

**To:** Dr. Charles Johns  
Board of Education

**From:** Dr. Jennifer Pearson

**Date:** January 23, 2023

**Re:** TrueNorth, TLS, and Transition Program Study - Recommendation for 2023-24 and Plan for 2024-2025

**Recommendation**

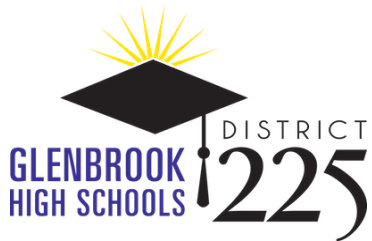
It is recommended that the Board of Education approve for the 2023-24 school year the implementation of phase I of the transition to a district-operated and staffed special education program to serve the needs of students currently enrolled in the TrueNorth TLS/SLE program.

**Background**

At the June 27, 2022, Board Meeting, the District brought forth a plan to engage in a study to determine our ability to more directly serve students who currently receive programming through Teaching Life Skills (TLS)/TrueNorth Supported Learning Environment Program (SLE) and the TrueNorth Transition Program. While District 225 runs its own special education programming, such as Developmental Learning Services (DLS) and Glenbrook Transition Services, for students with less significant disabilities, District 225 currently relies on TrueNorth for the Teaching Life Skills Program (TLS)/Supported Learning Environments (SLE) and the TrueNorth Transition Program. These programs serve our District 225 students with significant intellectual disabilities, autism, and multiple disabilities who require individualized academic and life skills instruction in high school and for transition services until the student graduates or reaches the age of majority (e.g., until the day before the student’s 22nd birthday, unless his or her 22nd birthday occurs during the school year, in which case he or she is eligible for such services through the end of the school year).

The study was focused on long-term sustainability, continuous improvement of the program, and a greater sense of community and continuity for our students. A detailed description of the study components and findings, along with the model and rationale for the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 plan, are presented below. Based on the findings, we are confident District 225 has the capacity to serve our students well and achieve the goals set forth in the study.

To ensure a smooth transition for students, families, and staff, we are not recommending full-implementation for the 2023-2024 school year, but rather, over a two-year period. Our approach in developing this plan is consistent with the school district’s commitment to implementing a deliberate, careful approach with our students’ best interests in mind.



# **TLS and TrueNorth Transition Study and Plan**

Presented January 23, 2023

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## Overview

### Purpose

To conduct an updated study of both the TLS program and TrueNorth Transition Program concluding with a recommendation to the School Board in the winter of 2023 for consideration for the 2023-2024 school year.

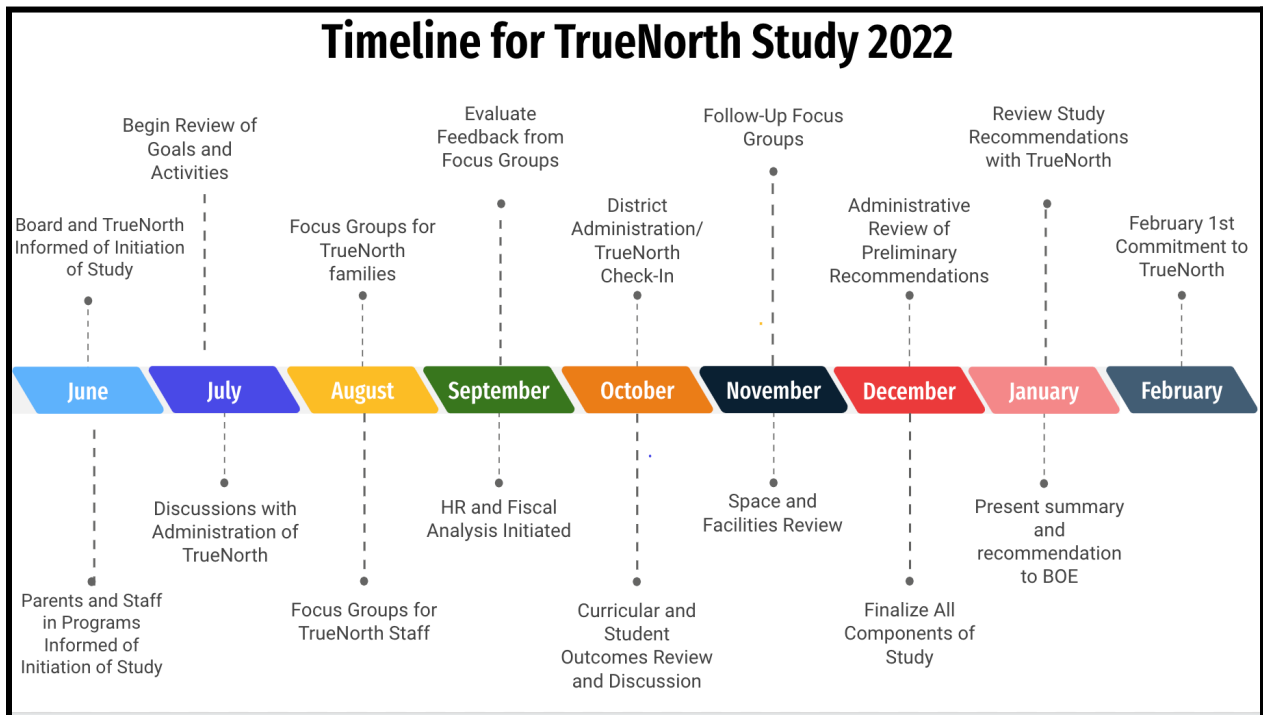
### Guiding Principles

We utilized the following guiding principles:

- Comparable high quality services
- Long-term sustainability
- Continuous improvement of the program
- Greater sense of community
- Greater flexibility in our continuum of services
- Cost effective

### Timeline

The following is an overview of the timeline of the processes and activities completed throughout the duration of the study:



## **Communications regarding Initiation of the Study**

June 17, 2022 Communication to TrueNorth Administration prior to the Board Meeting

June 24, 2022 [Letter](#) to TLS/TrueNorth Transition Parents prior to the Board Meeting

June 27, 2022 [Memo](#) and [Presentation](#) and [Slides](#) to the District 225 Board of Education

June 28, 2022 [Letter](#) to TLS/TrueNorth Transition Parents following the Board Meeting

June 28, 2022 [Letter](#) to TLS/TrueNorth Transition Staff following the Board Meeting

## **The Study**

### **Components of the Study**

- Stakeholder Meetings, including focus groups with families and staff currently in the programs
- Evaluation of feedback from stakeholder groups
- Human Resources Analysis
- Fiscal Analysis
- Curricular and Student Outcome Review
- Space and Facilities Review

### **Stakeholder Meetings**

- TLS High School Parent Focus Groups
- TrueNorth Transition Parent Focus Groups
- District 225 Administrative Meetings
- TrueNorth Administrative Meetings
- TrueNorth TLS High School Staff Stakeholder Meeting
- TrueNorth Transition Staff Meeting
- TrueNorth Team Meetings
- Sender District Administrative Meetings (District 27 and 30 jointly, 28, 34)
- District 225 Meetings with the GEA
- GBN Special Education Department Meeting
- GBS Special Education Department Meeting
- Meeting with District 113 Administration (shared TrueNorth Transition Program)
- Meeting with District 113 High School Teachers (recently built capacity and experience)
- Special Education Administrator Meeting
- Instructional Council Meeting
- District 225 Representative Teacher/Related Service Advisory Group Meetings

**Table 1: Stakeholder Meeting Feedback Themes**

<b>Major Themes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Individualization</li><li>■ "Boutique style" - makes sure kids are served properly in a structured environment, (school within a school)</li><li>■ Consistent parent communication</li><li>■ Specialization/expertise - certified and Instructional Assistant (IA) job functions</li><li>■ Comprehensive team and program support</li><li>■ Opportunities for collaboration, planning, mentoring networking/Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and targeted Professional Development (PD) across/within teams with similar expertise</li><li>■ Part of a larger community (whether with other peers, parents, or other districts)</li><li>■ Support and role of general education staff</li><li>■ Community-based instruction/vocational experiences</li><li>■ Amount of communication and case management with families</li><li>■ Supervision/administrative support</li><li>■ Familiarity with student needs and program by building admin and security</li><li>■ Transition planning process - elementary &gt; High School &gt; transition &gt; adult</li><li>■ Separate entity/caught between two systems</li><li>■ Silos (separate by department or location)</li><li>■ Independence/dependence (reliance on staff)</li><li>■ Transportation</li></ul>
<b>Future Possibilities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Greater continuum/fluidity across programs (DLS/TLS; District 225 Transition Services/TLS Transition Program)</li><li>■ Greater collaboration between staff, greater connections/relationships with colleagues</li><li>■ Greater inclusive support to general education, school community, and community-at-large, professional development for all staff, and open communication between entities</li><li>■ Desire to have transition sites in home community and closer to public transportation</li><li>■ Transition planning process - elementary &gt; High School &gt; transition &gt; adult</li><li>■ Opportunities for connections outside of school (local college, college-aged peers, jobs, volunteerism)</li></ul>

## Important Considerations

- Timeline and impact on TrueNorth
- Staffing considerations
- Flexibility in scheduling
- Response to student behavior/behavior support
- Amount of supervision
- Vision/evolution of model

### Key Takeaways

Sense of Belonging & Alignment of Systems: There is a sense of belonging felt by students from being within the larger, 225 community. There is a value placed on instruction, systems, and initiatives that further the inclusivity of students within school environments. However, there is a systemic dissonance for staff from operating under two different systems-District 225 and TrueNorth.

Timeline for Change: There is apprehension about the speed of whatever change is made, wanting to make sure that the needs of our students are first and foremost. In order to build systems for effective support and individualized instruction, it is important to consider the timeline.

Specialized Program vs. Continuum of Services: In terms of preferred educational environments, there was value placed on both specialized programming by staff with specific expertise and a fluid continuum of support. There is also an emphasis on providing the appropriate services to students. Whatever is deemed appropriate by the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) team, all stakeholders desire a greater continuum of services and collaboration between TLS and other District services to create greater flexibility and execute those individualized plans.

Building the Home & Parent Community: There is interest in a transition site located in the home community, allowing students to learn community supports in a more functional area. Parents see an opportunity to build a more cohesive parent community for greater networking, mentoring, and inclusion. They also expressed an interest in further opportunities for peer connections, including college-aged peers.

Opportunities for Collaboration: More systemic opportunities for collaboration were valued, as well, to create better experiences for all students. Aligned plan times, professional development, and building collegial relationships across disciplines were all valued.

Building Systems of Support: There was an emphasis on the importance of greater administrative oversight and behavioral support, examples of systemic changes currently ongoing within our sender districts that have built capacity. They have emphasized the importance of systems to build clarity of roles amongst all staff.

Implications for Other Districts: Multiple meetings were held with District 30, which has the next greatest usage of the SLE program (see Table 2), and District 27 which continues to rely on the TrueNorth SLE program. In collaboration with TrueNorth and the Township, the districts felt they could continue to serve their students well. Both are also considering building their capacity to directly serve their students in the township based upon similar guiding principles. Additionally, multiple meetings were held with District 113 (Deerfield/Highland Park High School). Those meetings served two purposes. First, District 225 and District 113 are the primary users of the TrueNorth Transition Program. District 113 has been exploring building capacity in transition, even prior to Glenbrook, and is prepared to do so. Secondly, District 113 recently built TLS/SLE capacity in their high schools, and it was a valuable opportunity to learn about the successes and challenges from their administrators and teachers.

**Table 2: TrueNorth Program Enrollment- Average Daily Enrollment (ADE) as of 11/29/2022**

District #	Sum of Enrollment/Tuition ADE	Arbor	EC Full Day, Blended Full, & Half Day*	EC Inclusion Partnership	SLE	Transition	NSA	NSAE	Grand Total
<b>Member (Totals)</b>		9.00	7.48	5.50	57.70	56.00	48.01	23.08	206.77
27	Northbrook School District 27				4.00		2.00	2.60	8.60
28	Northbrook School District 28				5.00		2.00	3.15	10.15
29	Sunset Ridge School District	1.00	2.00					0.12	3.12
30	Northbrook Glenview School District	1.00			11.28		1.00	2.00	15.28
31	West Northfield School District				1.00		4.82	2.16	7.98
34	Glenview School District	1.00					1.12	1.66	3.78
35	Glencoe School District		0.50					1.00	1.50
36	Winnetka School District		4.98	5.50	1.00		2.88	3.00	17.36
38	Kenilworth School District	1.00			4.00		0.88	2.00	7.88
65	Lake Bluff School District	1.00					1.15	0.84	2.99
67	Lake Forest School District	1.00						0.21	1.21
106	Bannockburn School District						1.00		1.00
109	Deerfield School District	1.00					3.00		4.00
112	North Shore School District	2.00					6.00	4.34	12.34
113	Township High Schools District					31.00	6.92		37.92
115	Lake Forest Community High School District						2.26		2.26
203	New Trier Township H S District						9.10		9.10
225	Northfield Township HS District				31.42	25.00	3.88		60.30
<b>Non-Member (Totals)</b>		5.00	0.84	0.00	2.90	1.00	33.11	12.72	55.57



### Human Resources Analysis

District 225 administrators met with TrueNorth administrators to review the current staffing patterns in classrooms. The data was used to ensure all staffing was accounted for in the planning and analysis of an apples-to-apples staffing plan. Table 3 provides the general staffing included in the four TrueNorth SLE classrooms at GBN and GBS, combined, and in their Transition Program located in Highland Park. Other factors have also been reviewed, discussed with the GEA, and taken into consideration in the proposed model.

**Table 3: TrueNorth Staffing Pattern**

TrueNorth SLE (2 GBN and 2 GBS)		TrueNorth Transition	
Role	FTE	Role	FTE
Teacher	4.0	Teacher	2.0
Learning Coordinator (Admin)	.95	Learning Coordinator (Admin)	.5
Director (Admin)	0.2	Director (Admin)	0.1
Instructional Assistants (1:1)	28.0* (across both)	Instructional Assistants (1:1)	28.0* (across both)
School Psychologist/Social Worker	1.0	School Psychologist/Social Worker	.4
Speech-Language Pathologist	2.0	Speech-Language Pathologist	1.0
Instructional Coach	.8	Instructional Coach	.4
BCBA/Behavioral Specialist	.4	BCBA/Behavioral Specialist	.6
Occupational Therapist	Based on IEP	Occupational Therapist	Based on IEP
Physical Therapist	Based on IEP	Physical Therapist	Based on IEP
Vision Teacher	Based on IEP	Vision Teacher	Based on IEP
Hearing Teacher	Based on IEP	Hearing Teacher	Based on IEP
Nurse	.4	Nurse	.3
Vocational Coordinator/DRS	.6	Vocational Coordinator/DRS	.4
Transition Specialist	.8	Transition Specialist	.4
Assistive Technology Coach	.2	Assistive Technology Coach	.1

*\*Current aide staffing used to study the model and compare apples-to-apples financial implications in later sections. One-to-one aide numbers can vary based on the needs of the students.*

**Other HR Considerations**

- Current Program Personnel and Staffing Pattern (Direct)
- Indirect Personnel and Costs in TLS and TrueNorth Transition
- Staff/Teacher Workload and Schedule
- Teacher Caseload
- Related Service Staff
- Job Descriptions
- Administrative Support
- Substitutes
- Instructional Assistants/Non-Certified Staff
- Non-certified staff work days/professional development days
- Salary schedules, certified/non-certified
- Staff Evaluations (who has the responsibility of evaluating IA’s)
- Teacher Team Meeting Time
- Consultants
- Transportation
- Hiring Process

**Enrollment**

Our enrollment in SLE/TLS and TrueNorth Transition Programs generally remains constant, with the exception of a few years where we may see a bubble in average daily enrollment (ADE) or changes in legislation.\* District 225 monitors projections in SLE/TLS and True North Transition through the articulation process with our sender districts.

Location	2020-2021 ADE	2021-2022 ADE	2022-2023 ADE	2023-2024 ADE
<b>TLS High School</b>	34 GBN 16 GBS 18	33 GBN 18 GBS 16	32 GBN 22 GBS 10	33 GBN 19 GBS 14
<b>True North Transition</b>	18	18.74	25*	25

\*Transition enrollment changed due to legislation for compensatory services following COVID-related school closures and extending age of majority through 22.

**Curricular and Student Outcomes Review**

Curriculum: Students in the SLE/TLS program receive research-based curriculum and instruction and curriculum adapted to their individual needs. District 225 utilizes several similar materials and practices. We would need to acquire some curriculum (e.g., EQUALS, Leveled Literacy,

SRA), but it is not a barrier to building capacity. The district also anticipates that greater collaboration would lead to shared resources to benefit all students.

Post-Secondary Outcomes: District 225 prides itself on helping all students achieve meaningful post-secondary outcomes by providing instruction in the areas of continued education, employment/vocation, independent living, and community/recreational experiences.

Most students enrolled in TLS/ SLE and TrueNorth Transition programs participate in volunteerism and vocational training while still students within the district. However, the majority of students exit the district and enter day programs. A few are employed and/or attend post-secondary education. The District 225 has a track record of success. A 2021-2022 report of District 225 Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) Secondary Transitional Service Program (STEP) outcomes revealed that 4 TrueNorth transition students achieved an outcome compared to 41 students in other Glenbrook special education services. (An outcome is achieved when a student works 240 hours over at least 60 days or, with exception, works 120 hours over at least 60 days due to the severity of disability). Several factors could contribute to this: district vision for employment, parent/student priorities/needs, the nature of the student's disability, relationships with local businesses, etc. Glenbrook has a long-standing relationship with many local businesses to employ students with disabilities. Our student employment outcomes exceed that of other area districts and the state. District 225 can meet or exceed those outcomes using our vocational relationships and experience within the students' home community.

### **Facilities and Space Review**

Presently, TrueNorth staff at Glenbrook North and Glenbrook South have their office space on the TrueNorth campus. We have analyzed and are planning for the office assignments if approved to build capacity.

The TrueNorth Transition Space is located in Highland Park. There is a strong desire to have the Transition space in students' home community. This will be discussed further in the model.

### **Financial Review of Comparable Programs through the District 225**

Currently, the District 225 pays a tuition cost to TrueNorth to administer the programs. The tuition costs for FY22 SLE and TrueNorth Transition were \$41,058 and \$44,081 per student. The tuition rates do not include the cost of related services (e.g. OT, PT) or 1:1 aides. The tuition and aide cost associated with the TrueNorth TLS/SLE and TrueNorth Transition Program is anticipated to be approximately \$3.7 million this year. The new TrueNorth financial model and budget parameter caused increased direct and indirect costs for FY22 and FY23. The FY23 anticipated rates are \$52,526 (27.90% increase) and \$45,317 (2.80% increase\*) respectively. There is also a 16.1% increase for 1:1 aides based on the collective bargaining agreement.

*\*The lease for the TrueNorth Transition Program was previously included in the tuition. It is not this year and will be billed separately.*

The cost of educating students with significant disabilities is extensive given the nature and severity of students' disabilities and the resulting need for individualized and comprehensive services. Given the difference in salary schedule at the high school level compared to that of TrueNorth (an average of area elementary and high school district salaries), the study of fiscal analysis revealed that the district will not realize a significant cost savings; however, we will realize a small reduction of overhead costs (approximately 9%), while maintaining high quality programming, long-term sustainability and a greater sense of belonging for families and staff in their home communities.

## Recommendation and Model

### Recommendation

After carefully considering all components of the study, it is recommended that District 225 transition from TrueNorth TLS and TrueNorth Transition Program to District-led programming, with consultation and support from TrueNorth as needed through our membership, over a two year period.

### Alignment to Guiding Principles

- Comparable high quality services: District 225 attracts, hires, and retains high quality staff with expertise in their field. The model will closely mirror the current services students receive while also providing for future flexibility in areas identified for continuous improvement.
- Long-term sustainability: District 225 has observed a lot of teacher and staff changes in our TrueNorth classrooms. Some due to staff leaving to work within district programs. This is not unique to TrueNorth, but rather special education cooperatives in general. It is anticipated that we will have high quality candidates seeking to make Glenbrook their long-term home.
- Continuous improvement of the program: There are a number of opportunities for improvement that can be realized: Greater continuum and fluidity between DLS and TLS courses and between District 225 Transition Services and TLS Transition Program, greater coordination and collaboration between staff, greater inclusive support to general education, school community, and community-at-large; transition site in home community and closer to public transportation; opportunities for connections outside of school (local colleges, jobs, volunteerism)
- Greater sense of community: While we work hard to ensure students and staff in the TLS program feel a sense of belonging, there is a systemic dissonance for staff from operating under two different systems- District 225 and TrueNorth. Feedback from teachers in other districts who built capacity reinforces this.
- Greater flexibility in our continuum of services: While we have students who would benefit from inclusion in both DLS and TLS courses, differences in the TLS schedule and teaming processes makes it difficult. This was evident from stakeholder discussions and was repeatedly identified to be a benefit of building capacity.
- Not cost prohibitive: Though previously more cost prohibitive, the TrueNorth cost structure and service delivery model has reached a point where previous concerns regarding programmatic and financial issues have now been diminished.

### Timeline

We heard concern about the 2023-2024 timeline. There was apprehension by the TrueNorth administration and some parents on the speed of whatever change is made. While we are excited about this recommendation, we recognize the amount of work ahead of us (hiring, staffing, staff

development, and space/facilities, etc.) to ensure a smooth transition for students, families, and staff. With this in mind, our timeline creates a foundation in the first year in order to create continuity, followed by a hiring of all the other aspects that allow for services to be effectively delivered.

2023-2024: High School Teachers, Speech Pathologists, and Administrator

2024-2025: Other High School Related Services and Transition Staffing and Space

### **New Model**

The draft plan presented within this memo was formed based on stakeholder feedback and alignment with the focus of the study. Utilizing the multiple sources of data from the study, District 225 is proposing a model that provides specialized programming throughout the day while also creating greater fluidity across the continuum of services. The model would closely align to the current staffing model to ensure a smooth transition and would also more closely mirror our staff and student scheduling to create greater opportunities for alignment and collaboration.

- ❖ Special Education is a service, not a place.
- ❖ Glenbrook students of all abilities are an integral part of the school-wide community, both academically and socially
- ❖ We offer a continuum of services to meet the individual needs of all students in their home high school.
- ❖ We staff each classroom with the personnel needed to meet the learning needs of students and provide the content expertise.

It is recommended that the Board approve the 2023-2024 Phase 1 Plan as presented below.

### **Phase 1**

Begin the transition by hiring core staff for high school classrooms and administration to provide supervision and support to those classrooms and families, and prepare for full-implementation for the 2024-2025 school year plan.

- Administrator 1.0 FTE
- GBN Certified Special Education Teachers 2.0 FTE
- GBS Certified Special Education Teachers 2.0 FTE
- GBN/GBS Certified Special Education Teacher 1.0 FTE
- District Speech Pathologists 2.0 FTE

In the first year, the **administrator** would assist the Director of Special Education and other district and building leaders in leading, planning, directing, and implementing programs and services for district students with disabilities enrolled in specialized services and programs, including TLS, TrueNorth Transition Program, and Glenbrook Transition Services. After Phase 1 planning and implementation, the administrator will oversee Transition for students previously in TrueNorth Transition and Glenbrook Transition Services and serve as an additional support to the buildings.

Hiring the **teachers for the 4 classrooms** allows us to create greater long-term continuity in staff for our students and families and will allow us to begin the work for the 2023-2024 school year (onboarding, curriculum planning, aide utilization, scheduling, integration in district systems). An additional **GBN/GBS teacher** is being recommended for hire to deliver courses and services per teacher contract for planning and lunch.

It was recommended by TrueNorth that the District 225 also hire the **speech pathologist FTE** in the first year as well. First, we had one (out of two) TrueNorth speech pathologist resign, and there would be a change for next year as is. Secondly, the speech pathologist in the other building may change as we switch from speech pathologists within the SLE/TLS program to it as a billed service. The speech pathologist also serves to provide coverage for the teacher.

### **Fiscal Implications**

For the 2021-22 fiscal year, TrueNorth expenses totaled \$4.9M. Financial projections for the 2022-23 fiscal year indicate a year-over-year increase of 19.17%, or a total expense of \$5.8M.

In an effort to determine the financial implication to transitioning the TrueNorth programs to district-operated programs, the Business Services team analyzed the TrueNorth 2022-23 staffing plan and operating budget for Glenbrook-based programs. Assuming average salary schedule placements for all personnel expenses, and a supply and materials budget that matches other district programs, we developed a sample budget. The sample budget indicates that the total budget for a district-operated program with the same level of services during the 2022-23 fiscal year would cost \$5.5M. This would result in a savings of approximately \$300,000, or 5.2%.

## Phase 2

### 2024-2025 School Year: Anticipated High School Related Services and Transition Staffing

Position	Total FTE	2023-2024	2024-2025 Additional Staffing
High School Teachers	5.00	5.00	0.00
Transition Teachers	2.00	0.00	2.00
Classroom Instructional Assistant	6.00	0.00	6.00
1:1 Aide*	28.00	0.00	28.00
Speech-Language Pathologist	3.00	2.00	1.00
Assistive Technology	0.30	0.00	0.30
Intervention Specialist	1.40	0.00	1.40
Nurse	0.70	0.00	0.70
Instructional Coaching	1.00	0.00	1.00
Board Certified Behavior Specialist (BCBA)/Behavioral Support)	1.00	0.00	1.00
Transition Specialist	1.00	0.00	1.00
Employment Specialist (Job Coaches)	4.00	0.00	4.00
Vocational Teacher/Coordinator	1.00	0.00	1.00
Transportation Claims/Support	1.00	0.00	1.00
Instructional Supervisor - TLS	1.00	0.00	1.00
District Administrator/Instructional Supervisor - Transition	1.00	1.00	0.00
Occupational Therapist	1.00	0.00	1.00
Physical Therapist**	0.50	0.00	0.50
Instructional Assistant Overtime	1.00	0.00	1.00
	<b>59.90</b>	<b>8.00</b>	<b>52.90</b>

\* Aide numbers may vary based on student need. However, 28 was used as current staffing and financial comparison.

\*\* May partner with TrueNorth or other districts given fluctuations of PT and part-time FTE

\*\*\*Vision and Hearing Itinerant Services are not part of program staffing and will continue to be contracted given low-incidence.

### Rationale for Additional Staffing

Teacher: The addition of a 1.0 teacher was previously discussed above.



Administration: Additional Administrator FTE of 0.25 addresses the need for coordinated supervision of Transition, including \*Glenbrook Transition which is currently supervised by the Instructional Supervisors in the buildings and supported by the Director of Special Education. It also addresses the need for additional Extended School Year (ESY) supervision that is currently provided by TrueNorth. This structure will allow the 1.0 Instructional Supervisor to be streamlined at GBN and GBS following our district building-based model to create greater communication, collaboration, and support across administration and staff addressing the goal of providing specialized programming and working toward a greater continuum of services. In the study, there was an emphasis on the importance of greater administrative oversight and behavioral support.

### **Transition Leased Space**

The district is recommending a transition from the use of TrueNorth Transition lease to a District 225 leased property in the Glenbrook region. This will be in addition to the small leased office space in downtown Northbrook which could not accommodate the number of students receiving transition services. Rather than having one large space, it is the recommendation to have a second space, ideally situated in Glenview to serve as a hub for both communities.