



# East Grand Rapids Public Schools

April 10, 2013

Program Accountability  
Office of Special Education  
Department of Education  
608 West Allegan Street  
P.O. Box 30008  
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Case: C-7599-13

This letter is in regards to the complaint filed by \_\_\_\_\_ against the East Grand Rapids Public Schools (District) received by the Michigan Office of Special Education on March 25, 2013 (Case C-7599-13).

Included with this letter, please find a summary of East Grand Rapids Public Schools procedures and processes regarding child study team/student assistance team, general education interventions, and special education procedures, programs, and services. We are also including a copy of the "Introduction to PSW in Kent County – How did we get here?"; a document used during training for Kent County school psychologists regarding the Kent ISD Guidelines for the Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses model of determining a specific learning disability.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide you with information about our district and Kent County special education practices, and we would be willing to provide any additional information should you so request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sara Magaña Shubel".

Sara Magaña Shubel, Ph.D.  
Superintendent

c:

enc: Summary of EGRPS Procedures and Processes  
Introduction to PSW in Kent County

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## Special Education Department

The following information is provided to the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education in response to complaint Case: C-7599-13

This is a summary of East Grand Rapids Public Schools; child study team/student assistance team, general education interventions, and special education procedures, and processes, programs, and services.

### District Programs and Services

East Grand Rapids Public Schools has special education programs and services preschool to post-secondary. In total, we provide 13 classes/programs throughout the district.

13 Special Education Classes/Programs in 6 buildings	
School	Program
Preschool	One Early Childhood Special Education class and two preschool speech classes
Breton Downs Elementary	One class for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Developmental Disabilities and one Resource Room
Lakeside Elementary	One Resource Room
Wealthy Elementary	One Resource Room
East Grand Rapids Middle School	One class for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and two Resource Rooms
East Grand Rapids High School	One class for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and two Resource Rooms

In addition to the 13 classes/programs, our district also provides related services, including occupational therapy, orientation and mobility, physical therapy, school social work, speech and language therapy, and teacher consultant service, based on individual student need.

Through cooperative agreements with other districts, East Grand Rapids Public Schools also provides services for students who require specialized programs not available in the district. The district pays tuition to the districts providing these specialized programs

for our students. Infants and toddlers, from birth to about two and one-half years of age, receive services through Grand Rapids Public Schools. Students who require post-secondary special education programs, (after high school attendance), can participate in county-wide special education programs held in a variety of settings. These programs emphasize functional skill development and vocational training. Some of our school age students (PreK-12<sup>th</sup> grade) with more significant disabilities also attend county-wide programs, with the type of program and services determined individually based on each student's need.

### General Education Interventions

East Grand Rapids Public Schools (EGRPS) staff has been working on the Response to Intervention (now termed Multi-Tiered System of Supports) process since the 2006-2007 school year, with formal committee work occurring during the 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011 school years. The district RTI-MTSS committee continues to meet periodically to review current student data, support services, and interventions. The RTI model in EGRPS has been structured from a "whole district K-12" perspective which includes both academic and behavioral supports. We use the core principals of RTI: *we can effectively teach all children, intervene early, use a multi-tiered model of service delivery, and use a problem-solving method to make decisions within a multi-tier model.* In using the problem solving model, multiple sources of information are reviewed to make decisions about the types of student support and services needed.

Over the past several years EGRPS has developed many different general education interventions, at both the elementary and secondary level, that support our students' needs. Leveled literacy intervention and reading support, general education school social work, check and connect program, intervention specialist, math lab, study skills, and guided study classes, targeted tutoring, and guidance office counseling are some of the interventions that have successfully been put into place to support our students. As our students have successfully progressed in the curriculum with the support of general education interventions and services, fewer students have required special education services, the "top tier" of the RTI pyramid. The provision of RTI has resulted in the following; a decrease in referrals for special education evaluations, successfully maintaining students in their general education classrooms, and has also improved our indicators of disproportionality. Even as the ongoing budgetary difficulties in the state of Michigan have necessitated many budget cuts in local school district programs and services, our general education academic and behavioral interventions have continued to be a priority for our district administrators, school board, teachers, and parents.

### **Graduation Rates**

Our high school special education graduation rate has consistently been above 90% from 2006 through the 2012 school years. Michigan Department of Education Graduation Cohort Report is based on ALL students, general and special education, graduating within a 4-year period. The above 90% from 2006 through 2012 includes both general and special education students.

### **Child Study/Student Assistance Teams**

Child Study Teams/Student Assistance Teams meet at a minimum, weekly at the elementary level and monthly at the secondary level. Team members include: building administrator(s), counselor (secondary level), general education teacher, reading teacher (elementary level), special education teacher, school psychologist, school social worker, and speech and language pathologist (elementary level). Teams review multiple sources of student data and develop interventions for students who struggle either academically or behaviorally, monitor student progress, and revise or develop new interventions as necessary.

Data sources for review of student progress include:

- Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) scores in reading, language, and mathematics
- MEAP scores
- K-6 Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System scores
- K-5 monthly reading records
- Explore, Plan and ACT scores (middle school and high school)
- Pre and post assessments in content areas including mathematics
- Student attendance, health information, grades, homework completion, class work, test and quiz scores

Parents often participate in Child Study Team meetings. As educators we believe that parent participation and involvement are an essential component for student progress and success.

### **Special Education Assessments**

Multidisciplinary special education evaluations are completed at either the request of parents or building-level Child Study/Student Assistance Teams. Child Study Teams/Student Assistance Teams recommend a special education Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET) assessment when there is a concern as to whether a student may have a disability that impedes or impacts the learning process.

For either school or parent initiated referrals, signed parental permission is necessary before evaluations can be completed. Once informed parent consent for evaluation is received by our school district, an Individualized Education Program Team meeting is held within 30 school days. The IEP team determines whether a student meets special education eligibility criteria and requires special education programs/services. If a student is found eligible for special education, the IEP team determines the annual goals based on the student's eligibility and area(s) of need, and the programs/services required by the student to meet their goals. IEP teams also determine required student accommodations, supplementary aids, and program modifications and supports.

### **Changes in Learning Disability Eligibility**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Regulations (2006) required a change in the identification process for students with learning disabilities. Rather than the continued use of the model known as "severe discrepancy" (significant difference between intellectual ability and academic achievement), districts were to use either a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both; or other alternative research-based procedures. All districts within Kent County, including East Grand Rapids Public Schools use a pattern of strengths and weaknesses model or a combination of models for the identification of students with learning disabilities.

As part of the evaluation process, multidisciplinary evaluation teams gather written information from parents and teachers, complete classroom observations in areas of suspected weakness(es), review all information collected as part of the Child Study Team/Student Assistance Team process and any other available information, including evaluation reports provided by parents. One of our school psychologists completes individual academic achievement testing with the referred student. Achievement tests are scored using both age and grade norms. Additional achievement test and curriculum based measures along with tests of cognitive ability are also used as needed for a recommendation regarding special education eligibility. East Grand Rapids Public Schools uses the Kent ISD Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses Model (PSW) for Learning Disability Determination.

[http://www.kentisd.org/downloads/sped\\_formsguidelines/psw\\_guidelines\\_20121113\\_160115\\_34.pdf](http://www.kentisd.org/downloads/sped_formsguidelines/psw_guidelines_20121113_160115_34.pdf)

The model includes the following guidelines in determining initial specific learning disability eligibility:

### **Brief Summary of Weaknesses**

**Special Education Testing Process**

A disability is suspected which requires special education programs/services for student progress in general education. Successively intensive interventions are insufficient for student progress.

Parent/guardian grants permission for evaluations and provides information for the Evaluation Team.

Evaluations, observations, information gathering is completed.

The Evaluation Team then makes a recommendation for special education eligibility.

- For initial evaluations, at least four weaknesses evident within one or more SLD categories
  - Progress monitoring falling below aim line for at least three consecutive data points
    - Norm-referenced test score at or below the 9<sup>th</sup> percentile
    - Curriculum-based measures in the 'at-risk' range or below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile if using local norms
    - Criterion-referenced assessments at least a year below grade level if in grades K-3 at least 1 ½ to 2 years below grade level if in grades 4+

- Curriculum assessment scores at or less than 70% - if using unit or teacher made tests, an average score of three or more assessments is recommended versus only using the score from the most recent assessment
- Professional teacher report compared to other students in the classroom
- Classroom observation(s) indicating below grade level performance in comparison to other students in the classroom
- Grades of D's or E's or 'does not meet' expectations

Furthermore, regarding initial evaluations:

- At least two data points must be within the category of academic achievement with respect to grade level and/or with respect to age level expectations, one of which must be from an individually administered academic achievement measure
- At least one data point must be from classroom performance relative to grade level and/or age level experience
- A classroom observation is required in all areas identified as a weakness

### **Brief Summary of Strengths**

- For initial evaluations, at least three strengths evident in one or more SLD categories
- Norm referenced test score at or above the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Curriculum based measures at benchmark or at/above the local median or at/above 25<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Criterion referenced results at/above grade level
- Curricular assessment at/above 80%
- Teacher report as compared to class
- Classroom observation suggests understanding comparable to peers
- Letter grades of "A" or "B" or "meets/exceeds" expectations

Furthermore, regarding initial evaluations:

- At least one data point identified must be within the category of academic achievement with respect to grade level or with respect to age level expectations.
- At least one data point must be from classroom performance relative to grade level and/or age level expectations.

While the Kent ISD PSW guidelines include a norm referenced test score at or below the 9<sup>th</sup> percentile as part of the definition of a weakness, a rigid cut score on one test does not determine the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team's (MET) recommendation for student eligibility. All information regarding a student's performance and achievement is considered by the multidisciplinary evaluation team when looking for a pattern of weakness.

### **State Assessment Participation Rate for Students with Disabilities**

Initial data reported by Michigan Department of Education (Fall 2012) regarding the participation rate on state assessments for East Grand Rapids Public Schools students with disabilities was unfortunately calculated and reported incorrectly on the mischooldata.org website. The formula used by MDE to calculate participation rates for students with disabilities did not take into account

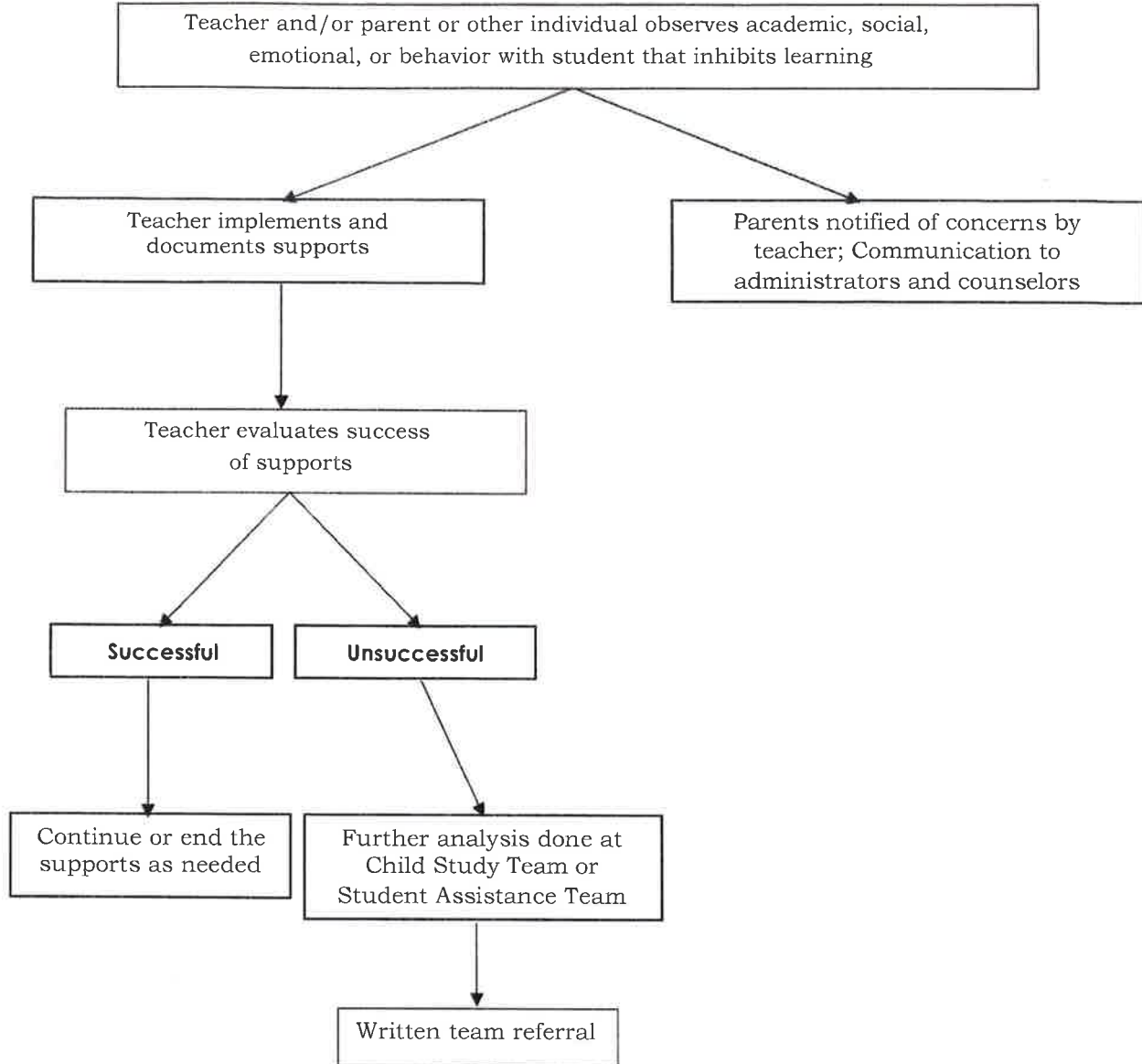
all factors and as such resulted in an inaccurate percentage rate of participation being posted on the state data site for several Kent county school districts. The MDE recalculation of the participation data resulted in a corrected participation rate for East Grand Rapids Public Schools of 100%.

<https://www.mischooldata.org/SpecialEducationEarlyOn/AnnualPublicReporting/AnnualPublicReportingSummary.aspx>

### **In Closing**

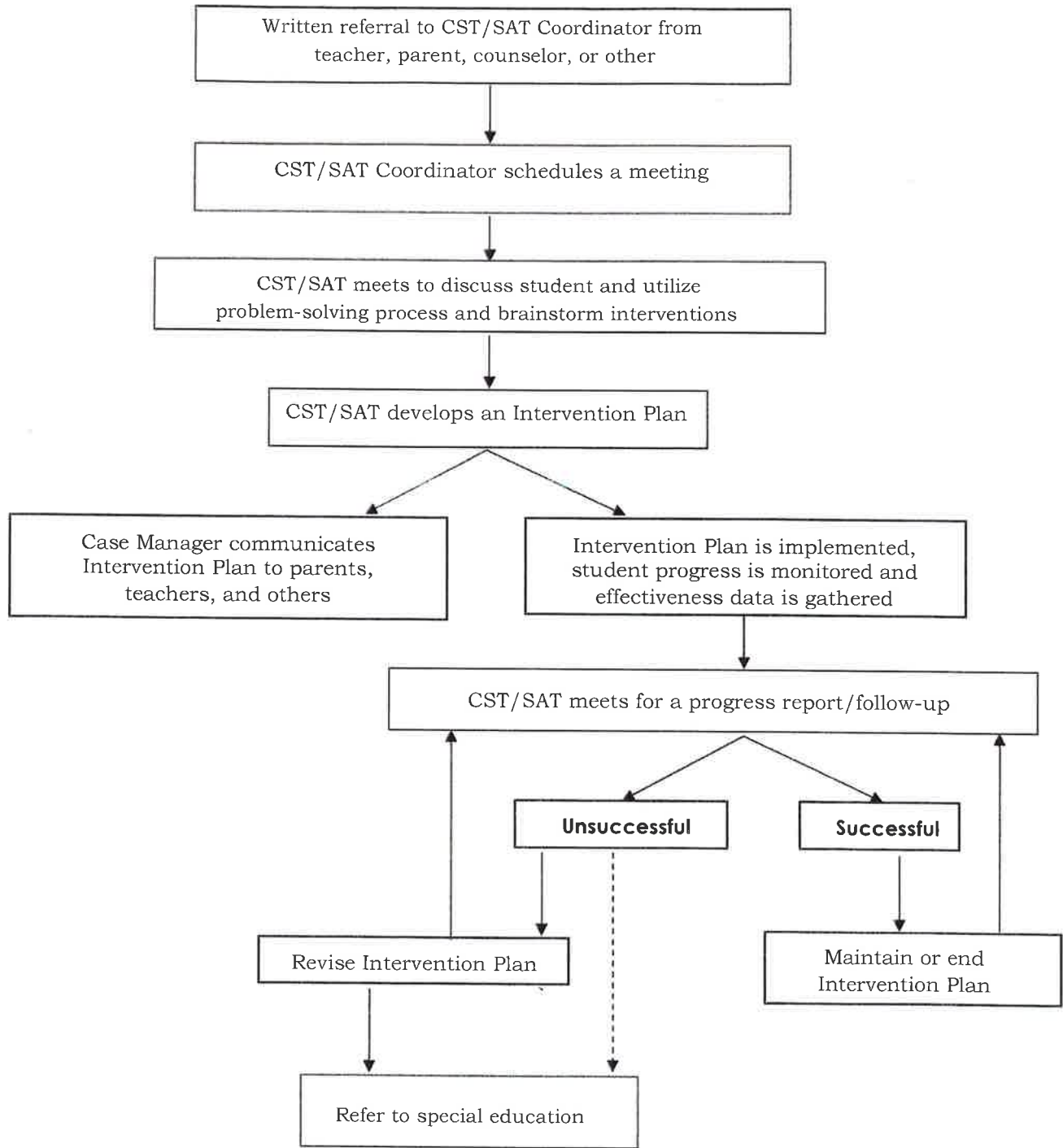
Since the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), significant changes have occurred in all aspects of K-12 public education. Specific changes in special education include greater emphasis on general education instruction, intervention, and support for students prior to placement in special education. East Grand Rapids Public Schools is committed to providing the interventions and supports required for all students to progress academically, behaviorally, emotionally, and socially. Our district follows all State and Federal rules and regulations regarding special education and adheres to the special education eligibility guidelines and plan developed by Kent Intermediate School District.

**ELEMENTARY CHILD STUDY TEAM  
SECONDARY STUDENT ASSISTANCE TEAM**



East Grand Rapids Public Schools

Elementary Child Study Team (CST)/Secondary Student Assistance Team (SAT) continued



Parents/Guardians can refer students for a special education assessment at any time.