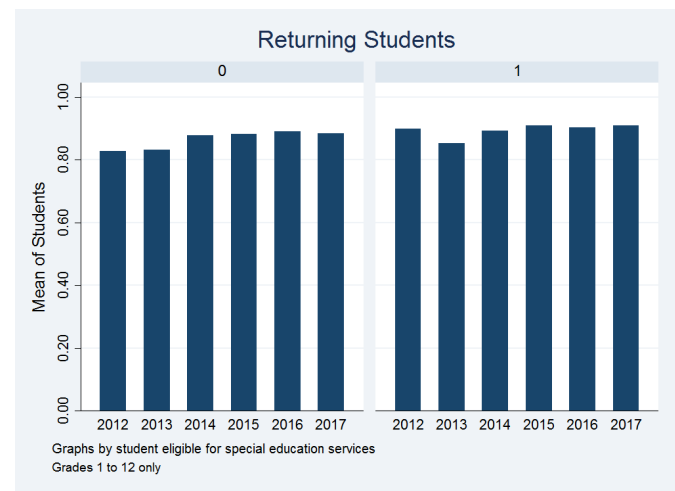
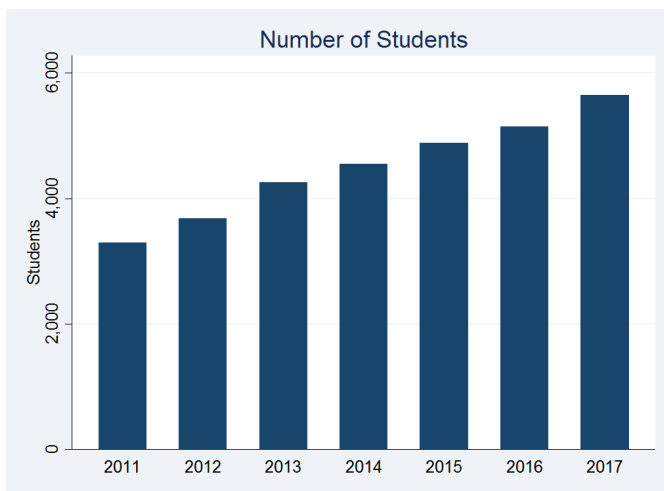


Partnership Goals & Activities

In 2017, the City Schools of Decatur (CSD) partnered with the Urban Child Study Center and the Center for Evaluation and Research Services in the College of Education and Human Development to gather information on how the district implements processes and procedures to ensure compliance, effective instruction, student achievement, & family engagement in its special education program. Over the course of 9 months, researchers conducted focus groups, administered surveys, and examined school-based data. From the analyses emerged a comprehensive and complex picture of special services programming in the district. **Here's what we've learned:**

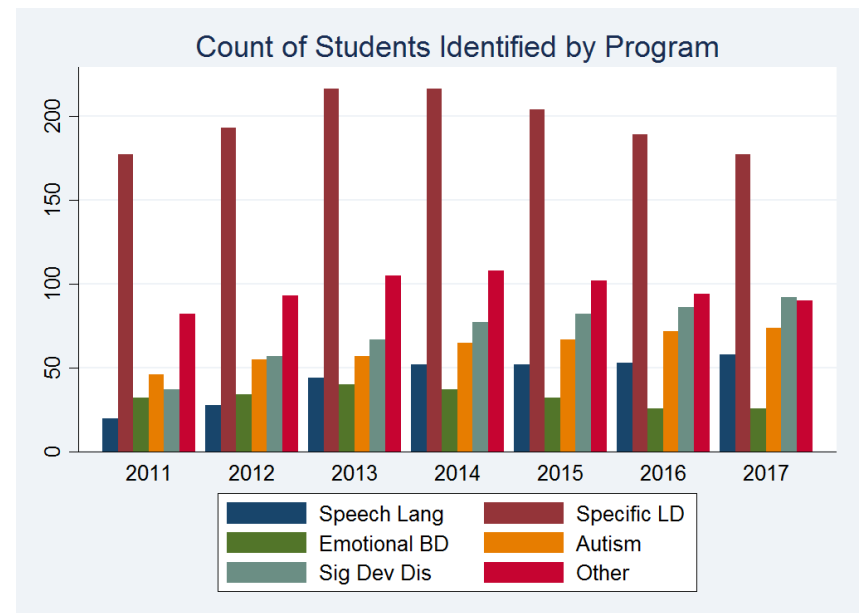
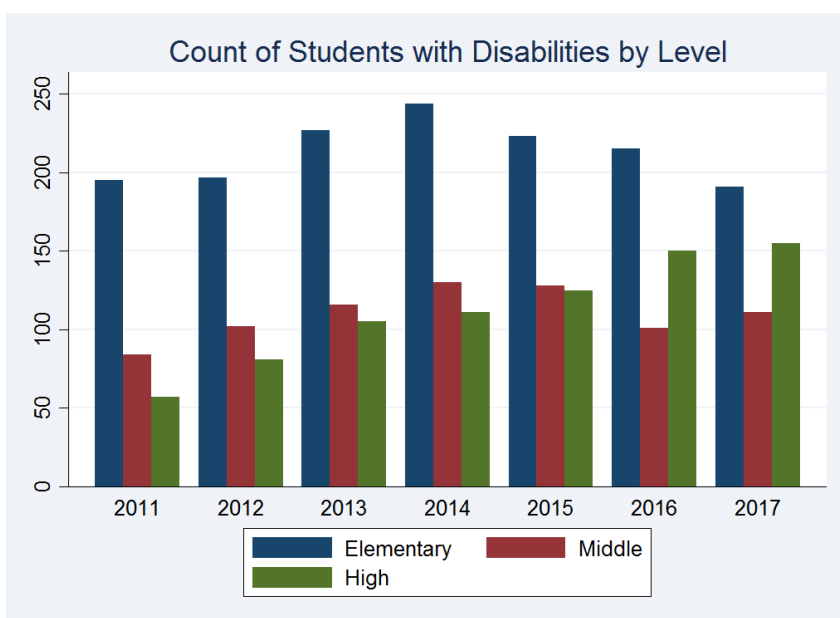
CSD is **growing** and students are **staying**.



The overall number of CSD students with disabilities is **growing**, but the numbers differ by grade level. **Middle and high school** are showing the greatest increases. The number of high school students served from 2011 to 2017 has tripled.

The numbers also differ by disability served. As in most districts, the largest disability population served in CSD is **Specific Learning Disability**. There are increases in the number of children served for:

- Significant Developmental Delay and Speech Language Impairment in elementary school
- Specific Learning Disability in high school (emerging in middle school)



Voices “on the ground”

Seven themes emerged from interviews, surveys, and focus groups with families, teachers, and staff (verbatim):

Shared values

I think we have a well-regarded special education program, specifically has a good reputation. I'm not sure we deliver on those expectations consistently.

Organizational structure

We receive a fair amount of support from our central office...I feel like they're responsive and they're very supportive and they come and they help problem solve all the time. So they're stretched thin but they're supportive.

Utilization of resources

... we do approve things that are supported by data and in the child's IEP...Just because we approve, it doesn't mean that everyone gets the same thing...our job is to ensure that we are delivering equitable and compliant practice based on students needs..

Data-driven decision making

If we see a child that is needing extra support, that's one of things we do is collect data.

Accountability & transparency

It's very rare that we find a student packet that does not have the appropriate interventions...

That's the inconsistency piece....it just depends on who I am talking to which year, which teacher, and which administrator.

Feedback loops

I don't get a lot of parents coming to me with concerns. They go right over both of our heads and go right to central office. A lot of times, if they would have talked to the school, there may be an opportunity for us to help alleviate their concerns.

Communal networks (parent involvement)

I am saying all of this great stuff, but when you guys meet our parents, I wonder if they're going to say something completely different from what I'm saying. I think they're generally really, really positive. I think they know that we have really, really good teachers...I think they'll complain about some of the processes, especially through the eligibility phase of things, but I just feel that there's an element of trust and an assumption of good will..."

Conclusions & Recommendations

Overall, the data suggest that CSD is a **rapidly growing district** with skilled high quality teachers and staff, effective resources, and an engaged community. These **assets help to create a culture** of care, safety, good will, and high expectations.

Meanwhile, this growth coupled with **shifts in the disability populations served** at each school level has created challenges with **both service delivery and communication** between families, teachers, schools, and the central office. The following recommendations are offered to address these challenges:

1. strengthen **communication protocols** to ensure common language and expectations
 - clarify procedures for determining eligibility and service delivery for special education, and maintain consistency across all school levels
 - provide education and awareness opportunities for all CSD stakeholders
 - create training opportunities for stakeholders on ways to support students with disabilities
2. consider both **grade level and disability type**
 - in the allocation of resources
 - in professional learning opportunities across P-12
 - in CSD's unique school configuration
3. examine **Response to Intervention (RTI) processes** for Tiers 1-4 across P-12
 - Examine the number and proportion of students receiving services at Tiers 2, 3, and 4
 - identify and distinguish interventions provided at each tier
 - determine effectiveness of interventions provided at each tier
 - strengthen transition points for new and continuing students, both within and across grades and schools
4. improve **data infrastructure**
 - to support progress-monitoring
 - to facilitate communication with families
 - to examine trends at school- and district levels
 - to support decision-making for improvement

**URBAN CHILD
STUDY CENTER**

The future is ours to develop.

