

# Fairfax County Special Education Comprehensive Review

## TECHNICAL AND COST PROPOSAL FOR YEAR 2 SCOPE OF WORK EXTENSION

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**In Response to the October 27, 2021 School Board Audit Committee Meeting: Contract  
No. 4400010175**

**November 5, 2021**

**Submitted to:**

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**Submitted by:**

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November 5, 2021

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**AIR.ORG**

RE: Fairfax County Special Education Comprehensive Review: Technical and Cost Proposal  
for Year 2 Scope of Work Extension

Dear Ms. Ko:

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is pleased to serve as the independent, third-party reviewer for the *Fairfax County Special Education Comprehensive Review* project. AIR thanks the members of the Fairfax County School Board for their feedback on the Year 1 interim report given during the September 21, 2021 meeting and the School Board Audit Committee for their feedback during the October 27, 2021 meeting. AIR has carefully considered this feedback and its implications for Year 2 data collection activities. AIR has prepared this proposal to outline ways that the scope of work for the project may be expanded in Year 2 to address the requests made by School Board members. This proposal includes technical and cost information for the proposed activities and details how they will contribute to the success of the review.

Please direct contractual questions about this proposal to Sarah Strom, contracts administrator, at 202-403-6248 or [sstrom@air.org](mailto:sstrom@air.org). For technical questions, please contact Lindsey Hayes at 202-403-5999 or [lhayes@air.org](mailto:lhayes@air.org).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Allison Gandhi".

Allison Gandhi  
Vice President  
Learning Supports

## Background

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) contracted with the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) in October 2020 to conduct an independent, third-party review of its special education program. In *RFP 2000003084: Special Education Comprehensive Review*, FCPS specified research questions for the review corresponding with goal areas: (a) evaluate the system's design, structure, and established processes; (b) evaluate the adequacy of human capital resources; (c) analyze the alignment of services with evidence-based practices; and (d) evaluate the effectiveness of communication with stakeholders. The original research questions provided by FCPS in the Request for Proposal (RFP) document are located in Appendix A.

The period of performance for the project is 2 years (October 23, 2020–October 22, 2022). The comprehensive review of FCPS's special education program is occurring in two phases, corresponding with the first and second years of the project. Year 1 included extant data analysis; document analysis; an audit of a stratified, random, representative sample of individualized education programs (IEPs); staff and parent surveys; and key informant focus groups. Year 1 culminated in the delivery of an interim report and presentation at the Fairfax County School Board meeting on September 21, 2021. Year 2 data collection activities will include stakeholder focus groups and classroom observations.

## Proposals From the October 27<sup>th</sup> School Board Audit Committee Meeting

Based on feedback from School Board members at the September meeting, AIR prepared a proposal for an expanded scope of work for Year 2 of the project. Some of the requests for data collection and analysis activities made by School Board members are within our scope of work and will be addressed in our planned Year 2 data collection activities. Other requests fall outside the scope of the work outlined in the acceptance agreement dated October 23, 2020.

AIR's proposal for an expanded scope of work for Year 2 was presented to the Fairfax County School Board Audit Committee on October 27, 2021. The Committee's advocacy was to proceed with the expanded scope of work for the stakeholder focus groups, classroom observations, and extant data analysis tasks. The Committee did not recommend proceeding with expanding the sample size for the IEP review due to the diminishing returns to expanding the sample size. After reviewing calculations for the current sample of 300 IEPs, the Committee concluded that the nominal improvements in the margin of error that would result from increasing the sample size did not justify the cost of additional data collection.

As an alternative, AIR proposed performing additional analyses on data already collected from the Year 1 audit of 300 IEPs to better understand variability between disability categories. However, upon closer examination of the sample sizes for the subgroups, AIR is not confident that this analysis will reveal differences between disability categories that are statistically significant. For this reason, AIR does not recommend that FCPS expend resources on this task as

part of the official expanded scope of work for Year 2. Nonetheless, even if the differences are not statistically significant, patterns of variability are meaningful if they align with patterns in other data sources. Therefore, AIR proposes to conduct a less formal analysis of the variability between disability subgroups, at no cost to FCPS. This analysis will help substantiate data on disability subgroups collected by other means (e.g., focus groups, classroom observations).

This proposal captures the final recommendations of the Audit Committee from the October 27<sup>th</sup> meeting. Table 1 summarizes these recommendations and their costs. Subsequent sections provide additional detail about the data collection and analysis activities. The price quoted for each data collection activity is AIR's best and final offer.

## Summary of Expanded Scope of Work

The following table summarizes the original scope of work as agreed to in the acceptance agreement dated October 23, 2020, AIR's proposed expansion to the scope of work for Year 2, and the cost of the proposed expansion to the scope of work.

**Table 1. Proposed Expansion of Year 2 Scope of Work**

Data collection activity	Original scope of work	Proposed expansion to scope of work	Relationship of the proposed expansion to the original research questions	Cost of expanded scope of work
<b>Stakeholder focus groups</b>	Year 2: Conduct 20 stakeholder focus groups (6–8 participants each; 60 minutes in duration)	Year 2: Conduct 20 additional stakeholder focus groups (6–8 participants each) and extend all 40 focus groups to 90 minutes in duration	Enhances the quality of response to the original research questions	\$40,502
<b>Classroom observations</b>	Year 2: Conduct 100 classroom observations across 20 schools	Year 2: Conduct 50 additional classroom observations across 30 additional schools, yielding a total of 150 observations across 50 schools	Enhances the quality of response to the original research questions	\$39,209
<b>Extant data analysis</b>	Year 1: Performed extant data analysis to gain an understanding of district performance on key metrics	Year 2: Perform additional data analysis to better understand variability at the school and program level	Adds new research questions	\$7,732
<b>Individualized education program (IEP) review</b>	Year 1: Conducted an audit of a stratified, random, representative sample of 300 IEPs	Year 2: Perform additional data analysis on data already collected from Year 1 to better understand variability between disability categories	Adds new research questions	\$0
<b>Total</b>				<b>\$87,443</b>

## Project Timeline

To have adequate time to complete all Year 2 activities before the end date of the contract (October 22, 2022), AIR must receive notification from the Fairfax County School Board of their intent to provide additional funds for AIR to execute an expanded scope of work **no later than November 11, 2021**.

In addition, AIR requests an adjustment to the deliverable schedules that accommodates the delayed start to Year 2 activities because of the discussions concerning potential changes in scope (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Proposed Adjusted Deliverables Schedule**

Task	Original deliverables schedule	Proposed adjusted schedule
<b>Task 5— Phase 2 Data Collection</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus Groups</li> <li>• Classroom Observations</li> </ul>	September 2021–January 2022	November 2021–April 2022
<b>Task 6— Phase 2 Data Analysis</b>	January 2022–April 2022	April 2022–July 2022
<b>Task 7— Final Report and Presentation</b>	May 2022–August 2022	July 2022–October 2022



## Description of Proposed Expanded Scope of Work

### Stakeholder Focus Groups

**Original Scope of Work.** In Year 2 of the project, AIR will coordinate with FCPS to conduct up to 20 role-specific focus groups of key special education stakeholders in the FCPS community. The purpose of these focus groups is to provide more explanatory detail on issues surfaced in Phase 1 data collection activities. Focus group protocols will be tailored to issues relevant to the stakeholder group's interests, including the provision of special education services and how they relate to student outcomes, in addition to human and structural resources that may impede or support the effectiveness of special education program delivery (e.g., schedules, time, availability of materials, professional development needs). AIR recommends that each focus group contains six to eight participants and lasts approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

**Cost of Original Scope of Work:** \$27,964.00

**Proposal for an Expanded Scope of Work.** School Board members listed many special interest groups from which they are interested in collecting information about the effectiveness of the design and delivery of special education services. To enhance the quality of our response to the original research questions from the RFP and accommodate these requests from the School Board, AIR proposes to double the number of Year 2 focus groups from 20 to 40. We also propose to extend their duration from 60 to 90 minutes to ensure adequate coverage of the many topics of interest with each stakeholder group. It should be noted that after reviewing AIR's draft plan for topics and participants for 20 focus groups, leaders from the FCPS Department of Special Services also expressed their support for significantly expanding the number of focus groups to ensure coverage of important stakeholder groups. A proposed list of the topics and participants for 40 focus groups can be found in Appendix B.

**Cost of Proposed Expanded Scope of Work:** \$40,502.00 (firm fixed price)

## Classroom Observations

**Original Scope of Work.** In Year 2 of the project, AIR will conduct on-site classroom observations to gather quantitative and qualitative data about the quality of the delivery of special education services in FCPS. Per the acceptance agreement dated October 23, 2020, AIR will conduct 100 observations through full-day site visits at 20 schools. Five observations will be conducted per school.

**Cost of Original Scope of Work:** \$27,297.00

**Proposal for an Expanded Scope of Work.** FCPS has expressed interest in ensuring that data is collected on “fidelity of implementation.” We believe that this emphasis on fidelity of implementation is squarely within scope for the stakeholder focus groups and classroom observations planned in Year 2. However, the School Board has also expressed an interest in ensuring that data collection activities include a range of school and program types. To address this consideration and enhance the quality of our response to the original research questions, AIR proposes the following: (a) increase the number of schools observed from 20 schools to 50 schools and (b) increase the total number of classroom observations from 100 observations to 150 observations.

Expanding the scope of work for this task will have two primary benefits. First, increasing the number of schools observed will help to ensure a broader range of schools are included in the observation sample, noting that the purpose of the task is to ensure that a representative range of *classroom* types are sampled (e.g., a representative range of special education settings, program types). Observing 50 schools will allow the AIR team to visit roughly one quarter of FCPS schools as opposed to 20 schools, which is roughly one tenth of FCPS schools. Second, expanding the total number of observations to 150 will increase the total number of classrooms observed by 50% while decreasing the number of observations per school from five to three. Given the current demands on school building leaders, we believe it will be a more manageable lift for school building leaders to schedule three observations per visit than five observation per visit, especially since AIR will be making requests to visit specific classroom types. AIR originally proposed observing 150 classrooms but was asked to reduce the number of observations as a cost savings measure in our best and final offer to FCPS.

Please note that increasing the number of schools observed from 20 to 50 will result in the need for 30 additional site visits. For logistical reasons, AIR is only able to commit to each observer visiting one school per day. These logistical reasons include school-level scheduling considerations (e.g., the need to observe certain program types, classroom types, or settings within schools that may only occur at certain times), the geographic size of the district and travel times between schools, and the need to coordinate schedules with FCPS personnel who must accompany AIR observers on every visit. Although there may be instances in which AIR is able to schedule observations in two nearby schools on the same day, we do not have enough control over the aforementioned logistical issues to guarantee that we can do this for all observations.

**Cost of Proposed Expanded Scope of Work:** \$39,209.00 (firm fixed price)

## Extant Data Analysis

**Original Scope of Work.** In Year 1 of the project, AIR reviewed extant administrative data for the district's special education student population. We examined extant data for four purposes: (1) to gain a contextual understanding of key special education indicators to inform instrument development and interpretation of findings; (2) to examine trends over time in the district with respect to key indicators of special education practice; (3) to examine differences between demographic groups with respect to key indicators of special education practice; and (4) to assess key special education indicators in the district relative to similar districts, the state, and the nation.

**Cost of Original Scope of Work:** \$14,660.00

**Proposed Expanded Scope of Work.** During the September meeting, School Board members expressed a general interest in further analysis of extant data, including several specific requests. For instance, School Board members requested further analysis of historical trend data and disaggregation of the staff and parent survey results. AIR considers both of these requests to be within the original scope of work for the project and will perform the additional analyses at no cost. Another request made by several School Board members asked for the disaggregation of extant data at the school level. AIR does not consider this request to be within the original scope of the work for the project because the research questions in the original RFP document written by FCPS (Appendix A) focus on the overall performance of the district. Therefore, AIR's extant data analysis in Year 1 focused on the district rather than the school level. Conducting disaggregated analysis at the school level will allow for a better understanding of variability in key indicators within FCPS; however, it will require working with FCPS to obtain new datasets that have the needed variables for students with and without disabilities. Appendix C outlines the additional analyses that AIR proposes to conduct to address the School Board's request for analyzing data variability across schools.

**Cost of Proposed Expanded Scope of Work:** \$7,732.00 (firm fixed price)

## IEP Review

**Original Scope of Work.** In Year 1 of the project, AIR performed a review of a stratified, random, representative sample of IEPs for 300 students with disabilities (SWDs) along with a review of the full eligibility histories for a subset of 50 of those students. To identify the sample, AIR used a dataset provided by FCPS that contained data on all SWDs in the district in 2018–19, including their grade, disability type, school region, limited English proficiency designation, race/ethnicity, and gender. We created two strata of the population based on grade level (PK, K–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12) and school region (Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and nonpublic placements). We then sampled 300 of the total population using Stata, a statistical software package. We generated three samples and ran statistical tests of proportionality between the sample and the original population on the following demographic variables: primary disability designation, limited English proficiency designation, and race/ethnicity, and gender. We used the sample with the fewest number of statistically significant differences. We followed a similar process to identify a subsample of 50 IEPs for which we requested access to the full histories (including initial and most recent eligibility determinations) to conduct a deeper analysis.

**Cost of Original Scope of Work:** \$29,479.00

**Proposal for an Expanded Scope of Work.** During the September 21, 2021 School Board meeting, School Board members raised the possibility of increasing the sample size of the IEP audit beyond the 300 IEPs reviewed in Year 1 of the project. This would involve reviewing some additional number of IEPs using the same coding protocols and procedures established in Year 1. During the School Board Audit Committee meeting on October 27, 2021, AIR presented additional information about the design of this task and the anticipated costs for the consideration of the members.

Based on our experience in Year 1 of the review, the AIR research team found that conducting a comprehensive review of 300 IEPs required more time than we originally anticipated. In addition to using a more extensive coding protocol than we have used in previous large-scale audit projects, AIR researchers also found that it took more time to thoroughly read each IEP than we initially estimated. For these reasons, our estimate of the cost to review an additional 300 IEPs in Year 2 of the project (for a total sample size of 600 IEPs) is \$43,487. This is substantially higher than the cost from the original proposal for Year 1 of the project (\$29,479).

Given the substantial cost of this activity, AIR wants to ensure that expanding the sample size will yield information that is relevant to the goals of the review, useful to FCPS stakeholders, and adds value to the data that have already been collected. AIR originally proposed a sample size of 300 IEPs because we believe that this is an adequate sample size to be representative of the demographics of the division (e.g., representativeness in terms of grade, disability type, school region, limited English proficiency designation, race/ethnicity, and gender). It also aligns with sample sizes that AIR has used in past audits of similarly-sized districts. A larger sample size would provide more precise estimates of average IEP quality (i.e., a smaller margin of error) but the gain in precision may not justify the additional cost.

To illustrate the trade-off between precision and costs, consider an example in which we want to report on a quality feature that exists in 25% of all IEPs in the district. Table 3 shows how the margin of error for the estimated prevalence of that feature would change based on the number of IEPs we sampled for the analysis. For example, if we only sampled 100 IEPs, the margin of error would be  $\pm 8.5\%$ , meaning we would only have confidence that the true percentage was between 16.5% and 33.5%. With a sample of 300 IEPs, the margin of error is  $\pm 4.9\%$ , meaning our confidence about the true percentage would narrow to between 20.1% and 29.9%. There are diminishing returns to expanding the sample size. For example, doubling the sample size from 300 to 600 only reduces the margin of error to  $\pm 3.5\%$ , and from 600 to 1200 has a marginal effect on the margin of error to  $\pm 2.5\%$ . These diminishing returns suggest that additional IEP reviews may not be worth the additional cost.

**Table 3. Example of the Relationship Between Sample Size, Margin of Error, and Confidence Interval**

Sample size	Margin of error	Confidence interval upper and lower bounds
100	$\pm 8.5\%$	16.5%–33.5%
200	$\pm 6.0\%$	19.0%–31.0%
300	$\pm 4.9\%$	20.1%–29.9%
400	$\pm 4.2\%$	20.8%–29.2%
500	$\pm 3.8\%$	21.2%–28.8%
600	$\pm 3.5\%$	21.5%–28.5%
700	$\pm 3.2\%$	21.8%–28.2%
800	$\pm 3.0\%$	22.0%–28.0%
900	$\pm 2.8\%$	22.2%–27.8%
1000	$\pm 2.7\%$	22.3%–27.7%
1100	$\pm 2.6\%$	22.4%–27.6%
1200	$\pm 2.5\%$	22.6%–27.5%

*Note.* Example calculations are for a true population percentage of 25% and a 95% confidence interval.

A sample size of 300 IEPs is large enough to give us confidence (at a statistically significant level) that results would be similar to what we would see in the overall population, give or take a reasonable margin of error (5% or less). Although margins of error decrease as sample sizes become larger, the rate of decrease is significantly small as samples become larger than 300. For instance, in the example shown in Table 3, the margin of error decreases by just 1.4% as we double the sample size from 300 to 600. In AIR's view, the tradeoff in slightly smaller margins of error for sample sizes greater than 300 does not justify the substantial increase in cost for reviewing more IEPs. We believe that a sample size of 300 IEPs offers good balance between precision and costs.

Based on this information discussed at the October 27, 2021 meeting, Audit Committee members did not recommend proceeding with expanding the sample size for the IEP review. However, members expressed their interest in learning more about differences in IEP quality for subgroups within the sample of 300 IEPs (i.e., differences in IEP quality between students of different disability types). Members also raised questions about statistical confidence in the sample size if AIR were to examine disability subgroup differences.

Examining differences between disability subgroups is beyond the scope of the original research questions guiding this review (Appendix A). The original research questions ask about the effectiveness of the design, structure, and processes that FCPS utilizes to provide special education services to meet the needs of students with disabilities. These research questions are aimed at investigating *divisionwide* trends in special education service delivery. For this reason, the IEP review was designed with the goal of examining divisionwide trends in IEP quality across a random, representative sample of 300 IEPs.

To address this out-of-scope request, AIR proposed using data already collected from the audit of 300 IEPs in Year 1 and performing additional analysis to examine the differences between disability subgroups. Page 50 of the interim report shows the number of IEPs reviewed within each disability subgroup. No additional data would be collected in Year 2; rather, additional analyses would be performed on data already collected in Year 1.

It is important to note that AIR cannot in advance promise that results from this proposed analysis will achieve statistical significance. All samples involve statistical uncertainty to some degree. Statistical significance is a measure of our confidence in the degree to which what we are seeing in sample data is what we would see if we pulled the data from the entire population. When examining differences between subgroups in a sample, statistical significance is a function of two things: (1) the sample size for each subgroup of interest, and (2) the size of the difference between groups for the statistic of interest.

This can be illustrated using some examples. For instance, we may find that 75% of IEPs for students with autism (n=47) have goals based on data whereas only 50% of IEPs for students with specific learning disabilities (n=125) have goals based on data. In this case, the subsample sizes and the difference between groups are large enough to achieve statistical significance. However, if the difference between the groups was smaller (say it was 60% of IEPs for students with specific learning disabilities instead of 50%) the difference would not be statistically significant. If we performed the same comparison between students with emotional disabilities (n=21) and students with intellectual disabilities (n=9), then the same difference in the statistic of interest (75% of IEPs compared to 50% of IEPs) would not be statistically significant because of the smaller sizes of the subgroup samples. Because there are so many possible findings and possible differences between subgroups of varying sample sizes, AIR cannot guarantee that we would find statistically significant results in all cases.

Because statistical significance is based on observed results, we can only estimate what we think is a sample size that is likely to generate statistically significant results. To ensure that the sample sizes for each disability subgroup are large enough for us to be reasonably confident that every possible difference between every subgroup will be statistically significant, we would need to review well in excess of 300 additional IEPs (cost: \$43,487) and potentially even thousands of



IEPs. For this reason, AIR does not recommend increasing the sample size with the goal of achieving statistically significant results for differences between disability subgroups.

Although AIR does not recommend increasing the sample size, we still believe that analysis of the variability between disability subgroups for the current sample of 300 IEPs could yield important information. Even if that information is not at a level of statistical significance, we believe that it could provide additional evidence to substantiate findings in the final report. For this reason, AIR will perform this analysis at no cost, as a final step in our Year 1 analysis.

**Cost of Proposed Expanded Scope of Work: \$0**

# Appendices

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# **Appendix A. RFP 2000002084: Special Education Comprehensive Review Research Questions**

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The following is an excerpt of Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) *RFP 2000003084 Special Education Comprehensive Review* dated May 4, 2020. The excerpt contains the original research questions provided by FCPS to guide the review.

RFP#2000003084

**SPECIAL PROVISIONS**

**6. TASKS TO BE PERFORMED:**

6.1. To achieve the main goals outlined in Section 1. Scope of Services, the comprehensive review must incorporate and answer the following key questions:

- 1) How and to what extent does the design, structure and established processes of FCPS' educational services meet the needs of students with disabilities? And to what degree are special education services at schools implemented with fidelity? And to what degree is the effectiveness of the processes continuously monitored?
  - a) What design, structure and processes does FCPS utilize to provide special education services to students with disabilities? Are the current design, structure and processes effective?
  - b) How does FCPS evaluate and identify students who may require special education services? To what extent is the referral and eligibility determination process, including local screening, working in terms of identifying students with disabilities? For example, is the period between the time of referral and service eligibility status determination reasonable?
  - c) How effective is Child Find and Early Childhood Special Education Services at identifying young children suspected of having a developmental delay or disability and providing/getting families access to services?
  - d) How does FCPS ensure the needs of special education students are included in the planning and implementation of new programs and services?
  - e) How are inclusionary practices, both academic and social, being implemented, tracked and monitored across schools and educational settings?
  - f) What processes are in place to support the individual educational needs of students with disabilities? What data and resources are used to develop the instructional goals, special education service hours, and accommodations required?
  - g) To what extent do IEPs and Section 504 plans identify specific needs, services, and accommodations that are aligned to the needs of students with disabilities identified by the individual assessments?
  - h) What processes and support are in place to facilitate seamless transitions between grade levels and into post-secondary opportunities?
  - i) To what extent do IEPs and Section 504 plans provide evidence that all identified services, accommodations, and/or goals were received by the students?
  - j) To what extent is the IEP and Section 504 reevaluation process being implemented?
  - k) To what extent do schools implement special education services with fidelity?
- 2) How and to what extent are the human capital resources assigned to special education students, the qualification of the staff, and the level of professional development received by them adequate?
  - a) How effective is FCPS in recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified and effective staff servicing students with disabilities, including teachers, paraprofessionals such as instructional assistants, public health training assistants and public health attendants, and school administrators?
  - b) How do FCPS' caseloads (number of students) and workloads (intensity of services per student) compare to similarly situated divisions and those in nearby proximity to FCPS?
  - c) How efficiently and consistently does FCPS allocate staffing to meet the needs of its population of students with disabilities?
  - d) To what extent does the professional development FCPS offers adequately prepare and continually support school professionals, including teachers, paraprofessionals such as

SPECIAL PROVISIONS

- instructional assistants, public health training assistants and public health attendants, and school administrators, to provide consistent services to students with disabilities?
- e) How effective is the support from central office personnel such as DSS and ISD in providing leadership, guidance and resources to staff servicing students with disabilities?
- 3) To what extent does the implementation of special education services at schools align with evidence-based practices?
- a) To what extent do the instructional delivery models demonstrate evidence-based practices?
- b) How and to what extent do schools utilize multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework to identify all students who require support and document any necessary interventions or remediation using monitoring systems?
- c) To what extent does the continuum of services offered by FCPS for students with disabilities address the needs of students? How do these services compare to other divisions (benchmarking)?
- 4) How and to what extent are FCPS' communication strategies to keep stakeholders informed about services for students with disabilities effective?
- a) How effective are communication efforts in reaching targeted audiences with pertinent information (e.g. division to school, school to division, division to parent, school to parent, teacher to teacher, case manager to case manager at transition points, etc.)?
- b) To what extent are families and community members kept informed about services for students with disabilities?
- 6.2. Several data sources will be required to complete the comprehensive review of special education services for students with disabilities:
- 1) Data and Document Analysis – To analyze special education population trends, programs, student performance data from both students with and without disabilities, and staffing data, etc. To review documents related to division and school programs, policies and practices related to special education, VDOE reports, measures concerning accountability, and other documents deemed necessary.
- 2) Surveys, Focus Groups and/or Interviews – To engage stakeholders in surveys, focus groups and/or interviews to collect qualitative and quantitative data.
- 3) Classroom Observations - Direct observation of teaching and related services across the continuum of services (inclusive settings, co-taught classes, pull-out/push-in services, public separate day school programs, etc.) across elementary, middle, and high schools. (Note: Public Separate Day Schools (PDS) are stand-alone buildings which serve only special education students with a variety of special education eligibilities.)
- 4) Research and Evidence-based Practices – To identify evidence-based practices in special education programs through research and perform benchmarking within FCPS schools.

## Appendix B. Proposed Plan for Stakeholder Focus Groups

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## Fairfax County Special Education Comprehensive Review

This document outlines a proposed plan to conduct 40 stakeholder focus groups as part of an expanded scope of work in Year 2. The purpose of each group will be to ask questions on a variety of topic areas to learn more about the experiences of each stakeholder group (e.g., parents of PreK students). Twenty focus groups are marked with an asterisk, which signifies that they are the groups most closely aligned with the 20 focus groups in the original Year 2 scope of work, and those that we propose conducting if Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) opts to maintain the original scope of only 20 focus groups. Note that the research team may have to combine focus group topics or participants to ensure adequate coverage of the research questions across 20 groups.

No.	Experience captured	Topic areas	Research questions
1.	<b>PreK Special Education Teacher Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 2d, 2e, 4a, 4b
2.	<b>PreK Parent Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Transitions</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 4a, 4b
3.	<b>Elementary Special Education Teacher Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 2d, 2e, 4a, 4b
4.	<b>Elementary Special Education Parent Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 4a, 4b
5.	<b>PreK and Elementary Administrator Experiences*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• Transitions</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k

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No.	Experience captured	Topic areas	Research questions
6.	<b>Middle School Teacher Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 2d, 2e, 4a, 4b
7.	<b>Middle School Parent Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 4a, 4b
8.	<b>Middle and High School Administrator Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• Transitions</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k
9.	<b>High School Teacher Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 2d, 2e, 4a, 4b
10.	<b>High School Parent Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 4a, 4b
11.	<b>Special Education Teacher Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs)</li> <li>• Fidelity</li> </ul>	1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 3b, 3c
12.	<b>Building-Level Administrator Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• MTSS/EBPs</li> <li>• Fidelity</li> </ul>	1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 3b, 3c
13.	<b>School Psychologist Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 3b, 3c, 4a, 4b

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No.	Experience captured	Topic areas	Research questions
14.	<b>Social Worker Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 4a, 4b
15.	<b>School Counselor Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 4a, 4b
16.	<b>Instructional Assistant Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 4a, 4b
17.	<b>General Education PreK and Elementary Teacher Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 2d, 2e, 4a, 4b
18.	<b>General Education Middle and High School Teacher Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 2d, 2e, 4a, 4b
19.	<b>Related Service Provider Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 4a, 4b
20.	<b>Twice Exceptional (2E) Teacher Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 2d, 2e, 4a, 4b

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No.	Experience captured	Topic areas	Research questions
21.	<b>English Learner (EL) Parent Experience for ELs with Disabilities*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 4a, 4b
22.	<b>EL Teacher Experience Providing Services to ELs with Disabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g 2d, 2e, 4a, 4b
23.	<b>Central Office Staff Experience Providing Services to 2E Students and ELs with Disabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Transitions</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g
24.	<b>Building Administrators Experience providing services to 2E Students and ELs with Disabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Transitions</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g
25.	<b>Parent Experience at Public Day Schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP)</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 4a, 4b
26.	<b>Teacher and Staff Experience at Public Day Schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• VAAP</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 2d, 2e, 4a, 4b



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No.	Experience captured	Topic areas	Research questions
27.	<b>Category B Teacher Experience (in Non-Public Day School Setting)*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• VAAP</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 2d, 2e, 4a, 4b
28.	<b>Parents of Category B Students Experience (in Non-Public Day School Setting)*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• VAAP</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 4a, 4b
29.	<b>Human Resources and Department of Special Services (DSS) Administrator Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment</li> <li>• Hiring</li> <li>• Retention</li> </ul>	2a, 2c, 2d, 2e
30.	<b>Building-Level Administrators Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment</li> <li>• Hiring</li> <li>• Retention</li> <li>• Professional Development/Training</li> </ul>	2a, 2c, 2d, 2e
31.	<b>New Special Education Teachers in Years 1–3 Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment</li> <li>• Hiring</li> <li>• Caseloads</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Professional Development/Training</li> </ul>	2a, 2c, 2d, 2e
32.	<b>Special Education Teachers in Years 4–6 Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retention</li> <li>• IEPs/Progress Monitoring</li> <li>• Caseload</li> <li>• Professional Development/Training</li> </ul>	2a, 2c, 2d, 2e
33.	<b>Central Office Staff Administrators Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caseloads</li> <li>• Staffing Allocation</li> <li>• Service Hours</li> </ul>	1e, 3c
34.	<b>Building-Level Administrator Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caseloads</li> <li>• Staffing Allocation</li> <li>• Service Hours</li> </ul>	3c

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No.	Experience captured	Topic areas	Research questions
35.	<b>Special Education Teacher Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caseloads</li> <li>• Staffing Allocation</li> <li>• Service Hours</li> </ul>	3c
36.	<b>Central Office MTSS Team Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MTSS</li> <li>• EBPs</li> <li>• Fidelity</li> </ul>	1k, 3a, 3b, 3c
37.	<b>Building MTSS Team Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MTSS</li> <li>• EBPs</li> <li>• Fidelity</li> </ul>	1k, 3a, 3b, 3c
38.	<b>Building-Level Administrator Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	4a, 4b
39.	<b>Central Office Staff Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	4a, 4b
40.	<b>Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) Experience*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education programming, policies, and practices</li> <li>• Referral &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• IEPs</li> <li>• VAAP</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 1k, 3b, 3c, 4a, 4b

*Note.* For each group, we will sample across levels (e.g., PreK, Elementary, Middle, High) and settings (e.g., inclusion classroom, resource room, self-contained, PreK programs) as appropriate. An asterisk indicates proposed focus group selection if we maintain original scope of work with 20 focus groups.

## **Appendix C. Proposed Plan for Extant Data Analysis**

Data source	Actual data analysis indicators <sup>1</sup>
<b>Student academic outcomes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) data</li> <li>Postsecondary outcomes <b>disaggregated by schools and regions</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% VAAP students passing alternate assessment, by school, school level, region</li> <li>% Students with an individualized education program (IEP) who are enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school, by school, region</li> <li>% Students with an IEP enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school, by school, region</li> <li>% Students with an IEP enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school, by school, region</li> </ul>
<b>Student discipline:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discipline data <b>disaggregated by schools, regions, race/ethnicity, English learner (EL) status</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% Students with an IEP who got an in-school suspension, by school, school level, region, race/ethnicity</li> <li>% Students with an IEP who got an out-of-school suspension, by school, school level, region, race/ethnicity</li> <li>% Students with an IEP who were expelled, by school, school level, region, race/ethnicity</li> </ul>
<b>Disproportionality of identification:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are certain types of students more likely to be identified for special education in Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS)?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% Students with an IEP by race/ethnicity, EL status, and gender (compared with general population) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall and by school, school level, region</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Disproportionality of service setting:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are certain types of students more likely to be served in certain settings or programs?</li> <li>Least restrictive environment (LRE) data <b>disaggregated by schools, regions, race/ethnicity, EL status</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% Students with an IEP served in different settings, by disability type and race/ethnicity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall and by school, school level, region</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> For all analyses disaggregated by school, AIR will not identify schools by name. The purpose of these analyses is to understand variability by school, not to compare schools to one another.

Data source	Actual data analysis indicators <sup>1</sup>
<p><b>Staffing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better understanding linkage between caseload and least restrictive environment (LRE)</li> <li>• Staffing ratios by setting</li> <li>• Staff allocations by LRE by school</li> <li>• Retention and hiring of teachers and school support staff <b>by schools and regions</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % Staff by role, by school, school level, region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Special education teachers (self-contained, resource, inclusion)</li> <li>– Instructional assistants</li> <li>– Public health training assistants</li> <li>– Public health attendants</li> <li>– School psychologists</li> <li>– Social workers</li> <li>– Guidance counselors</li> <li>– Speech-language pathologists</li> <li>– Physical and occupational therapists</li> <li>– Hearing and vision itinerants</li> <li>– Adapted physical education itinerants</li> <li>– Audiologists</li> </ul> </li> <li>• % Fully certified special education teachers, by school, school level, region</li> <li>• % Emergency certified special education teachers, by school, school level, region</li> <li>• % Yearly hiring rate of special education teachers and paraprofessionals, by school, school level, region</li> <li>• % Yearly attrition rate of special education teachers and paraprofessionals, by school, school level, region</li> <li>• % Student-teacher ratio, by school, school level, region</li> </ul>

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