

Addressing the Achievement Gap in Special Education



FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS

MILTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OCTOBER 2014

Addressing the Achievement Gap in Special Education



After the presentation on October 1st regarding the Achievement Gap in Special Education, the School Committee posed a number of follow-up questions.

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QUESTIONS:

1. Is the state trying to compare the different disabilities and looking at scores that way?
2. Do we have the data within each school or each program to compare students with disabilities?
3. Can we look at the student growth data so that administration or teachers could see whether students with a certain disability are responding well to an intervention, while others are not?
4. Can we do that to pinpoint which disabilities were NOT affecting as much growth with the strategies we are trying?

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- DESE has not published any data review related to specific disabilities and achievement rates.
- Individual student data is available and can be sorted and reviewed in any number of ways.
- DESE sorts data by grade, school and subgroups.
- DESE does not sort the data by different, specific groups such as disability or specific program.
- This is the kind of information that we hope a new Data Specialist will be able to complete.

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QUESTION:

1. We have individualized action plans for students performing at Warning or Failing level...understanding that our students in Special Education have IEPs, do you anticipate that there will also be some more work in determining specific strategies based on where they are, or what their disability is, that will allow us to be more specific about how we plan to accelerate progress and achievement?

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- Students with disabilities are evaluated with the same benchmark assessments as their peers throughout the year.
- Benchmark assessments are aligned with grade level Standards.
- Based on these ongoing assessments, targeted interventions are implemented for students who are not achieving at grade level.
- The function of IEP Teams is to determine what each student's individual needs are for accommodations, based on how their disability impacts access to the curriculum.
- Data driven differentiated interventions, based on disability, may be refined with the assistance of a Data Specialist.
- Student Service Plans are being implemented to include assessment data and specific strategies to support students based on their individual needs.

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QUESTIONS:

Regarding Response to Intervention and the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support chart:

1. On the chart what specifically is happening on that graph?
How does it actually play out now?
2. What are specific examples of the kind of interventions we are doing ?
3. Which way should we go? Do you use it in some classrooms or grades and not others?

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- Response To Intervention (RTI) is a process that typically requires a whole school approach, as both general and special education teachers are needed for the model.
- Students are instructed in flexible groups: whole group, small group and individualized learning centers.
- Student groupings can change throughout the year, based on how the student is accessing the curriculum and what specific interventions she/he may require.

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EX: The Tucker School employs an RTI approach in ELA and Math

- **IN ADDITION TO** full class instruction, they utilize their special education teachers, general education teachers, literacy specialists and Title I teachers to create smaller targeted groups.
- Grade 3 teachers create a pre-test on Measurement in Study Island. Students complete the assessment and teachers receive the data immediately.
- Student groups are created based on common needs and targeted lessons/interventions are planned based on those needs.
- At the end of the three weeks another assessment is given to monitor progress.

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QUESTIONS:

1. Do you have information from other districts that are further along in this process than we are, to see examples of what they are doing ?
2. What do they look like?
3. What do they cost?
4. What personnel are required for the inclusion models?

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Newton Public Schools uses the following RTI approach:

- Tier 1 – General Education instruction with “best” teaching practices. Standard accommodations as outlined in the Curriculum Accommodation Plan (CAP)
- Tier 2 – Small Group instruction provided by math and reading specialists to students identified through baseline assessments.
- Tier 3 – Referral to special education if, after 6 weeks, interventions are needed to continue, i.e. demonstrating evidence of need for specialized instruction, or if current interventions proved to be ineffective.
- Each grade level has a collaborative team meeting each week and a member of the special education team is part of each grade level team to assist with Tier 1 interventions.

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Bowen Elementary School staffing

- Full time Assistant Principal
- Full time Inclusion Facilitator
- Full time Sp. Ed. Team Chair
- Full time Psychologist
- Full time Speech Pathologist
- Co-Taught classrooms in each grade
- Part time Social Thinking educator
- Social Worker 3 days per week
- Part Time Behavior Analyst
- .8 Occupational Therapist
- Full time Math Coach
- Full time Literacy Specialist
- Part time Technology Specialist
- 4 part time literacy aides
- 3 part time intervention aides
- 5 Interns
- 13 instructional aides
- 1.8 Special Education Teachers (in addition to co-taught teachers)

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QUESTIONS:

1. How does a district go about the development of a Response to Intervention or Massachusetts Tiered System of Support model?
2. To the Administration, how do we go about deciding?
 - Steps to implementation would include:
 - Assess efficacy of each school's current intervention approach
 - Decide if there should be one District-wide RTI approach
 - Assess staffing needs to implement the model
 - Provide Professional Development
 - Create flexible schedules

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QUESTIONS:

1. In terms of the proposed plan, regarding timing and budget, are we on a schedule so that we are going to see some proposals for this budget year? 2015-16?
2. On the three themes (program evaluation, additional staffing, professional development), could you see them moving in parallel? The evaluation and teachers and PD, rather than evaluation and then one or two years down the line the other two?

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- How the District chooses to implement the proposed plan is up for discussion. The three suggestions may all occur at once, in parallel or by steps, in a 3 year plan.
- The Leadership Team needs to review various options and determine if they wish to commit resources (time and money) on any specific District-wide Professional Development.
- Professional Development is an ongoing process; it can occur on site, at various conferences, or in classes that staff attend. We seek out and identify opportunities that meet our needs.
- We may wish to conduct a formal Special Education Program Review to assess our need areas and target resources.
- The need for additional special education teachers should be assessed annually based on IEP needs. A proposal for additional special education teachers is already being discussed in light of the 2015-16 budget.

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QUESTION:

1. What are potential costs for a Special Education Program Evaluation?
 - The following quotes were just given to smaller District:
 - Walker Partnerships - \$12,045.00
 - West Ed I -\$29,986.00

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QUESTION:

1. What are we doing around social emotional needs/interventions?

To address Social Emotional needs:

- Every school has a Student Support Team (SST)
- Every school has at least 1 School Adjustment Counselor (SAC)
- Secondary schools also have Guidance counselors
- Professional development has been provided in:
 - ✦ Social Skills groups and interventions, Functional Behavior Analysis, Positive Behavior Intervention Plans

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- Every student has access to a counselor for support in school.
 - Students who demonstrate difficulty may be brought forward to their school's Student Support Team (SST) who will discuss and develop a support plan.
 - Teachers or parents can identify/refer students who need counseling support.
 - Older students may self refer.
 - Adjustment Counselors communicate with outside providers to assure an integrated approach.

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- Adjustment Counselors lead Social Skills Groups in all Elementary schools.
- Less formal Lunch Groups occur in all schools, where students who feel anxious can join a small group of peers with their Counselor and begin to build relationships.
- Adjustment Counselors complete a Functional Behavioral Analysis as needed and contribute to developing Positive Behavioral Intervention Plans for students (FBAs and BIPs).
- Counselors see most students at scheduled times, but are available for crisis intervention as needed in their buildings.

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QUESTION:

1. Is the number of students in the district on IEPs and 504s over the last few years going down?

October 1st	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
IEPs	604	625	600	592	609	629	646	649	580	538	564
OOD	79	68	71	59	56	51	44	49	51	45	47
504s									~28	72	178
*Total MPS	3594	3651	3724	3768	3876	3952	3921	3886	3934	3944	4064

*DESE report

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QUESTION:

1. What outside agencies are we using to support our ability to provide services to Special education students?
 - We are currently working with:
 - The New England Center for Children (NECC)
 - Augmentative and Alternative Communication Strategies (SWAAC Consulting)
 - South Shore Hearing Center
 - Clarke School for the Deaf
 - Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI)
 - Easter Seals
 - Ely Center

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QUESTION:

1. How are our children distributed in classrooms?
 - At the Elementary level special education students are placed in all classrooms.
 - Special education students who are able to access the curriculum, but have high needs for accommodations, are recommended for Co-Taught classrooms.
 - In schools and grades that have Co-Taught classrooms, there is typically only one other classroom per grade in which to place students with disabilities.

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- At the Secondary level, IEPs determine which students require Team teaching, Co-teaching and/or additional academic support classes.
- When not specified, students with disabilities in the Middle and High School are distributed as equally as possible with the following considerations:
 - Balance by a number of factors- sending school, gender, level of need, similar accommodations, etc.
 - Past history of students (i.e. sometimes students have been together for a long time and need a fresh start)
 - Teacher recommendations (i.e. a student works well with another)
 - Other considerations might include health, academic, social/emotional needs

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QUESTION:

1. What might it look like to have an inclusion classroom, or some services for students who might want to go into the French Immersion program, but can't because they have a special learning need?

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- The French Immersion program currently has two academic support teachers who provide support services to struggling students in a model similar to special education service delivery.
- Special Education services in English are available to French Immersion students.

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- Some challenges in providing services in English for French Immersions students include:
 - Occupational Therapy supports fine motor development for handwriting
 - ✦ French handwriting is different than English handwriting
 - Speech Language supports expressive and receptive language acquisition
 - ✦ Should students be pulled out of French to receive Speech Language supports in English?
 - Academic supports
 - ✦ If provided in English, does this defeat the purpose of the immersion experience?

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Some ideas:

- Formalize Pre-referral process that includes (RTI) interventions.
 - Only after third tier intervention refer for Special Education evaluation
- Hire additional French Immersion Support teachers to provide small group instruction/remediation.
 - Ideally they would also have a license in Special Education
- Hire an OT and SLP who are equally fluent in English and French to provide consistent services that do not disrupt the Immersion experience.
- Based on needs of specific cohorts of students assess need for Co-taught classroom, or segmented push in services.