

Special Education Study

Roanoke County Schools

December 2006

Executive Report

*Conducted by the Virginia Association of School Superintendents
Educational Services Review Program*

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The special education staff and other administrative staff in the central office and special education coordinators in schools, principals, and parent advisory committee members who participated in interviews.

All respondents to the online survey

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Rationale for Studying the Roanoke County Schools Special Education Program

This study was the second study conducted by a VASS Review Team for the Roanoke County Schools. The first study, completed in 1998, was done shortly after the appointment of a new special education director. That study was conducted for several reasons: to identify the strengths of the special education program, to give the new director ideas for streamlining staffing, procedures, and eligibility criteria, to suggest new ways to link with parents and community agencies, and to enhance the division's use of recognized 'best practices' in programming for students with disabilities.

This study has been conducted at a similar transition point in the special education program – a new special education director was appointed in July 2006, and it was determined that it would be a good opportunity to use "outside eyes" to review the department's strengths and areas for improvement and to gain input from staff in the central office and in schools regarding new directions the special education staff should pursue.

There were several objectives of this VASS Education Services Review of the Roanoke County Schools special education program. Overall, the study aimed to assess the strengths and areas for improvement in the special education program. Embedded in this goal was an objective to have a peer team of special educators suggest how the division might re-think its model for serving students with disabilities and suggest ways the division might find a new balance between 'essential' and 'excessive' programs and services.

Major Objectives of the Study

- To review staffing and use of staff time;
- To review numbers of identified students and gain an overview of programs relative to "appropriate" services and their costs;
- To listen to and survey staff to understand issues and concerns from the field -- what do teachers, administrators, and support staff perceive as the strengths of and concerns about special needs students and programs;
- To suggest additional professional development ideas that would be helpful to all professionals and paraprofessionals working with students with disabilities;
- To recommend ideas for re-thinking the special education program's 'model' of services.

The Study Team

With the approval of the superintendent and director of special education, a group of special educators with many years of experience in both special education and student services was selected to serve on the peer visiting team. The team leader was an incumbent Virginia superintendent with over thirty years experience working with programming for students with disabilities and school finance. The three additional special educators on the team were cabinet level administrators working in the areas of special education, intervention and prevention programs, and student services. The VASS review program director, also a team member, had many years experience in school finance and peer review programs. The Roanoke Superintendent and Director of Special Education approved all team members before they were invited to serve on the visiting team.

Procedures Used in the Study

The research design for the study drew on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of study often referred to as multiple methods, mixed method, or mixed model (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Data used to frame recommendations for improvement were drawn from personal interviews, data from Roanoke County Schools documents, analysis of both Likert-type responses and open-ended responses from interview guides, and from data obtained in an online survey.

The team interviewed the superintendent and the majority of board members, a cross section of special education staff in the central office, and a sample group of principals from the schools. Interview guides keyed to the major objectives of the study were used for all interviews. A total of 39 individuals were interviewed over a period of a day-and-a-half in late October.

In addition to interviews and documents review, the study team used an online survey that was uploaded to the school division's web site. The survey was designed by VASS in collaboration with the Director of Special Education and was used to gain employees' perceptions about strengths and areas for improvement of special education programming and services. The survey was available for all professional instructional staff, teachers and administrators, including those interviewed, and also for instructional assistants (Please see Appendix I for a copy of the survey). The survey was launched through the Roanoke County Schools technology department on November 9th and was active on the division's web site until midnight November 20th. The survey was anonymous to protect employee confidentiality. Two hundred forty-seven (247) individuals responded to the survey. Regular and special education teachers presented the highest percentage (65%) of response to the survey:

Special Education Teachers	28%
Regular Education Teachers	37%
Building Administrators	6%
Instructional Assistants-Special Education	13%
Instructional Assistants-Regular Education	1%
School Psychologists	3%
School Social Workers	<1%
School Nurses	<1%
Other Professional Staff-OT/PT	2%
Other Personnel: majority in this category were school counselors	10%

During the process of this study, the team also reviewed numerous documents listed below.

- Annual Special Education Plans for the past three years
- School Operating Budgets for the past three years
- Special Education Budget for the past three years
- Annual School Report for the past three years
- Data used as part of the NCLB cost study conducted by the Virginia Department of Education
- SOL and AYP results by school
- Discipline statistics for middle and high schools
- Special education referral rates and eligibility rates – by division and by school
- Graduation rates and diploma types by school
- Special education regulations and handbook
- Special education caseload numbers and aide/paraprofessional assignments by school
- Professional development activities available for regular and special education teachers
- Percentage of students with disabilities – by division and school
- Child Count figures for the past 5 year
- Job Descriptions of Special Education Staff

Commendations - Strengths to Celebrate

The Roanoke County Schools special education program has a number of strengths to celebrate. First, the school division is perceived as having exceptional programs and services for students with disabilities and has had this reputation for several decades. The program was seen as constantly looking out to meet the individual needs of children using whatever methods and caring it took to make that happen. In addition, the majority of respondents to the survey perceived that the program is well supported from the level of individual employees up to the board. In response to the question: *How would you describe the level of support overall for special education students in Roanoke County Schools - from the board down to individual employees in the schools*, responses were:

Excellent/Very Good	55%
Good	<u>26%</u>
	81%
Okay	8%
Could be Better	10%
Not Good	1%

Strengths of the special education program and services most often mentioned by those interviewed and responding to the survey were:

- Dedicated hard-working teachers, both regular and special education staff, and aides who do whatever it takes to help students be successful;
- Approachability, expertise, and high level of support from central office special education staff;
- Successful inclusion for the great majority of students, and teachers who are willing to develop a better working model;
- Support from building administrators and coordinators who believe in collaboration;
- Parents have an active voice in the education of their children.

In addition to the strengths cited by interview and survey respondents, the team commends the school division, the special education department, and the entire instructional staff that works with students with disabilities for obtaining strong AYP scores and for increasing the Advanced scores on SOL tests so significantly over the past few years at the elementary level (Source: School Report Card).

PREFACE to Recommendations

In addition to describing the strengths of the special education program, the study team was invited to make recommendations for enhancing the special education program. These recommendations are based on sound educational research and practice in the field of special education, based on review of numerous school division plans and documents related to special education, and offered using both the ideas of the peer team and Roanoke County Schools' staff who were interviewed or surveyed.

Equitable educational opportunities for all students are provided through special education; the special education program recognizes the uniqueness of all students. County support is impressive.”
-Survey Respondent

“I think we, as a school division, are very strong in our efforts to identify those students who qualify for special education services, and also very strong in the lengths we go to provide those services.”
-Survey Respondent

“Special Education is a big part of the comprehensive planning process...”
-Interview Respondent

“Focus on inclusion is, by and large, working for the majority of students.”
-Interview Respondent

“There are strong attempts to look at individual needs of students.”
-Survey Respondent

“The special education program is strong in the area of having teachers and aides who have many years experience in working with students with all different kinds of disabilities and levels of learning.”
-Survey Respondent

“Principal support is strong-they work collaboratively with staff to solve problems.”
-Survey Respondent

The team was impressed with Roanoke County’s special education department’s leadership and staff. We were impressed with the level of open communication and collaboration that has been attained in a short time by the new director with other supervisory staff in the central office and in the schools. We were impressed with the clarity of ideas of all those we talked with and heard from via the online survey regarding the strengths and areas for enhancement of the special education program.

*“One strength is the approachability and availability of special education administration from the building coordinators on up.”
-Survey Respondent*

The specific recommendations the team proposes to enhance the special education program are intended to give the special education director support for:

- continuing the work already initiated to update, clarify, and communicate procedures,
- committing to a broader ‘continuum of services,’
- designing short- and long-range plans for maintaining the high level of excellence in programs and services for students with disabilities, and,
- making delivery of services more effective and efficient.

*“We advocate for students with special needs, provide support and accommodations. Students with special needs are well-accepted into general education classrooms.”
-Survey Respondent*

We have summarized suggested enhancements in five thematic areas. These areas have been used because they were areas the team was invited to study and because all areas have impact on the efficacy of the program:

Recommendation I: Staffing Programs

1. Adopt a Staffing Formula
2. Clarify Job Roles

Recommendation II: Policies and Procedures

1. Adopt a Special Education Procedures Manual

Recommendation III: Programs and Services

1. Continue to Fine Tune the ‘Continuum of Services’

Recommendation IV: Professional Development

1. Continue to Support Best Professional Development Practices
2. Enhance Specific Interests/Needs for Professional Development

Recommendation V: Data Management and Budgeting

1. Develop a Plan for Contracted Services Using Division Personnel
2. Enhance Use of Data for Special Education Planning and Budgeting
3. Enhance Use of Student Data

Each **Recommendation Area** is introduced by an observation or observations about the Roanoke County Schools special education program made through using interviews, documents analysis, and the on-line survey.

I. Recommendation Area: Staffing Programs

A. Observation – Staffing of Special Education Programs

At the time of the team’s site visit there was a perception that staffing for special education programs in individual schools has been ‘inconsistent’ and ‘inequitable’ in the past. Other than adhering to the “special education staffing requirements” found in State Regulations 2002 (p. 20), the special education department has had no clear internal guidelines from the central office level as to how positions were assigned to schools. In the past, regional coordinators have staffed special education programs. There has been no formal means of communicating to schools how or why particular staffing decisions were made.

“Staffing has not been consistent throughout the Roanoke County School division. Some schools seem to get more services than others...”
-Survey Respondent

B. Observation – Job Descriptions for Special Education Staff

The team observed that there were not current job descriptions for all special education personnel. There was a very clear and informative description of the Special Education Coordinator position at the building level.

“At the school level, the staffing is not clear.”
-Interview Respondent

The only description of the Regional Coordinator’s duties and responsibilities the team saw was from an Announcement of Administrative Vacancy for that position that included a short list of basic duties.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS – Staffing Programs

1. Adopt a Staffing Formula

The special education director is commended for beginning the process of reviewing other divisions’ staffing formulas and designing a staffing procedure for Roanoke that would ensure equity in placement of special education professional and paraprofessional staff in the schools. This action is already apparent in responses to the survey. In response to the question: *“This year I feel the special education department is doing its best to equitably and consistently staff special education programs in the schools”* respondents said:

Strongly Agree	17%
Agree	48%
Neutral	18%
Disagree	12%
Strongly Disagree	5%
Did Not Answer	Less than 1%

The formula being developed should be based on student disability types and caseloads, should clarify the rationale for personnel placement and who has authority to place staff, and also define the method of communicating to schools how programs are staffed. The staffing formula should be included in the special education manual.

The team is forwarding (under separate cover) several staffing formulas used in other divisions that could be adapted to Roanoke County’s special education programs.

2. Clarify Job Roles

During this time of leadership change in special education, it would be a good time to clarify the roles of special education supervisory personnel – the director, regional coordinators, and building coordinators – and also to re-examine the chain of command leading to and from the director, to other supervisors, and to principals so that who has authority to make decisions regarding specific special education matters and who the expert is on specific procedures are clearly defined.

A specific example of role clarification would be reviewing the Building Coordinator job description. When the position was established, it was intended that the coordinators would assist with training of regular education teachers working with students with disabilities. The perception is that this is not necessarily occurring, and there was no reference to training regular education teachers in the building coordinator job description. The team suggests that when this job description is reviewed that it be clearly articulated for elementary, middle school, and secondary levels.

Another specific example would be regarding collaborative teachers. The division may want to review the current teacher job description and write a special education teacher job description so that both descriptions more clearly define how collaborative teaching is shared and how teaching content is shared.

II. Recommendation Area: Policies and Procedures

A. Observation – Special Education Manual and Procedures

A common theme running through discussions the team had in interviews and observed in reviewing survey data was that there was no special education manual or handbook describing how specific procedures should be handled, that a number of forms were out of date and/or unclear, and that there was not an up-to-date IEP handbook.

As part of the objective to listen to concerns in the field, the study team included two questions regarding ‘procedures’ on the survey. The first question was: *“I feel the special education program has sufficient and clear procedures for getting the most appropriate services to students in a timely way: Please check only ONE answer.”* Responses to this question across all respondents were:

Responses	Total	%
All of the time	11	4.45%
Most of the time	137	55.47%
Some of the time	87	35.22%
Rarely	12	4.86%
Never	0	0%

When the data was broken down by regular education versus special education teachers, there was only a small percentage difference in responses between these two groups at the ‘*most of the time*’ level.

The second question asked on the survey related to procedures was: “*Special education procedures I find most unclear or confusing are related to: Please check as many as apply.*” There was more flexibility in this question as respondents were allowed to give more than one answer. Responses to this question across all positions surveyed were:

Responses	Total	%
Child Study	19	7.69%
Referral to Special Education	24	9.72%
Eligibility for Services	56	22.67%
Most Appropriate Placement	91	36.84%
Disciplining Special Education Students	102	41.30%
Due Process	32	12.96%
Continuum of Services	67	27.13%
Other (please specify)	25	10.12%

Disciplining special education students is the area that drew the highest percentage of responses. When the data for this item was looked at by regular versus special education teachers, it showed that regular education teachers are *more likely* than special education teachers to perceive that procedures related to discipline of special education students were ‘confusing’ or ‘unclear.’ Regular education teachers were also *more likely* than special education teachers to perceive that procedures related to *Child Study, Referral to Special Education, and Eligibility for Services* were ‘confusing’ or ‘unclear.’

“Discipline issues are cloudy.”
-Survey Respondent

“Clear and consistent guidelines should be in place for students who have behavioral issues, and these guidelines should be communicated to all staff who have contact with that student.”
-Survey Respondent

“Coming up with a clear disciplinary plan for special ed students is important...”
-Survey Respondent

“There needs to be an identified ‘line’ to show when a student’s behaviors are too disruptive to be in a classroom.”
-Survey Respondent

II. RECOMMENDATIONS – Policies and Procedures

1. Adopt a Special Education Procedures Manual

The special education staff has already started to develop a special education manual and is in the process of collecting currently used special education forms and designing new forms that will align with updated and new procedures. The survey data regarding ‘confusing’ and ‘unclear’ procedures should be useful in updating policies and procedures in the manual. Other specific suggestions for the manual would be: include a procedure for allocating support services to special education programs; embed an updated IEP Handbook with instructions as to how to write IEPs that specify “appropriate” public education services.

“We need to streamline the paperwork more.”
-Survey Respondent

“We need clarification on how to write the IEP.”
-Survey Respondent

Once the manual is completed, the special education and regular instruction departments might collaborate on hosting service sessions for teachers, building administrators, and paraprofessionals to review the new manual and specific procedures. The division should upload the manual with all revised and new forms to the division’s web site.

The team is forwarding several manuals from other divisions (Albemarle and Hanover Counties) for the special education department to use in designing its own manual. Another example of procedures can be found online at the Stafford County Schools web site: <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/Div/Stafford/SpEd/home.html> .

At the same time the special education department publishes a new manual, the director might consider updating the parent handbook and uploading that to the division's web site. An example of a parent handbook from another Virginia school division can be found at: <http://www.fcps.edu/ss/SpecialEd/Handbook/ParentHandbook.htm> (Fairfax County Schools).

III. Recommendation Area: Programs and Services

A. Observation – Continuum of Services

At the current time, most of the division's special education students are served in full inclusion programs. Some students in inclusion classrooms have limited pull-out options available for specific services. Some students are served in resource programs or in private day programs. It is the perception of most respondents in interviews and to surveys that the inclusion model works well for the majority of students with disabilities, but not well for all students, particularly those with extreme behavior problems or other challenging disabilities. There is also a perception that the 'continuum' right now has only both ends of the spectrum – inclusion or private day programs.

When asked "What are the positive aspects of inclusion as practiced in the Roanoke County Schools? Please check as many as apply," across all respondents, these were the most frequent replies. (Percentages add up to more than 100% because multiple answers were possible):

- Collaborating teachers use multiple instructional strategies to reach all students (62%)
- Regular and special education teachers share instruction (59%)
- Special education teachers can 'pre-teach' and 're-teach' skills to small groups of students (58%)
- Teachers can alternate roles of 'lead' and 'support' teacher (57%)
- Instructional assistants work with students in small groups (57%)
- Teachers share responsibility for student discipline (56%)

When asked "What are the most problematic aspects of inclusion as practiced in the Roanoke County Schools? Please check as many as apply," across all respondents, these were the most frequent replies:

- Students with extreme behavior problems should have options other than inclusion (84%)
- There is little common planning time for collaborating teachers and teacher assistants (72%)
- Some collaborating teacher pairs work together better than others (69%)
- It's difficult to manage teaching, monitoring behavior, and designing interesting lesson plans for diverse students (60%)

B. Observation – Contracted Services

At the present time, there are no systematic guidelines for determining how support services are allocated for students with disabilities: counseling, tutoring, special medical or psychiatric evaluations, and one-on-one aides, to name some examples. The team understood that in the past IEP committees had

*"I feel we need to offer a TRUE continuum of services, not just full inclusion for all."
-Survey Respondent*

*"We need a wider continuum of services especially for students with severe disabilities."
-Survey Respondent*

*"You should stop talking about special education as if it is a 'place.' Special education is a level of 'service' based on student needs."
-Survey Respondent*

*"The collaborative process seems to work very well in most elementary settings. Special education teachers try to bridge the gap between the SOL curriculum and actual needs of students."
-Survey Respondent*

*"Collaborative teaching allows an outreach to students who would not otherwise qualify for special education services but desperately need help."
-Survey Respondent*

*"There needs to be more time set aside for collaborative planning and case management."
-Survey Respondent*

*"We desperately need time to plan together in order to effectively teach together."
-Survey Respondent*

*"I think we could do a better job matching collaborative teachers."
-Survey Respondent*

been determining support services needed, writing them into IEPs, and arranging for the services through outside contractors.

C. Observation – Regional Services

Several years ago, for very valid reasons, the Roanoke County Schools ended its participation in a regional program for special education services. Since withdrawal from the regional program, the special education department has been challenged to achieve maximum placements for some students who were in this program. Most of these students have severe autism or severe behavior disorder. Many are currently in inclusion settings. At the present time the division does not have an autism specialist and is contracting out for autism services.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS – Programs and Services

1. Continue to Fine-Tune the Continuum of Services

The superintendent and special education director are committed to supporting a full continuum of services for students with disabilities. One rationale for expanding the ‘continuum’ is this: although the overall number of special education students has remained fairly constant over the past five years, there has been a dramatic increase in the identification and incidence of certain disability categories (Please see Child Count data in Appendix II). The level of “appropriate” services needed by these has a direct impact on staffing and program costs.

Hire an Autism Specialist

The division is currently using contracted services to assist with students with autism. The team recommends that the division consider hiring an autism specialist for 2007-2008.

Explore Options with the Newly Organized Regional Program

In addition, the team suggests the special education department explore a new relationship with the current regional program that has been re-configured under new leadership. There are several rationales for this: first, using regional programs for students with severe disabilities would expand the ‘continuum of services’ and offer the most “appropriate” placement for students who are least likely to succeed in inclusion settings; second, sharing in the regional program might reduce the need for additional instructional assistants for these students within the division’s classrooms.

IV. Recommendation Area: Professional Development

A. Observation - Commendation

The school division’s professional development is both centralized and site-based. The division sponsors full day elementary teacher training related to instructional strategies prior to school opening. Two early release days are in the

“ I think we need more programs that teach life skills and social skills.”

-Survey Respondent

“There are some severe behavior problems that cannot be addressed adequately in the classroom. Interventions with day programs have helped, but other alternatives such as self-contained classroom may be an option for some children.”

-Survey Respondent

“ I feel we have used inclusion too much as a ‘one-size’ approach to special education.”

-Survey Respondent

school calendar for follow up of this training. In addition to this, the division sponsors key programs such as “Strategies to Improve Reading Comprehension for Middle and High School Students” during the year that are open to regular and special education teachers – no cost to schools.

Each school has an allocation for professional development and sponsors its own professional development activities prior to school opening and throughout the year. Principals and their staffs plan these workshops, and a list of planned activities is sent to the Associate Director for Personnel and Staff Development in the central office (Annual School-Based Professional Development Plan).

The special education director orients new special education teachers and PPS staff in a full-day session and meets for three hours each with elementary and secondary returning teachers. The special education director also does a full-day pre-school orientation and training session with instructional assistants and OT/PT staff.

B. Observation

The perception gained from both interviews and surveys is that collaborative teachers and instructional assistants need more professional development in specific areas. In responses to the survey question: “*I would like more professional development in these areas: Please check as many as apply*” these were the areas all respondents identified:

- Increasing students' engagement in learning (48%)
- Adapting curricula and instructional methods for diverse students – differentiation (42%)
- Finding the most effective way to measure what students are learning (35%)
- Preparing special education students for state SOL tests (31%)
- Modeling effective inclusion practices (29%)

These responses were broken down by groups of regular education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, and instructional assistants, and these were the results:

Regular education teachers were most interested in professional development related to: *increasing students' engagement in learning and differentiating instruction, and finding the most effective way to measure what students are learning.*

Special education teachers were most interested in professional development related to: *preparing special education students for SOL tests and increasing students' engagement in learning.*

Building Administrators were most interested in professional development related to: *differentiating instruction, increasing students' engagement in learning, and finding the most effective way to measure what students are learning.* In addition, the team understood that principals needed additional formal training in Child Study and Eligibility requirements for special education.

“I would like to see more training for assistants throughout the year.”
-Survey Respondent

“We should provide more time at the beginning of the year working on caseloads.”
-Survey Respondent

“We are working hard on inclusion and trying to develop a better model.”

“We have good teachers, and we provide good training.”
-Survey Respondent

Instructional Assistants were most interested in professional development related to: *preparing special education students for SOL test, increasing students' engagement in learning, and teaching academic content aligned with state standards and tests.*

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS – Professional Development

1. Continue to Support Best Professional Development Practices Overall

The division has made great strides in providing pertinent professional development for all classifications of personnel since a VASS visiting team worked in Roanoke County eight years ago. The division is encouraged to continue its broad array of professional development opportunities for all personnel.

2. Enhance Specific Interest/Needs for Professional Development

The Director of Special Education is encouraged to collaborate with the Associate Director for Personnel and Staff Development, Directors of Instruction at the central office level, and special education supervisory staff, and principals to determine the best in-service activities for all *collaborating* teachers, regular and special education, and instructional assistants. Wherever possible, schools should try to find release time for collaborating teacher who need additional assistance to visit other schools where collaboration is working to its maximum.

These could be sponsored partly through the central office and through school-based plans. Both the responses from surveys in this study and data from the Classroom Walk-Through Program used by principals could be used.

Since the special education department is in a transitional phase, it might also be a good time to revisit these areas of professional development with all personnel:

- Review of eligibility criteria for disability areas;
- Review of behavior intervention strategies;
- Review of “appropriate” support services for eligible students and how these are obtained.

V. Recommendation Area: Data Management and Budgeting

A. Observation-Commendation

Since the beginning of this school year, collaboration and clear communication between the Director of Special Education and Assistant Superintendent of Finance has addressed several issues related to data gathering and management and budgeting for special education. First, all finance personnel who deal primarily with special education analysis now report to the Assistant Superintendent of Finance but work closely with the Director of Special Education. In addition, as mentioned above, costs of contracted services for special education, previously obtained mainly from outside sources, are being reviewed. In addition, the special education department is expanding the use of data about students and costs to develop planning documents and budgets.

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V. RECOMMENDATIONS – Data Management and Budgeting

1. Develop a Plan for Contracted Services Using Division Personnel

As noted in a previous observation, outsourcing the level of contracted services the division has been doing is costly. For 2005-2006, the finance department calculated these costs were over \$250,000 or 6% of all special education expenditures. The majority of expenditures were in personnel costs - 81% of total costs. There are positions within the personnel cost that potentially could cover some contracted services now obtained from outside sources.

The special education director is encouraged to continue the process of reviewing responsibilities of all special education staff to see how the majority of these services can be brought back in house over the next several years. It may take several budget cycles to achieve this, but the bottom line in reduced costs and additional “ownership” the division will have for the services is worth the process.

2. Enhance Use of Data for Special Education Planning and Budgeting

A goal of the new special education director is to enhance data analysis to assist with special education planning and budgeting and do to this collaboratively with the Assistant Superintendent of Finance. The team suggested several ideas related to working with student numbers while it was on site, and we enumerate these here:

3. Enhance Use of Student Data

a. There is a perception that the number of special education students is increasing when in fact total special education enrollment between 2001 and 2006 has actually decreased by ninety-four (94) students. Because of this and because Roanoke County’s *total* student population has increased, the percentage of students with disabilities is moving closer to the state average; however, if you look closely at *specific disability* areas, there are large increases in certain populations, and these increases impact both least restrictive environment and costs of programs (Child Counts 2001-2006 in Appendix II). The fact that these specific disability areas have increased is one reason the division should explore sharing in the regional program.

Percentage of SPED versus Total Division Membership

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>SPED</u> <u>Dec.Child</u> <u>Count</u>	<u>Fall</u> <u>Mship</u>	<u>%AGE</u> <u>SPED</u>	<u>INCR</u> <u>in SPED</u> <u>County</u>	<u>State</u> <u>%AGE</u> <u>SPED</u>
2001	2323	14029	16.6%		14.2%
2002	2351	14238	16.5%	1.2%	14.5%
2003	2370	14537	16.3%	0.8%	14.8%
2004	2329	14512	16.0%	-1.7%	14.6%
2005	2331	14830	15.7%	0%	14.4%
2006	2229	14891	15.0%	-4%	14.5-15%

*Note: Figures in italics – 2006 - are estimated.

b. The team observed that there were several schools that served a larger percentage of students with disabilities than the overall division percentage. This could be due to the way that programs are placed in spaces available, but it could also be that these schools, for whatever reason, are identifying more students eligible for special education than other schools. The special education director may want to set up a process through which schools in this situation *review their Child Study and referral process and look at the pre-interventions* available for students before referral to see if any of these processes need clarification or improvement.

APPENDIX I

Interview Guide
On-Line Survey

Interview Guide

Interview Protocol: -Introduce yourself – go over purpose of the study

- Remind people of confidentiality
- Ask if person has questions before you begin
- Make interviewees comfortable

Perceptions about Overall Special Education Services

1. How would you describe the *level of support* for special education students in Roanoke County – overall, from the board down to individual employees in the school division?

_____ Excellent _____ Very Good _____ Good _____ Adequate _____ Could be better _____ Not Good

2. What are the greatest strengths of the special education program - what does the division do best to serve immediate and long-term needs of students with special needs?

3. How would you describe the ‘continuum of services’ the county offers its students with special needs?

4. Are there ways the special education program is not as effective as you would like to see it be?

At the central administrative level?

At the school level?

Within a specific disability program area?

In any other way?

Perceptions Regarding Specific Functions of the Program

5. Do you feel the special education program has sufficient and clear procedures and protocols for getting the most appropriate services to students in a timely way?

_____ All of the time _____ Most of the time _____ Some of the time _____ Rarely _____ Never

Are there any policies or procedures for special education programs that are unclear or confusing?

6. Who makes decisions about staffing specific programs and/or classes? Who interviews potential new special education teachers – central office staff, principals, teachers?

7. Are there additional professional development opportunities the division could offer for regular education and special education teachers to enhance curriculum, instructional strategies, student management, other needs?

8. What would you like to see the division do to strengthen the special education program?

Other comments?

Thank you very much.

Roanoke County Schools - On-Line Survey

1. I am a:

Special Education Teacher

Regular Education Teacher

Building Administrator

Instructional Assistant - Special Education

Instructional Assistant - Regular Education

School Psychologist

School Social Worker

School Nurse

Other Professional Services - OT, PT

Other (please specify)

2. I work in a (n): Please check as many as apply

Regular Classroom - no students with IEPs

Inclusion Classroom

Early Childhood Program

Itinerant Program

Resource Program

Alternative Program

Auxiliary/Other Professional Services

Other (please specify)

3. I work with students in: Please check as many as apply

Pre-K

K-5

8-Jun

9-12 and PG

4. I would say the level of support overall for special education students in Roanoke County Schools - from the board down to individual employees in the schools is: Please check only ONE answer

Excellent

Very Good

Good

Okay

Could Be Better

Not Good

5. I would say the level of support for special education programs in Roanoke County Schools from parents is: Please check only ONE answer

Excellent

Very Good

Good

Okay

Could Be Better

Not Good

6. I believe regular education teachers know a lot about specific disabilities of special education students in their classes and know how to work with them effectively: Please check only ONE answer

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

7. I believe special education teachers know a lot about specific disabilities of special education students in their classes and know how to work with them effectively: Please check only ONE answer

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

8. When there are difficulties or misunderstandings regarding the special education program, this is usually the major issue: Please check only ONE answer

Child Study

Referral to Special Education

Eligibility for Services

Most Appropriate Placement

Disciplining Special Education Students

Due Process

Continuum of Services

Other (please specify)

9. The positive aspects of inclusion as practiced in the Roanoke County Schools are: Please check as many as apply

Academic content standards for all students are high

Regular and special education teachers share instruction

Collaborating teachers use multiple instructional strategies to reach all students

Teachers can alternate roles of 'lead' and 'support' teacher

Special education teachers can 'pre-teach' and 're-teach' skills to small groups of students

Teachers share responsibility for student discipline

Special education students improve reading, writing, and study skills in content areas

All students have the best opportunity to pass state-mandated tests

Instructional assistants work with students in small groups

Instructional assistants facilitate cooperative learning activities

Other (please specify)

10. Problematic aspects of inclusion as practiced in Roanoke County Schools are: Please check as many as apply

It's difficult to integrate the values, interests, and methods of diverse teachers

Some collaborating teacher pairs work together better than others

There is little common planning time for collaborating teachers and teacher assistants

Collaborating teachers need to know more about what successful inclusion looks like

Regular education teachers need enhanced training in using differentiated instruction

Students with extreme behavior problems should have options other than inclusion

It's difficult to manage teaching, monitoring behavior, and designing interesting lesson plans for diverse students

Instructional assistants need more training in working in collaborative teaching classrooms

Inclusion is practiced inconsistently in the schools

Other (please specify)

11. I would like more professional development in these areas: Please check as many as apply

Teaching academic content aligned with state standards and tests
Teaching academic content specifically identified in a student's IEP
Preparing special education students for state SOL tests
Increasing students' engagement in learning
Finding the most effective way to measure what students are learning
Adapting curricula and instructional methods for diverse students - differentiation
Working effectively with instructional assistants
Modeling effective inclusion practices
Other (please specify)

12. I feel the special education program has sufficient and clear procedures for getting the most appropriate services to students in a timely way: Please check only ONE answer

All of the time
Most of the time
Some of the time
Rarely
Never

13. Special education procedures I find most unclear or confusing are related to: Please check as many as apply

Child Study
Referral to Special Education
Eligibility for Services
Most Appropriate Placement
Disciplining Special Education Students
Due Process
Continuum of Services
Other (please specify)

14. This year I feel the special education department is doing its best to equitably and consistently staff special education programs in the schools

Strongly Agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX II

Child Counts 2001 – 2005

ROANOKE COUNTY SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDY

Primary = K-3
 Elementary = 4-5
 Middle = 6-8
 High = 9-12 '(thru age 19 on VDOE Child Count)
 PG = Post 9-12 (age 20-22+ on VDOE Child Count)

CHILD COUNT YEARS

Year	School	AUT	DB	DD	ED	HI	MD	MR	OHI	OI	SD	SLD	SLI	VI	TBI	TOTAL	Total
2001	Age 0-4	3		31		2	2		1				62			101	4%
	Primary	8		88	16	1	3	11	50			54	209		3	443	19%
	Elem	5		3	27	5	5	11	81	1	1	154	72	1		366	16%
	Middle	6			55	3	13	22	149		1	309	27		2	587	25%
	High	7			120	8	23	32	218	1	1	398	10		1	819	35%
	PG				1				4			1	1			7	0%
	Total		29		122	219	19	46	80	499	2	4	916	380	1	6	2323
			1%	5%	9%	1%	2%	3%	21%	0%	0%	39%	16%	0%	0%		100%

Year	School	AUT	DB	DD	ED	HI	MD	MR	OHI	OI	SD	SLD	SLI	VI	TBI	TOTAL	Total
2002	Age 0-4	5		43		2			1			1	53	1		106	5%
	Primary	15		83	3	4	7	10	47	1		55	239		3	467	20%
	Elem	3			32	3	8	9	82	1		148	78	1		365	16%
	Middle	9			57	2	8	22	170	1	1	278	29	1	1	579	25%
	High	7			113	10	19	28	219	1	2	409	12			820	35%
	PG				3		4	5	1		1					14	1%
	Total		39		126	208	21	46	74	520	4	4	891	411	3	4	2351
			2%	5%	9%	1%	2%	3%	22%	0%	0%	38%	17%	0%	0%		100%

Year	School	AUT	DB	DD	ED	HI	MD	MR	OHI	OI	SD	SLD	SLI	VI	TBI	TOTAL	Total
2003	Age 0-4	2		59		3			1				59			124	5%
	Primary	16		87	9	3	12	8	39	1		53	250		2	480	20%
	Elem	10			28	3	6	12	79			142	79	1	1	361	15%
	Middle	9			59	3	6	21	164	2	2	264	26	1		557	24%
	High	8			106	6	26	31	226	1	2	414	16		1	837	35%
	PG						4	6	1							11	0%
	Total		45		146	202	18	54	78	510	4	4	873	430	2	4	2370
			2%	6%	9%	1%	2%	3%	22%	0%	0%	37%	18%	0%	0%		100%

Year	School	AUT	DB	DD	ED	HI	MD	MR	OHI	OI	SD	SLD	SLI	VI	TBI	TOTAL	Total	
2004	Age 0-4	2		73		1			2	1			60			139	6%	
	Primary	17		101	8	4	9	5	47	1		50	237			479	21%	
	Elem	16			13	1	10	15	63			143	81	2	3	347	15%	
	Middle	5			59	2	12	20	144	2	1	239	29		1	514	22%	
	High	12			94	7	25	36	236			3	416	10		2	841	36%
	PG						3	3	3							9	0%	
	Total		52		174	174	15	59	79	495	4	4	848	417	2	6	2329	100%
			2%	7%	7%	1%	3%	3%	21%	0%	0%	36%	18%	0%	0%		100%	

Year	School	AUT	DB	DD	ED	HI	MD	MR	OHI	OI	SD	SLD	SLI	VI	TBI	TOTAL	Total
2005	Age 0-4	2		70		3			1				45			121	5%
	Primary	15		125	6	6	10		49	2		44	257			514	22%
	Elem	13			10	2	13	14	73	1		136	68	1	1	332	14%
	Middle	11			54	5	11	18	139	2		244	27	1	1	513	22%
	High	12			99	4	24	46	249			4	393	10	1	842	36%
	PG						4	3	1				1			9	0%
	Total		53		195	169	20	62	81	512	5	4	818	407	3	2	2331
			2%	8%	7%	1%	3%	3%	22%	0%	0%	35%	17%	0%	0%		100%

Increase		83%		60%	-23%	5%	35%	1%	3%	150%	0%	-11%	7%	200%	-67%	0%	
2001-2005		AUT	DB	DD	ED	HI	MD	MR	OHI	OI	SD	SLD	SLI	VI	TBI	TOTAL	