

# **North Hunterdon Voorhees Feasibility Study Report**

*October 18, 2012*

**Executive Summary:** this report is based on information collected during the “Focus Groups” with the Regional Superintendents, Business Administrators, Special Education Administrators and Child Study Team members. The Hunterdon County Superintendent and Hunterdon County Special Education Supervisor participated in these focus groups. Additional statistical data was requested and supplied by the districts. All information the districts provided was considered and helped to develop the recommendations. The recommendations are developed in two parts; the first are suggestions that can be addressed immediately and the second part, reflects a significant staffing recommendation that should be implemented over time. For the Part I recommendations that are suggested for the immediate implementation, it would lead to increased “Shared Services” if as many elementary districts as possible adopt the suggestions for improved child study team procedures, one IEP system, instructional aides, Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy. If all districts do not adopt these recommendations then they should serve as a roadmap for future change.

## **Report Based On:**

- Focus Group Information
- Child Study Team service delivery: Case Loads vs. Level of Service
- The feasibility and cost of an electronic IEP program for the region
- OT and PT services that are currently being delivered with recommendations as to how they might be delivered more efficiently without a loss of quality
- The evaluation criteria and process used by each district
- The early intervention programs used in each district
- Analysis of New Jersey’s Census-Based Special Education Funding System

## **RFP data requested but was not provided by districts**

- Current in-district special education classes by district
- Out of district placements by district
- Special Education Transportation

## **Part I: The following recommendations can be addressed immediately**

**Finding:** the percentage of special education students in all districts is disproportionately high and exceeds NJDOE state averages

**Citation:** the school-based data supplied by each district. See below:

District	Total Enrollment	Total Classification	Percentage of Classified
Bethlehem	515	84	16.31
Califon	140	26	18.57
Clinton Glen Gardner	499	100	20.04
Clinton	1,620	311	19.20
Franklin	296	42	14.19
Hampton	116	19	16.38
High Bridge	393	93	23.66
Lebanon Boro	89	12	13.48
Lebanon	746	137	18.36
Tewksbury	708	90	12.71
Union	509	82	16.11
N. Hunterdon	1,801	293	16.27
Voorhees	1,108	205	18.50
	8,540	1,494	17.49%

**Analysis:** based on the above data, the classification rate ranges from a low of 12.71% to a high of 23.66% with a mean of 17.49%. This 17.49% percentage is above NJDOE averages and it is 3.49% above the NJDOE Census Based Funding formula. The high number of classified students may indicate special education services are being provided to non-disabled students. The wide range in classification numbers also indicates a wide range in individual district practice in determining eligibility.

**Recommendation:** the NHV Regional Elementary School Districts must adopt a Board approved Child Study Team Procedure Manual that will ensure compliance with NJAC 6A: 14-3.5. This would include the utilization of the “Severe Discrepancy” methodology. All districts must adopt the same procedures and utilize the same statistical formula when determining the severe discrepancy. It is recommended that the districts adopt a “regression formula” to determine how significant the discrepancy is between ability and achievement. A regression formula is considered more accurate because it takes into consideration the correlation between ability and achievement and also the phenomenon of “regression toward the mean”. In addition the districts must review their procedures for determining eligibility under the categories of Communication Impaired, Other Health Impaired and the district’s criteria for determining for eligibility for speech and language service in NJAC 6A: 14-3.6. The regional elementary school districts should plan professional development for successful implementation of the new CST Procedure Manual.

**Finding:** using limited information there appears to be a lack of data that documents the effectiveness of interventions in general education which then leads to a high number of classified students.

**Citation:** only three out of the twelve districts provided information on this NJDOE requirement. See below:

District	General Ed. Interventions	Activities
Bethlehem Township	No data	
Califon Boro	No data	
Clinton Town/Glen Gardner	No data	
Clinton Township	YES	K-8 Basic Skills intervention in class and pullout. I&RS team meetings Behaviorist on staff for behavioral consultant Counseling and social skill are provided Specialized computer programs. CST consults
Franklin Township	No data	
Hampton Boro	No data	
High Bridge Boro	YES	Assessment and data monitoring I&RS team interventions Behavior managements through BIPs Classroom interventions
Lebanon Boro	No data	
Lebanon Township	YES	Tier I RTI support for all K-4 students Tier II RTI support as pullout Tier III support in reading and math
Tewksbury Township	No data	
Union Township	No data	
NH High School	No data	
Vorhees Reg	No data	

**Analysis:** Clinton, High Bridge and Lebanon all provide extensive pre-interventions yet they all have 18.8 to 19.9 percent of their students classified. There is a disconnect between current practice and effective interventions.

**Recommendation:** the NHV Regional School Districts adopt a Board approved Child Study Team Procedure Manual that will include the implementation of an “Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) Team. The regional school districts should plan professional development for successful implementation of the I&RS Team.

**Finding:** all districts in the NHV Regional Schools District should adapt one IEP data management system.

**Citation:** only two out of twelve school districts provided information on data management. See below:

District	IEP MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
Bethlehem Township	No data
Califon Boro	No data
Clinton Town/Glen Gardner	No data
Clinton Township	IEP Direct
Franklin Township	No data
Hampton Boro	No data
High Bridge Boro	TIENET
Lebanon Boro	No data
Lebanon Township	No data
Tewksbury Township	No data
Union Township	No data
NH High School	No data
Vorhees Reg	No data

**Analysis:** Even with only two districts providing data, there are two different IEP management systems in place.

**Recommendation:** the NHV Regional Elementary School Districts must utilize the same IEP data system that is currently implemented at the two high schools.

**Finding:** the amount of **“Shared Services”** currently in place seems to be limited to professional development and sharing limited child study team services.

**Citation:** the shared services information each district provided. See below:

District	Special Education Shared Services	Services
Bethlehem Township	No data	
Califon Boro	No data	
Clinton Town/Glen Gardner	No data	
Clinton Township	YES	Professional Development Training offered by district to other districts
Franklin Township	No data	
Hampton Boro	No data	
High Bridge Boro	YES	Part-time CST members including speech/language, LDT-C and social worker
Lebanon Boro	No data	
Lebanon Township	YES	Sending-receiving tuition services School psychologists
Tewksbury Township	No data	
Union Township	No data	
NH High School	No data	
Vorhees Regional	No data	

**Analysis:** Based on the data there is a limited amount of shared services currently in place both among the elementary districts and with the Educational Services Commission. At this time the shared services includes Professional Development and sharing a limited number of child study team staff members. There is no procedure to seek out additional opportunities for shared staff members and other services.

**Recommendation:** there is a need to create more extensive shared services with the Educational Services Commission or the districts must create their own “Shared Service” model. The following are recommended areas for the creation of new “Shared Services”

**Shared Services Area # 1 - Aides**

**Finding:** the data the districts provided for aide salaries and benefits were extensive and each district’s compensation package varied.

**Citation:** the individual district’s salary guides for aides and compensation packages. See below:

District	Aide Hourly Rate	Aide - Total	Full Time Benefits/Y or N	Part Time Benefits/Y or N
Bethlehem Township	19,500. to 20,500. Per year	8 full time	No	X
Califon Boro	None	None	None	None
Clinton Town/Glen Gardner	18.64 per hour 28,787.to 29,544. Per year	10	No	X
Clinton Township	16.57 per hour	31 full time 1 part time	Yes	No
Franklin Township	11.00-12.00 per hr (high school) 18.00 per hour (certificate) 22.50 per hour (grandfather rate)	12 full time		
Hampton Boro	6,000. Contract for .5 aide	3.5 total – 2 FT contracted at 25,542. (ESC)	No	No
High Bridge Boro	10.00 to 13.95 per hour	25 20 no benefits	3 benefits	2 benefits
Lebanon Boro	None	None	None	None
Lebanon Township	14.03 to 16.67 per hour	22.75 (FTEs)	17 benefits	5.75 non benefits
Tewksbury Township	14.65 to 18.42 per hour	11	5 benefits	6 non benefits
Union Township	17.50 per hour	7	Yes	
NH High School	None	None		
Vorhees Regional	None	None		

**Analysis:** there is no consistency among the elementary districts as the compensation for aides. There are contracted aides and non-contracted aides. There are aides that receive benefits and in other district aides that receive no benefits. In terms of hourly pay rates they range from 11.00 per hour as the low rate to a high of 22.50 per hour in the same district.

**Recommendation:** As an elementary aide compensation standard it is recommended the elementary districts use the North Hunterdon Educational Service Commission compensation package of \$25,542.00 with no benefits for a full time aide. Part-time aides compensation should be pro-rated based on the above new compensation standard. All districts must immediately adopt this compensation package for all new hires.

***Shared Services Area # 2 - Occupational Therapy***

**Findings:** the data the districts provided on salary and benefits were both extensive and each district's compensation package varied.

**Citation:** the individual district's salary guides for OT compensation packages. See below:

District	OT Hourly Rate	OT - Full or Part Time	OT – Benefits Y or N	OT – Average Cost Per Student
Bethlehem Township	87.50	Part-time	No	54.69 per hour
Califon Boro	None	None	None	None
Clinton Town/Glen Gardner	78.00	Part-time	No	58.50 (45 min session)
Clinton Township	90.00	Full-time (2.6 FTEs)	Yes	No data
Franklin Township	85.00 (in-district) 88.00 (OOD)	Part-time	No	Annually 2,049. (In-district) 1,397. (OOD)
Hampton Boro	86.50 (agency)	Part-time	No	7,785. Per year
High Bridge Boro	86.50	Part-time	No	2,545. Per year
Lebanon Boro	None	None	None	None
Lebanon Township	86.50	Part-time	No	2,294. Per year
Tewksbury Township	86.50 97.00 (home)	Part-time	No	3,114. Per year (2x per week/30 min session)
Union Township	87.75	Part-time	No	1,601. Per year
NH High School	None	None	None	None
Vorhees Regional	None	None	None	None

**Analysis:** there is no consistency among the elementary districts as the compensation for Occupational Therapists. With the exception of Clinton Township with 2.6 full-time OTs all other districts employ part-time OTs or hire agencies to provide OT services. Only in Clinton do OTs receive benefits and in other district OTs that receive no benefits. In terms of hourly pay rates they range from 78.00 per hour as the low rate to a high of 97.00 per hour.

**Recommendation:** with the high number of students receiving OT the NHV Regional School Districts should create one hourly rate with no benefits for direct service. The district should also establish a standard fee for OT evaluations and re-evaluations.

### ***Shared Services Area #3 - Physical Therapy***

Physical Therapy: the data the districts provided on salary and benefits were both extensive and each district's compensation package varied.

Citation: the individual district's salary guides for PT and compensation packages. See below:

<b>District</b>	<b>PT Hourly Rate</b>	<b>PT - Full or Part Time</b>	<b>PT – Benefits Y or N</b>	<b>PT – Average Cost Per Student</b>
Bethlehem Township	75.00	Part-time	No	60.00
Califon Boro	None	None	None	None
Clinton Town/Glen Gardner	78.00	Part-time	No	58.50 per week for 45 min session
Clinton Township	205.00	Part-time	No	8,100 per year (1 xpw)
Franklin Township	105.00 (OOD)	Part-time	No	959.00 per student
Hampton Boro	No PT 2011/12	X	X	X
High Bridge Boro	82.00	Part-time	No	4,004.33 per student
Lebanon Boro	None	None	None	None
Lebanon Township	82.00	Part-time	No	2,710.00 per student
Tewksbury Township	86.50 (in-district) 97.00 (home)	Part-time Agency	No	3,114. Per student (2xpw / 30 min)
Union Township	95.23	Part-time	No	1,714.00 per student
NH High School	None	None	None	None
Vorhees Regional	None	None	None	None

**Analysis:** there is no consistency among the elementary districts as the compensation for Physical Therapists. All districts employ part-time PTs or hire agencies to provide PT services. No districts provide benefits but there is a wide range in individual hourly pay rate; in terms of hourly pay rates they range from 75.00 per hour as the low rate to a high of 205.00 per hour.

**Recommendation:** with the number of students receiving PT the NHV Regional School Districts should create one hourly rate with no benefits for direct service. The district should also establish a standard fee for PT evaluations and re-evaluations.

### ***Shared Services Area #4 - Utilization of the Child Study Team***

**Findings:** the child study team - special education student ratio averages **13.7** special education students for every child study team member. In the region these are an excellent ratios and significantly lower than comparable districts.



**Citation:** The personnel and classification data provided by the districts.

District	Total CST Personnel (FTE)	Number of Classified Students	Ratio Personnel: Classified Students
Bethlehem	5.30	84	15.8
Califon	4.30	26	6.0
Clinton Glen Gardner	5.00	100	20.0
Clinton	16.50	311	18.8
Franklin	2.77	42	15.1
Hampton	1.00	19	19.0
High Bridge	4.66	93	19.9
Lebanon Boro	2.00	12	6.0
Lebanon	7.90	137	19.5
Tewksbury	6.10	90	14.7
Union	5.60	82	14.6

**Analysis:** there is a wide range in the special education student to CST personnel ratio. Based on the above data the ratio ranges from a low of 6.0 students per CST personnel to a high of 20.0 of special education students to CST personnel. While it is difficult to provide services in smaller districts with the generous personnel ratio you expect a more significant role for each child study team member in general education. With the high classification rates, this is not the current situation.

**Recommendation:** all efforts should be made to increase the current CST member's efficiency and role in general education. The CST members should be part of the school based grade level teams, participate in professional development and monitor I&RS plans. Each of the 11 districts must review current personnel and their utilization in general education.

## **Part II: The following recommendations can be implemented over time**

**Consolidation of Child Study Team Services:** for increased efficiency and true cost saving, the NHV Regional School District should consider consolidating special education administrative and child study team services. The following recommendations for consolidation of child study team services are designed to provide cost savings for the regional school district. It must be understood and accepted, these reductions will impact the level of services to special education students that are currently provided.

**Findings:** based on the data provided by each district in the K-8 school districts there are 912 special education students supported by 52.6 (FTEs) special education staff for a 1:17.3 ratio student to staff. In comparable districts the student: staff ratio is closer to 1:30. There are 11 K-8 school districts in the region. A possible model would be to divide the K-8 region into two special education districts; group A being Bethlehem, Califon, Clinton/Glen Gardner, Clinton and Franklin. Group B would include Hampton, High Bridge, Lebanon Boro, Lebanon Township, Tewksbury and Union.

District	Number of Special Education Students	Current CST Personnel (FTE)	Cohort
Bethlehem	84	5.30	A
Lebanon Boro	12	2.00	A
Hampton	19	1.00	A
Franklin	42	2.77	A
Tewksbury	90	6.10	A
Total	247	17/3.40	
Califon	26	4.30	B
Clinton Glen Gardner	100	5.00	B
Clinton	311	16.5	B
High Bridge	93	4.60	B
Lebanon Township	137	7.90	B
Union Township	82	5.60	B
	749	43/7.3	

**Analysis:** the goal for efficiency of scale is to develop a larger special education mode for implementation of programs and services. Currently there would be in Cohort A servicing 247 special education student that results a 1:3.4 ratio. In Cohort B there would be 43 staff servicing 749 special education students.

**Recommendation:** the K-8 superintendents and BAs must create a new special education consortium with a goal to implement more effective special education administrative and child study team services. It our recommendation through attrition and staff changes to reduce the overall personnel-staffing model to a 1:25 ratio. Using 70,000.00 as the average compensation package, the results can be expected. In Cohort A there would be a reduction of 7 staff members from 17 to 10, a \$490,000.00. In Cohort B, there should be a reduction from 43 staff to 30 staff that would result in saving of approximately \$900,000.00. This plan projects an annual saving for the elementary regional school districts of more than one million dollars.

The new special education consortiums are aligned with the current sending/receiving high school relationships. It is also our recommendation to align all special education programs (including programs for disabled preschooler and for children with autism) and services including all related services along the new consortiums design.

**Special Note:** it is the understanding of the authors of this report; in the past consideration has been given within the NHV Regional School District to create a new regional special education district. After giving this idea considerable consideration, it is our opinion, at this time, resources are in place within the region to address the recommendations in this report and there is no need to create a new special education regional district.

**Conclusions:** from all the data reviewed, it is evident the regional school districts have comparatively high cost for special education. The shared services recommended in this report can make it possible to provide special education programs and services like a small district and enjoy the economy of scale of a larger district.

Respectfully submitted,

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