



Special Education and Student Services– Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Overview

Meg Belsito, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services

Patricia Waterhouse, Interim Assistant Director for Student Services

Key Areas of Budget Responsibility

- I. Responsible for supervising all special education staff, including directors, nurses, teachers, therapists, specialists, psychologists, adjustment counselors, applied behavior technicians, child-specific paraeducators, therapeutic support paraeducators, job coaches, and other special education instructional paraeducators.
- II. Oversees and ensures compliance with state and federal Special Education and 504 Accommodation legal requirements including the preparation of all special education and 504 plans and reports required by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the federal Department of Education, and Shrewsbury Public Schools. Coordinates the creation and maintenance of complete and accurate records on all students receiving special education services through an Individualized Education Program and/or 504 Accommodation Plans.
- III. Fiscally and programmatically responsible for students in out of district special education placement programs as well as coordination of transportation for students in our of district placements.
- IV. Cooperates and contracts with public and private agencies and schools, organizations, and other professionals in securing and providing services for students with special needs.
- V. Oversees the creation and maintenance of a current list and description of program options available for students with special needs prek-entitlement services (18-22 years old).
- VI. Oversees and coordinates the staffing of the summer special education programs.
- VII. Ensures processing and submissions of Circuit Breaker Reimbursement Program and federal Medicaid reimbursement claims.
- VIII. Seeks and applies for appropriate state and federal grants.
- IX. Design and facilitate district professional development department offerings, including the key strategic priorities of co-teaching, alternatives to discipline, and mental and behavioral health and social, emotional learning training for implementation of a multi-tiered system of support across all grades and buildings.
- X. Designing programming to meet our diverse student body including the design and implementation of a transition program and retail store.

Key Budget Investments for Fiscal Year 2026

Mandated Services Need

Key investments of \$15,000

Included in this category are:

- 0.2 FTE Nursing for Sherwood Middle School

Efficiencies Through Use of Grants or Alternative Funding in Fiscal Years 2025 & 2026

Grant or alternative funds used for Student Services include:

- \$1,771,015-Federal entitlement 240 grant to support OOD Transportation, RISE Program (Staff, Building Operations, Supplies, etc.), Disproportionality, Proportionate Share, Special Education Transportation

Other Examples of Efficiencies in Fiscal Year 2025-2026 (July 2025-February 2026)

Other Examples of Efficiencies for Student Services:

RISE and Maple & Main

- Maple and Main product revenue to date: \$30,000
- RISE in store donations to date: \$3,640
- Donations through philanthropy: Shrewsbury Federal Credit Union \$100,000 for van and ice cream cart for RISE and Maple and Main, Love Family donation \$7500 (\$5000 to RISE and \$2500 to Parker Road Preschool) and Emily Anderson Marathon fundraiser to date \$20,000 for RISE (funds to be requested for approval by School Committee once fundraiser is complete later this year).
- While FY26 is in progress, estimated FY25 net **program savings** for providing transition services to students enrolled in RISE compared to providing that service as an out-of-district program (including tuition, transportation, and estimated Circuit Breaker reimbursements) was about **\$288,000**

In-District Elementary Therapeutic Program Cost Savings: The cost savings through students remaining in-district through the **Therapeutic Learning Classroom** program that has been established at the elementary level, after considering tuition, transportation, and estimated Circuit Breaker reimbursements, is estimated to be approximately **\$185,000** for the current year.



To: School Committee

**From: Meg Belsito, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
Patricia Waterhouse, Interim Assistant Director for Student Services**

Re: Fiscal Year 2027 Budget for Special Education and Student Services

The Special Education and Student Services Department is committed to identifying and supporting students who require specialized instruction or accommodations through IEPs and 504 Plans. Our mission is to provide these services in the least restrictive environment, empowering students to build on their unique strengths and thrive as active members of society.

Supported by dedicated multidisciplinary teams, we foster an inclusive environment where parents, staff, and community members collaborate to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of every learner. Our vision is rooted in evidence-based practices and transparent communication, ensuring that we celebrate every student's growth and potential.

Shrewsbury Public Schools prioritizes equity, inclusion, and access. This report highlights the evolving complexity of our services and highlights the exceptional diligence of our staff. From the expansion of therapeutic classrooms and co-teaching partnerships to innovative programs like RISE and Maple & Main, we remain steadfast in our mission to enhance the social, emotional, and academic outcomes for all students.

During the 2025-2026 school year, Shrewsbury Public Schools has partnered with District Management Group (DMGroup), an educational consulting organization that possesses significant experience collaborating with districts throughout Massachusetts and New England on special education and intervention services. DMGroup will conduct a Student Services Opportunity Review to enhance our understanding of our strengths and identify areas for improvement concerning services, programs, procedures, potential efficiencies and resources.

The review will take place from Winter to Spring 2026. The review will include:

- Data analysis of student outcomes and service delivery to identify trends and areas for improvement.
- Interviews, focus groups, and surveys to gather input from a wide range of stakeholders and staff.

- Schedule-sharing activity, where staff will log their schedules over one week using a simple online tool to provide insights into the demands on staff time, including instruction, meetings, and paperwork.

All information collected through focus groups, surveys, and schedule sharing will remain anonymous. The goal of this review is to evaluate our systems and structures, not individuals.

This process will provide us with:

- A clearer understanding of what is working well in the district.
- Improved service delivery for students and families.
- Better utilization of district resources to support staff and students.

We look forward to a report later this spring to discuss recommendations and action steps for Student Services.

Student Services Overview

Each staff member brings unique expertise in providing comprehensive services to students across various areas, including academics, nursing, mental health counseling, career planning, special education accommodations, behavior management, crisis intervention, and occupational, physical, speech-language therapies and paraeducator support. Working collaboratively, they strive to promote the well-being and success of every student.

The Student Services Department current year staffing plan includes the following:

Role	Amount
Leadership (Assistant Superintendent; Assistant Director; PreK Director; Elem, Middle, and High School Directors; Nursing Director; Counseling and Mental Health Director; Specialized Programs Director; Elem. Coordinator (0.5 FTE)	9.5 FTE
RISE Program Coordinator and Retail Manager	2.0 FTE
Teachers: PreK, Moderate, and Severe Licensed	71.5 FTE
Therapists (Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, Physical Therapy)	5.8 OT FTE 13.6 SLP FTE 1.0 PT FTE
Clinicians: Psychologists and School Adjustment Counselors	33.0 FTE

District Clinical Coordinators	5.0 FTE
Paraeducators: ABA Technicians, Child Specific Paraeducators, Special Education Assistants, Preschool Assistants, Speech Language Assistants, Therapeutic Support Paraeducators, Job Coaches	126.0 ABA Technicians FTE 48.0 Child Specific Paras. FTE 36.0 Special Education Assts. FTE 10.0 Preschool Assts. FTE 1.0 Speech/Language Assts. FTE 8.0 RISE Job Coaches FTE 3.0 Therapeutic Support Paras FTE
Nurses	13.6 FTE
Team Chairs	7.5 FTE
Secretaries	6.0 FTE
Total	400.5 FTE

*******Due to the nature of Student Services, changes in actual FTE counts fluctuate throughout the year based on additions or subtractions due to student needs (such as students accessing less restrictive programming or student move-ins), acceptance of proposed IEPs, staff vacancies, changes in type of paraeducators required, etc.**

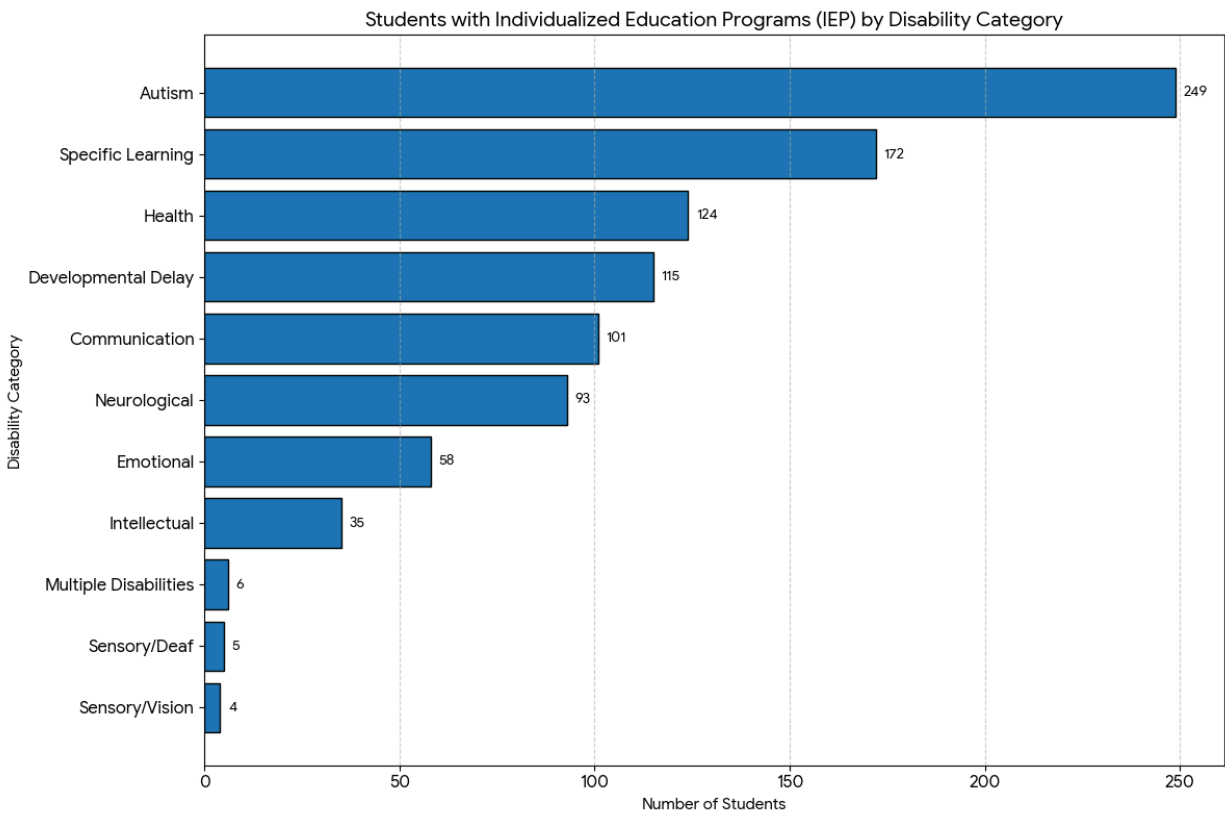
Number of Students with Individualized Education Programs:

The following bar chart illustrates the distribution of the 962 (as of February 2026) students currently receiving support through an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** across various disability categories.

The data reveals a broad spectrum of needs within the district, with several trends that inform our resource allocation and specialized programming:

- **Primary Disability Categories:** **Autism** is the most frequent disability category, representing approximately **26%** of all students with IEPs (249 students). This is followed by **Specific Learning Disabilities** (172 students) and **Health** (124 students), which includes conditions such as ADHD and chronic medical issues.
- **Early Childhood Trends:** The high number of students identified under **Developmental Delay** (115 students) reflects our robust early identification efforts and the critical nature of the preschool-to-kindergarten transition period.
- **High-Incidence Needs:** Categories such as **Communication** (101 students) and **Neurological** (93 students) remain significant areas of focus, requiring a steady investment in speech-language pathology and specialized behavioral supports.
- **Specialized & Low-Incidence Services:** While categories like **Sensory/Deaf** (5) and **Sensory/Vision** (4) have smaller student populations, they require highly specialized, evidence-based instruction and assistive technology to ensure these students can access the curriculum in the least restrictive environment.

By monitoring these demographics, the district can strategically adjust staffing, professional development, and clinical programming—such as the **Therapeutic Learning Classroom (TLC)** and **RISE** program—to meet the specific, evolving needs of our student body while maintaining fiscal responsibility.



Number of Students with Section 504 Accommodation Plans:

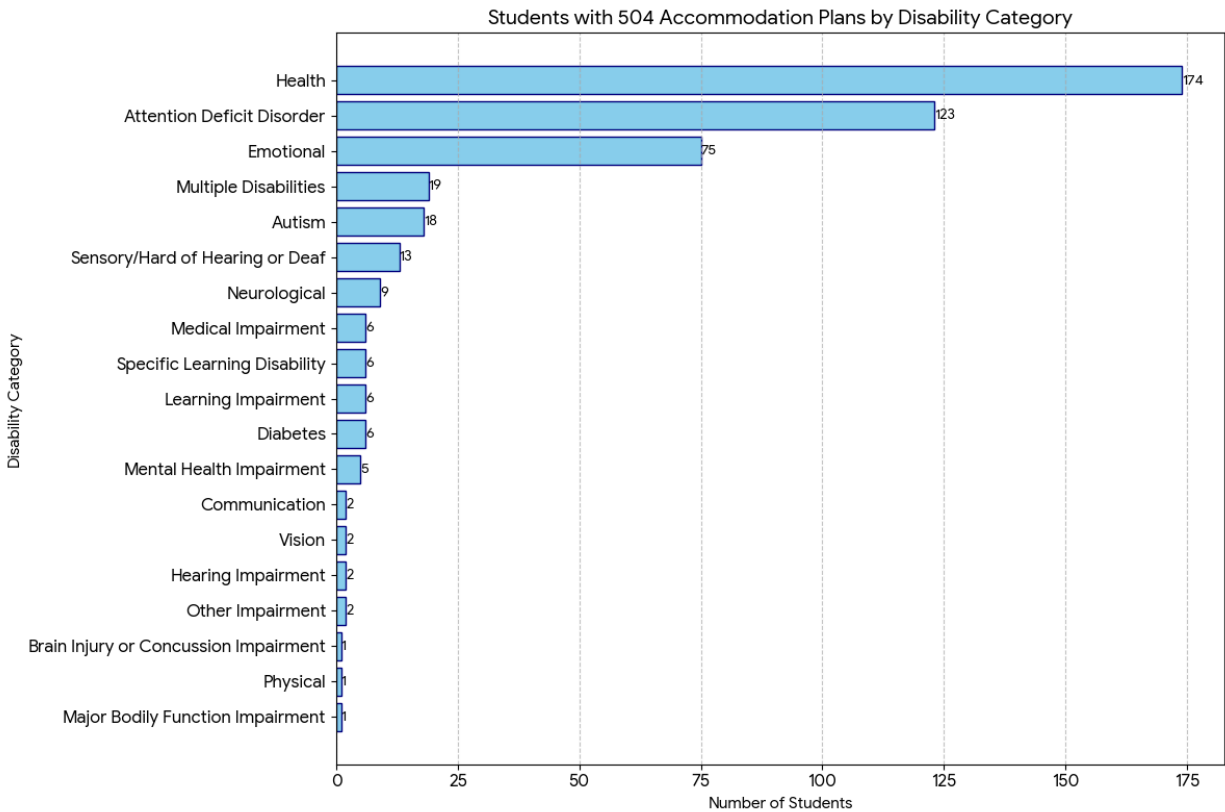
A 504 Accommodation Plan supports students with a documented disability that significantly limits one or more major life functions. While these students do not require specially designed instruction, they need specific classroom accommodations to ensure equal access to education.

Currently, 471 students receive accommodations through 504 plans, up from 446 in the previous fiscal year. Based on the data provided for students with 504 Accommodation Plans, the following bar chart illustrates the distribution of disability categories across the district.

The chart reveals that **Health** (174 students) and **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder** (123 students) represent the most common disability categories requiring 504 accommodations. These are followed by **Emotional** disabilities (75 students). The broad range of categories—from medical and sensory impairments to specific learning and mental health needs—reflects the district's comprehensive approach to supporting diverse student populations through tailored accommodation plans.

Key Data Insights for 504 Accommodation Plans:

- Nearly 63% of students with 504 plans fall under the "Health" or "Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder" categories.
- The district supports a wide variety of lower-incidence needs, including sensory impairments, neurological conditions, and physical impairments, ensuring equitable access for all learners.
- There is a significant cohort of students (80 combined in the Emotional and Mental Health categories) receiving support for social-emotional well-being through 504 plans.



Analysis of Services:

There continues to be an increasing trend of students qualifying for 504 Accommodation Plans, and Individualized Education Programs seem to be relatively stable based on data collected over a 6 year period. This increase in 504s due to the larger number of referrals, students moving into

the district, students with both IEPs and 504s, continued Child Find activities, and the continued impact of the school closure and mental health crisis.

School Year	Total Number of Enrolled Students	Students with Section 504 Accommodation Plans	Percentage of Students Receiving 504s	Students with Individualized Educational Programs	Percentage of Students with IEPs
2018-2019	6,207	206	3.0%	962	15.4%
2019-2020	6,251	235	3.0%	1,020	16.3%
2021-2022	6,008	275	4.5%	996	16.6%
2022-2023	6,076	336	5.5%	977	16.1%
2023-2024	6,108	403	6.6%	1055	17.3%
2024-2025	6,128	446	7.28%	999	16.3%
2025-2026	6,045	471	7.8%	962	16%

Extended School Year Services (ESY):

The **Extended School Year (ESY)** program provides essential support for students whose disability's nature or severity—or a demonstrated pattern of substantial regression and difficulty with skill recoupment due to breaks in service such as school vacations—necessitates instruction beyond the traditional school year. To ensure these services are both impactful and fiscally responsible, our teams rely on rigorous data tracking and eligibility reviews throughout the year to make informed, student-centered decisions.

Behind the scenes, ESY Coordinators and special education leadership engage in a year-round collaborative process to refine the program’s infrastructure. This includes strategic staffing, organizational planning, and an evaluation of student recommendation forms. By analyzing this data early, we are able to design tailored, high-quality programming that directly addresses the specific goals and service qualifications of each participating student.

FY 26 Extended School Year Student Enrollment (Summer 2025):

Programming Type	Student Count
Educational Learning Center (ELC) Classrooms	127
Academic Classrooms	96
Intensive Classroom	14
RISE	25
Total	262

262 students accessed ESY services, but this number only represents a portion of the program. Many students who participate in the academic, intensive, and ELC programs also receive multiple related services weekly, which requires additional staff to complete all services during the summer.

FY 26 Extended School Year Professional Staffing Plan:

ESY Staff	Total FTE
Teachers: PreK & Moderate	11.0 FTE
Therapists (Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, Physical Therapy)	1.0 OT FTE 3.1 SLP FTE 0.2 PT FTE
Structured Reading	3.0 FTE
ESY Coordinators and Admin. Asst.	3.0 FTE
RISE Coordinator, Retail Manager, Teachers	4.0 FTE
ELC Coordinators	7.0 FTE

Out-of-District Programming:

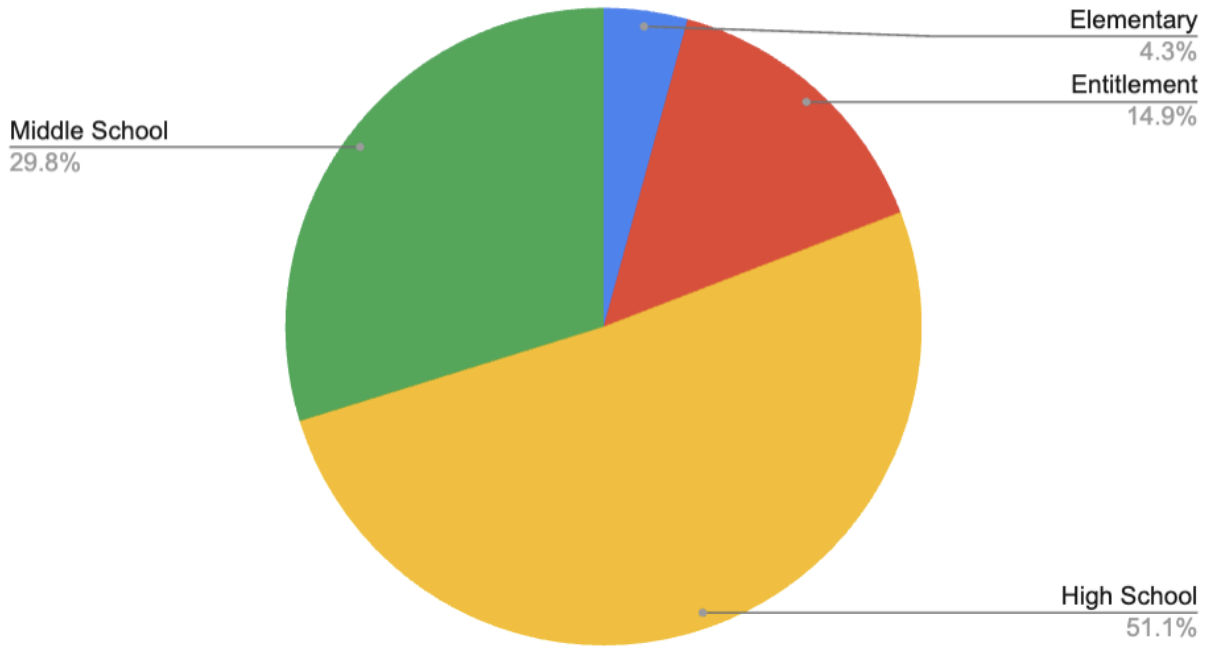
Shrewsbury Student Services is committed to supporting students to make effective progress in the least restrictive environment, empowering students and ensuring access to education that builds on their individual strengths and abilities. However, some students are not able to make effective progress in district programs and schools, and may require a more restrictive setting to make meaningful progress, due to their individual needs. Before coming to this conclusion, in-district IEP and school based teams exhaust all other less restrictive settings and interventions, and carefully monitor progress to ensure all students are making progress commensurate with their learning profile.

Once an IEP team determines that a student requires a more restrictive setting in order to make effective progress, the student/family are supported through the process of reviewing potential programs and referring the student to those programs for consideration to ensure that the identified school(s) can meet their needs. Families are an integral part of that decision making process of determining the appropriate program, in collaboration with the district. The district recommends potential placements that offer increasing levels of support beyond what the public school can provide. Approved out-of-district programs vary in what and how services are provided. A range of program types from less restrictive to more restrictive include: Entitlement programs providing school and community services to students between the ages of 18-22 who require additional supports beyond 12th grade; public day programs provided by special education collaboratives governed by a board of local administrators, which may or may not operate within a public school setting; private day placements, which are Chapter 766-approved and sanctioned by DESE; and finally, residential treatment programs for students with highly complex learning, living, therapeutic and safety needs. Residential treatment programs are also governed by DESE, and offer 24/7, year-round education, support and supervision.

There are currently 51 students placed in Out of District Placements. Below is the breakdown of students in OOD placements by grade level, with middle school being grades 5-8, and “entitlement” referring to post secondary education, or students ages 18-22.

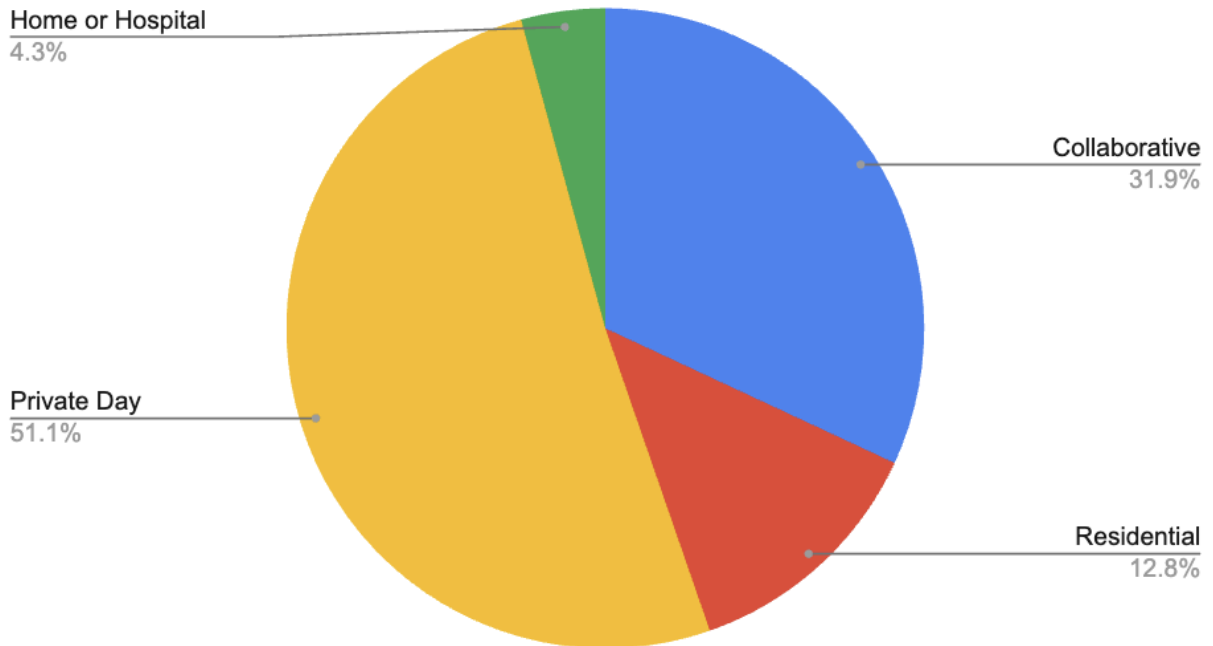
Below you will find a breakdown by age level of our current student population accessing their education at a more intense level of programming. Prior to the establishment of our RISE program, the percentage of OOD students in entitlement programs was much higher.

OOD students by age level



Below you will find a breakdown of placements of our current student population accessing their education at a more intense level of programming, broken down by type of placement. The category of Collaborative includes both students in the Assabet Valley Collaboratives, of which Shrewsbury is a member and therefore is considered a “substantially separate” program, as well as students placed at other collaboratives within MA.

% of OOD students, by placement type

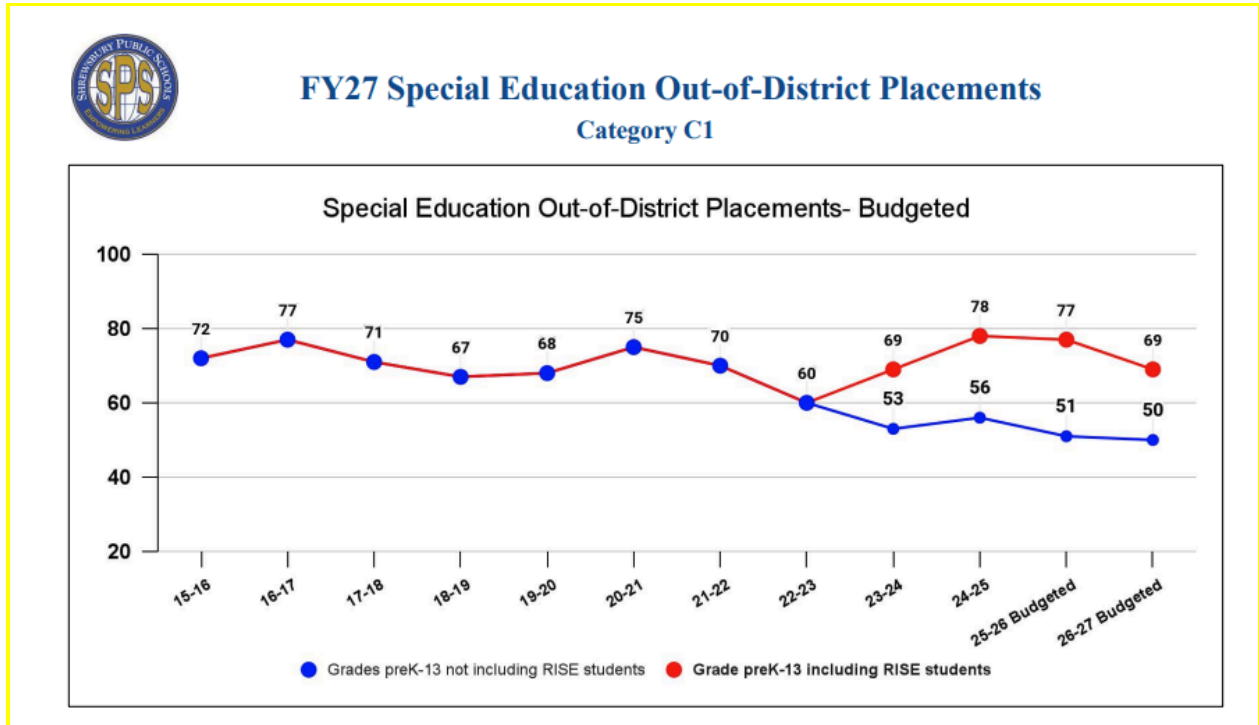


Out-of-district enrollment is projected to remain steady in Fiscal Year 2027, at 50 students. Factors influencing the number of students for next year include a family residency assignment (known as a Local Educational Agency, or LEA, assignment – see below) by DESE this year where one parent no longer resides in Shrewsbury, students who are currently educated in-district but who have been approved for OOD placement for the coming year, a student who was accepted for OOD last year but waitlisted, and students entering post secondary entitlement years, along with a number of current OOD students who will graduate or age out by June 2026. This enrollment is dynamic and will likely change over the course of the rest of this school year and also through next year.

Notably, already included in the current and projected number of students placed out of district, there are 3 students for whom Shrewsbury Public Schools shares the cost of placement equally with another district, due to having parents who each live in one of the districts. A cost share status must be approved by the Operational Services Division (OSD) via an “LEA Assignment”, and results in the district responsible for only half of that student’s tuition.

Student Services continuously evaluates the needs of students requiring our most restrictive placements to determine if their needs could be met in less restrictive placements, and

simultaneously supports our in-district service providers on an ongoing basis to meet student needs in the least restrictive environments possible that allow students to make effective progress. If a student is considered for potential change to a less restrictive setting, and particularly for a move back into the district, internal teams meet regularly to observe, identify needs, and plan for student transitions as needed. For example, if Student Services administrators are considering a student to move back into the district, an extended evaluation (i.e. a 45 day trial, can be conducted in the district, which preserves the current placement and trials a less restrictive environment, while collecting and analyzing data to determine if the student is able to make progress in the less restrictive environment).



As you can see, the district trends have shown a decline in students requiring out-of-district placements over time. This positive trend is attributed to several key factors, including:

1. Development of In-District Programs: Our RISE program for students ages 18–22 and our Therapeutic Learning Classroom (TLC) keeps students within Shrewsbury rather than outsourcing to external programs.
2. Enhanced Therapeutic Supports: Increased access to therapeutic services in our district provides students with the support they need before causing teams to consider a more restrictive level of programming to support them.
3. Professional Development: Ongoing training in collaborative problem solving and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) equips staff with effective strategies to support students' needs.

For context, if the 25 students currently enrolled in RISE attended an external collaborative program, the estimated cost (before transportation and state reimbursement) would be \$1.91 million, based on an average tuition of \$76,241 per student; for the last full fiscal year, we

projected a net savings of about \$288,000 by having these students enrolled in our in-district RISE program.

Additionally, if our 6 Therapeutic Learning Classroom students required out-of-district therapeutic placements, the district would face approximately \$480,000 in tuition costs and an estimate of another \$250,000 in out-of-district 1:1 staffing costs—again, not including transportation. Our estimate for net savings for these students in the current year by educating them within the district, including estimated transportation and Circuit Breaker reimbursement, is about \$185,000.

These in-district initiatives not only provide tailored support to our students in their local community but also result in cost savings in a program managed by our district.

Out of District Fiscal Impact:

As noted above, the out-of-district budget is fluid and may fluctuate as students are accepted into approved special education programs. The [Operational Services Division](#) sets tuition rates for M.G.L.-approved private special education programs purchased by municipalities and state departments.

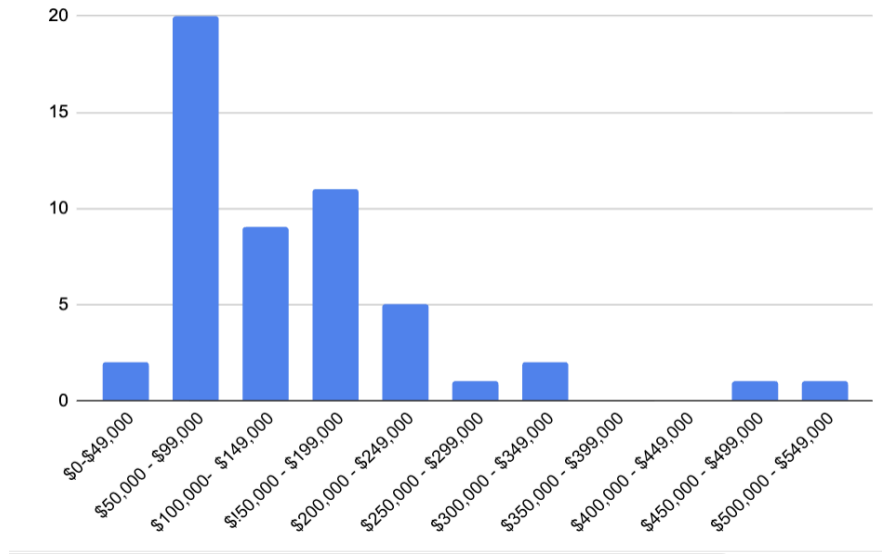
For this upcoming fiscal year, OSD approved a 3.04% increase for all Chapter 766-approved schools, applying this rate of inflation to all out-of-district placements.

The Operational Services Division (OSD) oversees and regulates Individual Price Authorization under 808 CMR 1.06(7)(a). An “Individual Price” is required for additional, unique, or specialized services mandated by an approved or amended Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that are not covered by a program’s established tuition. This may include services such as 1:1 support or other related interventions not regularly provided by the placement, resulting in costs beyond the approved tuition. The funding for these additional services is determined by the program or contracted provider.

Additionally, 2 of the OOD programs where we currently have placed students from Shrewsbury Public Schools have applied for a rate increase through a process called Reconstruction, which could, if approved by OSD, increase tuition for these placements by \$19,695.36 and \$32,022.18.

Because the number of students in out of district placements can fluctuate depending on varied circumstances, this projection could shift in either direction in the coming months. The chart below breaks down the number of forecasted out of district students by tuition cost. The total budgeted cost for out of district expenditures is currently \$7.55 Million for FY2026, and is estimated at \$7.79 Million for FY2027 due to the 3.04% approved inflation rate, projected reconstruction tuition rates, and differences in programs between this year and next year. This total estimated cost does not reflect the proportion budgeted to be paid from state Circuit Breaker reimbursement funds, which is illustrated in the next section.

Number of OOD placements by cost range for FY 27 Projected



Special Education Circuit Breaker:

The **Special Education Circuit Breaker** program is a vital state-funding mechanism designed to help districts manage the significant financial impact of high-cost special education services. Established in 2004, this program provides a "safety net" reimbursement for expenses that exceed four times the state's average foundation budget per pupil. By offsetting these intensive costs, the Circuit Breaker account ensures the district can provide high-quality, specialized placements without compromising the resources available for other educational programs.

To ensure fiscal accuracy, the Student Services Office engages in a semi-annual reporting process:

- **Data Submission:** Each winter and spring, our office submits detailed claims to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), documenting qualifying tuition and services.
- **The Threshold Formula:** Reimbursements are calculated based on the previous year's expenditures. Once a student's services cross the financial threshold, the state typically reimburses up to **75%** of the costs exceeding that limit, but we have seen some fluctuations subject to annual legislative appropriation, especially with regard to the reimbursement for out-of-district transportation costs (e.g., the current reimbursement percentage for transportation being received this year for last year's costs is only 61.36% at this time).

This financial table outlines the **Initial FY27 Budget Recommendation** for Special Education Out-of-District (OOD) tuitions, highlighting how the district leverages state Circuit Breaker funds to offset town-appropriated expenses.

Special Education Out-of-District Tuitions Category C1

Initial FY27 Budget Recommendation- February 2026	
FY27 Planned Use of Circuit Breaker vs Town Appropriated Funding for Special Education Tuitions	
1. Total Out-of-District Tuition Cost Projection for FY27	\$ 7,798,005
2. Estimate for Circuit Breaker Reserve at End of FY26	\$ 3,016,792
3. Estimate Additional Carry Forward from Overall FY26 Positive Budget Variance	\$ 238,930
4. Estimate for Circuit Breaker Funds To Be Received in FY27 (Reimbursement for FY26 Costs)	\$ 4,336,516
5. Total Estimated Circuit Breaker Funds Available in FY27 (Lines 2 + 3 + 4)	\$ 7,592,238
6. Estimate for Planned Use of Circuit Breaker Funds in FY27 for Out-of-District Tuitions (Circuit Breaker Offset)	\$ (5,423,980)
7. Budgeted Use of Town Appropriated Funds in FY27 to Pay Special Education Tuitions	\$ (2,374,025)
8. Total Funds Budgeted to Pay Out-of District Tuition (Line 6 Circuit Breaker Offset + Line 7 Town Appropriated Funds)	\$ (7,798,005)
9. Estimate for Circuit Breaker Reserve Balance at End of FY27 (Line 5 less Line 6)	\$ 2,168,258
10. Percentage of maximum Circuit Breaker Reserve Carry Forward (Line 9/Line 4)	50.00%

The district has projected a total cost of **\$7,798,005** for out-of-district tuition in FY27. To cover these costs, the budget utilizes a combination of two primary funding sources:

- **Circuit Breaker Offset:** **\$5,423,980** will be applied from state reimbursement reserves.
- **Town Appropriated Funds:** The remaining **\$2,374,025** is budgeted to be paid through local town funding.

Circuit Breaker Reserve Management

The chart also details a Circuit Breaker reserve, which is essential for managing year-over-year fluctuations in high-cost student placements or other unanticipated costs:

- **Total Available Funds:** For FY27, the district expects to have **\$7,592,238** in total Circuit Breaker funds available. This includes the year-end reserve from FY26 (\$3,016,792), additional carry-forward from budget variances (\$238,930), and anticipated FY27 reimbursements (\$4,336,516).
- **End-of-Year Projection:** After applying the \$5.4 million offset, the district estimates a remaining Circuit Breaker reserve balance of **\$2,168,258** at the end of FY27.
- **Fiscal Sustainability:** The district is maintaining a **50.00%** carry-forward percentage of the maximum allowed Circuit Breaker reserve, ensuring a financial "safety net" to start the following fiscal year.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Special Education Grant 240:

In Shrewsbury, Federal Special Education Grant 240 primarily funds RISE (Reaching Independence through Supported Employment) and special education transportation. The 240 Grant also allocates funds for Proportionate Share. Proportionate Share is an amount of the district's IDEA funds allocated to eligible parentally-placed students who are privately educated in the district's geographic boundaries regardless of student's residency and those that are home-schooled and reside in Shrewsbury.

Proportionate Share

In July 2017, DESE issued guidance regarding the IDEA funds through the 240 Grant allocation to monitor Proportionate Share. Annually, our district must calculate the proportionate share for privately placed schools in Shrewsbury and home schooled students. Each year the district must have meaningful consultation with our 7 local private institutions at minimum 3 times a year. Annually, the district holds individual student service meetings with each family that has a student with an active IEP. The allocated set funds for FY26 was a net sum of \$80,227 to support the needs for students that are eligible and maintain active IEPs. This net sum is calculated using the Department's formula which is based upon the enrollment numbers of students with active IEPs that are provided to Shrewsbury by the private schools which is an increase of 4.5% from last fiscal year.

In terms of expenditures, Shrewsbury has partnered with St. John's High School and their Gregory Academic Center to provide two part time tutors to address the academic and executive functioning needs of eligible students with active IEPs. Shrewsbury also consulted with Al Hamra Academy, St. Mary's Elementary School and Lilliput to provide additional academic and social skills support as well as curriculum materials for their students with active IEPs.

Significant Disproportionality

DESE is required under federal regulations to analyze data from school districts to identify and report to the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs regarding Significant Disproportionality in special education within racial and ethnic groups. This analysis is conducted pursuant to requirements under IDEA. The determination was made

following a review of data reported to DESE through the Student Information Management System and the Student Safety and Discipline Reports for the prior three years. The threshold rate for the formula established by the state is a “risk ratio” of 3.0 or higher, meaning a demographic group is 3.0 or more times as likely to be identified as other groups for one of several categories of disability or discipline.

Shrewsbury has been notified that the district exceeds the threshold for students identified as “White with a Health Impairment” and “White with an Emotional Disability.” To address this disproportionality, Shrewsbury must allocate 15% of the 240 Grant (approximately \$250,000) for fiscal years 2027 and 2028. A team of Shrewsbury representatives has been attending professional development training since October 2025, which is preparing that team to draft an action plan that will be submitted to DESE in March 2026 for approval. The plan will include a root cause analysis to demonstrate how the district determined the cause of the disproportionality, as well as development of a plan to make changes and train personnel across the district to recognize, prevent, and address disproportionality. As part of the process of drafting the action plan, the team also carefully examined district policies, protocols and procedures to ensure that systemic factors were contributing to the disproportionality. The district will continue to monitor all student groups for potential overidentification based on race and ethnicity, particularly regarding placement, disability type, and discipline.

In the past, funding has been utilized to support initiatives such as the May Institute for consultation and training across the district in the area of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS), Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS), psychological consultation from Dr. Alex Hirschburg for the Therapeutic Learning Classroom and Dr. Lisa Dieker for Co-Teaching, the Blume Method application to support the new IEP, Lexia Reading Software, PBIS Leads and teams in each building and Structured Reading Leads. These initiatives address two major district strategic goals: Implement common processes for implementing interventions and supports to ensure all students are making effective progress with academic, social, emotional, and behavioral development, including implementing the first phase of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework and Implement a therapeutic program at the elementary grade span to provide specialized support for students who qualify due to significant social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Further information about this year’s plan will be available later this school year, as the plan is submitted and reviewed by DESE for approval or feedback/revision. Some anticipated expenditures from this year’s plan will be stipends for a task force to analyze data, provide ongoing training and monitoring, and purchase of outside resources to ensure consistency of IEP team decision making at the eligibility determination level.

Other Student Services Costs

Contracted Services

The Student Services Department collaborates with certified contract specialists to provide mandated services and support for students with low-incidence disabilities within the district. These specialists offer expertise in various areas, including Psychiatry, Orientation and Mobility, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Behavior, Teacher of the Deaf, Home-Based Services, Teacher of Deaf/Blind, Audiological Services, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, and Assistive Technology.

Legal Consultation

Our legal counsel assists the district in navigating state and federal special education laws, offering guidance in legal decision-making and representing the district through appeals processes. While our team prioritizes resolving IEP disputes collaboratively with families, there are instances where mediation, pre-conference hearings, or formal hearings with the Bureau of Special Education Appeals (BSEA) are necessary to ensure appropriate educational programming for students. Full legal representation may be required during these proceedings.

Translation and Interpretation Services

In compliance with state and federal laws, the district provides special education communications to students and parents in their home language, both in writing and verbally.

Home and Hospital Tutoring

The district offers tutoring services to students who are absent for more than 14 consecutive or cumulative school days due to illness. A physician’s statement is required to initiate the home or hospital tutoring process.

Assessment Materials

Special education staff utilize standardized assessments for initial evaluations and reevaluations to determine eligibility for special education services. When assessment tools become outdated, the district adheres to a two-year replacement window to maintain compliance and ensure accuracy.

Contracted Services	FY26 Approved Budget	FY 27 Recommended Budget	Difference FY26 to FY27
Legal Fees	\$48,672	\$50,132	\$1,460
Home/Hospital	\$5,408	\$5,571	\$163
Educational Services	\$103,691	\$106,801	\$3,110
Translations	\$50,656	\$52,176	\$1,520
Evaluations	\$18,928	\$19,496	\$568
Psychological Services	\$54,080	\$55,702	\$1,622
Summer Therapies	\$10,816	\$11,140	\$324
SPED Therapies	\$223,553	\$230,260	\$6,707

Summary, Priorities and Impact

As evidenced by this report, Student Services is inherently complex, shaped by diverse student needs—ranging from unique learning differences to behavioral challenges—and a rigorous legal framework governed by the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** and **Section 504**. Meeting these mandates requires a multifaceted, multi-tiered approach that balances procedural compliance with high-quality, individualized instruction.

Summary of Core Commitments:

- **Strategic Independence:** We prioritize "fading" supports as students gain confidence, ensuring that adult assistance evolves into student self-reliance.
- **Collaborative IEP Development:** By fostering open dialogue between parents, educators, and specialists, we align Individualized Education Programs with rigorous academic standards and evidence-based best practices.
- **Resource Optimization:** We strategically manage personnel, assistive technology, and specialized funding to ensure that resources are deployed where they have the most meaningful impact on student outcomes.
- **Professional Growth:** Continuous staff training ensures our educators remain at the forefront of specialized instruction, equipped with the latest tools to support diverse learners.
- **Unified Coordination:** Through seamless communication between school teams and external agencies, we maintain a cohesive, inclusive environment that nurtures the academic, social, and emotional growth of every student.

Priorities and Impact by Level and Area

This section highlights some of the many positive impacts on students and their families from the budgeted funds allocated to the student services department.

Preschool: By prioritizing expanded access and a proactive service model, the Shrewsbury preschool program creates a high-impact foundation that ensures long-term academic and fiscal sustainability. Through the "front-loading" of support—including full-day programming, the implementation of the DESE Transition Toolkit, and a data-driven MTSS framework—the district effectively bridges the gap between preschool and Kindergarten. These initiatives emphasize "day-one" readiness, utilizing real-time data dashboards to guide instruction and increasing classroom engagement through high rates of Opportunities to Respond (OTR) and Behavior Specific Praise (BSP). Ultimately, this strategic investment reduces the need for initial special education referrals and intensive future interventions, allowing the district to allocate resources more efficiently while fostering an equitable environment where students thrive from their earliest point of entry.

Elementary: The elementary level is refining its instructional model by prioritizing data-driven precision and strategic independence. By streamlining "data dig" protocols and formalizing six-week pre-team planning meetings, educators are now able to align literacy interventions directly with specific student deficit areas and ensure that adult support is intentionally designed to fade as students gain self-reliance. This focus on efficiency extends to the "Through Line" IEP

process, which creates a clear, evidence-based narrative connecting a student's current performance to targeted goals and inclusive programming. Furthermore, the development of skill progressions within the Therapeutic Learning Classroom (TLC) provides a vital safety net, allowing high-risk students to remain in their community while systematically building the stamina and skills necessary for meaningful inclusion.

Middle Level: At the middle school level, the priority is ensuring high-school readiness through rigorous, research-based literacy interventions and inclusive instructional practices. The expansion of structured reading support at Sherwood and Oak Middle School has significantly increased student access to specialized interventions, providing a critical bridge to secondary-level expectations. Simultaneously, the implementation of the Expeditionary Learning (EL) Tier 1 ELA curriculum has served as a catalyst for professional growth; special education teachers and related service providers have engaged in ongoing professional learning to master these high-quality materials. By focusing on sophisticated scaffolding techniques, staff ensure that all students can meaningfully access complex grade-level content, fostering an environment where academic high standards and individualized support work in tandem.

High School: The Special Education Department at Shrewsbury High School is currently engaged in updating curriculum guides across all courses. This work includes the development of comprehensive scope and sequence documents and curriculum maps outlining units of study with clearly defined expected course outcomes for all students. Each unit incorporates guiding or essential questions, key concepts, content and skill development, and assessments aligned with intended learning outcomes. Curriculum development occurs during after-school department meetings and scheduled professional development days when available. In addition, the department is expanding vocational and community-based learning opportunities through collaborative efforts with student interns and cross-departmental colleagues, including those in Business and Consumer Science.

Intensive/Severe Programming: The group of educators working with students who have Intensive and severe disabilities has focused on ensuring students learn in the least restrictive environment while building independence across all areas and grade levels. Professional Development was delivered to ELC Coordinators, Intensive teachers, and Team Chairs to build capacity and to roll out data collection forms and fading plan templates. This work is supported largely by the ELC Clinical Coordinator who partners with teams to collect and analyze data to help them identify when adult support is needed—and when it's time to fade it. By using clear data and thoughtful planning, we're supporting growing independence and making sure adult support evolves as students do.

Clinical Counseling and Mental Health: The Clinical Counseling and Mental Health Department has become a cornerstone of student success by shifting from reactive support to a proactive, data-driven model. By implementing universal mental health screeners for students in grades 6 through 11, the department ensures that internalizing struggles like anxiety and depression are identified early rather than overlooked. This diagnostic precision is matched by targeted interventions, such as Tier 2 groups focusing on social pragmatics and emotional regulation for K-8 students.

To ensure these resources reach the right students, the Student Well-Being Teams (SWT) utilizes data-informed clinical decision-making to tailor support to individual needs. Perhaps most impactfully, the development of the Therapeutic Learning Classroom (TLC) at the elementary level provides a vital safety net for high-risk students. By addressing significant social, emotional, and behavioral barriers on-site, the TLC facilitates meaningful inclusion and allows students to achieve educational success within their own community, significantly reducing the need for out-of-district placements.

Recommendations for 2026/2027 School Year

Through observations, analysis and collaborative conversations with administrators and staff, the following position will further develop Shrewsbury Public Schools Student Services programs with integrity and consistency.

Position added during FY26 and included in FY27:

- 1.0 FTE School Adjustment Counselor at Sherwood
(This position was absorbed within the allocated personnel budget at no additional cost)

Positions needed to meet increased student need:

- 0.2 FTE Nursing Sherwood Middle School (\$15,000)

Positions moving from grant funding to the School Department budget:

- 1.0 Therapeutic Learning Classroom Teacher (\$118,262)
- 1.0 Therapeutic Learning Classroom Adjustment Counselor (\$82,692)

These two positions were added using Emergency Homeless Shelter state grant funding to establish this program; as noted above, the Therapeutic Learning Classroom is providing substantial cost savings compared to educating students in out-of-district placements while keeping students in their home community.

Lastly, our department will continue to look for potential efficiencies and, where warranted, to make shifts within existing programming and personnel assignments to address needs without additional funding allocations.

In conclusion, in the Special Education and Student Services Department, we believe every student possesses unique strengths that deserve to be celebrated. Our work goes beyond meeting federal and state mandates for IEPs and 504 Plans; we are dedicated to creating an inclusive culture where every learner has the tools to succeed in the least restrictive environment possible.

Success is a collaborative effort. By bridging the gap between home, school, and the broader community, we ensure our students feel respected and supported. We don't just focus on academic benchmarks—we prioritize the "whole child" through evidence-based social-emotional and behavioral support.

As the educational landscape shifts, our commitment to equity and access remains unchanged. Whether through our unified programming, Therapeutic Learning Classroom, or transition initiatives like RISE and Maple & Main, we are proud to provide thoughtful, efficient resources that meet the diverse needs of our district. This report reflects our staff's passion and our district's unwavering belief in a bright future for every student.