



Belmont Special Education Advisory Council

"Home and School in Partnership for Our Children"

Online Parent Survey

Report to School Committee
May 13, 2008

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INTRODUCTION

From February 13 – March 16, 2008, the Belmont Special Education Advisory Council (BSEAC) conducted a confidential online survey of parents of children in the Belmont school system who are on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). 270 parents completed the BSEAC survey, out of a total of 527 children on IEPs, or 51%. As far as we know, Belmont parents of children on IEPs have never before been systematically surveyed regarding special education services. This survey provides us with a fresh and invaluable perspective on Belmont special education's successes and challenges, from the point of view of parents.

In its statutory role, the BSEAC seeks to work collaboratively with Belmont school professionals and the Belmont School Committee to “participate in the planning, development, and evaluation of [Belmont’s] special education programs,” (see 603 CMR 28:07(4)). Extensive national research¹ has shown that parent-professional partnerships are essential to student success, and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 placed a new emphasis on the importance of schools’ facilitating parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. The BSEAC administered its survey in the hope that the Belmont Public Schools will benefit from this new mode of parent participation.

As detailed below, results of the survey clearly demonstrate that Belmont has much to be proud of. At every grade level, parents report that teachers have high expectations for their children. Parents on all levels agree that teachers, administrators, and therapists are professional and responsive. The great majority of parents feel that they are included as equal partners with professionals in planning their child’s IEP, and special education professionals at every level are credited with successfully implementing needed accommodations and modifications. Concerns, too, are evident, predominantly at the high school level. A thoroughgoing analysis of achievements and challenges can be found at the conclusion of this report, under “Findings and Recommendations.”

Special education in Belmont is a system held in tension by the significant resource constraints faced by our schools, the expectations of parents desiring an appropriate education for their children, and the letter (and spirit) of special education law. It is the principal endeavor of the BSEAC to assist in creating the best possible balance of each of these interests by facilitating communication between professionals and parents and by working collaboratively with all parties towards solutions for the common good. In this spirit, we respectfully submit this survey.

¹ For more information, see the National Network of Partnership Schools, <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/index.htm> and the Harvard Family Involvement Network of Educators, <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine.html>.

METHODOLOGY

This confidential online survey solicited the opinions of parents of children in the Belmont school system who are on IEPs, including Boston families and families whose children attend collaborative placements and who are placed in other out-of-district schools (see Appendix 1 for respondent demographics). The survey (see Appendix 2) was adapted by the BSEAC from the Parent/Family Involvement Survey developed by the National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring (NCSEAM). The NCSEAM survey was created to provide a valid, reliable, and useful measure of parent perceptions and parent involvement in special education, in response to federal legislation that specifies the ways in which families need to be involved in educational decision-making under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The NCSEAM survey consists of 95 questions, so in order to administer a shorter survey a committee of BSEAC parents narrowed down the number to 25 salient questions and added 9 others in 3 areas: homework, out-of-district placements, and levels of related services. These 3 areas were included because the committee felt they were of special interest, given feedback BSEAC Co-Chairs have received from parents over time.

The BSEAC survey, hosted on SurveyMonkey, was advertised via all Belmont school listserves, the special education listserve, the LABBB Listserve, the Metco Listserve, and the BSEAC Yahoo Listserve; notice was also posted on the main page of the Belmont Schools website. A total of 270 parents completed the BSEAC survey, out of a total of 527 children on IEPs, or 51% of the relevant population.

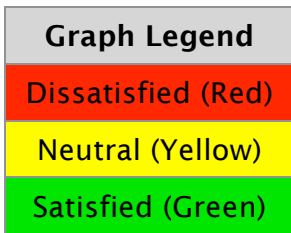
The survey was completed by 68 parents of high school students, 68 parents of middle school students, 105 parents of elementary students, and 28 parents of preschool students. Because of the high response rate and the high absolute numbers, we believe this survey has high validity. The number of preschool parents is smaller than the other groups, so statistical uncertainty is larger for that group. 231 of the responses are for children with in-district placements, providing a very firm statistical basis for that portion of the population. Since there are only 20 responses for children in collaborative placements and 15 responses for children in other out-of-district placements, results for these groups are more suggestive than quantitative. In addition, we received written comments from 70 parents, whose remarks will be woven into this report; they are illustrative of many of the results of our statistical analysis.

Participants responded on a 5-point Likert-scale (1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4 = satisfied, 5 = very satisfied), with the option of indicating "Not Applicable." In order to aid in the interpretation of the survey we have collapsed categories 1 and 2, as well as categories 4 and 5, in the graphs below. The complete raw data, without personal identifying information and comments, is available electronically from Stephanie Woerner (woerner@chasewoerner.org).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The BSEAC gratefully acknowledges the support of Belmont school professionals, in particular Ken Kramer, Peter Holland, Pat Aubin, Dan Richards, Debbie Alexander, Christine Francis, Amy Wagner, Janet Carey, Bruce MacDonald, Lee McCanne, Natasha Bochkov, Joe Brescia, and Diane Wiltshire, who kindly assisted us by publicizing this survey via school listserves and the Belmont Public Schools website. Special thanks to Anne Adams, Robin Keller, Sandy Bickford, and Laurie Graham who, together with BSEAC Co-Chairs Stephanie Woerner and Amanda Green, compiled this survey. We also thank the parents who took the time to give us this valuable information in the hopes that their voices would make a positive difference for Belmont's children.

SURVEY RESPONSES



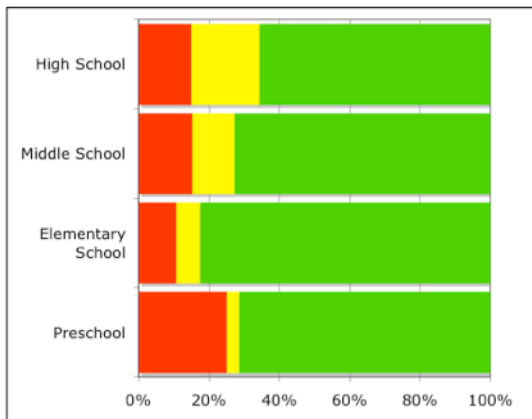
PARENT-PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIP (Questions 1, 2, 3, 7)

According to federal and state law, parents are equal members of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team, along with professionals. The great majority of parents – about 75% – are satisfied with the way they are invited to partner with professionals in planning their child’s IEP. 77% of parents overall are also satisfied that professionals are sensitive to the needs of their children. In general, parents of children in elementary school are more satisfied than parents of middle school students. Parents of high school students are the least satisfied. A typical elementary parent comment reads: “Staff has demonstrated a tremendous understanding of my child’s learning needs and has proactively addressed issues.” Although parents of preschool children feel that that professionals are sensitive to their children’s needs, in general they are not as satisfied as parents of elementary and middle school children that they are equal partners in the IEP process.

1. I am included as an equal partner with teachers and other professionals in planning my child’s program.

N = 265

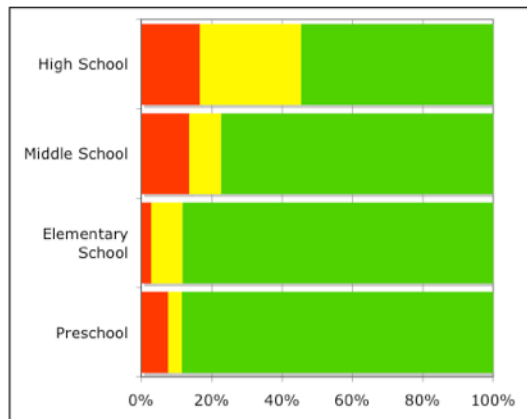
Mean = 3.92/5.0



2. Teachers and administrators show sensitivity to the needs of students with disabilities and their families.

N = 261

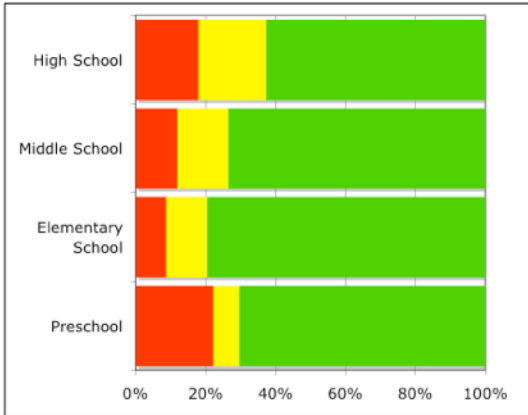
Mean = 3.99/5.0



3. Teachers and administrators encourage me to participate in the decision-making process.

N = 266

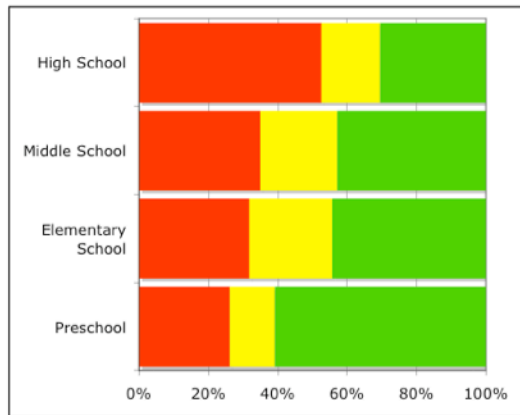
Mean = 3.85/5.0



7. Belmont asks for my input when they evaluate the effectiveness of special education programming for all children on IEPs.

N = 234

Mean = 3.11/5.0



Question 7 elicited a wide range of responses and an unusually high degree of dissatisfaction at all levels. Less than half of the elementary and middle school parents are satisfied, and less than one third of high school parents are satisfied.

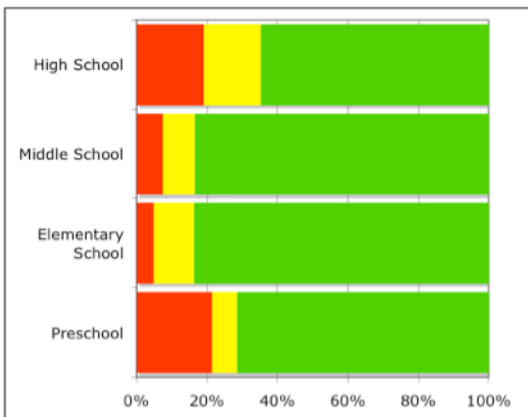
STAFF ACCESSIBILITY (Questions 4, 5)

78% of all parents feel that school staff are easily accessible and available to answer questions, and 83% overall report that school personnel return phone calls and emails in a timely manner. About 20% of preschool and high school parents are dissatisfied with staff accessibility. 18% of preschool parents are dissatisfied with the timeliness of returned phone calls and emails.

4. School staff are easily accessible and available to answer my questions.

N = 268

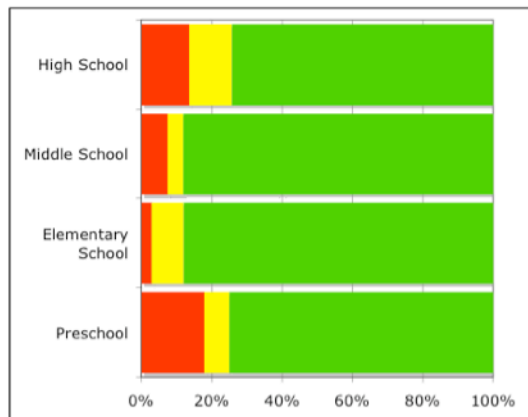
Mean = 3.97/5.0



5. School personnel return my phone calls and emails in a timely manner.

N=261

Mean = 4.09/5.0



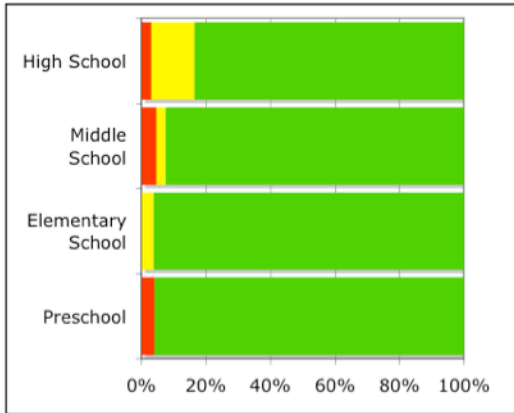
STAFF PROFESSIONALISM (Questions 16, 27)

Parents are extremely satisfied with the professionalism of school personnel. Fewer than 2% of parents overall are dissatisfied with the level of professionalism of the teachers, and fewer than 5% overall are dissatisfied with the professionalism of therapists.

16. Teachers interact with me in a professional manner.

N=265

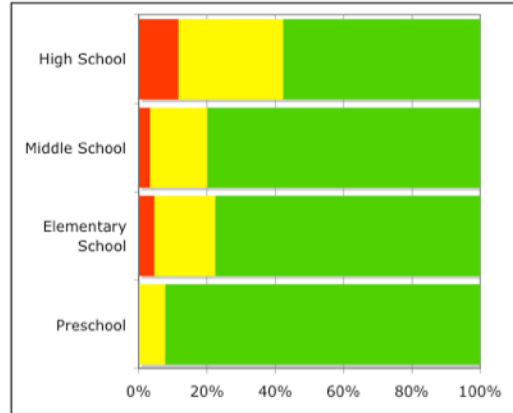
Mean = 4.36/5.0



27. Therapists interact with me in a professional manner.

N=149

Mean = 4.08/5.0



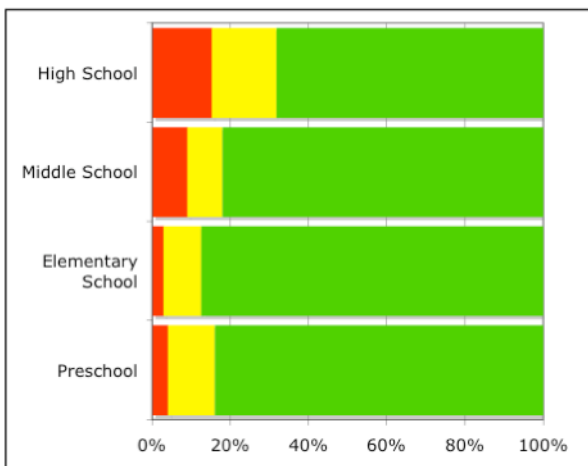
EXPECTATIONS OF SUCCESS (Question 20)

Overall, 81% of parents believe teachers have high expectations for their students. However, a noticeable minority (15%) of high school parents is dissatisfied.

20. Teachers show that they expect my child to succeed.

N = 262

Mean = 4.04/5.0



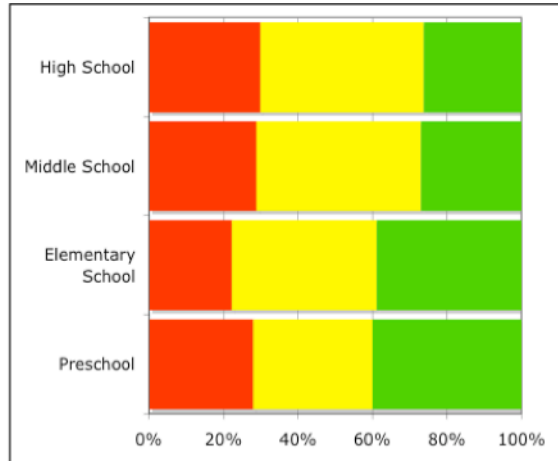
LEARNING ABOUT DISABILITIES (Question 8)

Parents had a very wide range of opinions about how well the school system addresses the issue of disability awareness. Many did not express an opinion either way. At no level (preschool, elementary, middle, or high school) did the satisfaction level exceed 40%.

8. The school offers students without disabilities, and their families, opportunities to learn about students with disabilities.

N = 230

Mean = 3.08/5.0



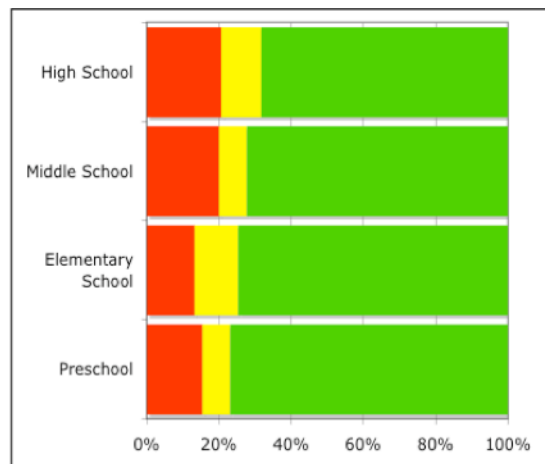
IEP PROCESS: PARENTS' INPUT (Question 9)

Most parents overall (72%) are satisfied that their input is incorporated into their child's IEP documentation. However, about 20% of the parents of middle school and high school students are not satisfied. Those parents who commented on the survey about this issue said they felt that the concerns they expressed at IEP meetings had been disregarded; parent calls to BSEAC Co-Chairs reflect this dissatisfaction.

9. At the IEP meeting, all of my concerns and recommendations were documented on the IEP.

N = 246

Mean = 3.82/5.0



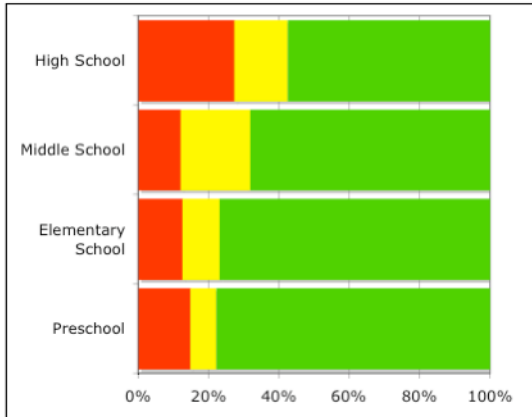
IEP PROCESS: STUDENT EVALUATIONS (Questions 10, 11)

Most parents overall are satisfied that evaluations conducted by Belmont professionals accurately reflect their child's needs (69%) and include specific recommendations (73%). Massachusetts special education regulations stipulate that evaluations "shall define in detail and in educationally relevant and common terms, the student's needs, offering explicit means of meeting them," (see 603 CMR 28:04(2)(c)). However, about 25% of parents of high school students do not feel that evaluations accurately reflect their child's needs.

10. Evaluations conducted by school personnel accurately reflect my child's needs.

N = 255

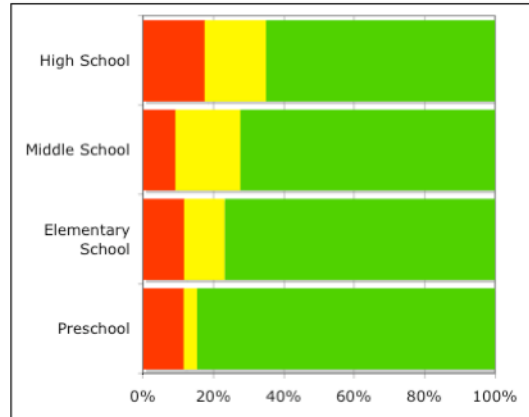
Mean = 3.73/5.0



11. Evaluations conducted by school personnel include specific recommendations for needed accommodations, modifications, and classroom placement.

N = 250

Mean = 3.87/5.0



IEP PROCESS: GOALS & PROGRESS (Questions 12, 13, 14, 15)

According to federal law, an IEP must include measurable goals and "a description of how the child's progress toward meeting the annual goals . . . will be measured," (see IDEA 2004 Regulations §300.320(a)(3)(i)). Most parents are satisfied that their child's IEP describes how progress will be measured (74%) and feel that their child is indeed making progress (71%). 85% of preschool parents, 77% of elementary parents, and 73% of middle school parents feel that their children are making progress on their IEP goals. However, only 56% overall are satisfied that the school communicates regularly with them regarding that progress. Several parents targeted this issue in their comments. A typical comment noted, "I find it hard to really know how my son is progressing." Although state regulations require only that "written progress reports for eligible students shall be submitted to parents at least as often as report cards or progress reports for students without disabilities" (see 603 CMR 28:07(3)), it is clear that parents desire more information. As one parent put it, "An email one or two times a month would be great."

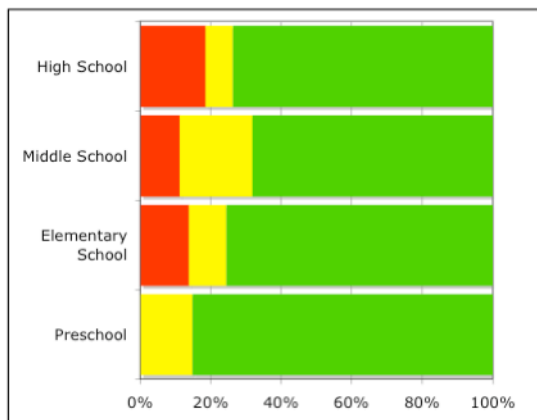
An issue of serious concern is that only 61% of all parents surveyed agree that their child is actually receiving the services and supports detailed in his or her IEP. The level of satisfaction is much lower for parents of high school students than for other age groups. Only 48% of parents of high school students are satisfied that their child is receiving the services and supports to which their child is entitled, and only 55% of them are satisfied with the progress their child is making

towards his or her IEP goals. A few remarks in the comments section supported the view that that some students are not receiving documented supports and services. 59% of middle school parents, 68% of elementary parents, and 77% of preschool parents are satisfied that their children are receiving the supports and services enumerated in their IEPs.

12. My child's IEP tells how progress toward goals will be measured.

N = 250

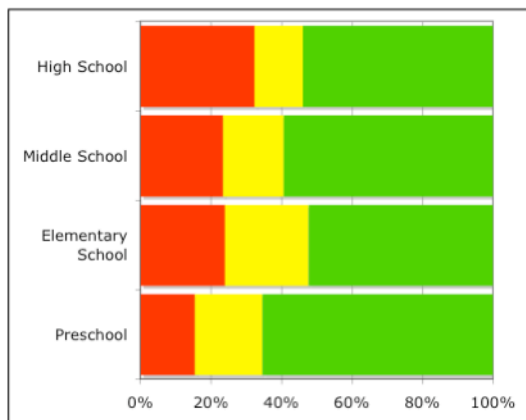
Mean = 3.84/5.0



13. The school communicates regularly with me regarding my child's progress on IEP goals.

N = 248

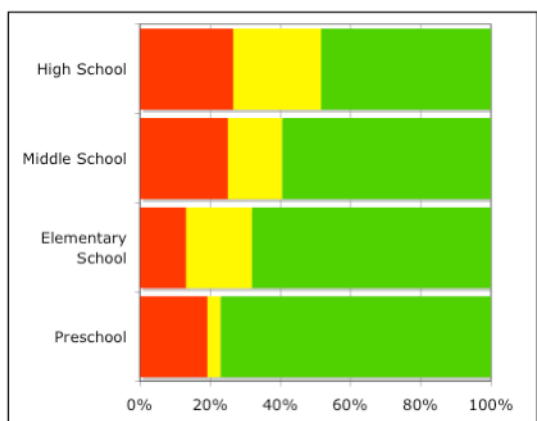
Mean = 3.42/5.0



14. The school provides my child with all the supports and services documented on my child's IEP.

N = 246

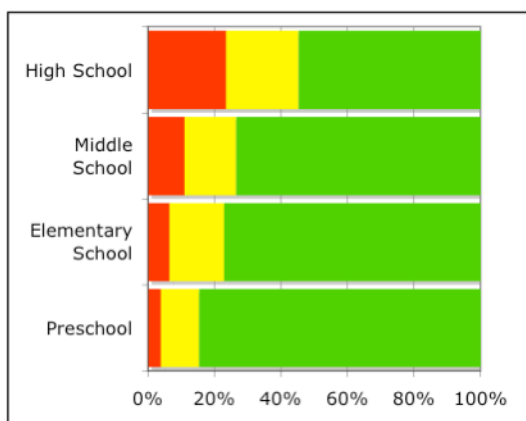
Mean = 3.58/5.0



15. My child is making progress on the goals and objectives on my child's IEP.

N = 247

Mean = 3.83/5.0



IEP PROCESS: STUDENT NEEDS & IMPLEMENTING IEPs (Questions 17, 18, 19, 28)

The overwhelming majority of parents of elementary school and preschool students are satisfied with teachers' and therapists' understanding of, and willingness to learn about, their child's needs. They are also satisfied with each teacher's understanding of his or her role in implementing the IEP. A parent comment reads, "The staff . . . has demonstrated a tremendous understanding of my child's learning needs and has proactively addressed issues."

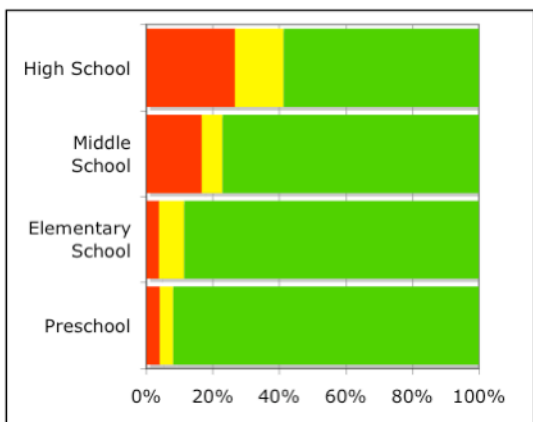
The majority of parents of middle school students are also satisfied that general education teachers and therapists understand their children’s needs, and teachers understand their role in implementing IEPs. Positive comments include, “My son’s teachers are great and they work with me to insure my son gets all the help he needs,” and “I feel like the teachers, both special education and general education, work hard to implement the IEP.” However, a significant minority is dissatisfied. 43% of middle school parents feel dissatisfied or neutral that teachers show a willingness to learn more about their children’s needs.

The high school raises the greatest level of concern. Only about half of the parents of high school students feel that teachers understand their role in implementing their child’s IEP, and about 30% are dissatisfied. Only 48% of high school parents feel that therapists understand their child’s needs.

17. Teachers demonstrate that they understand my child’s needs.

N = 265

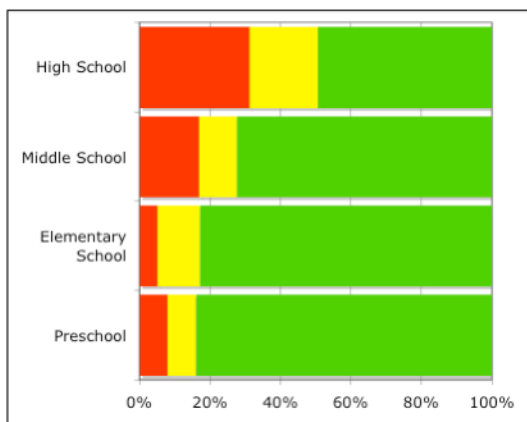
Mean = 3.95/5.0



18. Teachers demonstrate their understanding of their role in implementing my child’s IEP.

N = 257

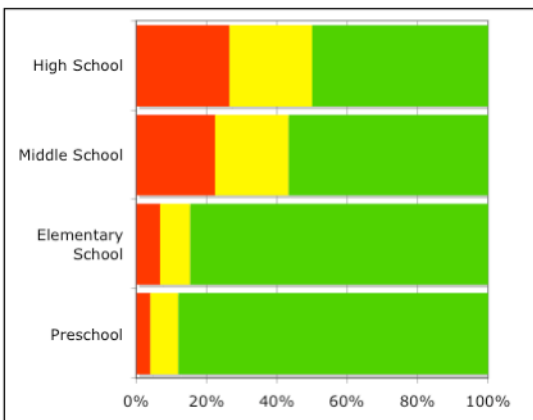
Mean = 3.83/5.0



19. Teachers show a willingness to learn more about my child’s needs.

N = 266

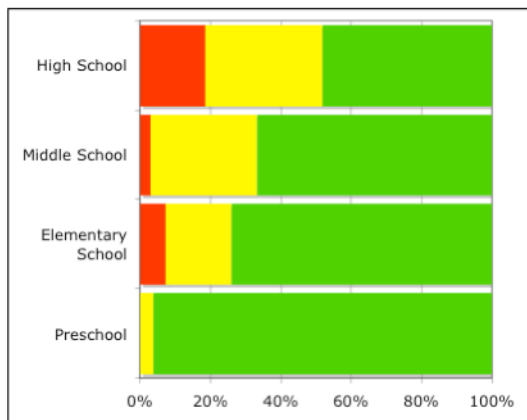
Mean = 3.79/5.0



28. Therapists demonstrate that they understand my child’s needs.

N = 155

Mean = 3.95/5.0



These findings are reflected in survey comments. Six high school parents specifically remarked that they feel general education teachers do not understand how to implement the IEP. An example reads, “Many of the teachers in the honors and AP classes have no idea how to implement the IEP, there's not a lot of resources or support from administrators for those teachers if they want the support, and my child has had several teachers that wouldn't even try to implement the IEP. Teachers don't seem to understand that how questions are asked highly influences whether or not my child will be able to answer the question.” Another says, “After half the school year, we found that many of the accommodations were not being [implemented]. Teachers were happy to listen to what we had to say; some even contacted us early on to discuss problems and solutions. However, it seemed that most of them did not read the IEP or did not understand what they needed to do.” A third parent comments, “Our experiences through elementary and middle school were very positive until we hit the high school . . . I feel that the teachers at the high school need some extensive training in ‘differentiated education’.”

IEP PROCESS: ACCOMMODATIONS & MODIFICATIONS (Questions 21, 22, 23)

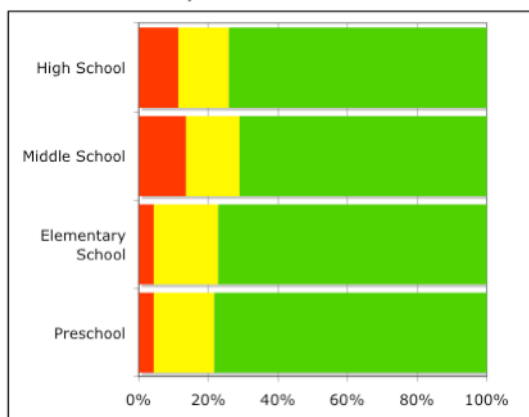
A large majority of parents (75%) feel that special education teachers make needed accommodations and modifications. However, a noticeable minority of the parents of middle school and high school students are not satisfied.

Almost all preschool parents and more than 75% of elementary parents feel that general education teachers ably implement the IEP. More than 75% of these parents also feel that general and special education teachers work together effectively. Most parents (63%) of middle school students are satisfied, as well. It should be noted, however, that a noticeable minority of middle school parents (18%) is not satisfied.

21. Special education teachers make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my child's IEP.

N = 236

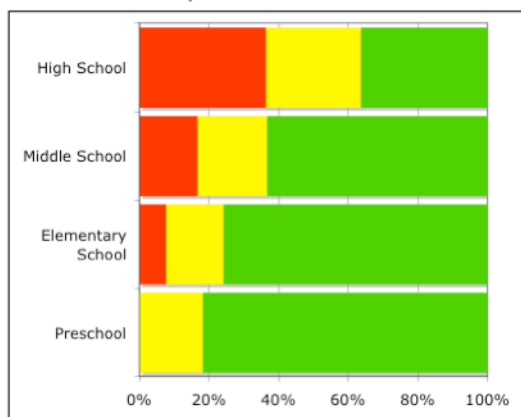
Mean = 3.94/5.0



22. General education teachers make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my child's IEP.

N = 218

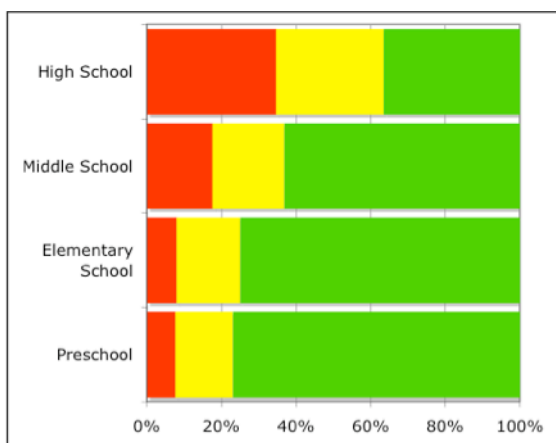
Mean = 3.63/5.0



23. General education and special education teachers work together to assure that my child's IEP is being implemented.

N = 211

Mean = 3.64/5.0



The situation is significantly different at the high school. Fewer than 40% of parents of high school students with IEP's are satisfied with the way general education teachers partner with special education teachers, and how they make accommodations and modifications for students with special needs. One parent comment reads, "The special education teachers have been very supportive, however, the regular education staff has not tried to follow all specified modifications in the IEP, which has made this year very challenging." These results correlate with answers to questions 17 – 18 on understanding and implementing IEPs.

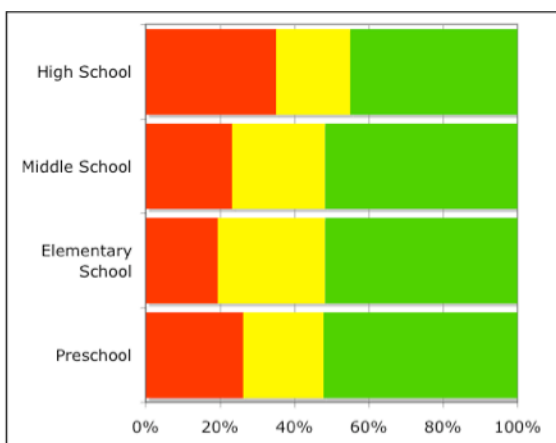
IEP PROCESS: PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS (Question 6)

Only about half of parents surveyed are satisfied that Belmont explains parents' options for disputing a decision. Unlike many areas of this survey, parent levels of satisfaction were the same at the preschool, elementary, and middle school levels, and nearly the same at the high school level. All parents of children on IEPs receive the Massachusetts Department of Early and Secondary Education's *Parent's Notice of Procedural Safeguards* at least once per year by mail, and the BSEAC provides a Basic Rights workshop once per year. See Findings and Recommendations for further discussion.

6. The school explains what options parents have if they disagree with a decision of the school.

N = 223

Mean = 3.29/5.0



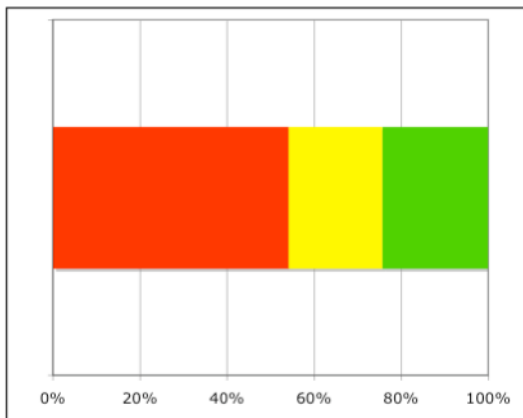
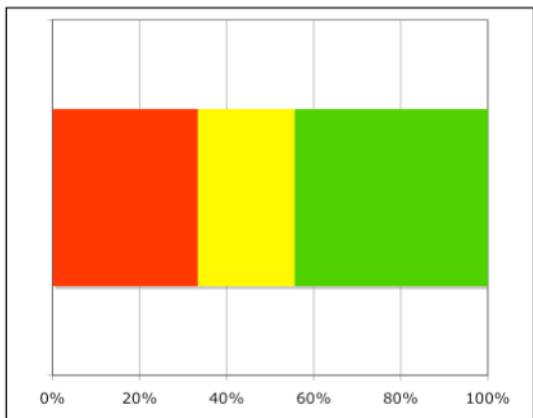
OUT-OF-DISTRICT PLACEMENTS (Questions 32, 33)

Due to the smaller sample size, results for Questions 32 and 33 are not broken down by grade level in order to preserve confidentiality. While 44% of parents whose children have out-of-district placements (generally children with the most significant disabilities) feel that the school

system collaborated with them in deciding on their child’s placement, only 24% overall were satisfied and 54% were dissatisfied that they were offered a range of placement options. State special education regulations specify that, “the school district and parent shall investigate in-district and out-of-district placement options in light of the student's needs and identified services required,” (see 603 CMR 28:06(2)(e)(2)).

32. Belmont worked collaboratively with me to decide on an out-of-district placement.
 N = 36
 Mean = 3.14/5.0

33. I was given several options for out-of-district placements.
 N = 37
 Mean = 2.51/5.0

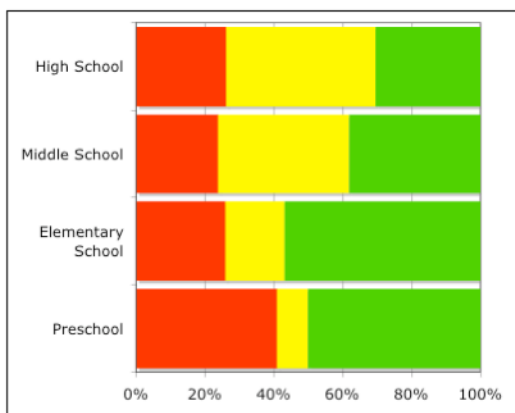
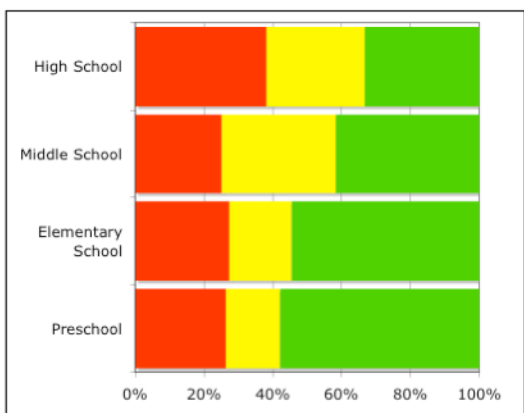


RELATED SERVICES (Questions 24, 25, 26)

A high fraction (28%) of all parents of children with IEPs are dissatisfied with the amount of occupational therapy and speech therapy their child receives. 41% of preschool parents are dissatisfied with the amount of speech therapy their child receives, and 38% of high school parents are dissatisfied with the amount of occupational therapy their child receives. In contrast, relatively few parents at any level are dissatisfied with the amount of physical therapy their child receives.

24. The amount of occupational therapy my child receives is appropriate to meet my child’s needs.
 N = 119
 Mean = 3.35/5.0

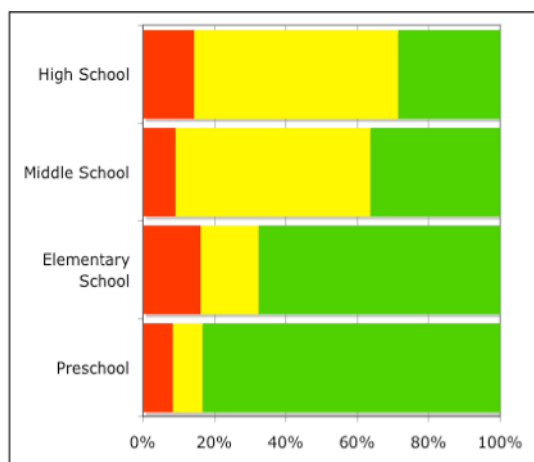
25. The amount of speech therapy my child receives is appropriate to meet my child’s needs.
 N = 124
 Mean = 3.32/5.0



26. The amount of physical therapy my child receives is appropriate to meet my child's needs.

N = 68

Mean = 3.63/5.0



An elementary parent writes, "I think there should be more therapists at the schools. There is just too much paperwork, services, and testing that needs to be done. The current level of therapists and resource teachers could be increased to ease the work load." Another parent remarks, "As parents of a child on an IEP, we have invested hours and hours of our own personal time, as well as thousands of dollars in tutoring, therapy and extra services to ensure that our child can keep pace with his peers." These comments are consistent both with the survey results and with phone calls received by BSEAC Chairs during this school year.

HOMEWORK (Questions 29, 30)

Many students with special needs require significant parental assistance with their homework. Only 53% of parents of all children with IEPs report that their children are able to do their homework with minimal assistance. About 20% of the parents of middle school children and 30% of the parents of high school children are dissatisfied with the amount of homework; presumably these parents believe their children are assigned too much homework. The parent of an elementary student writes, "I believe that regular education teachers need to be reminded of what students they have that are on IEPs, because sometimes the amount of homework my child receives is overwhelming and takes some nights up to 3.5 - 4 hours to complete."

29. My child receives an appropriate amount of homework.

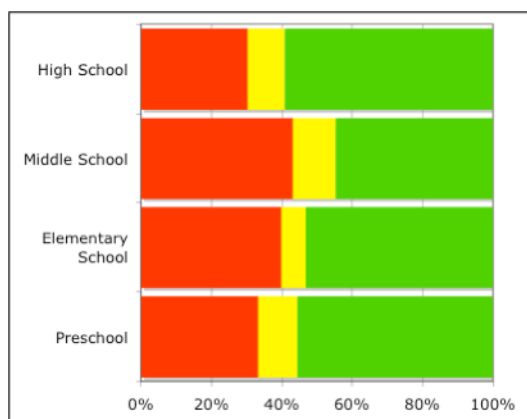
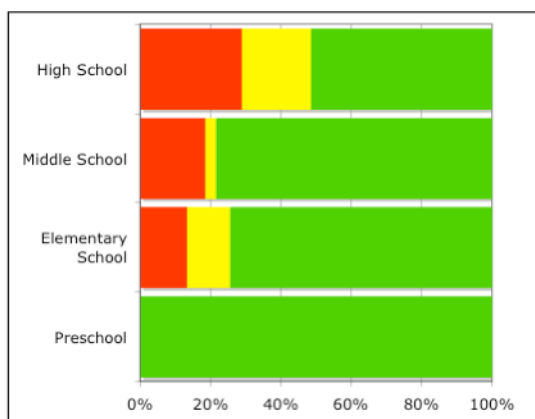
N = 240

Mean = 3.64/5.0

30. My child is able to complete homework with minimal or no assistance from me.

N = 239

Mean = 3.16/5.0



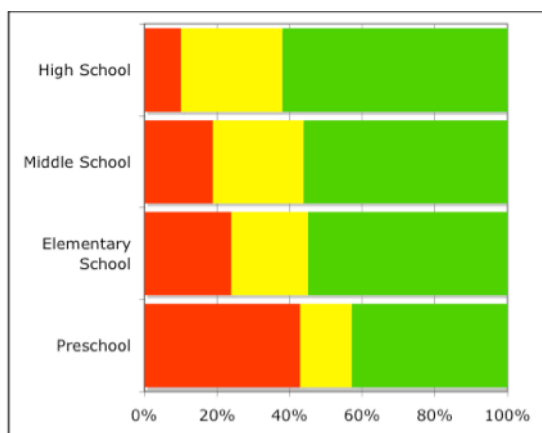
AFTERSCHOOL & EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES (Question 31)

Many (43%) parents of preschool students on IEPs are dissatisfied with the accessibility of afterschool programs. Most parents of elementary (55%) and middle school (56%) students are satisfied with the accessibility of afterschool and extracurricular activities, but a significant minority is dissatisfied. In contrast, the great majority of parents of high school students are satisfied with the accessibility of extracurricular activities. It is not clear which afterschool programs preschool parents may be referring to in this question. Based on conversations BSEAC Co-Chairs have received, this response may reflect a lack of programming for the preschool age group. At the high school level, the breadth of afterschool programming increases substantially, and students with very significant disabilities, for the most part, are not included in the general school population at Belmont High School.

31. The school ensures that after-school and extra-curricular activities are accessible to students with disabilities.

N = 177

Mean = 3.53/5.0



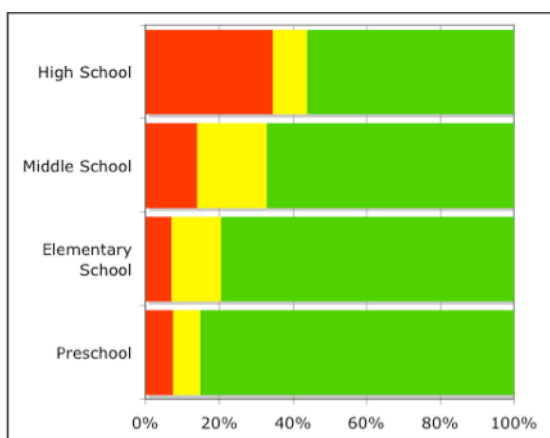
OVERALL SATISFACTION (Question 34)

Virtually all parents of elementary school (79%) and preschool students (85%) with IEPs are happy with the services their child receives. The vast majority of parents of middle school students (67%) are also satisfied. However, a large fraction of the parents of high school students with disabilities (34%) are dissatisfied with the services their child receives. While the high school program seems to be working well for most students, survey results highlight significant challenges.

34. Overall, I am happy with the services my child receives.

N = 252

Mean = 3.73/5.0



These trends are reflected in survey comments. An elementary parent writes, "My child has excelled far beyond any goal or expectation! It is all due to the unbelievable and talented people at this school." Another comments, "Belmont public schools are far ahead of all the neighboring communities in terms of their offerings and the individual attention that they give students on an IEP." A third writes, "We have had a very positive experience and are grateful for the wonderful attention our child receives."

Among middle school parents, one writes, "My son's teachers are great and they work with me to insure my son gets all the help he needs." Another comments, "The district has done a great job addressing my daughter's learning disability and her interventions have had great results. I am grateful we live in Belmont and have such great teachers." A cautionary note is sounded by another: "There seems to be a missing piece in my child's IEP. It is a 'point person' charged with making sure there is continuity of the plan implementation in his general classes. His teacher is great and attempts to help in regular class but it seems to be less coordinated amongst the team than is necessary." Another middle school parent makes the distinction of a "big discrepancy" between the upper and lower schools, describing "overtaxed special education and general education teachers" at the upper school. A third comments, "While classroom teachers are on board with my child's IEP, it seems that specials teachers . . . are not aware/informed/as willing to accommodate special needs."

Extensive comments offered by 22 high school parents suggest a mixed experience for students. As one parent noted, "Teachers at BHS vary widely in their understanding of disabilities and the need for accommodations for children . . ." While one high school parent remarked, "Belmont's IEP program has given my child the tools he needs to be a successful student," more often high school parents who provided comments expressed frustration with a range of issues from lack of communication, to lack of structure during the school day, to lack of training for general education staff and failure to meet student needs.

Survey results for this question correlate with phone calls received by BSEAC Co-Chairs. This year BSEAC Co-Chairs have received a disproportionately high number of complaints from high school parents, compared to calls from parents of younger students.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

POSITIVE FINDINGS

According to this BSEAC survey of all parents whose children are on IEPs, Belmont can look at its special education programming and find much to celebrate. Across the board, parents of preschool and elementary school students are extremely pleased with nearly every aspect of special education service delivery. Middle school results are also quite positive, though not as positive as they are for younger students.

Some specific findings are:

- 1) Universally, parents agree that teachers, administrators, and therapists are professional and responsive. This reflects well on district leadership and administration at every level.
- 2) Very importantly, parents feel that teachers at all levels expect their children to succeed. High expectations are key to high achievement.
- 3) Special education professionals at every level are credited with successfully implementing accommodations and modifications indicated on IEPs. Belmont should be proud of these skilled educators.
- 4) The great majority of parents feel they are included as equal partners with professionals in planning their child's IEP and that professionals encourage them to participate in the decision-making process. Since by law parents are full members of the IEP Team who collaborate with professionals to determine their child's program, this is a gratifying finding.
- 5) Most parents feel that evaluations conducted by school personnel accurately reflect student needs and that IEPs are written with measurable goals. This is a key finding, since the delivery of appropriate services to students on IEPs depends on accurate evaluations.
- 6) Most parents feel that their children are making progress toward achieving IEP goals. Progress on IEP goals, with the aim of preparing students to become as independent as possible, is the purpose of special education.
- 7) At the elementary and preschool levels, parents report overwhelmingly that teachers understand each child's needs and the teacher's role in implementing IEPs. This is further evidence that Belmont educators are skilled professionals.
- 8) A large majority of parents also reports that elementary and preschool teachers collaborate effectively with special educators. To be most effective, general and special educators work closely together.

Belmont can be justifiably proud of these survey results.

PRINCIPAL CHALLENGES

1) *High School*

Finding: On more than half of the survey questions, the overwhelming satisfaction of parents of elementary students contrasts sharply with the relatively high level of dissatisfaction expressed by parents of high school students. At the high school level, the

BSEAC survey reveals significant parent concerns. High school parent satisfaction drops to 50% or below in parent perceptions of the following key areas:

- Teachers' understanding of their role in implementing IEPs.
- Teachers' willingness to learn more about the needs of students with IEPs.
- Therapists' understanding of the needs of students with IEPs.
- General educators' implementation of accommodations and modifications as indicated on student IEPs.
- Collaboration between regular and special education teachers to ensure that student IEPs are implemented.
- The provision to students of all supports and services documented on IEPs.

In addition, only 55% of high school parents feel that teachers and administrators show sensitivity to the needs of students with disabilities and their families, only 58% of high school parents feel that evaluations conducted by school personnel accurately reflect their child's needs, and only 55% of high school parents feel their child is making progress on the goals and objectives listed in the IEP. Responses to these survey questions are corroborated by several detailed parent comments on the survey, and echo parent phone calls to BSEAC Co-Chairs over this school year.

Discussion: In the elementary model, as contrasted with the high school model, general education teachers develop a thorough knowledge of each student. Parent responses may suggest that this in-depth knowledge, as well as smaller class sizes, smaller case loads, a higher degree of structure during the school day, and a greater opportunity for staff collaboration are optimal conditions for special education service delivery. Better access to and higher rates of participation in professional development in special education at the elementary level may also be a factor.

It is important to reiterate that Massachusetts regulations require evaluations to accurately delineate each student's needs; if a student's needs are not spelled out in evaluations, then appropriate services cannot be determined or delivered. Provision to students of all supports and services detailed in the IEP is required for compliance with federal and state law. Both general and special educators are responsible for implementation of the IEP.

Recommendation: The BSEAC suggests that Belmont should further explore these issues at the high school. One possible course of action would be to convene a collaborative task force composed of administrators, teachers, parents, and students. This task force might consider the optimal organization of scheduling, professional development, and personnel resources to effectively and efficiently address these challenges.

2) *Related Services*

Finding: In contrast to high parent satisfaction levels with the amount of physical therapy available, less than half of all parents surveyed feel that their children are receiving adequate speech and occupational therapy. More than 24% of parents at each grade level are dissatisfied. Dissatisfaction is particularly acute at the preschool level, where 41% of parents are dissatisfied with the amount of speech therapy their children receive. 38% of high school parents are dissatisfied with the amount of occupational therapy students receive. During the

school year, BSEAC Co-Chairs commonly hear from parents who feel their children require more therapy.

Discussion: Clearly this is an issue that touches on resource prioritization and allocation.

Recommendation: Belmont may wish to consider whether additional funds can be apportioned to address these parent concerns.

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

1) *Procedural Safeguards*

Finding: Only 50% of parents overall are satisfied that Belmont explains what options are open to parents when they disagree with a decision the school has made.

Discussion: Although Belmont distributes the Massachusetts Department of Early and Secondary Education's *Parent's Notice of Procedural Safeguards* (see Appendix 3) by mail at least once per year, and the BSEAC provides a Basic Rights workshop once per year, this level of communication is apparently insufficient for a large number of parents.

Recommendation: Parent education is a continuing need. Belmont may wish to consider options such as (a) distributing the *Procedural Safeguards* document at every IEP meeting or (b) utilizing the newly updated website to provide parent education.

2) *Learning About Disabilities*

Finding: Only 33% of parents overall are satisfied with Belmont's provision of disability awareness education to students without disabilities and their families.

Discussion: Disability awareness education can demystify disability by increasing understanding, encouraging empathy, and promoting acceptance.

Recommendation: Belmont may wish to consider further what existing opportunities for disability education can be optimized, and what new opportunities can be created, including those at the curriculum level.

3) *Evaluating Special Education Effectiveness*

Finding: Only 42% of all parents surveyed are satisfied that Belmont solicits their input when evaluating the effectiveness of special education programming.

Discussion: The high rate of response to this survey suggests a high level of parental interest and investment in special education programming. According to state special education regulations, the BSEAC should "participate in the planning, development, and evaluation of the school district's special education programs," (see 603 CMR 28:07(4)).

Recommendation: In order to collaborate more effectively with parents to achieve positive results for students, Belmont should consider new ways to solicit parent feedback. By partnering with the BSEAC and by utilizing other means of communication with parents, such as email, online and paper surveys, advisory councils, PTAs/PTOs, and the district

website, Belmont may be able to gather valuable information needed to continuously improve special education programming.

4) *Out-of-District Placements*

Finding: Most parents with children in out-of-district placements do not feel either that the school district collaborated with them when determining their child's placement, or that they were able to choose among several placement options.

Discussion: According to special education law, parents should be full partners, along with professionals, in the IEP process. Parents need to be fully informed so that they can effectively participate.

Recommendation: A more extensive survey of these parents may be justified to better elucidate the causes of this high degree of dissatisfaction.

5) *Middle School*

Finding: On most questions, parents of middle school students on IEPs are less satisfied than elementary and preschool parents, but more satisfied than high school parents. Many more middle school parents are dissatisfied with the way their child's IEP is implemented (questions 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23) than parents of younger children. For example, 25% of parents of middle school students are dissatisfied that the school provides all the supports and services documented on their child's IEP, whereas only 13% of elementary school parents are dissatisfied. Another example: 22% of middle school parents are dissatisfied that teachers show a willingness to learn more about their child's needs, whereas only 7% of elementary school parents are dissatisfied. The other questions listed follow this pattern.

Discussion: This downward trend may be due to some of the same factors which cause the high degree of dissatisfaction among high school parents. The fact that 25% of parents feel that the school is not properly implementing the IEP may be of concern as a liability issue.

Recommendation: Belmont should decide whether the levels of dissatisfaction at the middle school merit further examination. If organizational improvements are implemented at the high school, they may prove beneficial at the middle school as well.

6) *Homework*

Finding: At the middle school, only 45% of parents are satisfied that their children are able to complete homework with minimal or no parental assistance. At the high school, parental satisfaction is at 59%.

Discussion: It is generally agreed that middle and high school are the years when students should become more self-sufficient.

Recommendation: It may be beneficial for Belmont to consider how best to structure assignments so that they can be completed independently by students with disabilities. At all levels but especially in middle and high school, teachers may wish to consider what further accommodations and modifications can be used to help students gain access to their homework assignments, and to complete them with minimal assistance.

7) Reporting Progress

Finding: Only 56% of all parents are satisfied that Belmont communicates regularly with them regarding student progress on IEP goals.

Discussion: Good communication lessens parental anxiety, facilitates early identification of potential problems, allows professionals to benefit from parent experience and knowledge of their children, and encourages parental follow-through.

Recommendation: Although educators face numerous demands on their time, Belmont may wish to contemplate whether existing technological solutions can facilitate brief but meaningful, regular communication between professionals and parents.

Finally, on behalf of Belmont parents of students with disabilities, the BSEAC thanks the Belmont School Committee and Belmont Schools administration for their consideration of this report, and most especially for their sincere and thoughtful commitment to the education and wellbeing of all Belmont students.

APPENDIX 1: Respondent Demographics

Where Families Live		
	N	%
Belmont	254	94%
Boston	6	2%
Other	10	4%
Total	270	100%

School Level		
	Frequency	Percent
Missing	1	1%
Preschool	28	10%
Elementary School	105	39%
Middle School	68	25%
High School	68	25%
Total	270	100%

District		
	Frequency	Percent
Missing	4	1%
In-district	231	86%
Out-of-district Collaborative	20	7%
Out-of-district Other	15	6%
Total	270	100%

APPENDIX 2: Survey
(as parents/guardians saw it online)

APPENDIX 3: Procedural Safeguards Document
(MA Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education,
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/prb/pnps.pdf>)