

# OnTeam

## October 2008



Dear Parents/Guardians,

Over the last two years, I have sent you OnTeam, an initiative from Pupil Services, to encourage discussion and enhance our school-home partnership. In continuing that effort, I thought it may be interesting to connect some of the latest national thinking and research in the field and match it with our action plan this year.

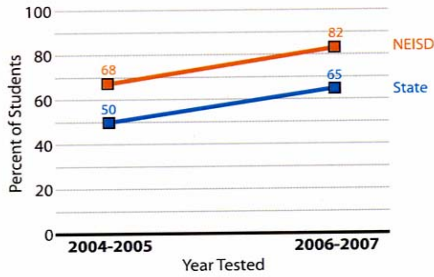
Coincidentally, Nancy Sherburne, our SpEd PAC (Special Education Parent Advisory Council) Co-Chairperson, shared with us an article from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). I had the opportunity to read and reflect upon the various levels of interventions that five underperforming school districts throughout the US implemented to better help students with special education needs. What can we learn from these underperforming schools' histories and what can we apply from those learned experiences to our district? Even though we are doing well, I must always look for ways to have our students excel in learning and achievement.

What is striking in the report was the underlying common denominator in all schools: inclusion. The more the school included the students in the regular education classes and offered support within the classroom, the higher the scores, as measured by their respective States' high-stake testing. Raising the bar for these students was important as the message to the home, teachers, and especially to the students was: you can! High levels of expectation are important in student achievement. But, inclusion in and of itself is not enough. The collaboration between special education and regular education teachers is a coordinated effort, not only in the planning of curriculum, but also in the instruction itself (co-teaching, as an example). Schools, which did well, had a strong commitment to the school-home partnership and involved the home in the decision-making process. Consequently, the payoff was high; tests scores increased dramatically.

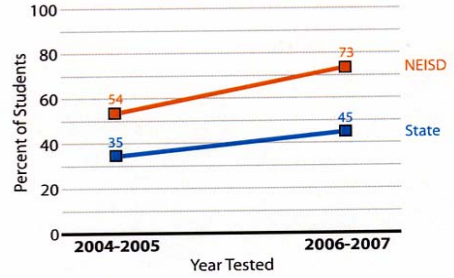
These accomplishments are not an easy task for any school. First, these inclusive practices must be research proven and targeted to professional development. The amount of planning and reflective time for teachers, both in regular and special education, must be available and a deep sense of commitment must permeate the culture of the school. Second, data must be collected and analyzed for instruction in general by examining the curriculum as well as scrutinizing individual students' performance to make appropriate changes and modification in teaching. Data helps drive the decisions we make about curriculum and instruction, both generally and specifically.



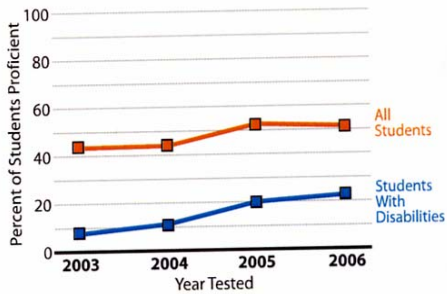
**North East Independent School District  
TAKS Pass Rates for Special Education  
Students: Reading**



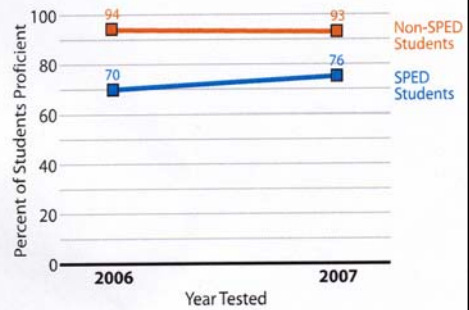
**North East Independent School District  
TAKS Pass Rates for Special Education  
Students: Math**



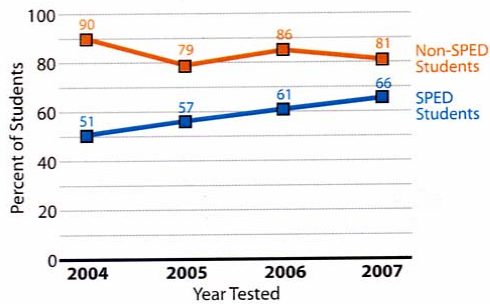
**Snowline Joint Unified School District  
English/Language Arts**



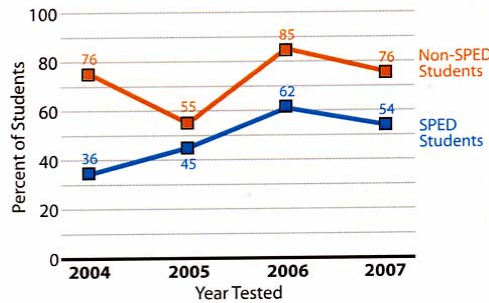
**Worthington Hills Elementary School  
Third through Sixth Grades: Reading**



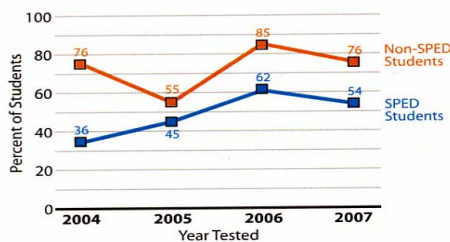
**Mary Lyon School  
Whole School MCAS ELA:  
Proficiency Gap Analysis**



**Mary Lyon School  
Whole School MCAS Math:  
Proficiency Gap Analysis**



**Mary Lyon School  
Whole School MCAS Math:  
Proficiency Gap Analysis**





However, this global summary of the article remains on sterile ground unless we can apply some of its principles to our own school district. Let me explain. Inclusion has been a top priority for the Acton Public/Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools and everyone has supported this endeavor. The more a student is included, the better chances of success, as the student has a tremendous opportunity to have the bar raised in regular education with support. My 2008-2009 Action Plan, complemented by an additional upcoming blueprint of the Special Education Task Force for fiscal drivers, will emphasize that inclusion really addresses our goal of excellence in instruction and quality programs in which reflective thought had been given in the development and execution of teaching, consistent with State standards.

The 2008-2009 Action Plan complements the following research principles:

1. We are continuing our efforts in collecting data on special education students and comparing that data to their regular education counterparts. We assess, reflect, look at data, incorporate school and home input, and make targeted changes, including academic, social and behavioral interventions by offering a set of new skills to our teachers through professional development.
2. Although we remain at the cutting edge of examining students' performance, we are reviewing the Child Study Teams/Student Assistance Teams for more efficient operation to better meet the needs of students. We collaborate closely with the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, to ensure a seamless flow of services between regular and special education with on-going meetings to think through the regular education initiative of RTI (Response to Intervention) over the next two school years. The RTI process will be discussed in an upcoming issue of OnTeam.
3. We are reviewing the out-of-district population in a systemic way to transition some students back to a more inclusive setting. We continue to advocate for new programming to provide better opportunities for students to succeed. And, those attempts will not only benefit the student population, but also the budgetary process as well.
4. We will continue our efforts to closely look at IEP goals themselves to ensure that the goals are related directly to the State standards of the regular education curriculum. That is why the role of the regular education teacher who participates at the IEP team meeting is so critical. Balance of remediation and compensatory strategies are important factors in the development of an IEP.
5. We are making greater efforts, based upon data, to shift some students to a more integrated setting (shift from support from outside the classroom to inside the classroom) to raise the level of expectation. That is why our work with the curriculum department is so important as all these steps are necessary to implement for students' learning and achievement but our approach is always done in a thoughtful and intentional way, based upon sound research and data collection.

The article detailed many small but useful suggestions that are valid but what I intended to do here in this summary was enumerate the systemic goals and the vision for excellence in our schools by merging the major report findings with my Action Plan. As always, I am interested in your comments and your view. Please share them with me by email, by telephone, in person or through our many opportunities for parents, including our upcoming 3rd Annual Parent Workshop Day on November 7th at Congregation Beth Elohim, Acton. Let's begin another productive year of learning!

P.S. If you are interested in reading the full text of the article by the National Center for Learning Disabilities, "Challenging Change: How Schools and Districts are Improving the Performance of Special Education Students", we have placed it on our website and have limited hard copies available for you, upon request. Again, we thank our SpEd PAC for sharing this article with us.

Sincerely,  
Liza Huber  
Director of Pupil Services



Join the Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council by visiting [www.abspedpac.org](http://www.abspedpac.org)  
Co-Chair Nancy Sherburne, [nsherburne@mindspring.com](mailto:nsherburne@mindspring.com) Co-Chair Terry Lindgren, [terry.lindgren@comcast.net](mailto:terry.lindgren@comcast.net)