I. INTRODUCTION

In March 2009 the Alexandria City Public School Board adopted a five year Strategic Plan to guide division initiatives for 2010 – 2015. The following statements of principle are excerpted from the plan:

We Believe In Educational Excellence

- Every child deserves a healthy, safe, engaging, supportive and challenging learning environment.

We Believe In Higher Achievement for All

- Each and every student can learn.
- Educational outcomes are not presumed by income, race, disability, gender, language or family background.

To achieve the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan, a detailed Division Education Plan that includes measurable objectives, metrics and targets to assess progress at regular intervals was developed in 2010. Objective #8 of the Division Education Plan requires the school division to “Create an inclusive learning environment in which every child with disabilities has access to the standard curriculum (based on SOL) across a continuum of services.”

In December 2010, the Superintendent directed the Office of Student Services to convene a team of individuals comprised of school-based administrators, parents, central office personnel, general education teachers, special education teachers and outside consultants to develop a comprehensive plan to address inclusive practices in the Alexandria City Public Schools. The group’s mission was to develop a framework of goals, objectives, metrics, targets and tasks to be implemented over the next three years to make certain that the necessary conditions and resources are in place to significantly raise the achievement of students with disabilities while providing services in the least restrictive and most appropriate learning environment. The objectives of the Inclusion Plan are aligned with objective #8 of the Division Education Plan. In addition, schools are to provide individualized support to each student based on the student’s
academic and emotional needs through the use of tiered responses to ensure that all students achieve academic growth.

The inclusion workgroup was created, in part, in response to two evaluative reports: one resulting from the federal monitoring review through the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) in 2008, and the other from a comprehensive qualitative assessment of the Special Education Program conducted by the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) in 2009.

2008 VDOE Federal Monitoring Report

Federal law requires that children with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE), defined as:

“to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are non-disabled and; special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.”

The law requires school divisions to have a “continuum of services” available, extending from the regular education classroom to a hospital setting, in order to accommodate the needs of all students with disabilities. Using the continuum of services makes it more likely that each child would be placed appropriately in an environment that is specifically suited to meet his/her needs. ACPS recognizes that students with disabilities must be placed in the LRE beginning with consideration of the delivery of services in the general education classroom. ACPS also acknowledges that for some students with disabilities the LRE may not be the general education classroom.

The VDOE federal monitoring review conducted in May, 2008 found that ACPS was out of compliance with the regulatory provision of Least Restrictive Environment for students with disabilities. Specifically, ACPS was directed to ensure that placement decisions made by the IEP team conform with the least restrictive environment provisions and that a child not be removed from education in age-appropriate general education classrooms solely because of needed
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modifications in the general curriculum. VDOE found that the school division had too many students receiving services outside of ACPS without consideration for established division-based services. VDOE directed the school division to review its placement of students with disabilities to ensure students are: 1) placed in general education settings with modified curriculum with age-appropriate peers, 2) placed in programs within the division before considering placements outside the division, and 3) given access to alternative programs within the division before being placed outside of the division.

2009 Comprehensive Qualitative Assessment of Special Education.

In October 2008 the Alexandria School Board adopted the 2008-2010 Division Goals. In the area of Special Education, the Board directed that “…a comprehensive qualitative independent assessment of the Special Education Program be completed by June 2009.” ACPS contracted with VASS to complete this assessment. An April 2009 report of findings to the Superintendent and School Board staff from the Educational Services Review Program within VASS identified a number of concerns to include a division-wide culture of low expectations for students with disabilities, inconsistencies in the delivery of special education services across the division and a long-standing achievement gap. The report detailed the need for ACPS to aggressively transform the culture of the school division regarding students with disabilities.

Especially troubling was that the VASS group had made many of the same observations following a 1995 evaluation, and that little progress had been made in meeting the needs of all learners in the general education classroom since that time. The 2009 report noted that schools within ACPS generally did not follow well-established inclusive practices. Rather, placements for students with disabilities “consisted primarily of resource, ‘pull-out’ for reading and math, ‘push-in’ for content curriculum, or self-contained, but very little inclusion.” The report further stated that “there was no perceived process for returning students to their home schools as a result of annual IEP evaluation [from citywide programs]. The citywide programs are an ‘inhibitor’ to inclusion as they exist.”

The 2008 VDOE report and the 2009 qualitative assessment of special education provided the impetus for a reassessment of the division’s special education program, and set in motion a series of initiatives to resolve deficiencies
During the 2009-2010 school year, the Office of Student Services intensified efforts to improve the delivery of special education and related services to students with disabilities in the general education setting by hiring two inclusion specialists. As part of the reorganization of the Office of Student Services and the continued need to support inclusive practices, ACPS hired an additional inclusion specialist for the 2010-2011 school year to specifically address the needs at the secondary level. The specialists focused their efforts on assisting instructional staff and administrators with implementing inclusive practices in schools as a means of providing all students with disabilities access to the general curriculum.

ACPS hired a consultant to provide training and technical assistance to schools. Dr. Lisa Dieker is a nationally-recognized expert in the area of inclusive practices. The focus of professional learning centered on the tenets of co-teaching, the development of school-based inclusion plans, and addressing the needs of diverse learners in the general education classroom. In the summer of 2010, all principals were invited to meet individually with Dr. Dieker to reflect upon and discuss their readiness level in the area of inclusive practices for the upcoming school year. Out of a total of 19 building administrators, 7 took advantage of this opportunity.

Over the past 2 years, ACPS has placed a strong emphasis on serving students with disabilities in their home schools or as close as possible to their home schools. In the fall of 2009, 5 elementary level classes serving students with Developmental Delays were closed and approximately 19 students were moved to their home schools to receive special education services in the LRE. The inclusion specialists supported the students and classroom teachers through the transition from the sending schools to the home schools. To the greatest extent possible, students with moderate disabilities receive services in their home schools unless the IEP team determines that a more restrictive placement is required for the student to receive educational benefit.

These efforts have led to some positive change within some schools. However, significant inconsistencies remain with the level and quality of inclusive practices. Obstacles to the implementation of inclusive practices in ACPS are systemic, and it will require systemic practices and standards implemented with consistency throughout the school division to eliminate them.
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II. BACKGROUND

Students and Settings: In FY 2011 ACPS is providing special education services to 1,661 students with disabilities across a variety of settings. Approximately 63.8% of students are served in the general education classroom for 80% or more of the instructional day, 24.14 % of students receive special education services in the general education classroom for 40-79% of the instructional day and 5.00% of students receive services for less than 40% of the time in the general education classroom. The number of students served in placements outside of ACPS continues to decline; approximately 7.10% of students are served outside of the school division in private day or residential placements. (Note: not all of students served outside of ACPS are placed by the school division. In specific situations, the Department of Rehabilitative Services and Court Services may make decisions regarding student placement In other instances, parents choose to pay tuition for a private placement for their children when they believe it would be a better option.

Student Achievement: Achievement data for students with disabilities is currently measured by utilizing the Virginia State Assessment Program (VSAP) data. The chart below compares the recent pass rates in reading and math of students with disabilities to their non-disabled peers.

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<td>Reading</td>
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<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>VSAP</td>
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Personnel Resources: The current ACPS staffing formula generates 1 teacher for every 20 “points,” as measured by the percentage of special education services in an IEP. Paraprofessional staffing is based on Level II (see glossary of terms) students only; for every 20 Level II points, 1 paraprofessional is generated for that school. Regardless of the point calculations, all schools are granted a minimum base allocation of 2 special education teachers and 1 paraprofessional. Different staffing formulas are applied for students who receive services in city-wide programs specifically designed for students with Autism, Emotional Disabilities and Multiple Disabilities.
An analysis of Level I (see glossary of terms) and Level II services over the past 2 years demonstrates a downward trend in the number of students receiving services for more than 50% of the instructional day. During the 2011 fiscal year, 1,195 students received Level I services and 333 students received Level II services. This is an increase of 232 students for Level I and a decrease of 363 students for Level II from FY2010 to FY2011. Normally this overall decrease would result in a commensurate reduction of licensed professional and support staff positions. In an effort to support the division-wide implementation of inclusive practices 43 licensed and support positions are being held harmless (see glossary of terms) in the FY2012 operating budget. The hiring of 3 inclusion specialists within the last two years has helped schools meet the instructional needs of a diverse student population who are served in inclusive settings. Inclusion specialists provide support to schools through a variety of instructional enhancements to include but not limited to, job embedded coaching, lesson modeling, preparation of curriculum adaptations, scheduling suggestions, and instructional strategies. Despite the work of the inclusion specialists, teachers and staff, ACPS remains in the early stages of building the belief systems and capacity of teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners in the general education classroom.

**Differentiated Instruction and Instructional Supports:** One of the key instructional approaches for teaching all students to achieve at high levels is differentiated instruction. In order to meet the needs of diverse learners we must understand students’ learning styles, readiness levels, interests and learning profiles. With this in mind, differentiating instruction for students with disabilities is one small part of the larger issue of teaching all students. It is essential that ACPS integrate the concepts and effective practices related to differentiated instruction into the inclusive classroom. It is the responsibility of the co-teaching pair to determine the instructional strategies that work best for each student and implement accordingly. A significant number of teachers—both special education and general education—are not prepared with the unique repertoire of strategies needed to enable students with disabilities to achieve at high levels. Without this repertoire teachers often resort to “teaching to the middle” instead of meeting all students’ needs and helping all students advance.

Technology integration is a critical aspect of differentiated instruction. Rather than relying on teachers for direct support, students with disabilities must be taught and motivated to use technology as a means for gaining academic independence and problem solving skills.
The lack of consistency between schools regarding instructional supports continues to be of great concern; students with disabilities are not consistently afforded the same access to teacher specialists, after-school tutoring and other instructional supports as are their non-disabled peers.

School and Classroom Culture: A systemic belief that all children can achieve at high levels in general education classrooms has yet to be acculturated in ACPS. Although some progress has been observed, the necessary systemic and pervasive changes in behavior, beliefs and practices have yet to be demonstrated by all instructional and administrative staff. While we have worked hard to pair special education teachers and general education teachers in inclusive settings, co-teaching in and of itself does not guarantee student success. It must be accompanied by lesson design and implementation that meet the needs of all learners in the classroom.

Prior to 2009 students with moderate cognitive disabilities received special education services in separate settings. Research substantiates that students with disabilities who receive special education services primarily in a separate setting were more likely to experience low expectations for their performance. These students may have limited access to the general education curriculum, which makes it unlikely they will succeed in a general education classroom. It has become a cycle of low expectations of these students contributing to low achievement and low success rates—in school, work and life. Over the past two years some students with moderate cognitive disabilities have been enrolled in their home schools and have experienced success through appropriate interactions in the general education classroom and targeted academic supports, placing them on a positive path to achieving at high levels. Efforts in this area must continue until all students who can be educated appropriately in their home school environment are.

Physical Environment: Although most students are receiving special education services in the general education classroom, there are situations where students require access to appropriate resource room space that is large enough and quiet enough to minimize distractibility and improve attention. Specifically, special education resource room space is often shared with other groups of students, so that simultaneous instruction is taking place within a single classroom; this arrangement can be disruptive to the learning process for the students with disabilities.
Professional Learning: Over the past 2 years a variety of professional learning opportunities have been made available to teachers, administrators and support staff. These include but are not limited to: an overview of inclusive practices; inclusion planning at the school level; co-teaching, co-planning and co-assessing; accommodations and modifications; differentiated instruction and meeting the needs of students with moderate disabilities in the general education classroom.

The school division has experienced moderate success in building inclusive classrooms among staff members who have consistently taken advantage of professional learning opportunities over the past years. Some participants have demonstrated progress in the areas of co-teaching, co-planning and co-assessing in inclusive classrooms, so that ACPS now has pockets of effective co-teaching at various levels throughout the school division. Instructional strategies learned during training and coaching sessions are being applied in some inclusive classrooms on a regular basis, which are strengthening teaching practices and providing enhanced learning opportunities for students with disabilities. Individual coaching sessions by the inclusion specialists have led to the implementation of suggested strategies by some general education teachers, resulting in measurable improvements in instructional practice as observed by the inclusion strategic planning team. In addition, the division education plan and school education plans are focusing our efforts on academic achievement for all learners, as well as inclusive practices.

However, the operative word is "some." What has been missing in ACPS until now is a division-wide plan to train all licensed and paraprofessional staff in differentiated instruction and the characteristics of various disabilities. The moral imperative to provide the necessary supports needed by students with disabilities to learn and thrive in the general education classroom compels us to find ways to put into place these foundational trainings for all administrators and teachers as one component of moving inclusive practices forward. Training modules must be made be accessible through a variety of delivery models (workshops, summer courses, webinars, online learning, coaching, etc.) that respond to schedules and learning preferences of teachers and administrators.

In addition to the recommended foundational training, teachers are required to develop a Professional Learning Plan (PLP) which places emphasis on targeted individual professional
development. PLPs are developed by each licensed staff member in coordination with their supervisor. These plans reflect the professional learning needs of each teacher as they relate to the division and school education plans. Because every school within ACPS has a strategic plan relating to inclusion, PLPs are the vehicle through which additional professional learning related to inclusive practices can be detailed and agreed upon by the educator and his or her evaluator.

III. GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND TASKS

**Goal One:** All students with disabilities will score commensurate with, or higher than, that of the overall population of students without disabilities in the areas of reading and math on the Virginia State Assessment Program (VSAP).

**Objective:** Students with disabilities will achieve at least a 5% gain on the VSAP for each year over the next three years to close the gap of overall achievement in reading and math.

**Metric:** Pass rates for students with and without disabilities on the VSAP.

**Target 1:** By 2012, the discrepancy in reading and math VSAP achievement between students with disabilities and students without disabilities will be reduced to 10% or less.

**Target 2:** By 2013, the discrepancy in reading and math VSAP achievement between students with disabilities and students without disabilities will be reduced to 5% or less.

**Target 3:** By 2014, there will be no discrepancy in reading and math VSAP achievement between students with disabilities and students without disabilities.

- Task 1: Deliver an overview session for administrators and special education lead teachers on the Virginia Accountability System for Students with Disabilities with particular focus on allowable testing accommodations. Lead Teachers will share the testing brochure and information about allowable accommodations for testing with special education teachers and parents.
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- Task 2: Deliver an in-depth training to administrators, designees and special education teachers on the Virginia Accountability System for Students with Disabilities to include the new Virginia Modified Achievement Standards Test (VMAST).
- Task 3: Investigate the implementation process for the introduction of Standards-Based IEPs (see glossary of terms).
- Task 4: Establish a timeline and develop a plan for implementation of Standards-Based IEPs.
- Task 5: Solicit interest and identify participants who are dedicated to implementing Standards Based IEPs as part of a pilot.
- Task 6: Develop training for Standards-Based IEPs.
- Task 7: Implement training in the development of Standards-Based IEPs to administrators, designees, special education teachers related service providers, students and families.
- Task 8: Develop and implement a process checklist for school personnel to review Standards-Based IEPs.
- Task 9: Conduct quarterly reviews of Standards-Based IEPs to ensure compliance during the first year of implementation. Ongoing training and procedural compliance will be conducted and monitored by the procedural staff on a regular basis through monthly trainings with special education lead teachers and administrators.
- Task 10: Gather baseline data by school regarding all instructional interventions provided to all students. Determine the number of students with disabilities who have access to the identified instructional interventions.

Task Narrative:
The data clearly indicates that ACPS students with disabilities are achieving well below their non-disabled peers in the content areas of reading and math. Specifically, an 18-point discrepancy in reading and a 15-point discrepancy in math exist. Through site visits to ACPS schools and anecdotal reports, the team noted systemic inconsistencies in the use of allowable accommodations for students with disabilities throughout the division. What is provided to students varies widely from school to school.

The team also noted the same inconsistency in IEP goals. Some are written with fidelity and reflect the content goals of the general curriculum; others do not. Through the introduction and
implementation of Standards-Based IEPs (see glossary of terms), the achievement of special education students will be directly linked to the general education curriculum—the same way that the achievement of all other ACPS students is measured.

The tasks within this goal focus on training and accountability. Administrators and lead special educators will receive in-depth training on accommodations and assessment opportunities for students with disabilities as allowed under the Virginia Accountability System. Further, tasks requiring, training and implementation of Standards-Based IEPs are included within this goal. A system of compliance checks for properly written Standards-Based IEPs will be required.

**Goal Two**: Students with disabilities will receive special education services in an inclusive setting during the instructional day.

**Objective**: 80% or more of students with disabilities will receive special education services for 80% or more of the instructional day in the general education setting with the necessary instructional supports.

**Metric**: % of special education services provided in the general education classroom.

**Target 1**: By 2012, 70% or more of students with disabilities will receive special education services in the general education setting for 80% or more of the instructional day with the necessary instructional supports.

**Target 2**: By 2013, 75% or more of students with disabilities will receive special education services in the general education setting for 80% or more of the instructional day with the necessary instructional supports.

**Target 3**: By 2014, 80% or more of students with disabilities will receive special education services in the general education setting for 80% or more of the instructional day with the necessary instructional supports.

- Task 1: Establish baseline data (division-wide and school specific) for the level of special education services delivered in the general education setting.
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- Task 2: Identify local and regional school divisions that are successfully serving (as measured by achievement data) 80% of students with disabilities for 80% or more of the day in the general education classroom.
- Task 3: Visit local and regional school divisions that are serving 80% of students with disabilities for 80% or more of the day in the general education classroom.
- Task 4: Monitor progress of individual ACPS schools regarding placement of students in the general education classroom based on local requirements for least restrictive environment.
- Task 5: Monitor continuity of level of special education services for students with disabilities during the transition process from ES to MS and MS to HS.
- Task 6: Develop an inclusive practices considerations guide to assist schools and IEP teams in determining the LRE for individual students.

**Task Narrative:**
Currently no guidelines exist to determine whether to include individual students in the general education classroom or provide services in a more restrictive setting. Additionally, ACPS has no uniform method to determine the range of supports an individual student with disabilities needs in order to succeed in an inclusive classroom. Instead, decisions about services and instructional settings for students with disabilities are made without the necessary data to support the decision making process.

According to state performance plan requirements, the overall goal for the delivery of special education services is: 80% of students with disabilities will receive services in the general education classroom for 80% of the instructional day. Alexandria’s current level of including students in general education is 63.8%. Further, the decision making process for determining LRE for special education students is inconsistent from school to school.

Anecdotal data indicates that when students transition from elementary to middle or middle to high school they are often placed in a more restrictive environment. This shift towards a more restrictive setting is often unnecessary, and results in lost instructional time and additional IEP meetings at the receiving schools. In order to address this issue, a process needs to be implemented whereby a staff member from the receiving school who is knowledgeable about the supports and
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instructional opportunities attends the transition meeting when a student moves from one level to the next.

The tasks within this goal focus on research, development of a guide for determining LRE, and progress monitoring. Baseline data about the percentage of students receiving services in the general education classroom will be gathered at a division and school level. Visitations will be conducted in local or regional school divisions that are recognized both for their inclusive practices and for the achievement of their students with disabilities. The transition between Elementary, Middle and High School will be closely monitored to determine if LRE changes between placements are appropriate. A LRE considerations guide will be developed to assist teams with data-based decision making.

Goal Three: All schools will ensure that each inclusive classroom maintains a proportionate number of students who have academic and/or behavioral needs in order to maximize student achievement.

Objective: Inclusive classrooms will be comprised of no more than 30% of students with disabilities. Decisions about placement and classroom composition will be guided in part by the nature and severity of the disability.

Metric: % of students with disabilities in each inclusive classroom (core subjects are prioritized)

Target 1: By June 2012, all inclusive classrooms will be comprised of no more than 40% of students with disabilities.

Target 2: By June 2013, all inclusive classrooms will be comprised of no more than 30% of students with disabilities.

- Task 1: Collect baseline data on the percentage of students with disabilities in general education classrooms by school.
- Task 2: Develop criteria to schedule students with disabilities first in the master scheduling process and disseminate the criteria to all schools.
- Task 3: Implement a method to communicate the staffing needs at each school prior to the budget staffing process. The Director of Special Education will meet with each principal in the spring and again in the fall to discuss staffing needs based on the percentage of special education services and the severity of the disabilities of the students at the school, as outlined in students’ IEPs. This information will be communicated to the Office of Budget and will be an integral part of the central office special education staffing process.

- Task 4: Develop a set of staffing criteria in order to maintain a classroom composition of no more than 30% of students with disabilities (e.g., the number of content areas taught and grade levels, number of students with disabilities, size of school, needs of individual students)

- Task 5: Develop an elementary school staffing formula based on established criteria and individual student needs. (Note: this formula does not apply to city-wide classes.)

- Task 6: Analyze current schedules of middle school special education teachers to ensure content alignment and minimize the number of grade levels taught by one teacher.

- Task 7: Analyze the feasibility of having middle school special education teachers deliver special education services campus-wide instead of by individual school to ensure alignment of content expertise.

- Task 8: Develop a middle school staffing formula based on established criteria and individual student needs. (Note: this formula does not apply to city-wide classes.)

- Task 9: Develop a high school staffing formula based on established criteria and individual student needs.

- Task 10: Analyze the implications for special education staffing of the implementation of RtI and the delivery of more intensive reading and math interventions to general education students.

**Task Narrative:**

Some inclusive classes in ACPS are comprised of 50% or more of students with disabilities—significantly higher than the generally acknowledged best practice of 30%. This disproportionate representation of students with disabilities negatively impacts the behavior and academic achievement of all students and undermines the intent of the inclusion model. The team discussed some of the problems Alexandria schools have experienced as the division has expanded inclusive practices over the past 2 years. There are anecdotal reports that because inclusive classrooms
have additional staff (co-teachers or a paraprofessional and general education teacher), a practice has developed of placing a disproportionate number of general education students with high behavioral or emotional needs in those classrooms. Consequently, the traditional allocation formula may not provide sufficient staff or the necessary instructional supports for inclusive education in core subjects across grade levels.

The tasks within this goal focus on collecting baseline data on the percentage of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms at each school; scheduling students with disabilities in general education classes according to services on their IEPs; and developing staffing models that serve students at all grade spans and in schools with large and small enrollments. Improved communication between school principals, the Office of Student Services and the Office of Budget is imperative in order to staff schools based on the individual needs of students.

**Goal Four:** All schools will consistently provide an environment for students with disabilities which emphasizes a culture of shared responsibility and accountability for the success of all students.

**Objective:** As measured by the inclusive practices *School Expectations Rubric*, schools shall meet the requirements in the category of *strong evidence* in the areas of adherence to IDEA, special education knowledge, expectation for student achievement, student scheduling, professional development, intra-school IEP communication, instructional interruptions, classroom culture, culture of ownership and accountability, and transitional IEPs.

**Metric:** % of schools performing in the *Strong Evidence* category of the School Expectations Rubric.

**Target 1:** By June 2012, 50% of schools will meet the requirements of the school expectations rubric in the category of “Strong Evidence”

**Target 2:** By June 2013, 75% of schools will meet the requirements of the school expectations rubric in the category of “Strong Evidence”
Target 3: By June 2014, 100% of schools will meet the requirements of the school expectations rubric in the category of “Strong Evidence”

- Task 1: Develop the School Expectations Rubric.
- Task 2: Collect and analyze baseline data on all schools using the School Expectations Rubric.
- Task 3: Share results of School Expectations Rubric with school administrators.
- Task 4: Monitor school progress through ongoing re-evaluation using the School Expectations Rubric to determine current status at each school.
- Task 5: Analyze and report results to the Superintendent.

Task Narrative:
Substantial inconsistencies have been noted throughout ACPS regarding the commitment to and implementation of inclusive practices. The areas of concern include adherence to IDEA, special education knowledge, student achievement and high expectations, student scheduling, professional development, intra-school IEP communication, instructional interruptions, classroom culture, culture of ownership and accountability, and the development of IEPs as students transition from one level to the next.

This situation is a result of a lack of clearly spelled out expectations for school staff and administrators regarding the elements of a successful inclusive school, and the failure to hold those staff members and administrators accountable for inclusive practices. To address these issues, a school expectations rubric will be developed to monitor the progress of all schools in the specific areas mentioned above. Baseline data will be collected using the rubric prior to the end of the 2010-2011 school year. Mid-year and end of year monitoring will take place during the 2011-2012 school year to re-evaluate the progress of every school. The results will be analyzed and provided to the Superintendent.

Goal Five: All students in inclusive classrooms will be supported by teachers and paraprofessionals who are knowledgeable and high performing in the foundational areas of special education to maximize student success.
Objective: 100% of all staff will be required to fully implement the instructional strategies based on the foundational training sessions on inclusive practices in 3 years.

Metric: % of staff who fully implement the foundational training in inclusive practices (Characteristics of Disabilities and Differentiated Instruction)

Target 1: By 2012, 100% of all staff will fully implement the foundational training in the area of Characteristics of Disabilities.

Target 2: By 2013, 50% of licensed staff will fully implement the foundational training in the area of Differentiated Instruction. *Note: All administrators will complete the DI training in year one.*

Target 3: By 2014, 100% of licensed staff will fully implement the foundational training in the area of Differentiated Instruction.

- Task 1: Continue ongoing training in the areas of co-teaching, co-instructing and co-assessing with outside consultant and ACPS trainers for co-teaching partners.
- Task 2: Develop a timeline of professional learning in ACPS for foundational training sessions.
- Task 3: Identify additional human resources for the delivery of the foundational trainings of Characteristics of Disabilities and Differentiated Instruction.
- Task 4: Develop a professional learning tool to teach Characteristics of Disabilities.
- Task 5: Develop a professional learning tool to teach Differentiated Instruction.
- Task 6: Develop a train the trainer (lead teachers) model for the delivery of targeted training to paraprofessionals.
- Task 7: Implement training for special education and general education licensed and support staff in the area of Characteristics of Disabilities.
- Task 8: Implement training for special education and general education teachers in the area of Differentiation of Instruction for students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom.
- Task 9: Conduct overview training for new special education teachers on special education services, procedural processes and instructional strategies during new teacher orientation.
- Task 10: Train administrators on using and implementing the inclusive classroom observation to monitor the implementation of co-teaching, instructional strategies and
inclusive classroom indicators required to meet the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Inclusion specialists will conduct random sampling observations using the observation guide to ensure the integrity of the process.

**Task Narrative:**

Due to the significant implications and intricacies of inclusion it is imperative that staff are adequately trained and prepared, and can fully implement the instructional strategies required to meet the needs of diverse learners. Placing students into inclusive classrooms where the necessary knowledge, skills and strategies are not applied is detrimental to all students. Ongoing training opportunities have been consistently provided in the areas of inclusive practices and instructional strategies over the past 2 years; however, attendance at the training sessions has been poor. It is the responsibility of the Office of Student Services to provide multiple opportunities and venues for professional learning to enable all teachers to access training programs.

Based on an assessment of the professional learning needs of teachers, the following foundational training areas have been identified as priorities: characteristics of disabilities; differentiated instruction; and co-teaching, co-planning and co-assessing. Training should include, but not be limited to those areas. In addition, a “train the trainer” model will be used: Lead teachers will train paraprofessionals in the areas of characteristics of disabilities, instructional strategies, behavior management and data collection.

**IV. CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS**

The following critical success factors are vital to the overall improvement of inclusive practices in ACPS.

- *School Support Staffing*—In order to implement the inclusion plan it will be necessary to hire two additional inclusion specialists to help deliver the extensive professional learning for all instructional staff, support staff and administrators. In addition, the three inclusion specialists currently in ACPS are not sufficient to perform all the duties outlined in this document: observing co-teaching, performing job embedded coaching and conducting progress monitoring using the School Expectations Rubric. All of these are vital instructional supports designed to meet the needs of all students in inclusive learning environments.
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- **School-Based Staffing**—In order to fulfill the appropriate ratio of students with disabilities within general education instructional settings, it is necessary to place an additional 4 FTE special education positions into the staffing reserves. These positions must be available to implement inclusive practices across all grade levels and in all schools (with special attention given to schools with small enrollments.)

- **Leadership and Accountability**—In order to ensure consistently exceptional inclusive practices throughout the school division, it is imperative that principals are held accountable for building the capacity of inclusive practices as outlined in the School Expectations Rubric.

- **Professional Learning**—In recognition of the multitude of professional learning requirements, it is imperative for the trainings outlined in this plan to take priority as a means of directly raising student achievement for students with disabilities. In order to deliver the massive amount of professional learning, a flexible schedule and variety of delivery models (i.e. webinars) will be offered in order to prevent lost instructional time.

**V. PROGRESS MONITORING**
The following progress monitoring tools will be used in order to keep all stakeholders apprised of the progress of implementation.

- Quarterly reports to the Special Education Advisory Committee
- Quarterly progress monitoring reviews and updates on the implementation of the Inclusion Plan to the Inclusion Workgroup
- Monthly progress reports from the Director of Special Education to the Chief Academic Officer
- Semi-annual monitoring of school administrators using the School Expectations Rubric to document accountability in the area of inclusive practices.
- Information and progress updates to be provided at least 2 times during the year at PTA meetings.

**VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**
The inclusion workgroup recommends the following as necessary steps if ACPS is to adequately implement inclusive practices.
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1. The results of the School Expectations Rubric shall be included as documentation to be considered during the mid-year review for principals.

2. Data collected from the Inclusive Practice Observation tool shall be included as a piece of evidence in a teacher’s performance evaluation.

3. The additional 4 FTE special education school-based positions shall be added to the staffing reserves for the 2011-2012 school year (approximately $320,000, funded by Title VI-B 2010 carryover).

4. Two additional inclusion specialists shall be hired to accelerate full implementation of inclusion throughout the division (approximately $160,000, funded through the Title VI-B 2010 carryover).

5. Training on inclusive practices shall be built into the scheduled professional learning time during the 2011-2012 school year. Training opportunities shall include new teacher orientation, the first week back to work for teachers and other occasions throughout the school year.

Addendums:

- Goal Templates
- Working Group Member List
- Walk Through Guide and Rubric
- LRE Data
- Research
- Glossary of Terms