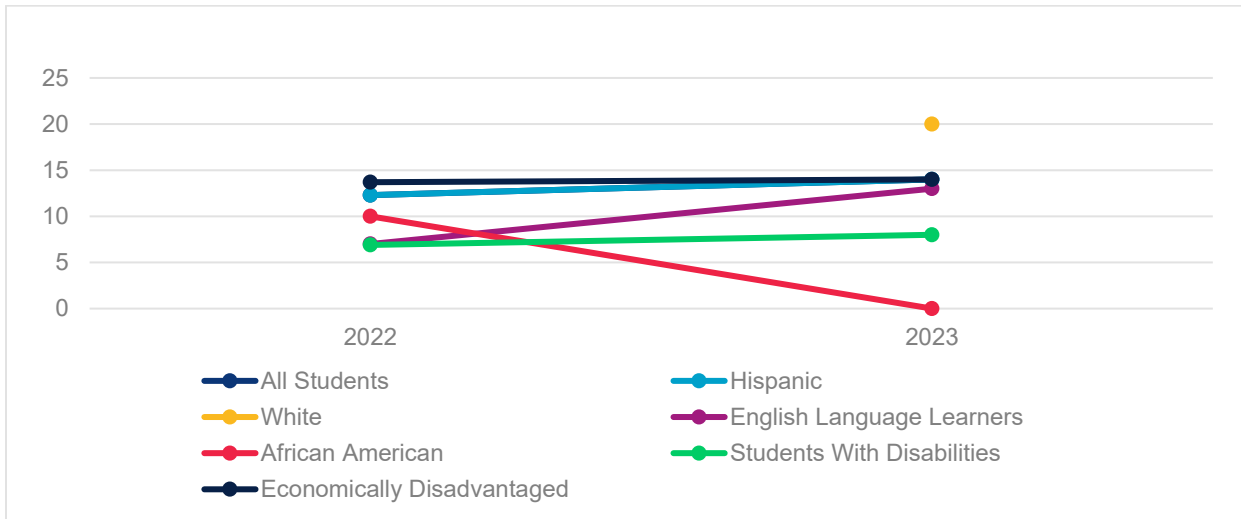
FIGURE 31: PROFICIENCY FOR GRADE 5 MATH



Note: Retrieved from "Lakewood Township School District (29-2520) Performance Reports" by Official Site of the State of New Jersey, (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/prioryearreport/2016-2017/29/2520/>)

For eighth grade students, math proficiency decreased from 2022 to 2023 for African American students and remained the same or increased for all other subgroups (**Figure 32**). There are no data for White students' math proficiency in eighth grade for 2023. In 2023, all Lakewood student subgroups performed above state proficiency levels for eighth grade math except for White students.

FIGURE 32: PROFICIENCY FOR GRADE 8 MATH



Note: Retrieved from "Lakewood Township School District (29-2520) Performance Reports" by Official Site of the State of New Jersey, (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/prioryearreport/2016-2017/29/2520/>)

SPECIAL EDUCATION

This chapter reviews the special education practices of the Lakewood Public School District and follows this organizational structure:

- Characteristics of students with disabilities in the District
- Teaching and Learning for Students with Disabilities
- Building Capacity and Materials
- Staffing, Leadership, and Collaboration
- Family Engagement, and
- Nonpublic Schools.

Throughout the chapter, PCG analyzes the approaches taken to teach and support students with disabilities, and their families, to understand how these practices may impact the overall efficacy of the District.

SUMMARY

- **State Performance Plan Indicators.** Of the indicators in which the District is not meeting targets, the most significant are Indicator 5, specifically including children with IEPs with typically developing peers 80% or more during the school day; Indicator 3B, specifically 4th grade ELA and math assessment; and Indicator 6, preschool children with disabilities in separate settings and the time spent during the day with typically developing peers.
- **Data Reporting.** There also appear to be significant data discrepancy and reporting issues for the SPP indicators and within categorizations of students by placement type.
- **Preschool Population.** Of the overall three-to-four-year old student population of students with disabilities, 79.8% were White and 15.7% were Hispanic. This demographic distribution is not representative of the District's overall population.
- **Incidence Rates.** Over the past three years, Lakewood's special education public school incidence rate is on average ten percentage points higher than the state's incidence rate.
- **Significant Disproportionality.** The District has consistently been found to be significantly disproportionate in several identification and placement categories and is required to set aside 15% of its IDEA federal grant dollars for Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services.
- **Limited Continuum Options.** The District has limited programming for Emotional Regulation Impairment, Visual Impairment, and Intellectual Disabilities in its schools.
- **Out of District Tuition Costs.** Lakewood's out of district tuition costs totaled \$57.5M in 2021-2022 for 372 students, with comparable districts spending far less (from a low of \$4.7M for 62.5 students in one district to a high of \$20.5M for 129 students in another).
- **Access to the General Education Curriculum and Specially Designed Instruction (SDI).** There are several significant concerns regarding access to the general education curriculum and the overall implementation of SDI in Lakewood for students with disabilities, from the inability of teachers to modify curricular materials, to pacing concerns, to the implementation of parallel/co-teaching, to the fact that many IEPs reviewed do not align to grade level requirements.
- **Related Services Equipment.** The District has made substantial investments in state of the art related therapy equipment; yet, these resources appear to be underutilized given the District's population with significant disabilities is not educated within the public school buildings.
- **Families.** Lakewood has an active Special Education Parent Advisory Group (SEPAG), which meets monthly. Nearly three-quarters of parents surveyed were familiar with the SEPAG and the support it offers.
- **Nonpublic Schools.** The number of nonpublic students, ages 5-21, eligible to receive special education services increased by 1,606 students, from 8,171 in 2019-20 to 9,777 in 2021-22. This

growth represents a 20% increase in eligible students. These increases have required the District to set aside an increasing allocation under its IDEA federal grant. The management of child find, eligibility, and service determination and provision are managed by an outside provider.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

This section provides context for special education programming by reporting special education prevalence rates based on various subgroups of students, including analysis by disability type and race/ethnicity. Specifically, it addresses data pertaining to the overall percentage of students with IEPs based on total student enrollment and disability area, comparisons to other districts, and composition by race/ethnicity. This information provides an overall background for understanding the disparate characteristics of students who receive special education services. Data from the State Performance Plan (SPP) indicators are also presented to benchmark Lakewood against state targets in specific areas.

State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) and Results Driven Accountability (RDA)

The United States Department of Education (ED), Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has established State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) requirements that include 17 indicators. Based on requirements set by OSEP, each state is required to develop annual targets and monitor Local Education Agency (LEA) performance on each special education indicator. The state must report annually to the public on its overall performance and on the performance of each of its LEAs according to the targets in its SPP. Both states and LEAs receive one of the following “determinations” annually: 1) meets the requirements and purposes of the IDEA, 2) needs assistance in implementing the requirements of IDEA, 3) needs intervention in implementing the requirements of IDEA, 4) needs substantial intervention in implementing the requirements of the IDEA. Annual determinations dictate the amount of oversight or monitoring a state or LEA may receive the following year.⁶⁴

FIGURE 33: IDEA PART B INDICATORS

- Indicator 1: Graduation Rate
- Indicator 2: Dropout Rate
- Indicator 3: Assessment (Participation and Performance)
- Indicator 4: Rates of Suspension
- Indicator 5: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Age 6-21
- Indicator 6: Preschool LRE, Age 3-5
- Indicator 7: Preschool Outcomes
- Indicator 8: Parent Involvement
- Indicators 9, 10: Disproportionate Representation Due to Inappropriate Identification
- Indicator 11: Timely Initial Evaluations
- Indicator 12: Early Childhood Transition
- Indicator 13: Secondary Transition
- Indicator 14: Post-School Outcomes
- Indicators 15, 16: Dispute Resolution
- Indicator 17: State Systemic Improvement Plan

Note. Retrieved from “IDEA Part B Indicators” by the US department of Education Results Driven Accountability website, (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda/index.html>)

OSEP has been criticized in past years that the SPP indicators are heavily focused on compliance and have limited focus on results for students with disabilities. As a result, in 2013, the Department announced its intention to change this practice and to include test scores, graduation rates, and post-school outcomes as the basis of the new Results-Driven Accountability (RDA) structure. The intent of RDA is to strike a balance between the focus on improved results and functional outcomes for students with disabilities, while still adhering to the compliance requirements of IDEA. RDA is designed to be transparent and understandable and to drive the improved academic and functional achievement for students with IEPs. The SPP indicator data collected takes on additional importance now that OSEP has moved to the RDA framework, as there are points associated with both a “Part B Compliance Matrix” and a

⁶⁴ RDA: Results Driven Accountability. (n.d.). U.S. Department of Education <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda/index.html>

“Part B Results Driven Accountability Matrix.” Taken together, these scores constitute an RDA Determination and conclude whether Districts and, ultimately states, meet IDEA requirements. The NJDOE monitors SPP/APR Indicators individually and through the QSAC process.

In the following sections, longitudinal SPP data are presented, alongside state targets, for select indicators. Additional data are presented in these three categories:

- State Performance Plan Indicators
- Special Education Demographics
- Educational Setting Data for Students with IEPs

State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report Indicators

Over the past three most current years, with the 2021-22 school year being the most current, Lakewood Public School District has not met targets in the following indicators:

- Indicator 1: Graduation
- Indicator 2: Dropout
- Indicator 3: Participation in Statewide Assessment and Proficiency
- Indicator 5: School Age Least Restrictive Environment
- Indicator 6: Preschool Least Restrictive Environment
- Indicator 11: Timely Initial Evaluations
- Indicator 12: Early Childhood Transition

Of the indicators in which the District is not meeting targets, the most significant are Indicator 5, specifically including children with IEPs with typically developing peers 80% or more during the school day; Indicator 3B, specifically 4th grade ELA and math assessment; and Indicator 6, preschool children with disabilities in separate settings and the time spent during the day with typically developing peers. Referencing the exhibit below, which only includes indicators which Lakewood Public School District did not meet, further details the targets set by the state and the corresponding results achieved by the District in each indicator.

EXHIBIT X. STATE PERFORMANCE PLAN AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT – INDICATOR TARGETS NOT MET BY LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT⁶⁵

Indicator	Years/Subject	State Target	District Result	Status
Indicator 1: Graduation	2021-22	91.6%	80.36%	Target not met
	2020-21	91.5%	88.89%	Baseline
	2019-20	81.5%	81.4%	Target not met
Indicator 2: Dropout	2021-22	-	-	Target not met
	2020-21	11.11%	8.3%	Baseline
	2019-20	-	-	NA – not listed
Indicator 3A: Participation In Statewide Assessments	2021-22 – High School ELA	95%	78.89%	Target not met
	2021-22 - High School Math	95%	88.76%	Target not met
	2020-21	-	-	NA
	2019-20	-	-	NA
Indicator 3B: Proficiency (NJSLA)	2021-22 – 4 th Grade ELA	23.50%	18.2%	Target not met

⁶⁵ Retrieved from: <https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/monitor/spp/>.

*Not all indicators are measured by NJDOE each year. Some assessment not included due to the suspension of the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment during the pandemic emergency.

Legend: *Data are not displayed to support student privacy.

	2021-22 - 4 th Grade Math	25%	12.79%	Target not met
	2021- 22 – 8 th Grade ELA	20.5%	11.49%	Target not met
	2021-22 – 8 th Grade Math	13.5%	*	Target not met
	2021-22 – High School ELA	17.5%	*	Target not met
	2021 – 22 High School Math	9.5%	*	Target not met
	2020-21	-	-	NA
	2019-20	-	-	NA
Indicator 5: School Age Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) – In General Education 80% or More of the School Day	2021-22	45%	5.5%	Target not met
	2020-21	45%	5.97%	Target not met
	2019-20	50%	6.2%	Target not met
Indicator 6: Preschool LRE	2021-22 – Regular Preschool	47%	42.6%	Target not met
	2021-22 – Separate Preschool	57.31%	38.75%	Target not met
	2020-21 – Regular Preschool	47%	19.93%	Target not met
	2020-21 – Separate Preschool	44.93%	38.75%	Target not met
	2019-20 – Regular Preschool	17.4	46.6%	Target not met
	2019-20 – Separate Preschool	50.7%	34%	Target not met
Indicator 11: Timely Initial Evaluations	2021-22	94.3%	100%	Target not met
	2020-21	95.81%	100%	Target not met
	2019-20	76.7%	100%	Target not met
Indicator 12: Early Childhood Transition	2021-22	100%	87.67%	Target not met
	2020-21	100%	86.32%	Target not met
	2019-20	100%	77.4%	Target not met

Note. Retrieved from "State Performance Plan Annual Performance Report" by Official Site of the State of New Jersey, (<https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/monitor/spp/>)

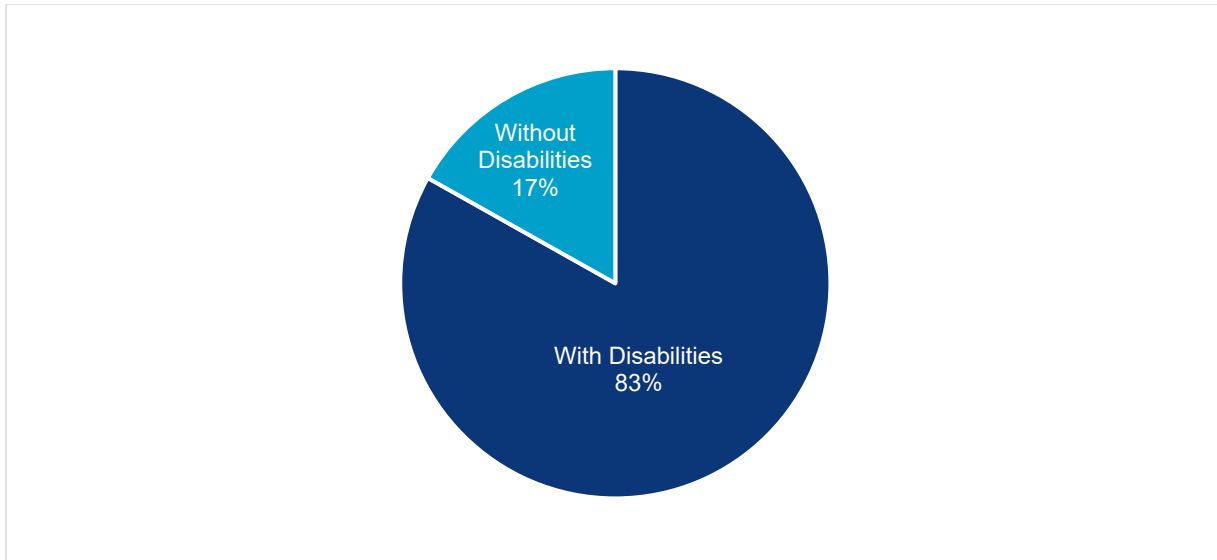
Special Education Demographics

The data in the charts below reflect the statistics for public school students, ages 3-21, with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Early Childhood Data

In 2022, 83.0% of students in early childhood had an identified disability.

FIGURE 34: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT AN IDENTIFIED DISABILITY (AGES 3-4), 2022

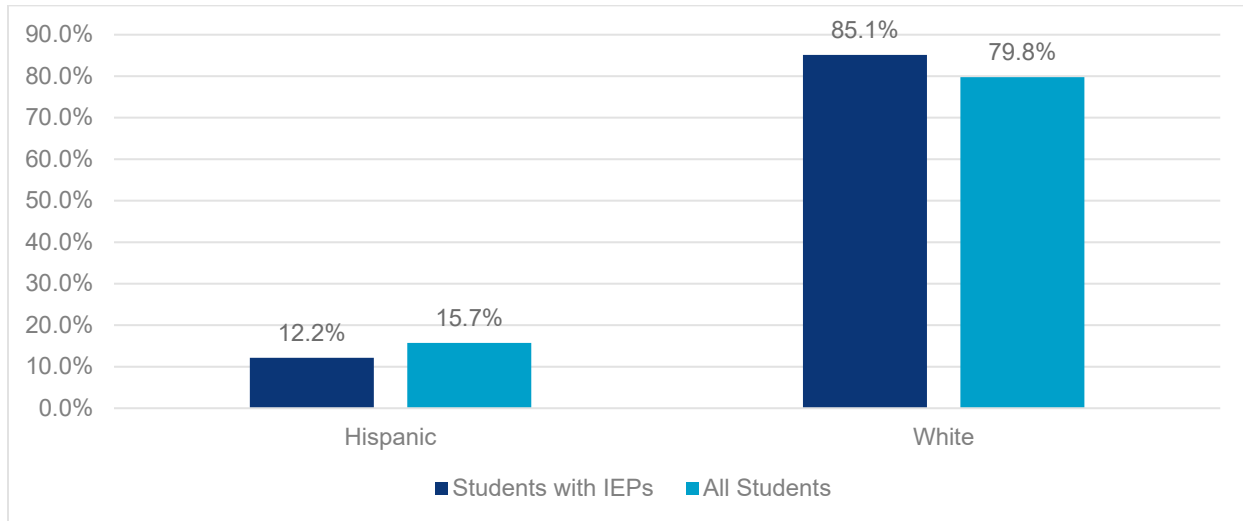


Note. Data are from "NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot", Nov 2023" provided by Lakewood Public School District

Of the overall three-to-four-year old student population, 79.8% were White and 15.7% were Hispanic. It should be noted that this demographic distribution is not representative of the District's overall population.

Of the total population of White students, 85.1% of them have an IEP. Of the total Hispanic population, 12.2% have an IEP.

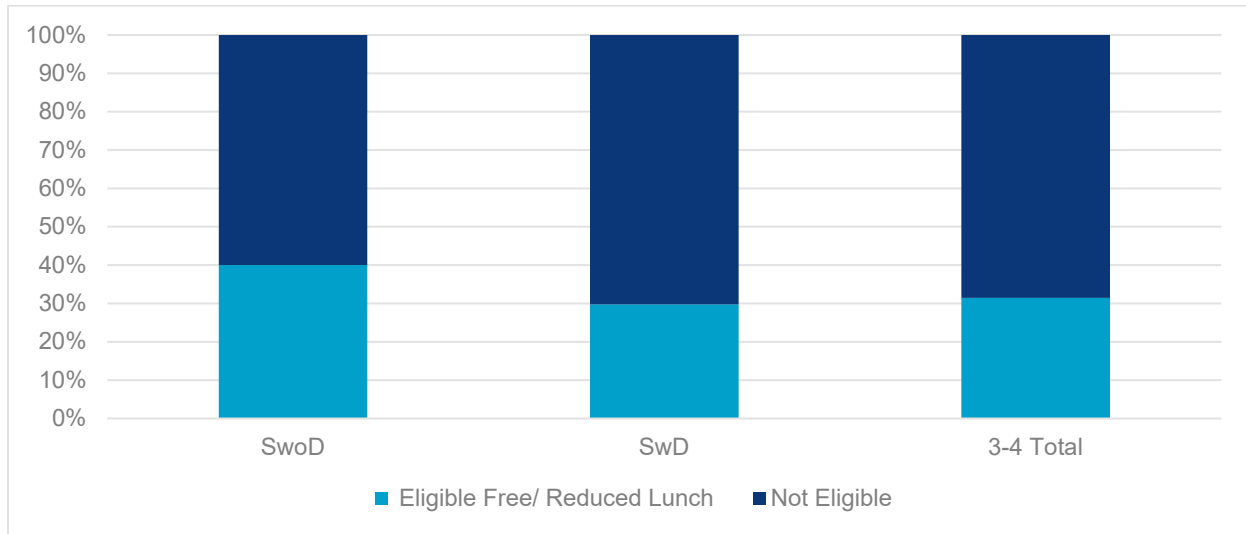
FIGURE 35: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (AGE 3-4) BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2022



Note. Data retrieved from "NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot", Nov 2023", provided by Lakewood Public School District

Of the total three-to-four year old population, 31.5% are eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch. Of preschool students with a disability, 29.7% are eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch. It should be noted that these rates are not representative of the District's overall Free and Reduced Lunch Rates.

FIGURE 36: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (AGE 3-4) BY FREE/REDUCED LUNCH, 2022

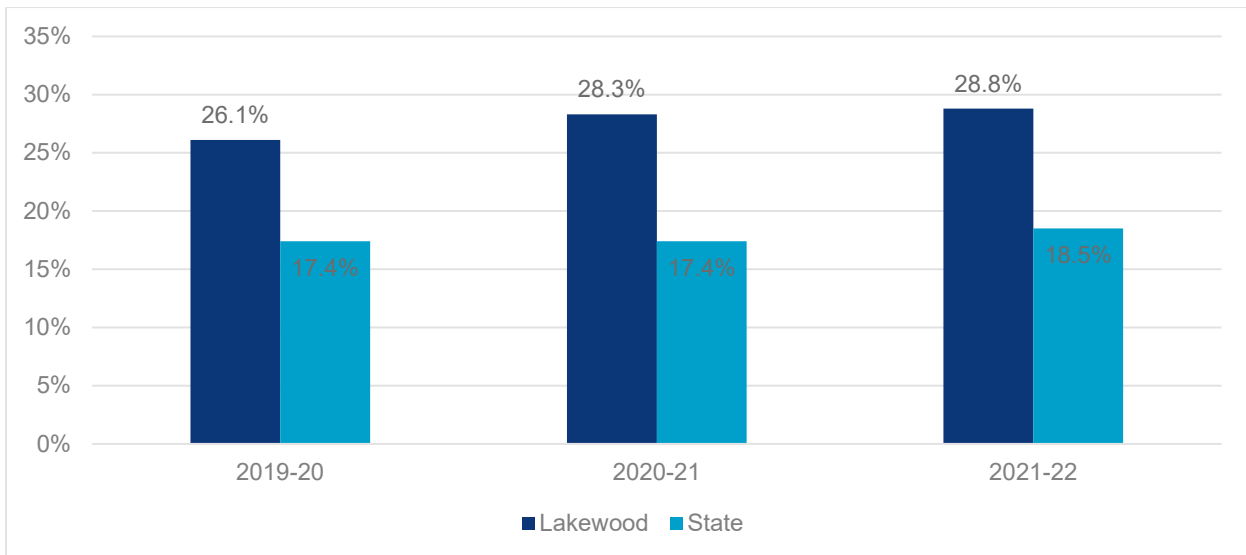


Note. Data retrieved from “NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot”, Nov 2023”, provided by Lakewood Public School District

School-Age Incidence Rates

Between 2019-20 and 2021-22, the percentage of students with IEPs ages 5-21 in the District varied between a low of 26.1 percent in 2019-20 to a high of 28.8 percent in 2021-22. Compared to the state incidence rate during that same period, Lakewood’s incidence rate averaged 9.97 percentage points higher.⁶⁶

FIGURE 37: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS WITH IEPs COMPARED TO STATE INCIDENCE RATES, 2019-2020 TO 2021-2022⁶⁷



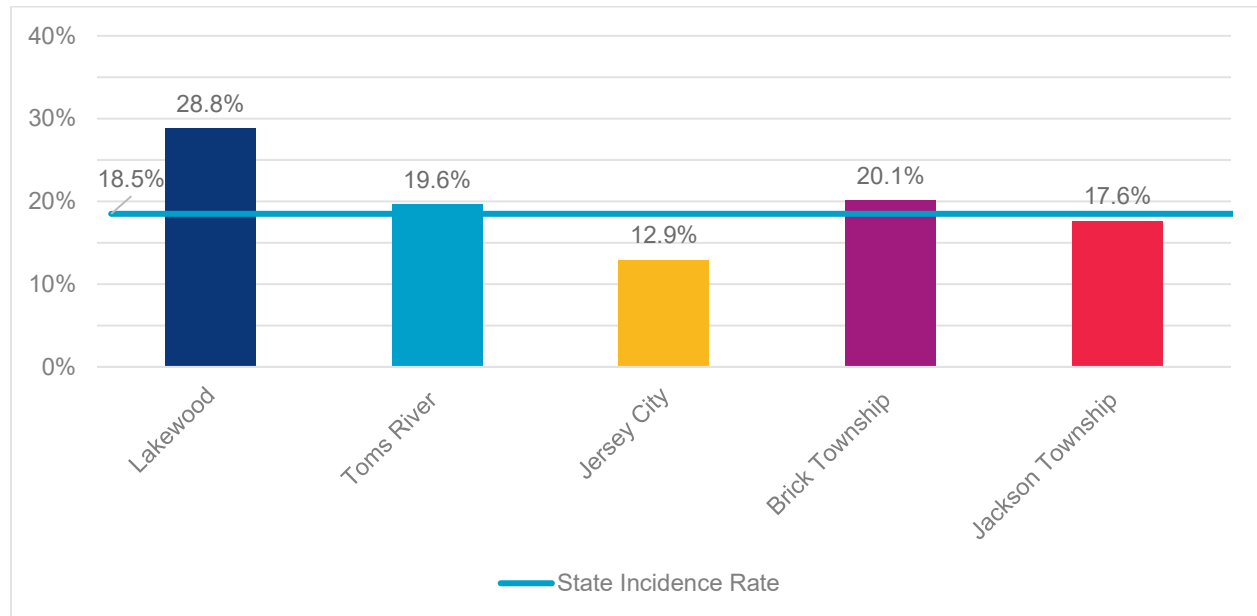
Note: Retrieved from “NJ School Performance Report”, by District and State Data, 2024, (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>)

⁶⁶ These rates do not include eligible students enrolled in schools.

⁶⁷ District and State Data for 2019-20 to 2021-22 (n.d.). NJ School Performance Report. Accessed Jan 2024, <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>.

PCG identified four New Jersey school Districts to compare key quantitative data to Lakewood Public School District. When compared to the identified comparison Districts, Lakewood had the highest incidence rate (28.8%), followed by Brick Township (20.1%) and Toms River RSD (19.6%). These averages were above the state average of 18.5 percent. The remaining two comparable Districts, Jackson Township and Jersey City, had incidence rates below the state average. (Figure 38)

FIGURE 38: LAKEWOOD'S IEP RATES COMPARED TO OTHER NEW JERSEY SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND STATE, 2022



Note: Retrieved from "NJ School Performance Report", by District and State Data, 2024, (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>)

INCIDENCE RATES BY PRIMARY DISABILITY

Of students with IEPs in Lakewood Public School District:

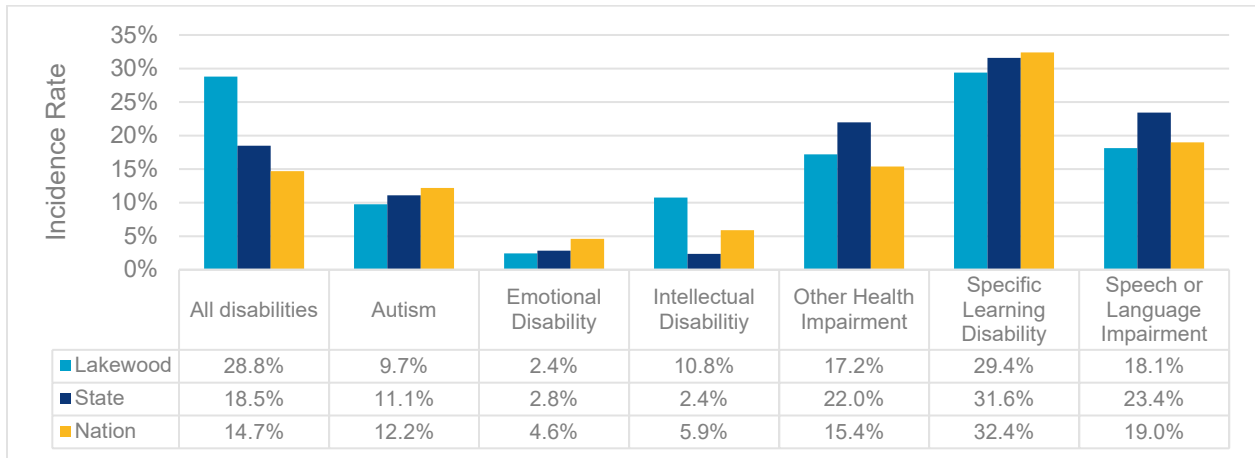
- 29.4 percent had a specific learning disability,
- 18.1 percent had a speech or language impairment,
- 17.2 percent had an other health impairment,
- 10.8 percent had an intellectual disability,
- 9.7 percent had autism, and
- 2.4 percent had an emotional disability.⁶⁸

There are a few data comparisons to note regarding incidence rates.

- Lakewood Public School District's overall incidence rate (28.8%) is nearly twice the national incidence rate (14.7%). Similarly, the rate of students in the District with a diagnosis of Intellectual Disability (10.8%) is nearly twice the national rate (5.9%).
- Conversely, the District's Emotional Disability rate is less than half of the national rate.

⁶⁸ Where appropriate, PCG utilizes disability categories aligned to federal definitions. New Jersey uses the term Emotional Regulation Impairment instead of the federal category term Emotional Disturbance. PCG slightly deviates from the federal category and uses the term Emotional Disability.

FIGURE 39: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES DISABILITY AREA COMPARED TO STATE AND NATION (AGES 5-21), 2022



Note: Data are from “2022 Special Education Student Count Districts and Charters by Disability” provided by New Jersey Department of Education

Note: National Data obtained from National Center for Education Statistics '2022 Digest of Education Statistics', https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_204.30.asp

INCIDENCE RATE BY RACE AND ETHNICITY⁶⁹

Of students with IEPs in the District in 2022:

- 67.0 percent were Hispanic,
- 25.9 percent were white, and
- 6.5 percent were Black/African American.

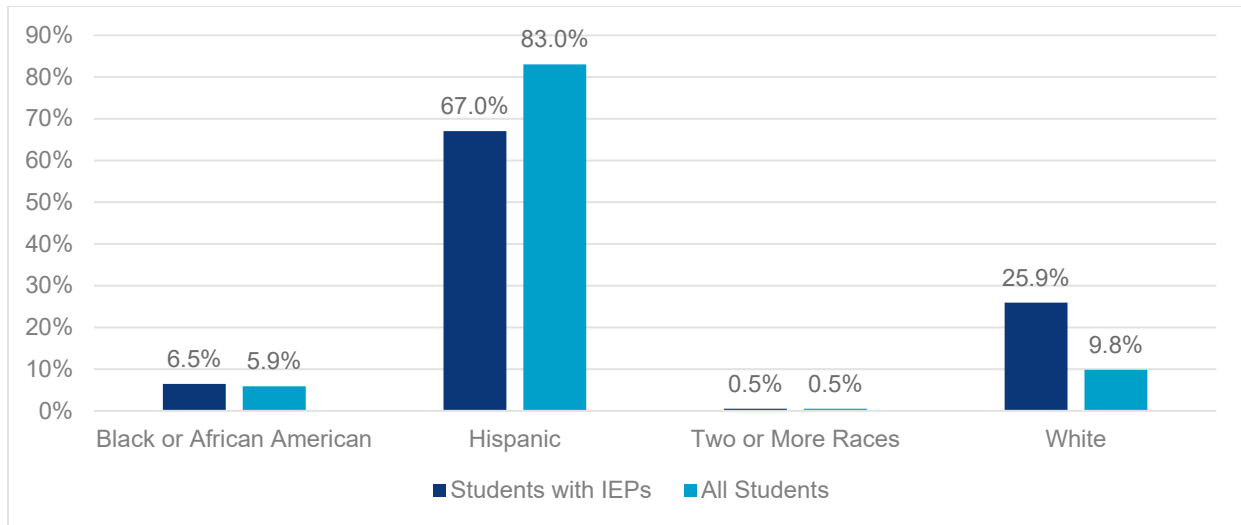
There are a few data comparisons to note regarding incidence rates specific to race and ethnicity.

- 84% of all students in Lakewood identify as Hispanic. Of this demographic, 67% have an IEP.
- 9.8% of all students in Lakewood identify as White. Of this demographic, 25.9% have an IEP.
- 5.9% of all students in Lakewood identify as Black or African American. Of this demographic, 6.5% have an IEP.

Monitoring comparisons in race and ethnicity across populations of students who have IEPs can serve as one method of proactively identifying possible instances of disproportionate representation.

⁶⁹ Incidence data was suppressed for the following Race and Ethnicity populations in this section due to sample sizes <5: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

FIGURE 40: PERCENT OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS WITH IEPs (AGE 5-21) BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2022

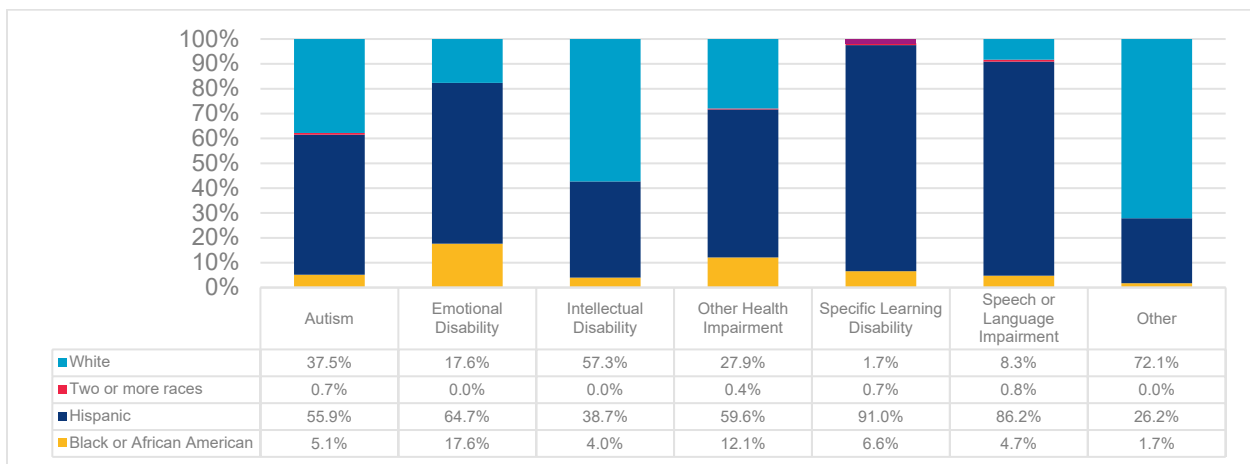


Note. Data retrieved from “NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot”, Nov 2023”, provided by Lakewood Public School District

Data indicated the prevalence of disability types for certain races and ethnicities higher than District demographics, with variations in disability categories. Key differences, displayed in the graph below, include:

- Hispanic students accounted for 91.0 percent of students identified with a specific learning disability and 88.2 percent of students with a speech or language impairment. These percentages were higher than the overall percentage of Hispanic students with an IEP (67.0%).
- White students accounted for 57.3 percent of students with an intellectual disability and 37.5 percent of students with autism. These percentages were higher than the overall percentage of white students with an IEP (25.9%).
- Black or African American students accounted for 17.6 percent of students identified with an emotional disability and 12.1 percent of students identified with an other health impairment. These percentages were higher than the overall percentage of Black or African American students with IEP (6.5%).

FIGURE 41: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS (AGE 5-21) BY DISABILITY AREA AND RACE/ETHNICITY, 2022



Note. Data retrieved from “NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot”, Nov 2023”, provided by Lakewood Public School District

DISPROPORTIONALITY AND RISK RATIO ANALYSIS

One of the most useful, informative, and proactive methods used to calculate disproportionality "is the risk ratio, which compares one racial/ethnic group's risk of receiving special education and related services to that of all other students."⁷⁰ The risk ratio can be used to calculate disproportionality at both the state and District levels. The analysis below is intended to provide Lakewood Public School District with a tool to calculate risk ratios in order to monitor trends and identify areas of concern.

The risk ratio tool tells school personnel how the risk for one racial/ethnic group compares to the risk for a comparison group.⁷¹ It can be used to assess:

- How much more likely is it for students from one race or ethnicity group to be classified with a disability compared to all other students;
- How much more likely is it for students with disabilities from one race or ethnicity group to be suspended for more than 10 days compared to all other students;
- What the likelihood is that a student from a particular racial or ethnic group will be classified with a disability, be given a specific disability classification, or placed in a most restrictive environment;
- What the likelihood is that a student with a disability from a particular racial or ethnic group will be suspended for more than 10 days.

As a concept, "risk" looks at the general enrollment data for each racial group along with the number of students from that group who were identified for a specified category and calculates the likelihood that a student from that racial group would be found in that particular category. The general risk equation is as follows:⁷²

FIGURE 42: RISK RATIO EQUATION

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Number of children from racial/ethnic group in disability category}}{\text{Number of enrolled children from racial/ethnic group}} \times 100$$

As shown below, a risk ratio greater than 2.0 for a racial/ethnic group indicates a higher risk of over-representation, while a risk ratio of less than 1.0 indicates a higher risk of under-representation. For the state of New Jersey, the threshold for identification of significant disproportionality for students based on placement, identification for special education and related services, and discipline is 3.0 for three consecutive years.

PCG conducted a risk ratio analysis of Lakewood Public School District data to identify areas where over-identification of students with disabilities based on disability, race, educational setting, and discipline may be occurring. The risk ratio calculated is not designed to replicate New Jersey's significant disproportionality reporting process.⁷³ The intent of this calculation is to provide a formative data point to assess the extent

⁷⁰ Bollmer, J. Bethel, et al. (2007). Using the Risk Ratio to Assess Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education at the School-District Level. *The Journal of Special Education*, Vol 41, Issue 3, pp. 186 – 198.

⁷¹ *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Special Education: A Multi-Year Disproportionality Analysis by State, Analysis Category, and Race/Ethnicity*, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, February 2016.

⁷² PCG analyzed student populations with at least 30 students in a particular Race and Ethnicity group with an IEP and at least 10 students with a specific disability classification, aligned with New Jersey's application of minimum sample sizes and cell sizes.

⁷³ Further information about the state's significant disproportionality calculations and findings can be found in the section below.

to which identification rate and educational placement and behavior decisions are impacted by students' race and ethnicity and educational environment. This tool can be used to inform ongoing analysis and monitoring.

As displayed in the figure below:

- White students were over twelve times as likely to be identified with an intellectual disability (exceeding the state threshold), five and a half times more like to be identified with autism (exceeding the state threshold), and three and a half times as likely to be identified with an other health impairment (exceeding the state threshold) when compared to other race and ethnicity groups.
- Black or African American students were twice as likely to be identified with an other health impairment.
- Hispanic students were twice as likely to be identified with a specific learning disability.

FIGURE 43: RISK RATIOS BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND DISABILITY, 2023



Note. Data retrieved from "NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot, Nov 2023", provided by Lakewood Public School District

SIGNIFICANT DISPROPORTIONALITY

In 2016, the United States Department of Education (USED) issued new Equity in IDEA regulations with regards to identifying Districts with significant disproportionality. These rules required states to develop a risk ratio threshold to be used in identifying Districts for significant disproportionality. New Jersey established a 3.0 risk ratio threshold that was used to identify Districts for significant disproportionality in the areas of placement, identification for special education and related services, and discipline.

Further, the IDEA requires each state to have in place a State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR) evaluating the state's implementation of Part B of the IDEA and describing how each state will improve such implementation. Two of the indicators concern the disproportionate representation of specific racial/ethnic groups in special education.

- Indicator 9 – Percent of Districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education and related services that is the result of inappropriate identification (20 U.S.C.1416(a)(3)(C)); and
- Indicator 10 – Percent of disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in specific disability categories that is the result of inappropriate identification (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(C)).⁷⁴

New Jersey applies the same 3.0 risk ratio threshold to identify Districts with disproportionate representation. Districts identified with significant disproportionality are also identified with disproportionate representation. Data from the NJSmart October 15th snapshot and the Student Safety Data System (SSDS) are used for the risk ratio calculation.⁷⁵

In September 2023, Lakewood Public School District was notified that NJDOE determined the District to be significantly disproportionate in the following areas:

- White students eligible for special education and related services under the Autism category
- White students eligible for special education and related services under the Intellectual Disability category
- Hispanic students eligible for special education and related services placed in general education for less than 40% of the day
- White students eligible for special education and related services placed in separate settings.

Districts that met the criteria for significant disproportionality and disproportionate representation of racial/ethnic groups in special education were required to complete a self-assessment in the fall of 2023.

The 2023 NJDOE findings were not the first time Lakewood Public School District was found to be significantly disproportionate. Previously, in 2022 Lakewood Public School District received notification that the District had to set aside 15% of its IDEA funding for Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CCEIS).⁷⁶ This directive, a requirement of IDEA when an LEA who has exceeded the 3.0 risk ratio threshold for three consecutive years, was based on a “a continued pattern of significant disproportionality.”⁷⁷

Table 27 shows a summary of significant disproportionality data provided by the NJDOE for Lakewood Public School District for 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23.⁷⁸

TABLE 27: SIGNIFICANT DISPROPORTIONALITY RISK RATIOS

		Total Enrolled General Education Students By Race	Total Classified Special Education Students By Race & Disability Category	Total Enrolled General Education Students By Other Races	Total Classified Special Education Students by Other Races & Disability Category	Risk Ratio
White - Autism	2020-21	640	47	5105	96	3.91
	2021-22	620	48	4833	105	3.56
	2022-23	587	49	4475	109	3.43

⁷⁴ IDEA Part B Regulations-Significant Disproportionality (Equity in IDEA) essential questions and answers. (2016, December 19). US Office of Special Education Services. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/significant-disproportionality-qa-03-08-17.pdf>

⁷⁵ Memo from NJDOE Director of Special Education (2022, September 17). Lakewood Public School District Superintendent.

⁷⁶ Under 34 CFR §300.646(b)(2) of the IDEA Part B, if a state identifies significant disproportionality based on race or ethnicity in a local school LEA (LEA), the LEA must allocate 15 percent of its total IDEA Part B award (Basic plus Preschool) towards the provision of Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CCEIS).

⁷⁷ In the following categories:

- White students with the disability category of Autism
- White students with an Intellectual Disability
- White students in Separate Settings
- Black students for Total Disciplinary Removals.

⁷⁸ “Lakewood Dispro Data” provided by NJDOE via email January 24, 2024.

White - Intellectual Disability	2020-21	640	69	5105	57	9.66
	2021-22	620	74	4833	56	10.3
	2022-23	587	78	4475	61	9.75

		Total Enrolled Classified Special Education Students By Race	Total Classified Special Education Students By Race & Placement Category	Total Enrolled classified Special Education Students By Other Races	Total Classified Special Education Students by Other Races & Placement Category	Risk Ratio
Hispanic - Less than 40%	2020-21	1174	453	606	77	3.04
	2021-22	1187	490	574	71	3.34
	2022-23	1111	442	540	68	3.16

		Total Enrolled Classified Special Education Students By Race	Total Classified Special Education Students By Race & Placement Category	Total Enrolled classified Special Education Students By Other Races	Total Classified Special Education Students by Other Races & Placement Category	Risk Ratio
Lakewood Township Overall	2020-21	509	309	1271	62	12.44
	2021-22	484	301	1277	64	12.41
	2022-23	434	299	1217	73	11.49

Note. Retrieved from "Lakewood Dispro Data", 2024, provided by New Jersey Department of Education

The identification of Lakewood as significant disproportionality in several areas dates to 2020, when the NJDOE ordered Lakewood to use 15% of its IDEA funding to address the overidentification of White students in four categories and Black students for total disciplinary removals. Lakewood appealed this decision, arguing that the State’s decision to order the CCEIS set aside was “arbitrary and capricious because it was based upon factual errors and an improper methodology of calculation.” On November 28, 2023, the Appellate Division ruled in favor of NJDOE, determining: “We reject Lakewood’s argument that it should be permitted to divert only 15% of the portion of the IDEA grant allocated to public school students, rather than be required to divert 15% of its total IDEA grant. The relevant regulations and statutes do not allow the remedy Lakewood advocates.”⁷⁹

For FY 24, Lakewood was required to set aside \$1,711,367 in Basic IDEA funding for CCEIS. This amount was allocated to salaries, benefits, and professional services. For Preschool IDEA funding, Lakewood set aside \$114,877 for professional services for CEIS. The set aside was evident in the FY 24 IDEA application that PCG reviewed.⁸⁰

Eligibility by Student Subgroup

English learners are more likely to be identified with specific learning disabilities and speech language impairment and less likely to be identified with other health impairments, autism, and emotional disturbance as compared to all school aged students served under IDEA, Part B.⁸¹ Multilingual learners account for 11.8% of all students served under IDEA, Part B.⁸²

Nationwide, nearly 45% of students identified as multilingual learners who have been dually identified as having a disability under IDEA, Part B, are classified as having a literacy-related disability known as a

⁷⁹ Superior Court, New Jersey Appellate Division Ruling, Docket No. A-0709-21. (2023, November 27). Provided by the New Jersey Department of Education.

⁸⁰ IDEA application. (n.d.). Public Access. Retrieved from: <https://njdoe.mtwgms.org/NJDOEGmsWeb/Logon.aspx>

⁸¹ OSEP fast facts. (n.d.). IDEA. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/osep-fast-facts-students-with-disabilities-english-learners>

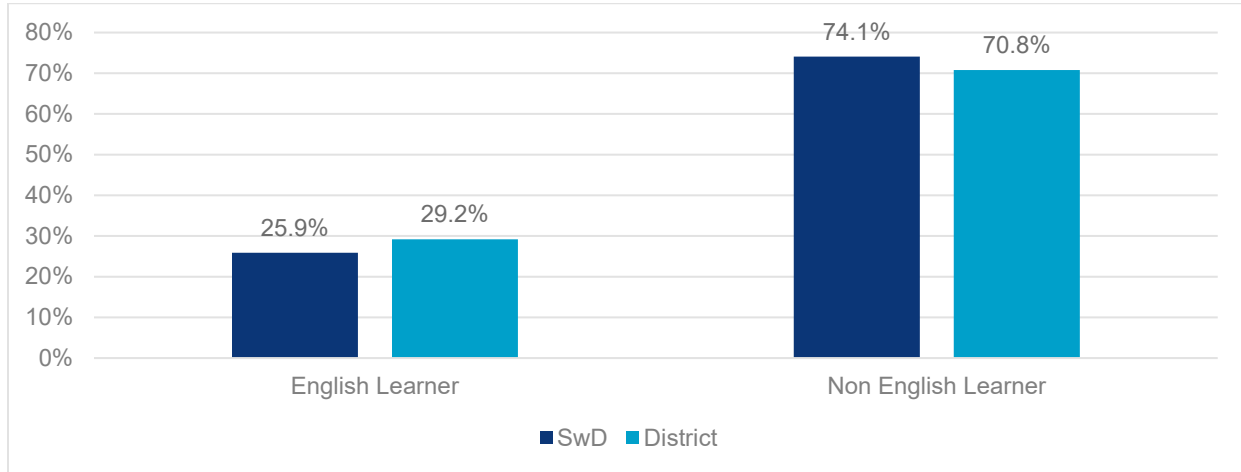
⁸² Ibid.

specific learning disability.⁸³ This rate in New Jersey is 36%. Nearly 19% of multilingual learners nationwide are identified with speech or language impairments.

ELIGIBILITY BY EL STATUS

Twenty-nine percent of students in Lakewood Public School District are English learners. Of the students with IEPs, 25.9 percent are English learners.

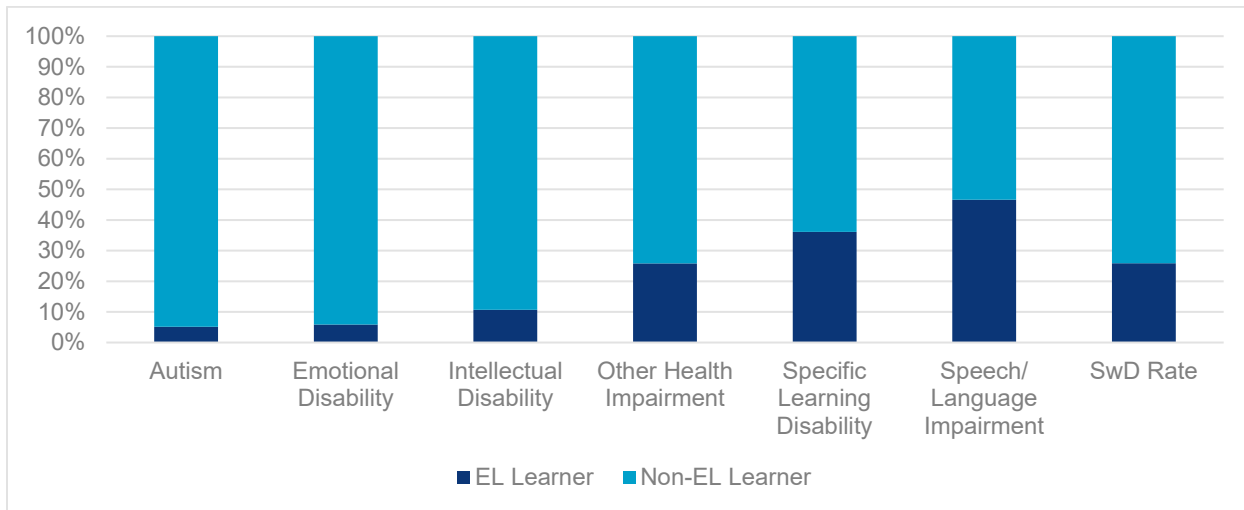
FIGURE 44: PERCENT OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS AGES 5-21 BY EL STATUS, 2022



Note. Data retrieved from "NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot", Nov 2023", provided by Lakewood Public School District

English learners with an IEP accounted for 46.6 percent of students with a speech or language impairment and 36.1 percent of students with a specific learning disability.

FIGURE 45: EL STUDENTS BY DISABILITY, 2022



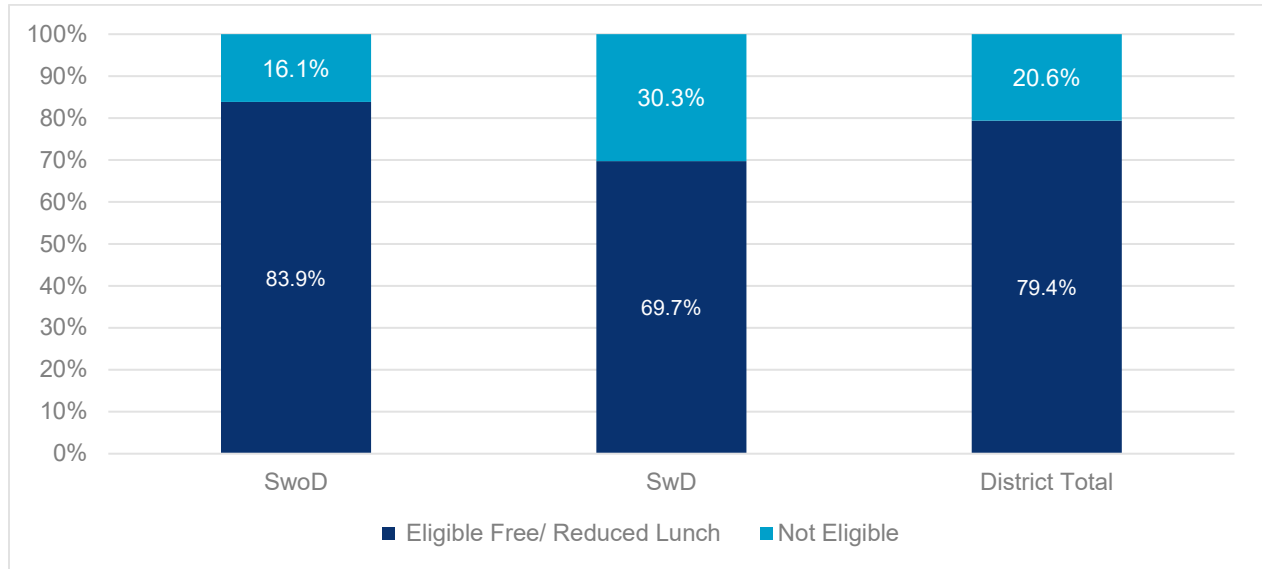
Note. Data retrieved from "NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot", Nov 2023", provided by Lakewood Public School District

⁸³ WIDA focus bulletin: identifying multilingual learners with specific learning disabilities. (n.d.). WIDA. <https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusBulletin-Identifying-Multilingual-Learners-Specific-Learning-Disabilities.pdf#:~:text=Further%20investigation%20of%20those%20states%20with%20lower%20than,%284%25%29%3B%20Kentucky%20%284%25%29%3B%20Missouri%20%283%25%29%3B%20and%20Vermont%20%282%25%29>

ELIGIBILITY BY FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH

Overall, 79.4 percent of students in Lakewood are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. A smaller percentage of students with disabilities were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (69.7%) compared to their peers without an IEP (83.9%).

FIGURE 46: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES VS. STUDENTS WITHOUT DISABILITIES PARTICIPATING IN FREE AND/OR REDUCED LUNCH (AGES 5-21), 2022

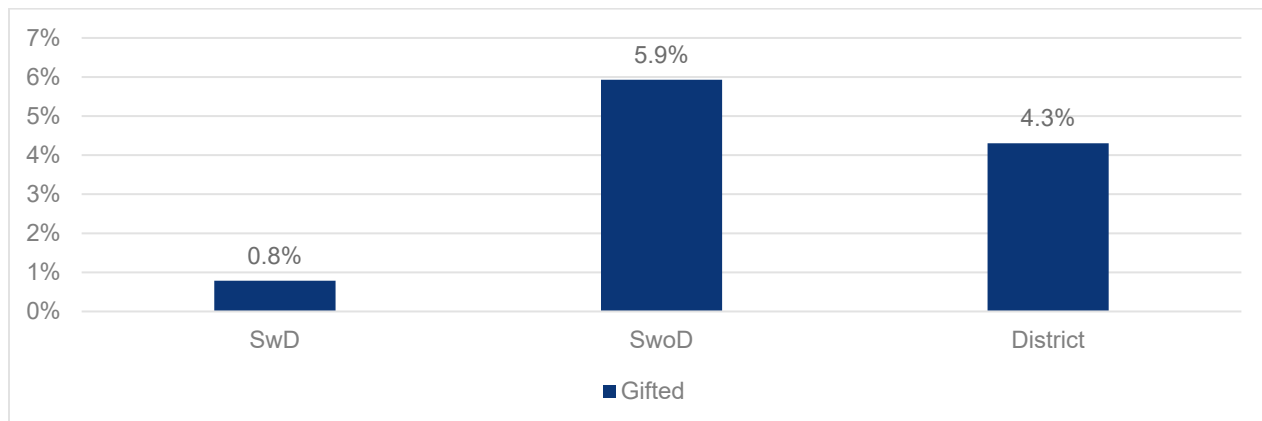


Note. Data retrieved from “NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot, Nov 2023”, provided by Lakewood Public School District

ELIGIBILITY BY GIFTED STATUS

Overall, 4.3 percent of students in Lakewood are identified as gifted. A small percentage of students with disabilities (0.8%) are identified as gifted compared to 5.9 percent of students without an IEP. It should be noted that New Jersey does not have guidance around how to categorize or track this population of students, so comparisons are not possible.

FIGURE 47: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IDENTIFIED AS GIFTED BY DISABILITY ELIGIBILITY, 2022



Note. Data retrieved from “NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot, Nov 2023”, provided by Lakewood Public School District

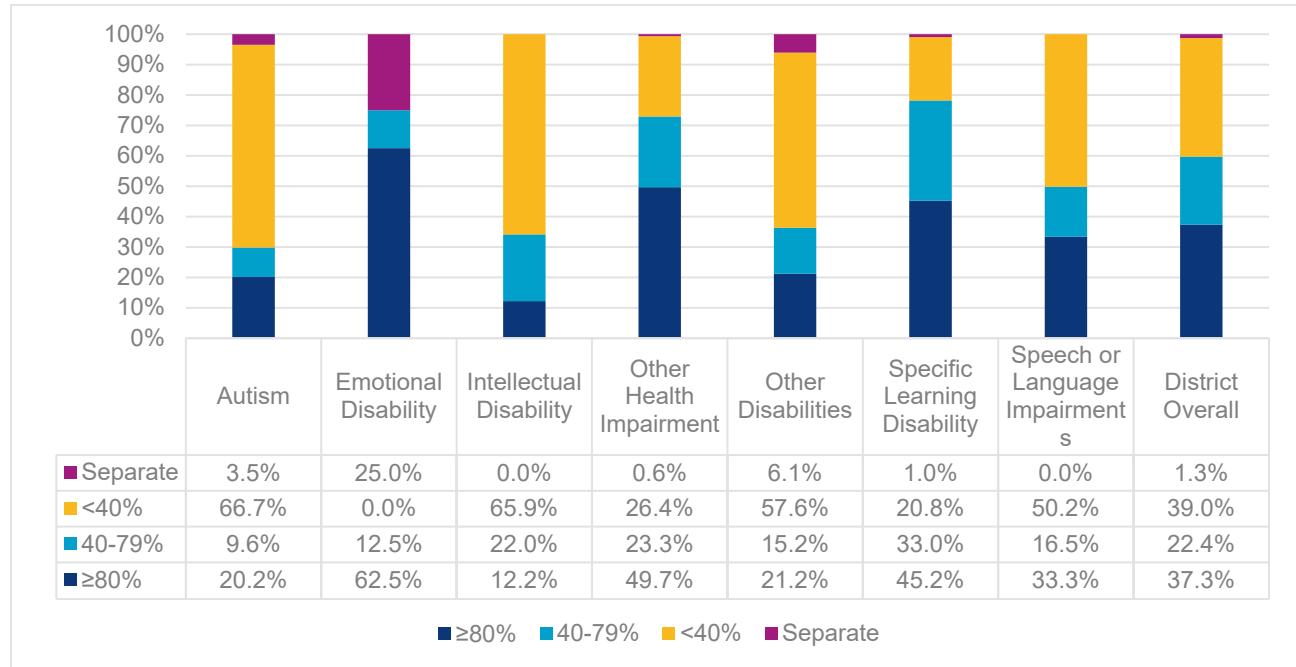
Educational Setting

Of public-school students with IEPs in Lakewood, 37.3 percent spend 80 percent or more of their day in general education, 22.4 percent spend 40 to 79 percent of their school day in general education, 39 percent

spend less than 40 percent of their school day in general education, and 1.3 percent are in a separate setting.

These data defer substantially from data submitted in the 2021-22 State Performance Plan report, which lists that only 5.5% of students with IEPs in Lakewood spend 80 percent or more of their day in general education.⁸⁴

FIGURE 48: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS (AGE 5-21) BY DISABILITY AREA AND EDUCATIONAL SETTING, 2022

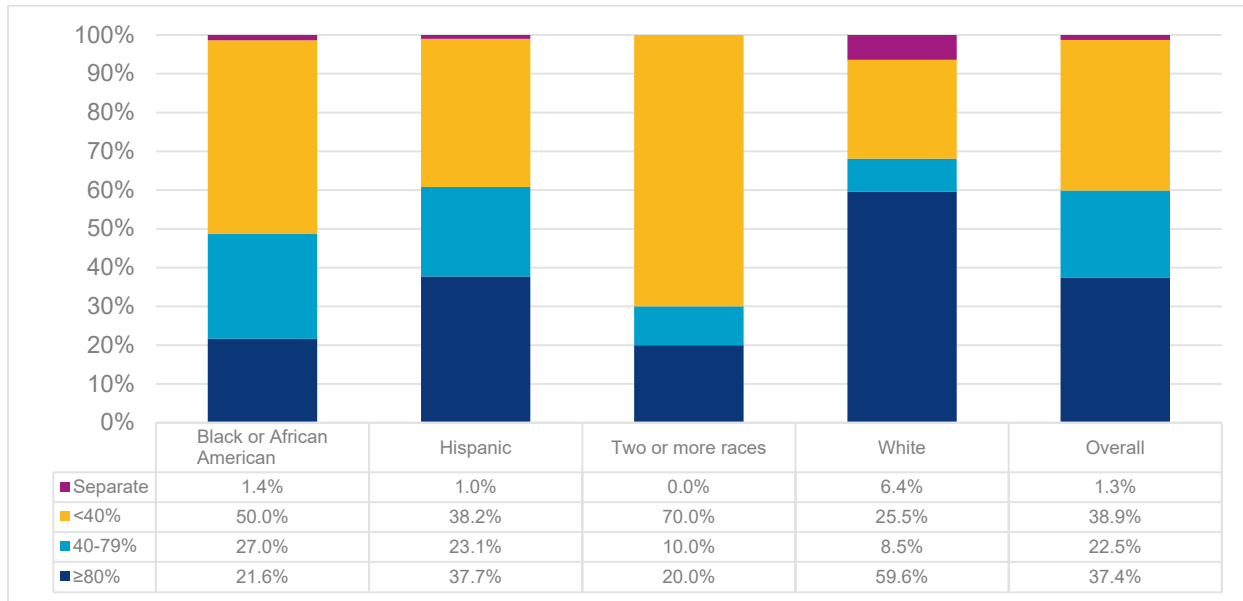


Note. Data retrieved from "NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot", Nov 2023", provided by Lakewood Public School District

Fifty percent of Black or African American students and 38.2 percent of Hispanic students are served in general education setting less than 40 percent of the day. This is contrasted with 59.6 percent White students served in general education greater than 80 percent of their school day.

⁸⁴ State performance plan annual performance report. (n.d.). Department of Education. <https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/monitor/spp/>

FIGURE 49: PERCENTAGE OF LAKEWOOD STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (AGE 5-21) BY RACE AND EDUCATIONAL SETTING, 2022⁸⁵



Note: Data retrieved from "NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot", Nov 2023", provided by Lakewood Public School District

Within the Separate Setting category, Lakewood tracks students attending a specialized program for special education in a school that is not his/her/their resident school within the resident school District in a distinct category.

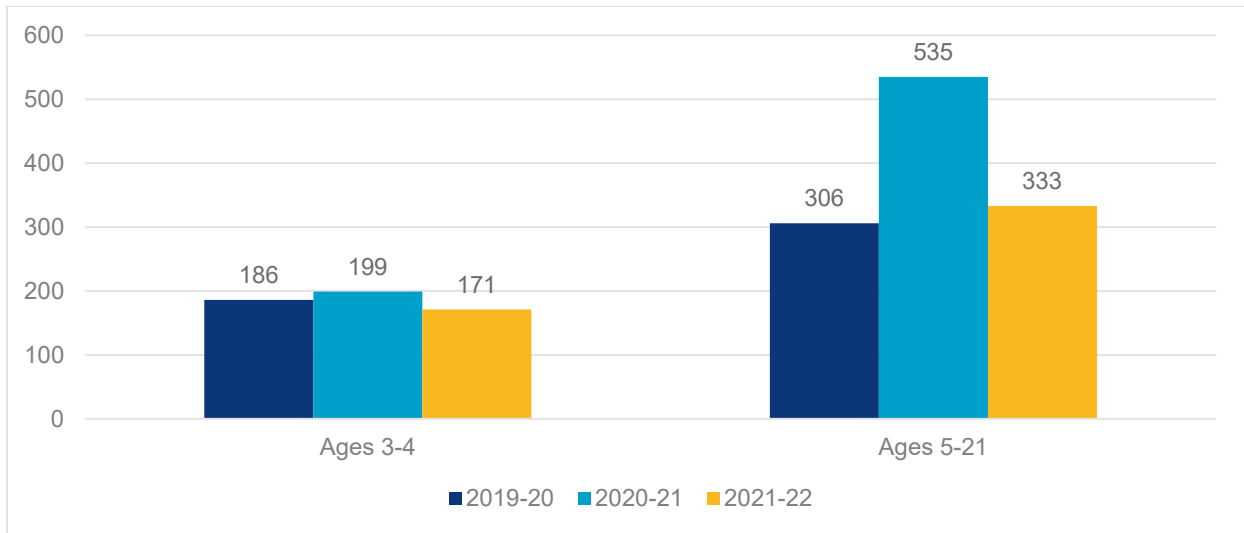
In Lakewood, during the 2021-22 school year, 171 students ages 3-4 were in specialized out of district placements. This is a decrease in placement numbers for this age group of 186 in 2019-20 and 199 in 2020-21.

During the 2022-23 school year, 333 students ages 5-21 were in specialized out of district placements. This is an increase in placement numbers for this age group from the 2020-21 school year (306) but a decrease from the 535 students in 2021-22.

Lakewood indicated that all of these placements are at Approved Private Schools for the Disabled (APSD) locations and were made through IEP team decisions. The District does not have any students in Naples Placements. Additional information about these placements can be found in the next section.

⁸⁵ The 'n' size for Asian students was less than 5, so this demographic group was not included in the chart.

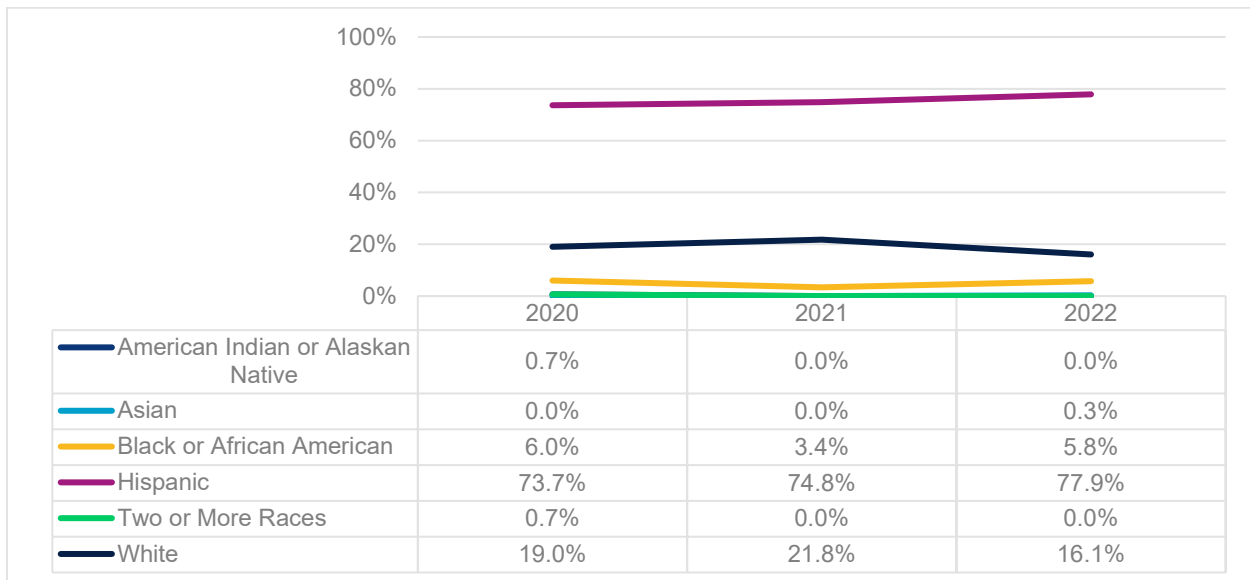
FIGURE 50: SPECIALIZED OUT OF DISTRICT PLACEMENTS, 2019-20 TO 2021-22



Note. Data retrieved from “NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot”, Nov 2023”, provided by Lakewood Public School District

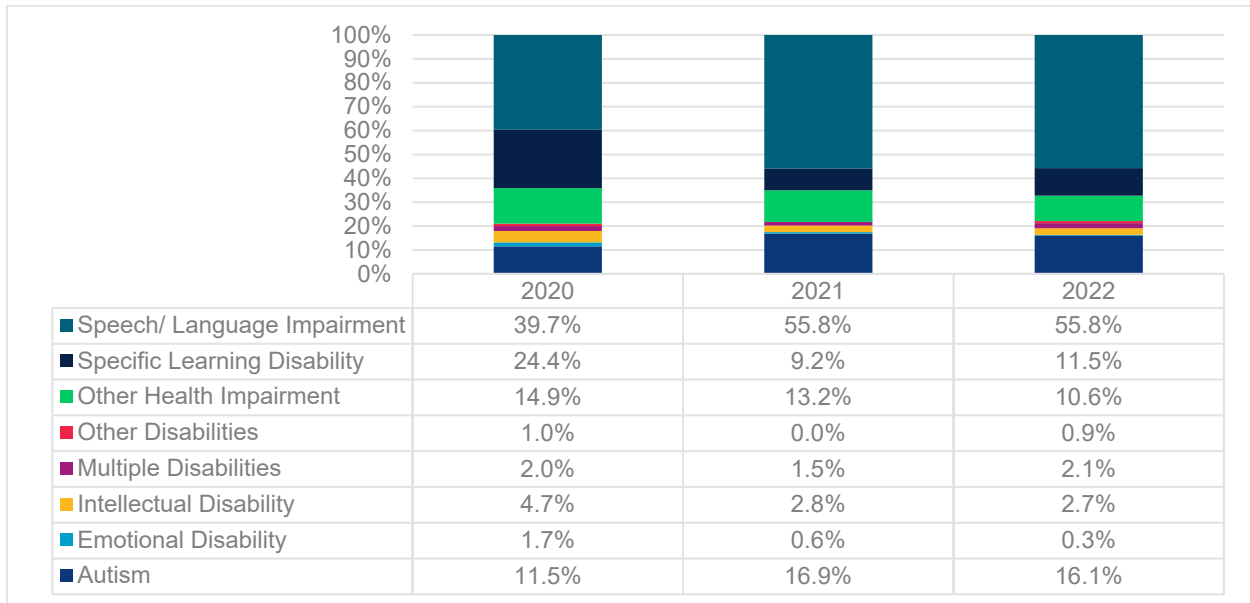
Approximately three-quarters of the students in specialized out of district placements are Hispanic, at 73.7% in 2020, 74.8% in 2021 and 77.9% in 2022. (This is slightly lower than the overall District incidence rate of Hispanic students with IEPs, which is 83%.) It is unclear from the information provided what prompted the substantial increase and then subsequent decrease in these placement numbers.

FIGURE 51: PERCENT OF SPECIALIZED OUT OF DISTRICT PLACEMENTS WITH IEPs (AGE 5-21) BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2020-2022



Note. Data retrieved from “NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot”, Nov 2023”, provided by Lakewood Public School District

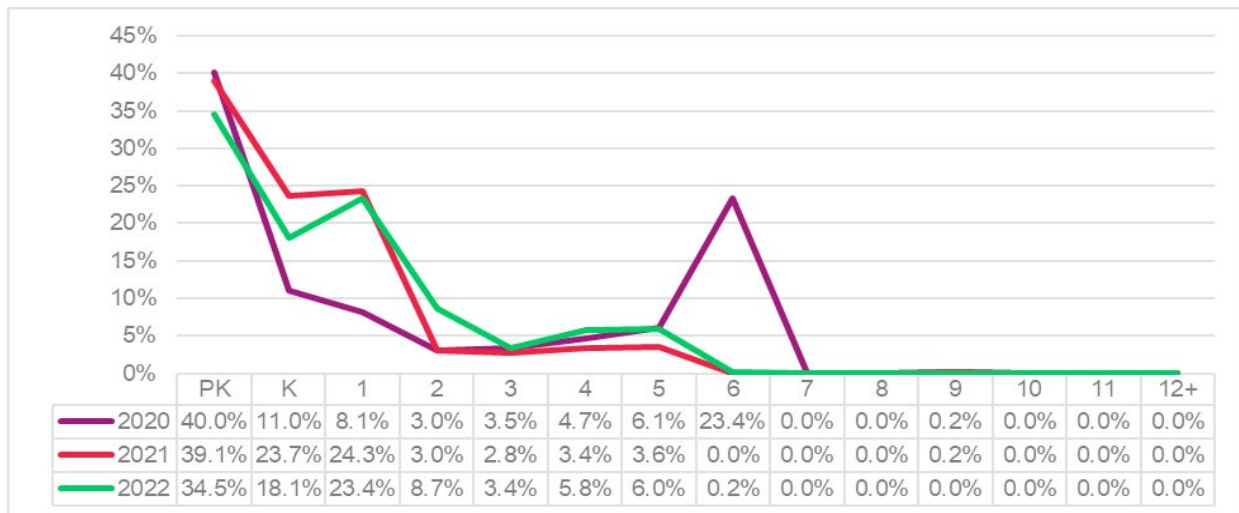
FIGURE 52: PERCENT OF SPECIALIZED OUT OF DISTRICT PLACEMENTS WITH IEPs (AGE 5-21) BY PRIMARY DISABILITY, 2020-2022



Note. Data retrieved from "NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot", Nov 2023", provided by Lakewood Public School District

The majority of students in out of district placements across all three years were those with speech or language impairment as a primary disability. It is unclear why so many students with a primary disability of speech or language impairment are in specialized out of district placements; however, it could be that they have other secondary or tertiary disabilities as well.

FIGURE 53: PERCENT OF SPECIALIZED OUT OF DISTRICT PLACEMENTS WITH IEPs (AGE 5-21) BY GRADE, 2020-2022



Note. Data retrieved from "NJ SMART Data Extract - Oct 15 Snapshot", Nov 2023", provided by Lakewood Public School District

The majority of students in these placements are in grades Pre-K to 6th grade.

TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

This section of the report is devoted to how Lakewood is supporting teaching and learning for students with IEPs, and how the District provides specialized instruction, related services, and supplementary aids/services that enable students with disabilities to receive the educational benefits to which they are entitled.

While compliance indicators remain important, under the new Results-Driven Accountability (RDA) framework, the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has sharpened its focus on what happens in the classroom to promote educational benefits and improve outcomes and results for students with disabilities. This change is based on data showing that the educational outcomes of America’s children and youth with disabilities have not improved as expected, despite significant federal efforts to close achievement gaps. The accountability system that existed prior to the new one placed substantial emphasis on procedural compliance, but it often did not consider how requirements affected the learning outcomes of students.⁸⁶ This shift is having a great impact in guiding the priorities of special education department nationwide, including in Lakewood. Districts need both to raise the level of and access to high levels of rigor, and also to generate a culture of academic optimism.⁸⁷

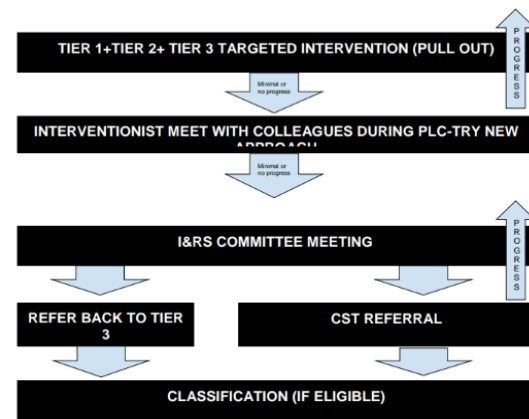
These issues have become even more significant with the March 27, 2017 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*.⁸⁸ In this decision, the Court updated its prior standard for determining a school District’s provision of an appropriate education for students with disabilities. This case centered on the importance of establishing ambitious and challenging goals that enable each student to make academic progress and functional advancement and advance from grade to grade. Progress for a student with a disability, including those receiving instruction based on alternate academic achievement standards, must be appropriate in light of his/her circumstances. Furthermore, yearly progress must be more demanding than the “merely more than de minimis” standards that had been used by some lower courts. For children with disabilities, receiving instruction that aims so low would be tantamount to “sitting idly . . . awaiting the time when they were old enough to ‘drop out.’”⁸⁹ The Court made it clear that IDEA demands more. The recommendations in this report serve to bolster the OSEP’s recent shift toward improving instructional outcomes.

Eligibility and Evaluation

In New Jersey, when a child is identified as possibly having a disability, their matter is referred to the District’s special education administration who then subsequently refers it to the District’s Child Study Team (CST). Referrals may be submitted by instructional, administrative and other professional staff of the local school District, or parents and state agencies, including the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), concerned with the welfare of students.⁹⁰

Lakewood Public School District has clearly documented policies and procedures related to the referral process and a designated email address

FIGURE 54: LAKEWOOD INTERVENTION TIERS



⁸⁶ Results driven accountability summary. (2012, April 5). U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from: www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rdasummary.doc

⁸⁷ Hoy, W. K., Tarter, C. J., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2006). Academic optimism of schools: A force for student achievement. Working Paper – The Ohio State University. <http://www.waynehoy.com/school-academic-optimism/>

⁸⁸ Supreme Court of the United States. (2016). Retrieved from https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/16pdf/15-827_0pm1.pdf

⁸⁹ US Supreme Court Ruling. (2016, September 29). retrieved from: <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/580/15-827/opinion3.html>

⁹⁰ New Jersey code, N.J.A.C. 6A:10A-3.3(a)3ii special education. (n.d.). <https://www.nj.gov/education/code/current/title6a/chap14.pdf>

(referrals@lakewoodpiners.org) for all referrals to the Child Study Team (CST) from parents, teachers, early intervention providers, administrators, and school staff. There is also a link to a document on the Lakewood website regarding Project CHILD FIND, a free referral service and statewide public awareness campaign to assist in the identification of unserved/underserved youth with a delay or disability from birth through twenty-one years of age. Project CHILD FIND develops and distributes information to the public about early intervention services and special education programs throughout New Jersey.⁹¹ The graphic in Figure 54, from the District's 2022-23 Intervention Manual, depicts the process through which intervention support and referral to the CST occur.

The District outlined the following process for Initial Referrals.

District Process: Initial Referrals⁹²

The District has 20 days from the receipt of a referral to hold an Initial Determination Meeting. Upon receipt of the referral, the Office of Special Services will assign a Case Manager to ensure the meeting occurs within 20 days. The following shall occur:

- *For K-12 the Case Manager will notify the Child Study Team Secretary of the day and time of the meeting. The Child Study Team Secretary will contact the parent via phone. The meeting shall be scheduled as soon as possible to allow for and in anticipation of the parent not being available for the meeting. This will allow for the District to schedule another meeting and maintain compliance. All information must be documented in Realtime case notes. Ex: Parent no show; Parent not available and needs to reschedule....*
- *The Child Study Team Secretary will call the parent to inform them of the day and time of the meeting.*
- *The Child Study Team Secretary will send out a meeting notice reflecting the day and time of the meeting.*
- *The Child Study Team Secretary will call the parent to confirm the day before the meeting.*
- *The Child Study Team Secretary will notify building administration of the meetings and which teachers are required to participate.*
- *The Child Study Team Secretary will notify the teachers that are required to attend three business days prior to the meeting.*
- *Both Child Study Team Secretary and Case Managers will coordinate so multiple meetings will be scheduled on one day to maximize substitute coverage.*
- *The Child Study Team Secretary will coordinate substitute coverage of the meetings.*
- *The Child Study Team Secretary will coordinate translators for the meetings.*

Child Study Team members from other buildings may be utilized to ensure the District is compliant with meeting this mandate.

Additionally, the District's 2023 staff handbook outlines the procedures to follow for initial referrals.

⁹¹ Project Child Find Information, retrieved from: Project Child Find.pdf (lakewoodpiners.org)

⁹² "Referral Process" provided by Lakewood Public School District.

FIGURE 55: LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT HANDBOOK, SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES⁹³

LAKWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS **LAURA A. WINTERS Ed.D, SUPERINTENDENT** **August 13, 2023**

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES

Referral

What is a referral?
A referral is a written request for an evaluation that is given to the school district when a child is suspected of having a disability and might need special education services.

Who can make a referral?

- Parent
- School personnel
- Agencies concerned with the welfare of students, including the New Jersey Department of Education.

If you believe that your child may have a disability, you may refer your child for an evaluation by submitting a written request to your school district.

What happens when a referral is made?
Within 20 calendar days of receiving a referral, the school district must hold a meeting to decide whether an evaluation will be conducted. If an evaluation will be conducted, another decision is made about the type of testing and other procedures that will be used to determine the nature and scope of the evaluations. If an evaluation will not be conducted, recommendations may be made with respect to interventions or services to be provided the student in general education.

Decision-Making and Participation in Meetings

How are decisions made about your child's special education needs?
Decisions regarding your child's special education needs are made at meetings. As the parents of a child who has or may have a disability, you have the right to participate in meetings regarding:

- Identification (decision to evaluate or not)
- Evaluation (nature and scope of assessment procedures)
- Classification (determine whether your child is eligible for special education and related services)
- Development and review of your child's individualized education program (IEP)
- Educational placement of your child
- Reevaluation of your child

You are considered a member of the multi-disciplinary team of qualified persons who meet to make these determinations and develop your child's individualized education program (IEP).

Intervention and Referral Service procedure (I&RS)
The School Building's Intervention and Referral Services assist **Regular Education and Special Education** teachers to offer support and works with students with learning and/or behavior problems who may require additional support.
The I&RS team helps classroom teachers by:

96 | Page

Note. Retrieved from "Staff Handbook" provided by Lakewood Public School District.

⁹³ "Staff Handbook" provided by Lakewood Public School District.

LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

LAURA A. WINTERS Ed.D, SUPERINTENDENT

August 13, 2023

- Providing an efficient and effective means of assistance
- Providing peer support
- Providing a vehicle to share their expertise in working with a variety of learning and behavioral problems with all students – Regular and Special Education.
- Offering structured support and assistance by suggesting instructional strategies to promote pupil competence
- Enabling the school’s instructional program to meet a broader range of pupil needs.

Parental Requests: While parents have a right to request a Child Study Team Evaluation, we have a responsibility not to enlist parent requests.

Private CST Evaluations: Evaluations completed by a private Child Study Team at the parents’ request must be submitted to the Principal who will forward it to the Child Study Team.

Speech Referrals: New referrals should be addressed with the Speech Therapists and Counselors.

SECTION 504

Processed by the building administrator and the Guidance Counselor

Individual 504’s for students must be updated and revisited each year. They are not automatically renewed. 504’s cannot be used just for testing nor written and developed just prior to testing. In addition, the provisions of the 504 must be implemented every day to avoid legal ramifications. We do not want to be accused of failing to implement.

- Please review and implement existing 504 plans.
- Begin thinking about revising and updating new 504 plans.
- By November of each school year, all revised and updated 504’s should be in place and signed off by parents.
- By January of the same school year, all brand new 504’s (except for transfers) should be in place and signed off by parents.

STATE RESIDENCY REQUIREMENT

NJ First Act, N.J.S.A. 52:14-7 (Act) effective September 1, 2011. It provides that “every person holding office, employment, or position with ... a school district... shall have his / her Principal address within the State.” New employees are entitled to a grace period of one (1) year from the date of hire to comply with the residency requirement.

There is a “grandfather clause” for existing staff members employed in the District as of September 1, 2011 and who, as of that date, resided outside of New Jersey.

Please note that staff members who were employed in the District but actually resided in New Jersey as of September 1, 2011 are not exempt from the residency requirement.

97 | Page

Note. Retrieved from “Staff Handbook” provided by Lakewood Public School District.

During the 2022-23 school year, the CST received 841 referrals for special education. As of November 2023, there were 319 referrals for the 2023-24 school year.⁹⁴ General observations of these data show that the majority of referrals are from Early Intervention and parents, with far fewer coming from schools. Deeper

⁹⁴ Referral Data” (n.d.). Lakewood Public School District.

analysis of these data was not possible given the format of the information provided. However, considering the total number of identified students with disabilities in Lakewood's public schools is 1,395, this referral number is high. It is unclear if these numbers are also inclusive of students who are parentally placed in nonpublic schools and could potentially be evaluated through Chapter 193.

District Practices

Staff shared a range of feedback about students who were referred for an evaluation, or, in some cases, about students they believe should have been referred sooner. Some focus group participants indicated that, from the perspective of helping the students in any way possible, everyone works together to go above and beyond to ensure students are getting serviced and receiving the services they need through testing and that there is validity in how students are chosen and recommendations provided through I&RS. One another positive note, staff shared in focus groups that Spanish bilingual evaluations do not create challenges, as testing is done in both languages and there are staff dedicated to them. There may be challenges with other languages, however.

Others focus group participants shared divergent views, in that they question the eligibility criteria and whether determinations are accurate. There reportedly have been cases in which parents believe their children have not been properly evaluated. Further, focus group participants shared that there is also a perception that that the administration is focused more on data, numbers, and classification rates than children. Decisions are reportedly heavily influenced by data analysis rather than a comprehensive consideration of individual student needs. According to some, the identification process is long, and there are children who will go multiple grades without support. Their needs may be great by the time an evaluation occurs. There is a recognition, however, that it is a balance to implement MTSS with fidelity and not overidentify students as well.

The work of the CSTs is overseen by the Supervisor of CST. During the 2021-22, there were 33 CST members across the District, with FY22 actuals for CST expenses totaling \$4,538,157.⁹⁵ According to focus group participants, these CST members only support students within Lakewood Public School District and do not work with nonpublic schools.

Early Childhood Special Education Services

Lakewood Public School District has the Lakewood Early Childhood Center (LECC) where most of its Preschoolers with Disabilities population is located. The District offers both general education, in-class resource (ICR), and separate class settings. In the separate class setting, it was reported that Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) protocol is followed. Teachers reported they use the Creative Curriculum.

PCG visited two classrooms in the LECC. Both were bright, organized, and children were highly engaged. The LECC is in a complex of three campuses of modular-trailer classrooms, two of which are interconnected. Campus 1 has ABA and self-contained classes, and Campus 2 has 2 self-contained and transitional K. Campus 2 is not interconnected.

Within the interconnected trailers, the District has installed PT equipment in a separate setting and in a Snoezelen Multi-Sensory Room. The campus is also equipped with pre-school sized bathrooms. However, it was reported on multiple occasions that having the preschool program in modular trailers is not ideal. Staff said that they can easily become noisy, and the layout of the classrooms can be precarious because of the space limitations of a trailer.

One unique element of Lakewood Public School District's early childhood programming is the age of its students. Lakewood allows children at age four to exit preschool and start kindergarten. This is highly unusual as most other kindergarten students with disabilities across the state start preschool at age five, at the earliest.

⁹⁵ "CST Staff Data" provided by Lakewood Public School District. Funding information retrieved from the Lakewood User Friendly Budget book: https://www.nj.gov/education/finance/fp/ufb/2022/reports/29/2520/UFB23_2520.pdf

School Age Special Education Services

In New Jersey, several types of supplementary instruction and special class programs exist.

According to NJAC 6A:14-4.6, supplementary instruction "...is provided to students with disabilities in addition to the primary instruction for the subject being taught. The program of supplementary instruction shall be specified in the student's IEP."⁹⁶ It includes in-class resource programming, pull out resource programming and pull-out replacement programming:

- **In-Class Resource (ICR):** In-class resource programs and pull-out replacement resource programs are programs of specialized instruction organized around a single subject and are provided to students with disabilities by an appropriately certified teacher of students with disabilities. Instruction in more than one subject may be provided in a pull-out resource program.
- **Pull-Out Replacement and Pull-Out Resource (POR):** Pull-out replacement resource programs are programs of specialized instruction organized around a single subject and are provided to students with disabilities by an appropriately certified teacher of students with disabilities. Pull-out replacement resource programs are programs of specialized instruction organized around a single subject and are provided to students with disabilities by an appropriately certified teacher of students with disabilities. More than one subject may be provided in a pull-out resource program. In Lakewood Public Schools, Pull-Out Replacement occurs in the middle and high school settings; Pull-Out Resource occurs at the elementary schools.

According to NJAC 6A:14-4.7, a special class program shall serve students who have similar intensive educational, behavioral, and other needs related to their disabilities in accordance with their IEPs. Placement in a special class program shall occur when the IEP team determines that the nature and severity of the student's disability is such that no other school-based program will meet the student's needs. Special class programs shall offer instruction in the New Jersey Student Learning Standards unless the IEP specifies a modified curriculum due to the nature or severity of the student's disability. The general education curriculum and the instructional strategies may be modified based on the student's IEP.⁹⁷ The Administrative Code offers several settings that include requirements on the maximum number of students and as well as teachers and classroom aides present. The following abbreviations for settings along the continuum are included below:

- **Language and Learning Disability (LLD).** Special class programs for students with learning and/or language disabilities may be organized around the learning disabilities or the language disabilities or a combination of learning and language disabilities.
- **Multiple Disabilities (MD).** Special class for students with multiple disabilities, when the combination of those disabilities causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in a program designed solely to address one of the impairments.
- **Emotional Regulation Impairment (ERI).** Special class for students exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a student's educational performance due to: an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances; a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems
- **Autism (AUT).** Special class for students with severe to profound intellectual disabilities shall maintain a three to one student to staff ratio.
- **Visually Impaired (VI).** Special class for students that, even with vision correction, vision impairment adversely affects a student's educational performance.

⁹⁶ New Jersey code NJAC 6A:14-4.6 special education. (n.d.). <https://www.nj.gov/education/code/current/title6a/chap14.pdf>

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Continuum of Services

Of the settings specified in Code, Lakewood provides the following continuum within its schools.

TABLE 28: SPECIAL EDUCATION CONTINUUM MAPPING, GRADES PK-6

	LECC (PK)	Piner School	Spruce Street School	Oak Street School	Clifton Avenue School	Ella G. Clark School
Special Education Setting	Grade: PK	Grade: PK-K	Grade: 1	Grades: 2-6	Grades: 2-6	Grades: 3-6
General Education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Preschool Disabilities (ABA) – Separate Classroom	✓					
ICR	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
POR				✓	✓	
LLD		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
AUT		✓	✓	✓		
MD				✓		
Related Services ⁹⁸	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note. Retrieved from “Master Schedule Data” provided by Lakewood Public School District.

TABLE 29: SPECIAL EDUCATION CONTINUUM MAPPING, GRADES 7-12

	Lakewood Middle School	Lakewood High School
Special Education Setting	Grades: 7-8	Grades: 9-12+
General Education	✓	✓
ICR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Math 7 and 8 ✓ ELA 7 and 8 ✓ Science 7 A 1, 7 A2, 7 A3, 7 B1, 7 B2, 7 B3, 8 D1, 8 D2 ✓ Social Studies 7 A1, 7 A2, 7 A3, 8 D1, 8 D2, 8 D3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Geometry ✓ Algebra I ✓ Biology ✓ Horticulture ✓ English I ✓ English II ✓ English III
POR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Math 7A, 7B, 8A, 8B ✓ ELA 7A, 7B, 8A, 8B ✓ Science 7A, 7B ✓ Social Studies 7A, 7B, 8A, 8B 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Geometry ✓ Algebra I ✓ Algebra II ✓ Physical Science ✓ Environmental Science
LLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ELA 7A and 7B ✓ ELA 8 ✓ Social Studies 7A, 7B 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Geometry L10 ✓ Algebra I L9 ✓ Algebra II L11 ✓ Physical Science ✓ English L9, American History ✓ World History
AUT	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Language Arts ✓ Vocational/Career

⁹⁸ Includes OT, PT, and Speech

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Science ✓ Math ✓ Social Studies ✓ Life Skills
MD	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Language Arts ✓ Vocational/Career ✓ Science ✓ Math ✓ Social Studies ✓ Life Skills
Related Services ⁹⁹	✓	

Note. Retrieved from "Master Schedule Data" provided by Lakewood Public School District.

TABLE 30: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS BY TYPE AND NUMBER OF CLASSES PER GRADE LEVEL

2023-24 Special Ed Programs	Program	# Classes	Program	# Classes	Program	# Classes	Program	# Classes	Program	# Classes	Program	# Classes	Program	# Classes
PreK	Autistic	0	MD	0	LLD	0	ICR	3	POR	0	SELF CONTAINED	11	ICS	10
K	Autistic	2	MD	0	LLD	3	ICR	2	POR	0	SELF CONTAINED	0	ICS	3
Gr. 1-3	Autistic	4	MD	1	LLD	9	ICR	8	POR	1	SELF CONTAINED	0	ICS	10
Gr. 3-4	Autistic	1	MD	0	LLD	1	ICR	0	POR	2	SELF CONTAINED	0	ICS	0
Gr. 3-5	Autistic	0	MD	0	LLD	1	ICR	0	POR	0	SELF CONTAINED	0	ICS	0
Gr. 4-6	Autistic	1	MD	1	LLD	5	ICR	8	POR	5	SELF CONTAINED	0	ICS	9
Gr. 7-8	Autistic	1	MD	1	LLD	5	ICR	5	POR	5	SELF CONTAINED	0	ICS	0
Gr. 9-12	Autistic	2	MD	2	LLD	5	ICR	5	POR	5	SELF CONTAINED	4 (See Autistic & MD)	ICS	0

Note: Retrieved from Special Education Class Data provided by Lakewood Public School District.

Lakewood Public School District reportedly does not have programming for Emotional Regulation Impairment, Visual Impairment, Intellectual Disabilities in its schools.

Interviews and focus groups with administrators said that they believe the District’s continuum is tailored to the specific needs of its student population. One possible explanation for the relatively fewer Multiple Disabilities settings, as well as the absence of Emotional Regulation Impairment and Intellectual Disability settings, could be attributed to a significant number of students with more profound needs receiving their education in nonpublic schools or through out of District placements. This determination is typically made either by the CST team or through parental placement. It raises the question as to whether, with additional planning and specific programming development, the District could bring some students with more significant needs back from out of District placements.

In the PCG staff survey, 54.0 percent of staff agreed that there is collaboration between the CST and building leadership to implement a robust continuum of services, and 38.6 percent of staff believe the central office is responsive to their school’s requests for assistance with special education related issues. Further, just 68.6 percent of families agreed that their school effectively responds to the needs and concerns of families of students with IEPs. These low percentages indicate that the District will need to further focus on collaboration across stakeholders and improve its responsiveness to both schools and families.

Specialized Out-of-District Placements

The IDEA affords children with an IEP a Free and Appropriate Education in the Least Restrictive Environment. When a Child Study Team determines that a student with an IEP is unable to make academic and functional progress in the school and program they attend, the IEP team can determine the provision of FAPE and LRE is best suited in an out-of-District placement. When a CST makes this decision, they generally must choose an appropriate school that is also an Approved Private School for Students with Disabilities (APSD). This placement must be consistent with NJAC 18A:46-14, in which the CST must consider:

⁹⁹ Includes OT, PT, and Speech

- A. A special class or classes in the District, including a class or classes in hospitals, convalescent homes, or other institutions;
- B. A special class in the public schools of another District in this State or any other state in the United States;
- C. Joint facilities including a class or classes in hospitals, convalescent homes or other institutions to be provided by agreement between one or more school Districts;
- D. A jointure commission program;
- E. A State of New Jersey operated program;
- F. Instruction at school supplementary to the other programs in the school, whenever, in the judgment of the board of education with the consent of the commissioner, the handicapped pupil will be best served thereby;
- G. Sending children capable of benefiting from a day school instructional program to privately operated day classes, in New Jersey or, with the approval of the commissioner to meet particular circumstances, in any other state in the United States, the services of which are nonsectarian whenever in the judgment of the board of education with the consent of the commissioner it is impractical to provide services pursuant to subsection a., b., c., d., e. or f. otherwise...¹⁰⁰

Generally, the New Jersey Department of Education County Offices' Child Study Team Supervisor sign-off on this CST team decision to finalize the change in placement. The child's IEP must also be amended to reflect this placement and address other provisions within that are specific to out-of-district placements.

If the Child Study Team is unable to identify a placement that meets the requirements of sections A through G of the regulations:

"...that child may be placed in that academic program by the board of education, with the consent of the commissioner, or by order of a court of competent jurisdiction. An academic program which meets the requirements of the child's Individual Education Plan as determined by the child study team and which provides the child with a thorough and efficient education, shall be considered an approved placement for the purposes of chapter 46 of this Title, and the board of education shall be entitled to receive State aid for that child as provided pursuant to P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-43 et al.), and all other pertinent statutes."¹⁰¹

This kind of atypical placement is known locally as a Naples Placement. Such a placement is either a nonpublic school within the state or, in any other state in the United States, and determines that the identified program meets the requirements of the child's IEP. In this case, the approval of this Naples placement requires it be an accredited nonpublic school; the services of the placement are non-sectarian and the placement is approved by the board of education with consent of the Commissioner or by order of the Court.¹⁰² As is noted elsewhere in this report, the District does not currently have any students in a Naples Placement.

During focus groups and interviews, it was consistently noted that a significant number of students placed out of District have complex needs, presenting challenges ranging from being non-verbal to requiring ventilators, having feeding tubes, or facing severe medical conditions. According to participants in the focus groups and interviews, they believe the District lacks the essential behavioral support resources needed to address these complex cases. Many believe meeting the medical needs of these students, especially those placed out of District, often exceeds the District's capacity. Some students have diagnoses that may be unfamiliar to educators, such as familial dysautonomia with approximately 13 cases reported in Lakewood.

¹⁰⁰ New Jersey code NJAC 6A:14-4.6 special education. (n.d.). retrieved from <https://www.nj.gov/education/code/current/title6a/chap14.pdf>

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² PL 1989 chapter 152 naples placement instructions and forms. (n.d.). State of NJ. <https://homeroom.state.nj.us/exaid/doc/Chapter152NaplesForms.pdf>

Teachers in the District expressed a lack of knowledge regarding the out-of-district placement process, indicating that they are not actively involved in that decision-making process. Additionally, there is a call for exploring the possibility of creating a program similar to what neighboring out of District schools have for students with significant needs. However, participants noted that limited funding poses a major obstacle to implementing such a program, representing a substantial struggle for the District. Many participants noted the need for additional resources and financial support to address the unique needs of students with complex medical and behavioral challenges.

According to the User-Friendly Budget, during the 2019-2020 school year, Lakewood spent \$48,755,738 for 402 students in out of district placements. The average per pupil tuition for that year was \$121,282.93.

The tuition total amount increased to \$57,499,863 in 2021-2022, though the number of students decreased to 372. The average per pupil tuition for that year was \$154,569.52.¹⁰³

FIGURE 56. OUT OF DISTRICT TUITION AMOUNTS FOR COMPARABLE DISTRICTS, 2020 TO 2022

	2020 Actual			2021 Actual			2022 Estimate		
	Enrollment	Tuition Total	Per Pupil Tuition	Enrollment	Tuition Total	Per Pupil Tuition	Enrollment	Tuition Total	Per Pupil Tuition
Lakewood	402	\$ 48,755,738.00	\$ 121,282.93	372	\$ 57,499,863.00	\$ 154,569.52	389	\$ 50,766,692.00	\$ 130,505.63
Jackson	55	\$ 4,731,339.00	\$ 86,024.35	47	\$ 6,265,760.00	\$ 133,314.04	54	\$ 5,059,139.00	\$ 93,687.76
Brick	66.5	\$ 4,681,305.00	\$ 70,395.56	62.5	\$ 4,697,215.00	\$ 75,155.44	87.5	\$ 4,291,708.00	\$ 49,048.09
Toms River	86	\$ 7,553,746.00	\$ 87,834.26	77	\$ 7,726,358.00	\$ 100,342.31	77	\$ 1,787,180.00	\$ 23,210.13
Jersey City	139	\$ 20,854,439.00	\$ 150,031.94	129	\$ 20,530,995.00	\$ 159,155.00	129	\$ 19,429,493.00	\$ 150,616.22

Note: Retrieved from "Comparable District User Friendly Budgets" by Official Site of the State of New Jersey (<https://www.nj.gov/education/finance/fp/ufb/2022/17.html>)

Access to the General Education Curriculum

IDEA requires that all children with disabilities be provided with access to the general education curriculum (GEC).¹⁰⁴ The GEC is defined as the curriculum used by all students enrolled in the same grade, including students with disabilities, and is based on a state's academic content standards. As described in the Curriculum and Instruction section of this report, Lakewood has developed standard pacing guides across the District; however, this structure has raised additional questions about how to meaningfully include students with disabilities.

For students with disabilities to improve their academic achievement and reduce the achievement gap with their nondisabled peers, they need to be included in the core curriculum and receive evidence-based interventions that are targeted and implemented with fidelity. As was noted earlier in this section, for the past three years, the District has not met state targets for preschool or school age students being educated in the least restrictive environment. As such, this is an area that will continue to benefit from focused attention to ensure Lakewood continues to meet the targets in the future. According to PCG's classroom visits, schools within the District appear to vary with respect to the extent to which students are educated in general education classes, and the extent to which special and general educators co-teach to educate these students. The variance ranges from a very high degree of inclusivity where almost all students are educated within general education classes to very little inclusiveness in terms of accessing the materials.

Embedded within this approach is the expectation that students with disabilities have access to grade-level content and can achieve at high levels. A relatively high percentage (82.1%) of staff on the survey agreed with the statement "Building administrators (principals, assistant principals, etc.) in my school have high expectations of students with IEPs." Similarly, 87.1% of staff survey participants believe that school staff (teachers, related service providers, paraeducators, coaches, social workers, counselors, etc.) in their schools have high expectations for students with IEPs.

¹⁰³ *User friendly budgets*. (2022-2023). State of New Jersey Department of Education. <https://www.nj.gov/education/finance/fp/ufb/2022/17.html>

¹⁰⁴ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004), retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/>

During information gathered from focus groups, teachers shared concerns over time constraints and pressures to follow the curriculum while meeting the individual needs of students with IEPs. They overwhelmingly expressed frustrations with pacing guides and their incongruence with the demands of following students' IEPs. Teachers also shared these concerns for students who are both English Learners as well as having an IEP. A quick roll-out of the ELA curriculum, known as CommonLit 360, in addition to its prescriptiveness, was also cited as problematic. Many teachers shared concerns that they do not work in an environment where they can express these concerns without experiencing retribution, such as building transfers or non-renewal of their contracts if they are non-tenured.

Specially Designated Instruction and Individualized Supports

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, "special education" means "specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability including (a) instruction in the classroom in the home, in hospitals, and in other settings; and (b) instruction in physical education."¹⁰⁵

Students can receive specially designed instruction (SDI) throughout a continuum of special education services which are provided in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), where, to the maximum extent appropriate, a student with a disability is educated with peers who are not disabled.¹⁰⁶

SDI is "adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology or delivery of instruction (i) to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and (ii) ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children"¹⁰⁷ (34 CFR §300.39(b)(3)).

PCG learned about SDI in Lakewood by evaluating data gathered from interviews, focus groups, and surveys as well as classroom visits.

INTERVIEWS, FOCUS GROUPS, AND STAFF SURVEYS

Information gathered from interviews, focus groups, and staff surveys noted several concerns regarding access to the general education curriculum and the overall implementation of SDI in Lakewood. Many staff shared that teachers are expected to use general education materials but face challenges in modifying them. Almost all teachers shared that the curricula used by the District require strict adherence to the instructional materials that accompany it, specifically slide presentations and worksheets. Furthermore, it was shared that pacing guides also present challenges in providing SDI to students because teachers have limitations in their time. Several teachers voiced significant concerns that these create barriers to individualized learning for students. Even in situations where two teachers are in the room, such as ICR, teachers believe the pacing is too fast and the curriculum is too prescriptive to meet individual student needs.

Teachers expressed frustration with a lack of say in curriculum decisions and their impact on instruction, particularly in ELA and Math classrooms K-12 for students with disabilities. Many teachers voiced a belief that the District's instructional focus is more focused on the curricular materials than students' needs. Changes in the overall curriculum occur frequently, leading to a lack of continuity. They shared their lack of knowledge on how to modify the curriculum to meet students' needs with constant changes to the curriculum.

In Lakewood, according to focus group participants, decisions on curriculum and instruction are made by Curriculum Supervisors. In some cases, coaches create the curricular tools on their own, in other cases they procure curriculum and play a critical role in training and implementation. In addition, curriculum coaches are responsible for creating pacing guides. These guides prompt teachers on what content and

¹⁰⁵ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §1401(29), retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/>

¹⁰⁶ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §1412(a)(5), retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/>

¹⁰⁷ Code of Federal Regulations, 34 CFR §300.39(b)(3), retrieved from <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-III/part-300/subpart-A/subject-group-ECFR0ec59c730ac278e/section-300.39>

materials they should be working on and when. Administrators shared that teacher can request adjustments to the guide if they seek permission.

ICR teachers indicated that the District recently determined that parallel teaching, a form of co-teaching, is a primary focus. In parallel teaching, each teacher leads half of the class teaching the same content or addressing instructional objectives; it is distinct from station teaching in that the groups do not switch.¹⁰⁸ The District engaged a consulting company to provide professional development for the 2023-24 school year to provide training on parallel teaching. According to contents within the training provided by the District for the 2023-24 school year, parallel teaching in Lakewood is the following: “The general education teacher provides instruction to the majority of students while the ICR teacher provides a parallel lesson to a small group of students, who are unable to participate in the whole group lesson as determined by the data.” The training indicates: “This model should be used daily, across all subject areas.” The training also defined team teaching as the following: “When the whole group lesson effectively meets the instructional needs of all students in the class, the ICR teacher co-teaches with the General Education teacher. This approach involves both teachers delivering instruction at the same time.” This training notes that team teaching “...should be used sparingly (1-5% of the time)” and that it “...should only be used if all students’ data shows that they can effectively participate in the whole class lesson.”¹⁰⁹

Many teaching staff shared they do not understand how to parallel teach given the structure of the curriculum, materials, and pacing. Some teachers shared frustration that this may be temporary until the next change is made because of so many frequent changes to instructional practices and expectations.

Others reported that parallel teachers are expected to adhere to the pacing guide, hindering the inclusive atmosphere that characterized classrooms before this shift. The once indistinguishable roles of general education teachers and special ed teachers have given way to a clear division, with a distinct “back table group” replacing the inclusive approach. This change, according to teachers, has resulted in a lack of collaboration among co-teachers and diminished support for newer teachers. Some also expressed concerns that there is not enough, or no, common planning time and noted that the special educator in the room frequently gets pulled to either provide coverage for other special education teachers or has to leave because of meetings.

Concerns were raised by teachers who support both English Learners who also have IEPs. Specifically, teachers expressed concerns that these students have limited elective options at the high school level due to scheduling constraints.

CLASSROOM VISITS

PCG visited classrooms where students with IEPs are receiving their special education services. In total, PCG visited all subject areas across all grade-bands where students were receiving special education services (**Table 31**). PCG visited a total of 33 classrooms where instruction was provided by at least one special education teacher. These visits occurred on December 11 and 12, 2023 and January 3, 2024. Classroom visits were 20-25 minutes each. PCG made every effort to visit a representative sampling of Lakewood’s continuum of special education services across the District. The PCG team met with a principal or designee at each school where they were presented with the list of classrooms to be visited. Staff checked to ensure that teachers were present. If not, substitutions were made where possible. In addition to the classrooms visited, PCG also visited related service spaces.

TABLE 31: CLASSROOMS/PROGRAMS VISITED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

Grades	In Class Resource (ICR)	Language/Learning Disability (LLD)	Multiple Disabilities (MD)	Pull-out Resource (POR)	Autism (AUT)	TOTAL
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¹⁰⁸ Friend, M. (2019). Co-Teaching: Strategies to Improve Student Outcomes, Second Edition.

¹⁰⁹ The power of 2: refining the inclusive model to promote LRE. (2023). Magnolia Consulting Group.

Preschool	1				1	2
K-6	2	3	1	1	3	10
7-8 ¹¹⁰			1		1	2
9-12+	3	3	5	5	3	19

AREA I: FOCUS ON LEARNERS

Student Engagement

- **Disengaged Learning.** Rote fill-in-the-blank prompts dominated most classrooms, with limited checking for understanding or mastery. The emphasis appears to be on completing pages rather than grasping concepts, or students working on computers individually. In multiple instances, students did not respond to direct teacher questioning. This was most notable in high school LLD, POR, and ICR settings. In the majority of LLD, POR, or ICR classrooms visited, student engagement was limited. These patterns coincided in settings where there was heavy use of worksheets, teachers were pacing the instruction in a manner that appeared too fast, and paraprofessionals appeared underutilized and disengaged.
- **Active Engagement.** Isolated classrooms demonstrated active student engagement in discussions, note-taking, project completion, and problem-solving. This was seen in high school life skills and an ICR classroom as well as in some of the elementary school classrooms. This was also apparent in all of the early childhood classrooms visited.

Student Activity

- **Routines.** Consistent routines were noted in a small handful of self-contained classrooms, contributing to a predictable and organized learning atmosphere, which can positively impact student behavior and engagement. Routines were most notable in the high school MD, Autism, and life skills settings, as well as throughout early childhood, elementary and middle school classrooms visited.
- **Communication Challenges in Autism Classes.** PCG noted students of limited verbal ability in these classrooms. Without Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems present in classrooms, many appeared to struggle to communicate. When asked about those options, teachers reported that no student IEPs required Augmentative Communication Systems. Additionally, while ABA and BCBA services and supports were reported, there were unclear reinforcement systems, and occasional issues with compliance; almost no pairings of visual information to support verbal communication; no visual communication schedules; and no examples of alternative communication systems such as picture exchange systems, communication boards, or communication devices in instances exhibited of limited student verbal communication skills. Teachers noted they seemed unnecessary. In these settings, student communication and engagement were highly variable and often nonexistent. In addition, there was also inconsistent application of strategies to reinforce appropriate communication and engagement. The most noted strategies were simply verbal inducements. There were no data sheets or evidence of data collection relative to academics or behavior. PCG did observe examples of staff providing students edible reinforcements (gummy bears, cookies) to induce alternative behaviors in a manner that did not appear to follow any established formal reinforcement protocol.

AREA II: FOCUS ON INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Lesson Design

¹¹⁰ Scheduled to attend 6; however, fire drill and school assembly disrupted schedule.

- **Challenges Implementing Specialized Instruction.** In classrooms where students were receiving special education services, teachers followed the general education curriculum using instructional materials provided to them such as worksheets and slide presentations; however, there were limited visible individualization, adaptation, differentiation, personalization, or use of modifications. These challenges coincided with apparent challenges in pacing, whereby the teachers were moving too fast relative to the students' understanding. These challenges most notably occurred in the majority of high school POR, LLD, and ICR classrooms visited and nearly all elementary school classrooms visited.
- **Structured Lessons.** There were a few instances of structured lessons with clear objectives, warm-up activities, and guided notes were observed.
- **Instructional Technology.** Teachers consistently used technology to enhance lesson delivery such as Smart boards, laptops, and interactive slides. In every classroom visited, instructional technology was a critical component of the lesson. Teachers used this technology with ease. While most students also used the technology with ease, they often appeared not to be engaged in the activities or lessons.

Checks for Learning/Understanding

- **Lack of Checks for Understanding.** Several classrooms lacked checks for understanding, with teachers moving through material without ensuring student comprehension or mastery. There was limited reciprocal communication in the instructional environment between students and teachers. In almost all the high school LLD, POR, and ICR classrooms, there were inconsistent checks for understanding that appeared to align with teachers need to meet pacing guide requirements. In elementary and middle schools, teachers more frequently used both formal and informal checks such as thumbs up, thumbs down or verbal questioning. PCG saw very few examples of data collection happening in real-time during instructional activities. In many of these instances, there were underutilized paraprofessionals in the room who could have been collecting data and were not.

Subject Mastery

- **Subject Mastery.** Teachers in some classrooms displayed a strong command of the subject matter, using relevant vocabulary and making connections to real-life scenarios. It was observed in high school life skills and LLD classrooms but was not evident across all high school instruction. This mastery was also observed throughout most of the elementary and middle school classrooms.

Co-Teaching

- **ICR Predominately Followed One-teach, One-Observe Co-Teaching Model.** One-teach, one-observe was the predominate co-teaching model used in ICR settings. There was very little team teaching evident during visits. There was some parallel teaching observed in elementary school settings. It was notable that in about half of the ICR classrooms visited, the ICR teacher was either not present or was planning to leave due to classroom coverage issues or having to leave to attend meetings. What was observed during classroom visits was inconsistent with the District's definition of parallel teaching.
- **Lesson Objectives.** In almost all but one or two isolated classrooms PCG visited, there were lesson objectives posted. These objectives were almost universally a repeat of a specifically referenced New Jersey educational standard. While the standard was noted, in most instances, it was difficult to ascertain if posted objectives actually linked to the instruction observed. While the instruction matched the academic subject under observation, it was only in one or two classrooms that there was a directly observable connection between the objective and instruction. Since PCG did not have lesson plans for the classrooms observed, it was difficult to ascertain further correlation. While PCG may have observed instruction related to a subset of a standard, which then did meet the posted objective, it was just not readily apparent without additional data.

Levels of Student Work

- **Pacing Challenges:** Pacing issues were evident in multiple classes, with lessons moving too fast relative to student responses. In these instances, teachers often asked questions which either went unanswered by students or the teacher verbally answered the questions themselves. In almost all classrooms visited, aside from Autism, MD, and early childhood, teachers were notably moving through material quickly. It appeared to be an impediment in nearly all LLD, POR, or ICR high school classrooms. In many of the elementary school classrooms, pacing was uneven. In all of these situations, teachers were using pre-made slides or materials.

Instructional Materials

- **Workbook/Worksheet Use.** Many classrooms heavily relied on workbooks, leading to rote fill-in-the-blank activities without sufficient emphasis on higher order thinking, topic understanding or topic mastery. In nearly all high school LLD, POR, or ICR classrooms, students were working entirely from worksheets and engaged in activities where an activity was focused on worksheet completion.
- **Curriculum Materials.** Classroom materials were largely part of a curricular program such as Common Lit 360 for high school English Language Arts. Teacher-presented slides were either part of a curricular program or created internally by the District.
- **Underutilization of Paraprofessionals.** In multiple instances, paraprofessionals were observed as disengaged or not actively participating in supporting students. In several instances, paraprofessionals appeared uncertain of their roles and were in the back of the room and circulated. This was especially true in settings where the paraprofessionals were there to support classroom instruction. In half of the high school LLD, POR, or ICR classrooms, this was observed.

AREA III: FOCUS ON CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Classroom Appearance

- **Neat and Organized Classrooms.** All classrooms were consistently clean, neat, and organized.

Classroom Management

- **Compliant Students in Instruction.** Students were consistently compliant in engaging in appropriate and safe school behaviors such as remaining seated at their desks, communicating politely with teachers, and not talking or arguing with each other or adults. However, in several instances, students were not following directions when asked to answer questions or complete instructional tasks. In these situations, there was limited redirection by teachers or paraprofessionals.
- **School Security.** Security officers throughout buildings, with apparently positive rapport with students and teachers.

Classroom Culture

- **Compliant Students in Safe and Appropriate School Behavior.** Students were consistently compliant in engaging in appropriate and safe school behaviors such as remaining seated at their desks, communicating politely with teachers, and not talking or arguing with each other or adults. PCG only saw two instances among the 33 classrooms visited where students were non-compliant. In both instances, teachers redirected students and the students became compliant.
- **Routines.** Consistent routines were noted in some classrooms, contributing to a predictable and organized learning atmosphere, which can positively impact student behavior and engagement.

Space and Equipment

- **Related Service Space and Equipment.** PCG visited all Speech, OT, and PT rooms in all buildings across the District. The rooms were large and well equipped with state-of-the-art

equipment such as Therapy Cages. There was equipment for students with significant fine and gross motor skill needs as well as mobility needs. However, it was noted that no students in the District's buildings presently use wheelchairs. In addition, much of the newer equipment has not yet been used.

- **Snoezelen Multisensory Environments.** The District has Snoezelen Multisensory Rooms in its schools. These rooms are used for students who need support in a calming environment. Many of these rooms are relatively new to the District and appeared to be in use.

Related Services

During focus groups and interactions with related service providers, they also spoke to the positive collaboration between administration, staff, and parents, in the support of students on their caseloads. Many related service providers shared their concerns, however, about the amount of time students are outside of the classroom receiving services and expressed their desire to provide more push-in services.

Participants spoke favorably to the District's efforts to procure new equipment when needed. During site visits, PCG saw all occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), and speech therapy spaces in all school buildings across Lakewood Public School District. Each of these spaces were very well equipped. Many elementary speech spaces had doll houses, kitchens, and books. Some of the spaces had brand new climbing walls. Additionally, many of the OT and PT spaces contained Therapy Cages – state of the art therapy equipment often used to support people with significant needs in a medical setting. Rooms also had trikes, mobility equipment, and Riften chairs. PCG noted the amount of equipment to support students with mobility issues and the few students within the District's buildings with significant mobility issues. For example, there are no students in the District who presently use wheelchairs. The District shared that Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) grant funding was used to purchase and upgrade the newer equipment.

Therapy spaces were large with significant room for therapies to occur. Building administrators noted there have been no recent capacity issues with the delivery of related services in their respective therapy spaces.

Positive Behavior Supports

Lakewood Public School District is a participant in the New Jersey Positive Behavior Supports in Schools (NJ PBSIS) project which is a collaboration between the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education and the Boggs Center at the Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. The initiative is funded through IDEA Part B. In the 2022-23 school year, Lakewood Middle School achieved "implementation fidelity" as determined by the program.

According to the NJ PBSIS website:

NJ PBSIS provides comprehensive professional development to support the implementation of tiered interventions that provide equitable access to a range of school intervention needs including conduct, behavior and social and emotional wellness. Since 2003, NJ PBSIS annually enrolls a cohort of schools whose personnel participate in a three-year professional development experience to design and implement a plan for their tiered intervention system.¹¹¹

Although Lakewood is a participant in the program, there appears to be a disconnect between the program and District staff as it relates to supporting students with IEPs. Staff at elementary schools, middle school, and high school shared there is a reliance on school counselors to support behavioral needs. Some staff indicated there are very few programs in the District to support positive behavior. During focus groups and interviews, Lakewood participation in NJ PBSIS was not raised.

¹¹¹ "NJ PBSIS" (n.d.). pbsisnj.org

When PCG visited the middle school, there was a school-wide assembly on behavior. Throughout PCG's classroom and building visits, children were polite and well behaved. School security officers and school staff in the hallways were familiar with the students.

ADDRESSING BEHAVIORAL NEEDS

Teachers expressed concerns that there are not enough programs in the District for children who need behavioral interventions. Many teachers believe the Board-Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) in the District are supportive, it was also shared that BCBA support for classroom varies and they are not always accessible.

PCG visited both Autism classrooms as well as classrooms where it was shared that Applied Behavior Analysis protocols were occurring. PCG saw multiple instances of edible reinforcement being used (from gummy bears to cookies); however, it did not appear that data was being collected on use of the edible reinforcers or if they were part of a behavior protocol. PCG also saw instances when use of visual social stories may have been helpful but were not apparent. It was reported that the addition of LLD programming is initiated to support students with behavioral challenges in District.

Transition Activities

Starting at age 14, teachers and CST members reported they engage in the process of creating transition goals and completing the transition sections within IEPs. Staff reported that transition is a "team approach" and that students are involved in the process.

PCG visited MD and Autism programs where the focus is on functional reading, life skills, and pre-vocational training. Students in these programs have classes in rooms that include ovens/kitchens, a bed, and tables. Staff indicated the District collaborates with government agencies such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitative Services to support the transition of students in its post-graduate program (ages 18-21) into adult life after their time at Lakewood High School.

Lakewood has four community-based instruction sites. The District also has a coffee cart program and a program called "Piner Diner" where students shop in the community for food and engage in a food service program in the high school.

IEP Development

According to the New Jersey guidance on IEP Development:

The cornerstone of the IDEA is the entitlement of each eligible child with a disability to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet the child's unique needs and that prepare the child for further education, employment, and independent living. 20 U.S.C. §1400(d)(1)(A). Under the IDEA, the primary vehicle for providing FAPE is through an appropriately developed IEP that is based on the individual needs of the child.¹¹²

An IEP must take into account a child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, and the impact of that child's disability on his or her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. IEP goals must be aligned with grade-level content standards for all children with disabilities. The child's IEP must be developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with the requirements outlined in the IDEA in 34 CFR §300.320 through §300.324.¹¹³

While requirements in IDEA delineate when and how an IEP is developed, it is essential for all members of the team to work in a collaborative manner on behalf of each student. Parents have valuable information to

¹¹² Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §1400(d)(1)(A), retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/>

¹¹³ Code of Federal Regulations, 34 CFR §320-324, retrieved from <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-III/part-300/subpart-A/subject-group-ECFR0ec59c730ac278e/section-300.39>

share about their child. As a team, families and practitioners need to develop a partnership in which each team member feels trusted, valued, understood, and respected.¹¹⁴

To support the perception of collaboration between parents and educators, 75.0 percent of staff surveyed agreed that the IEP process involves collaboration between general educators, special educators, and parents. Of parents surveyed, 79.3% believe they are given a meaningful opportunity to participate in IEP meetings.

Using the Golden Thread framework and Quality Indicator Review protocol, PCG randomly selected and reviewed approximately 25 student IEP files to assess the overall quality of the content of IEPs developed by Lakewood Public School District. Files reviewed were a representative sample of preschool, general education, and specialized programming IEPs throughout the District. More information about the Golden Thread Framework and the indicators used for the evaluation can be found in the Appendix.

A narrative summary is included below as evidence for each indicator.

Quality Indicator Review Findings

PRESENT LEVELS OF ACADEMIC AND FUNCTIONAL PERFORMANCE (PLAAFPS)

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A variety of in-depth data was provided to paint a clear picture of the students' current areas of strength and areas of need. • There were bilingual evaluations for students that required them.
Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only two student records included rating scales which should be part of a comprehensive evaluation for some of the students based on their disabilities. Only the teacher scale that was included and not the parent. There was no note as to whether the parent input was sought. • Some files reviewed only included the score report that is generated for specific assessments, not a report that provided student background or interpretation of scores and how this impacted the student academically. • Only a few of the IEPs reviewed included parent input. Most did not have a section included for it.

MEASURABLE ANNUAL GOALS

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of goals were written in SMART goal format. • The goals and objectives were aligned to grade-level/meaningful standards for students.
Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There appear to be many formatted goals that are plugged into IEPs. There were several grammatical errors, missing student names, and redundancies of statements throughout the IEPs reviewed. • There are inconsistencies with IEP development especially related to measurable objectives relating to the goal. • In some cases, goals only focused on academics and there were no goals to address the student's challenges with organization and attention.

¹¹⁴ Supporting parent participation in the individual family service plan or individualized education program process. (2018). PACER Center. <https://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c259.pdf>

- Goals and objectives did not seem to fully align with students' needs, in some cases. While they were aligned to standards, they lacked specificity to the students' needs for reading and written expression.
- Goals were generally aligned with PLAAFP areas; however, with some goals, it would be hard to measure progress or understand how the student was going to improve in these areas based on how the goals were written.

SERVICES AND PLACEMENT

Strengths

- The statements for the justification of removal from general education were detailed and provided a rationale for students being removed from the general education setting.
- The support for school personnel section was clearly outlined in every IEP reviewed, so it was clear how the team was working together to support the student and what support was needed.
- Some IEPs have pages of accommodations and modifications, the volume of which are very hard to implement and could be eliminated given good teaching practices or strong Universal Design for Learning (UDL) implementation.

Opportunities

- Assistive Technology was not a widely used consideration for students in the IEPs reviewed despite many of the students having more moderate disabilities. There were accommodations in some IEPs, mostly low-tech options, but this was not checked under Special Considerations.

PROGRESS REPORTS

Strengths

- Progress reports were completed for students whose files were reviewed.

Opportunities

- Progress reports were inconsistent, in that some were blank, some had only ratings for student progress, and others included ratings with supporting data as to how the teacher arrived at the rating.
- Progress reporting does not appear to have District-wide requirements to include both qualitative and quantitative data sources.

Overall, IEP paperwork generally does not align with grade level requirements stipulated for an IEP. For example, a preschool IEP includes state testing and transition paperwork required for older students.

BUILDING CAPACITY AND MATERIALS

PCG visited all school buildings at Lakewood Public Schools. Overall, PCG had the following impressions:

1. **Physical Plant Space:** Appropriate and appear sufficient for all service delivery needs, including storage.
2. **Accessibility:** Accessible options in each school, including ramps, stair lifts, elevators, restrooms, and hallways.

3. **Resources:** Extensive and well-resourced schools in terms of materials, including cutting-edge OT and PT therapy gyms, therapy cages, climbing walls, sensory rooms, mobility devices, treadmills, rowing machines, ellipticals, trikes, bikes, therapy tables, slides, climbing/tumbling equipment, and technology for speech services.
4. **Facility Maintenance:** Facilities are well-maintained, clean, with inviting decor, color-coded wings aiding in security.
5. **Security:** School security is highly diligent, accounting closely for all who enter and exit buildings.
6. **Related Service Delivery Spaces:** Spaces for related service delivery are located close to areas of student need, ensuring minimal classroom to service transition time. Related service staff have sufficient space to store materials, provide therapy, and office space. Almost all spaces are equipped with state-of-the-art equipment, including climbing walls, Snoozelen Rooms, and new PT Cages, typically found in medical settings.
7. **Instructional Technology:** Every classroom in every building visited had modern instructional technology that was in use. This included interactive white boards, student laptops, and teacher laptops. Students and staff throughout the buildings and in all grade levels used technology in both teaching and learning.

During interviews and focus groups, information was shared about the facilities. The first is that the facilities house only a fraction of the school children who reside in Lakewood and receive their education in private schools. Some staff spoke of a belief that the programs within buildings are over capacity. However, administrators and staff within the District, especially those who have been in the District for many years, acknowledged that capacity issues are much less a problem now than years ago. The most notable concern about facilities shared by teachers and administrators is the facilities for the LECC, which is spread across three campuses in modular trailer classrooms. Staff shared concerns about noise within the trailers and moving between the trailers. Others had concerns about making capital improvements on facilities that have a notably shorter useful lifespan than permanent structures.

Building Visits

At the **Early Childhood Campuses (LECC)**, with integrated and separate special education preschool, there are three campuses with a trailer system, and most of the staff work in cubicles. There is not much technology in classrooms, but teachers have computers. Campuses 1 and 3 are connected with integrated trailers and have a new accessible playground. The OT/PT space has a new therapy gym, Snoozelen sensory room, trampoline, climbing wall, adapted mobility equipment, Rifton chairs, trampolines, trikes, and various storage options. The Speech space has engaging materials like a play kitchen, dollhouse, puzzles, and games. Campus 2 has a playground and multiple trailers with similar resources. As this is a single-story building, there is no elevator. The classrooms visited were clean, well appointed, bright, and were at or under capacity. There are presently no students at this school who use a wheelchair for mobility access. School administration noted that there are no known capacity issues in any of the building's special education classrooms and/or related service spaces. All spaces throughout the building were notably clean. School Security was present and processed all adults entering and exiting the building. Facilities information such as date of construction and capacity were not available.

The **Piner Elementary School**, grades preschool and kindergarten, is a single-story building. The classrooms visited were clean, well appointed, bright, and were at or under capacity. The OT/PT related service space is well-equipped with standing swings, mats, ramps, slides, trikes, tumble rollers, bean bag seating, and more. Speech has two rooms for individual and group sessions with Rifton Chairs and lots of therapeutic materials stored in cabinets. As this is a single-story building, there is no elevator. Piner has ADA bathrooms. There are presently no students at this school who use a wheelchair for mobility access. School administration noted that there are no known capacity issues in any of the building's special education classrooms and/or related service spaces. District administration noted they are renting this space from a local church. The facility once housed a parochial school. All spaces throughout the building were notably clean. School Security was present and processed all adults entering and exiting the building. Facilities information such as date of construction and capacity were not available.

The **Spruce Street School**, grade 1, is a one-story building with accessible restrooms. The OT/PT space is well-supplied with tables, Rifton chairs, standing swings, treadmill, slides, climbing equipment, sensory room, and they follow the District policy for adult presence. Speech has two therapy rooms with a dollhouse, classroom library, and therapy tables with adapted seating. There are presently no students at this school who use a wheelchair for mobility access. School administration noted that there are no known capacity issues in any of the building's special education classrooms and/or related service spaces. All spaces throughout the building were notably clean. School Security was present and processed all adults entering and exiting the building. According to the Lakewood Township School District Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ended in June 30, 2021, this building was constructed in 1960 and has a capacity for 799 students. The building is 49,724 square feet.

At the **Clifton Avenue School**, grades 2-6, there are ADA bathrooms, an elevator, and a new stair lift. The classrooms visited were clean, well appointed, bright, and were at or under capacity. There are two related service rooms—one for speech and one for OT/PT. The OT/PT space is smaller than a regular elementary classroom but filled with useful things like standing swings, mats, balls, climbing equipment, adapted seating, Rifton Chairs, kidney tables, fine motor materials, and a new Smartboard. The Speech room is also smaller but has lots of technology, therapy materials, play equipment, and storage. There are presently no students at this school who use a wheelchair for mobility access. School administration noted that there are no known capacity issues in any of the building's special education classrooms and/or related service spaces. There are presently no students at this school who use a wheelchair for mobility access. All spaces throughout the building were notably clean. School Security was present and processed all adults entering and exiting the building. According to the Lakewood Township School District Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ended in June 30, 2021, this building was constructed in 1923 and has a capacity for 782 students. The building is 79,039 square feet.

At the **Oak Street School**, for grades 2-6, the OT/PT related service space is large with a state-of-the-art therapy cage, new climbing wall, standing swing, treadmill, elliptical, mats, bean bag chairs, sensory ball pit, trampoline, and various play-based therapy options. Speech is in a shared space for two therapy groups with extensive materials stored in cabinets and a counseling-designed play therapy space. The Oak Street School is a multi-level building and has an elevator. There are presently no students at this school who use a wheelchair for mobility access. The classrooms visited were clean, well appointed, bright, and were at or under capacity. School administration noted that there are no known capacity issues in any of the building's special education classrooms and/or related service spaces. All spaces throughout the building were notably clean. School Security was present and processed all adults entering and exiting the building. According to the Lakewood Township School District Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ended in June 30, 2021, this building was constructed in 1983 and has a capacity for 799 students. The building is 70,659 square feet.

At **Ella G. Clark Elementary School**, for grades 3-6, they have three related service rooms—two for speech and one for OT/PT. The OT/PT space is large and feels like an auxiliary gym. It has a climbing wall, new flooring, standing swings, therapy cage, trikes, mats, balls, bean bag toss, climbing equipment, slides, therapy tables, treadmill, and balance beams. Three therapists work on speech, and they have dedicated spaces with lots of resources. Clark has ADA bathrooms. The classrooms visited were clean, well appointed, bright, and were at or under capacity. There are presently no students at this school who use a wheelchair for mobility access. School administration noted that there are no known capacity issues in any of the building's special education classrooms and/or related service spaces. All spaces throughout the building were notably clean. School Security was present and processed all adults entering and exiting the building. According to the Lakewood Township School District Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ended in June 30, 2021, this building was constructed in 1946 and has a capacity for 432 students. The building is 61,370 square feet.

At the **Lakewood Middle School**, grades 7-8, the building is multi-level and has an elevator for student access. The OT/PT related service space is in the process of getting a new, state-of-the-art therapy cage and has standing swings, bean bag chairs, climbing options, ramps, balance beam, Rifton chairs, benches,