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**Newton Public Schools**

**Special Education Review**

**Revised December 2, 2011**

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## **Introduction**

District and Community Partners (DCP), a division of the District Management Council (DMC), conducted a Special Education Review on behalf of the Newton Public Schools. The review focuses equally on the academic achievement of students with special needs and on the cost effective use of limited financial resources. The study is conducted under the framework of the continuous improvement model. It does not try to determine what is good or bad, but rather creates a road map to help move a district to the next level of performance. This process acknowledges that all systems can improve and that opportunities for improvement are built upon the district's current strengths, history, structure, and resources.

The review compares current practice in the district to best practices drawn from similar systems around the country. It also incorporates a number of well-tested analytical tools. In all cases, the evaluation recognizes that increasing student achievement, managing costs, and respecting children, parents and staff are equally important. Addressing one, while ignoring the others, is not an option.

The review also respects the reality that school districts are complex organizations tasked with a multitude of expectations, unfunded mandates, priorities, and responsibilities. To that end, a small number of high-potential, high-impact, and high-leverage opportunities are recommended. A short, targeted plan is more beneficial than a long laundry list of observations, options, and possible actions. Other aspects of the RFP are addressed separately.

The research includes extensive in-person interviews, online surveys, a deep look at hard data, classroom visits, benchmarking against best practices and like communities, and online research. Extensive financial analysis and a review of existing reports and district documents were also conducted.

The Special Education Review highlights many of the strengths in the district and pinpoints six interrelated opportunities to increase student achievement and reduce costs.

## Commendations

### **1. The district’s commitment to inclusion is passionate, ingrained in the culture, and implemented across the board.**

The concept of inclusion—having students with special needs participate in general education classrooms—is a thoughtful response to the historical scenario in which special education students were relegated to special classes with few materials, scant curriculum, and low expectations for success. Inclusion tears down the artificial and often counterproductive wall between “special education” students and all other students. It conforms to the principle that all students should receive rigorous classes that are taught by teachers who are certified in the subject. Inclusion also provides opportunity for social interactions between typically developing students and their disabled peers.

Districts and states now routinely express their desire to maximize the amount of time special education students spend in general education settings. The Newton Public Schools goes even further. Its support for inclusion is not merely a policy, but a genuine, personal, and passionate commitment woven into the fabric of the district. Indeed, teachers, administrators, and parents all articulated a sense of pride in the district’s strong commitment to inclusion. Inclusion is a source of pride, but, even more importantly, it delivers results. When asked to describe the aspects of special education that pleased them, parents cited inclusion with great frequency. Surveys included such responses as, “I believe my child is getting a better education in Newton than elsewhere,” or, equally enthusiastically, “The current inclusion model is working extremely well for my child and he is thriving in it.” Overall, inclusion at the elementary level was praised more often and more vigorously than at the secondary level.

- 79% of parents surveyed believe that “inclusion is beneficial for most students with mild special needs.”
- 90% of special education staff believe that “inclusion is beneficial for most students with mild special needs.”
- When asked during in-person interviews “What are you most proud of?” nearly 100% of participants responded that the district’s commitment to inclusion was their top source of pride.
- Parents overwhelmingly believe their child with special needs is accepted by the school staff.

Inclusion is successful in the Newton Public Schools because the district embraces it as a practice as well as a theory. In the district, inclusion is really happening, day in and day out.

- So thoroughly embedded in the general education setting are special education students that, in many cases during our site visits, we could not even tell who had an IEP and who

didn't. All students with and without an IEP were receiving engaging, high quality instruction.

- Students with severe special needs are fully included in general education elementary classes. This is an “above and beyond” commitment to inclusion compared to like districts in the state.

### **1a. Relatively few students out-of-district**

Because the district is committed to integrating special education students into the general education setting, the district does not send many students out-of-district. At the point of data collection, the district had 160 students in out-of-district placements, representing 1.3% of all students in the district.

- The percentage of students the Newton Public Schools serves out-of-district is slightly (0.3 percentage points) lower than the state average.
- Newton is squarely in line with the top 30 highest performing districts in the state.
- Massachusetts overall has many more students at out-of-district placements than most other states. As such, the Newton Public Schools has slightly (0.3 percentage points) more students out-of-district than like districts nationally.

<b>Students out-of-district</b>	
Newton	1.3%
Top Performing MA Districts	1.4%
All MA K-12 Districts	1.6%
National Like Communities	1.0%

### **1b. A broad array of “programs”**

The district offers a very broad array of in-district programs and individual accommodations for students with somewhat greater needs, such as emotional and psychiatric difficulties and specific learning disabilities. Being able to serve these more challenging students within the district is a strong statement of the Newton Public Schools’ commitment to inclusion.

Most school districts provide classroom based programs to support students with autism or behavioral needs, but the Newton Public Schools has adapted this strategy to align with its commitment to inclusion. In most districts, a special education program is classroom-based, and often substantially separate from the general education setting (with some inclusion during the day). In the Newton Public Schools, programs are not, for the most part, separate or classroom based. Most students spend nearly all their day in general education classes but receive extra support, paraprofessional help, inclusion facilitator guidance, check-ins, and oversight from

program-based staff. The district's programs provide vastly more inclusion than programs in like communities in the state.

Most parents prefer their child to be educated within the district. This provides stronger ties to the community, neighborhood friendships, opportunities for inclusion with typically developing peers, and a much shorter ride to school. In-district programs also reduce costs by up to 40%, while preserving quality.

## **2. Students with special needs achieve academically at high levels.**

Students with special needs in the Newton Public Schools achieve at high levels. The district's performance on the MCAS is similar to like communities and the highest achieving districts in the state.

There are, as with any district, areas of relative strength and weakness. Though strong across the board, the district's special education performance is especially robust at the elementary level:

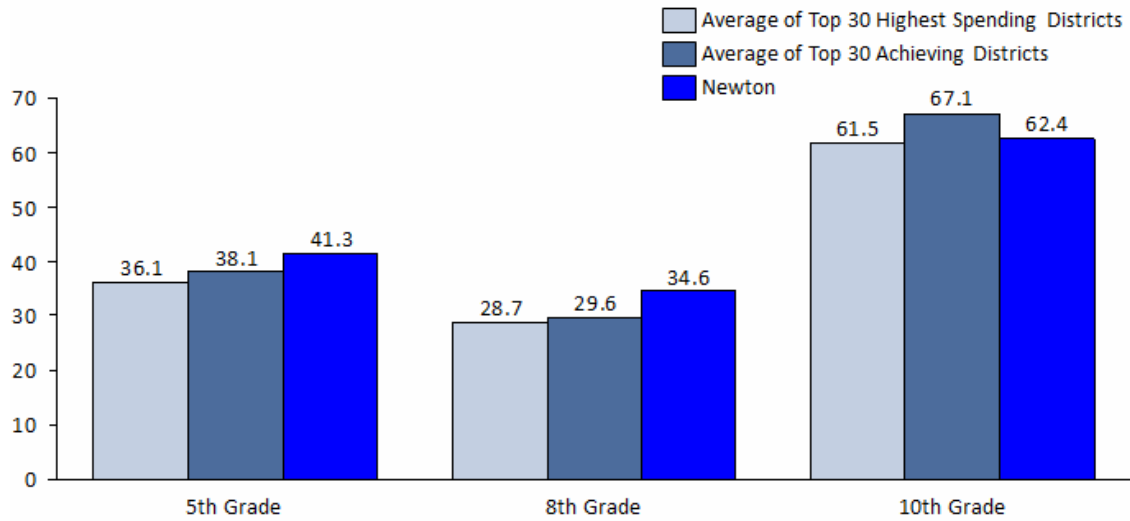
- The district's 5<sup>th</sup> graders with disabilities have above-average math proficiency when compared to either like or highest achieving districts in the state.
- The district's 5<sup>th</sup> graders with disabilities performed even more impressively in ELA. Their proficiency is significantly above the average when compared to either like or highest achieving districts in the state.

As grade levels progress, the district also outshines its peer group in 8<sup>th</sup> grade math proficiency.

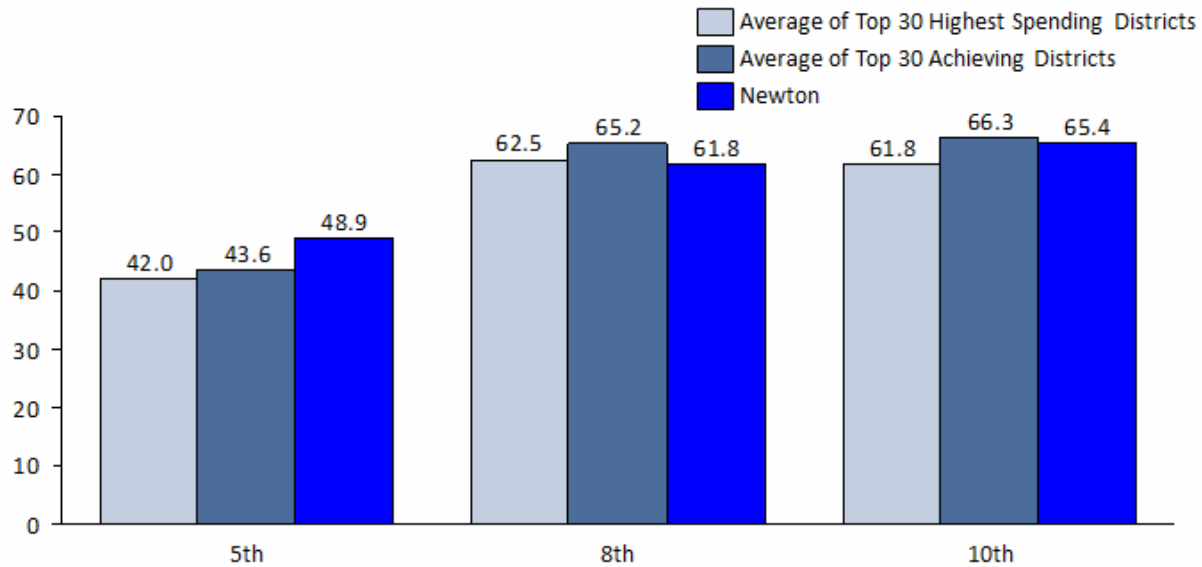
- The district's 8<sup>th</sup> graders with disabilities have an above-average math proficiency when compared to either like or highest achieving districts in the state.

The overall achievement level is strong, but it is not as strong in ELA as in math nor is it as strong in 10<sup>th</sup> grade as in the earlier grades.

**Math Proficiency among Students with Disabilities (2010 MCAS)**



**ELA Proficiency among Students with Disabilities (2010 MCAS)**



Despite the inevitable peaks and valleys, the district's special education achievement is admirable and broadly in line with a distinguished peer group.

It should be noted that the district's strong achievement for students with disabilities is skewed by the district's higher rate of special education identification (see Opportunity #6).

### **3. Staff members have a passion for students and a genuine desire to improve continuously.**

Staff members of the Newton Public Schools have a passion and devotion to ensure that students with special needs achieve academically, socially, and emotionally at high levels. A clear sign of the staff's commitment is their specific focus on accommodating the needs of each individual student.

Being an educator of students with special needs is a demanding job, especially during times of tight budgets, rising expectations, and increasing numbers of students with significant disabilities.

In the Newton Public Schools, however, complacency has in no way taken root. Much to the contrary, staff members strive for continuous improvement. They are rightly proud of their accomplishments and eager to show off their schools, but they are also engaged in working toward even higher achievement.

During the in-person interviews, staff were highly engaged in the discussions, sharing well-developed analyses of the district's strengths and challenges. They were candid and they exhibited a genuine desire to move to the next level of excellence.

During the school visits, both teachers and administrators were eager and proud to share their successes, but they also did not sugarcoat areas that could still be improved. This exemplifies their professionalism and commitment.

Throughout the conversations, the definition of success was broad, including social and emotional measures as well as academics. In some high-performing communities, academic achievement can eclipse the whole child focus, but not in the Newton Public Schools.

### **4. The district's financial staffing and budgetary systems are world-class.**

Financial sophistication is rare among school districts and special education departments because the skill sets needed to excel in number-crunching and data analysis do not generally align with those associated with loving to work with children. Yet the systems required to conduct financial analysis are just as vital as pedagogical knowledge in this period of tight finances.

The Newton Public Schools has developed accurate and detailed financial systems that can be used flexibly to provide swift and accessible information. Virtually all data requests regarding finances, staffing, IEPs, compliance, and trends were provided quickly, accurately, and with context. Both the business office and the special education office have, at their fingertips, a wealth of information that can be cut, cross-tabbed, and analyzed quickly and thoughtfully. This level of speed, accuracy, and flexibility is very uncommon and an important strength as the district navigates a challenging financial road ahead.

## **5. The district's ability to collect and analyze student achievement data is very comprehensive and sophisticated.**

Many school districts struggle to handle the large quantities of data produced by MCAS, common formative assessments, and state reporting requirements. Most districts simply collect this information, but do not have the capability to make meaning from the numbers.

Amid this backdrop of most districts' limited capabilities, the Newton Public Schools distinguishes itself: It has a highly sophisticated student data infrastructure and an extremely able data analysis staff. Both the systems and the staff are more capable than districts of comparable size. This combination of technical and human capital enables the district to capture and analyze any type of information—not only standard topics for analysis like MCAS data and common formative assessments, but also higher order questions like student growth and even less readily quantifiable metrics such as social interaction. (Not all of this data is available, but if it were available, the infrastructure exists to process and analyze it.)

## High Impact Opportunities

### **1. Fine-tune the district’s inclusion model to better serve a small number of children with severe needs (likely less than 5% of students with severe needs) who might benefit from a slightly more structured environment.**

Inclusion is an inspiring and compelling principle. It promotes rigorous learning and fosters social interaction. However, full inclusion may not meet the needs of all children. Sometimes, inclusion provides only superficial integration that does not remove the sense of isolation or may not provide an environment for some children to flourish.

Inclusion is the preferred method of service delivery for most students. It works effectively for the vast majority of students and it should be used whenever helpful. But inclusion is most successful as a tool for reducing the achievement gap and helping students when its limitations are recognized.

#### **1a. There is a need for open dialogue about which students with severe special needs are best served in inclusion.**

The current approach to inclusion is effective for 95%-plus of students with special needs. There is an opportunity to fine-tune the district’s approach to inclusion, which could be beneficial to some students with severe special needs. Staff members are aware of inclusion’s constraints for students with severe special needs, but found it difficult to discuss them freely. The virtue of the district’s strong commitment to inclusion—translating it into practice rather than just supporting it in theory—becomes a weakness when inclusion hardens into a dogma that cannot be debated. Inclusion for all is not the same as inclusion when best, and, at times, in moderation.

The trend appears to be that parents and general education teachers are more concerned about how inclusion is working while administrators are the most positive.

Inclusion works well in the district:

	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>
Parents	22.6%	77.4%
General Ed teachers	28.6%	71.4%
Special Educators	18.1%	81.9%
Administrators	10.1%	89.9%

The following quotes from online parent surveys represented some of the sentiments that were also voiced in the in person interviews.

- The quote of one parent aptly summarizes a more general feeling: “The district clings to an inclusion philosophy that does not always serve individual students best, refusing to consider other instructional models that would be more appropriate for certain students.”
- As another parent concurred, “[The district should] recognize the reality that full inclusion may rob children of important time to develop skills through intensive instruction.”
- During classroom visits, especially at the elementary level, some students who were “fully included” were observed as actually being fully separated from the general education class, but simply located within the same classroom.

In particular, there are two discrete groups for whom inclusion may not in all cases be the best approach. For these students, the all-embracing commitment to inclusion prevents a frank discussion of inclusion’s limitations and the individual needs of students with certain disabilities.

### **1b. Explore options to better serve students with severe autism, emotional/behavioral impairments, and cognitive impairments.**

Some students with significant special needs, such as those with cognitive impairment, may not benefit from constant and total integration in the general education setting. They could benefit from learning basic life skills before they tackle the specialized content of subject-based classes.

Far from achieving integration and accelerating progress, placing these students in a regular classroom can inhibit learning and fosters isolation. Their only teacher and friend is often their aide. They work on different assignments than the rest of the students. Stories from other districts exemplify the challenge of cognitively impaired students in general education settings. For example, in one other district, we observed a student with significant special needs colored a picture of a boat while the rest of the class wrote an essay on Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*. It can be equally unhelpful when these significantly disabled students receive the same assignment as the rest of the class. The students then wait passively while their aide writes a haiku or completes a math exercise for them.

- Our visits to three different elementary schools in the district observed special education students with severe special needs sitting on the perimeter of the class or at a table in the back of the room with their paraprofessionals. The students were not engaged with the general education teacher or their peers. In one case, an aide both wrote and read to the class an assignment for a student who seemed unaware of the activity.

Based on parent feedback from the surveys it is clear that many believe inclusion is working well for their child, and consider neighborhood inclusion one of the best aspects of the district’s offerings. At the same time, a fairly sizable group of parents want less inclusion and more pullout or separate classes. The key will be keep what is working and expand the offerings, when appropriate.

- A majority of parents (54%) disagreed with the statement, “Inclusion is beneficial for most students with severe special needs.”
- Nearly a third of parents stated that less than 75% inclusion would be best for their child.

While it is difficult to generalize, since IEPs should be individualized based on each student’s needs, a few options could be considered when appropriate and with full parental involvement and agreement. For students with significant disabilities:

- Define what skills will most benefit the student, including socialization, life skills, basic money management, personal hygiene, or communication.
- Provide direct instruction during at least part of the day in these targeted skills. This will likely be in a pullout setting.
- When (in a few cases) grade-level content isn’t practical, provide instruction based on student ability and need.
- Provide inclusion and social interaction opportunities during non-academic times of the day.

Some of this instruction is more effective in a partially separate setting.

It is important to keep in mind that these programs can still maintain much of the feel and philosophy of the Newton community. For example, while some districts might centralize such programs in only a few schools, this type of support can be provided at each neighborhood school, which reflects the community’s value of local neighborhood schools.

### **Financial Impact**

Given the very high level of support provided to students with severe autism, emotional/behavioral impairments and cognitive impairments, such as inclusion facilitators, 1:1 aides, and special education teacher support, it is likely that slightly less inclusive programs based at each school would not increase costs at all.

In some districts, special education teachers assigned to support students with cognitive impairment are expected to develop appropriate curriculum and manage their own programs. These programs are often staffed with one paraprofessional for every two students.

More centralized programs would be more cost-effective but may be inconsistent with the district’s desire for neighborhood schools for all elementary children. If the district were to pursue more centralized programs for students with severe needs, one option would be to group students with similar needs (such as severe cognitive impairments) across the district as they are leaving preschool and then again as they are leaving elementary school. Students with similar needs could attend one elementary school that receives specialized resources to serve students with that profile of need, and the school could develop expertise in serving students with those

specific needs.

### **1c. Create more small, safe, structured environments.**

Some students with emotional disabilities or Asperger's also might benefit from support beyond full inclusion. These students are often very bright and thrive on rigorous academics. They struggle, however, in the intimidating environment of a large, loud school, primarily at the middle and high school levels.

The absence of such small, safe learning environments is especially noticeable at the middle and high school level. While the elementary schools reinforce inclusion with additional support, the middle and high schools are large and they provide few "small, safe settings." Currently, some such programs are offered:

- Central High, a small, structured alternative program serving students with a range of emotional or therapeutic needs and currently accommodating 14 students.
- The Bridge Program, offered at Day Middle School, provides students with emotional disabilities with small group and individualized support, weekly group counseling and a behavioral management system. Students receive close monitoring, crisis intervention, and coordination with outside mental health providers. The program served 15 students at the time of research.
- Project FOCUS at Brown Middle School is another existing program that creates a small, safe environment for students. Students are fully included in grade-level academic classes with additional support as needed. Throughout the day, students are supported by behavior therapists that are specifically trained in addressing the needs of this population. The program also has a dedicated space for students when they are not in inclusion.
- 45-day stabilization programs across from South, at the Education Center, and Franklin Elementary serving seven, 12, and nine students at the time they were observed, respectively
- The Learning Program at South presents materials in a multi-sensory format with frequent review and practical application of new skills to aid students in acquiring and refining skills. The classroom setting is highly structured, homework is closely monitored and extra support time is available to facilitate learning, with a goal of increasing students' ability to access the general education curriculum.
- The Southside program at South serves students with behavioral, emotional, social, and/or academic challenges that have prevented them from succeeding in a mainstream academic environment. Many students have a long-standing history of difficulties in school and may have experienced difficulties in other special education programs. At the time of research, the program served 23 students.

Several pieces of evidence point to the desire for the small, safe settings that are currently in short supply in the district's middle and high schools.

As noted in the commendations the district has 1.3% of students in out-of-district placements, a level typical of like communities. Yet the district’s profile of which students are attending out-of-district programs is somewhat atypical and suggests that creating small, safe settings could further reduce the number of students out-of-district and increase the amount of inclusion, particularly for those students with specific learning disabilities and emotional disabilities.

**Students currently out-of-district by disability**

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Number of students out-of-district</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Specific Learning Disability	45	28.1%
Emotional	34	21.3%
Autism / ASD	19	11.9%
Neurological	14	8.8%
Multiple Disabilities	12	7.5%
Health	12	7.5%
No IEP	7	4.4%
Hearing	5	3.1%
Developmental Delay	3	1.9%
Physical	3	1.9%
Intellectual	3	1.9%
Communication	2	1.3%
Unknown	1	0.6%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100%</b>

The largest number of students, 45 (28%), who are out-of-district have a diagnosis of specific learning disability (SLD). To have such a high number of students with SLD served out-of-district is uncommon; in some districts, 0 students with SLD are at out-of-district placements. Students with SLD do not have complex needs that can’t be met in a typical school.

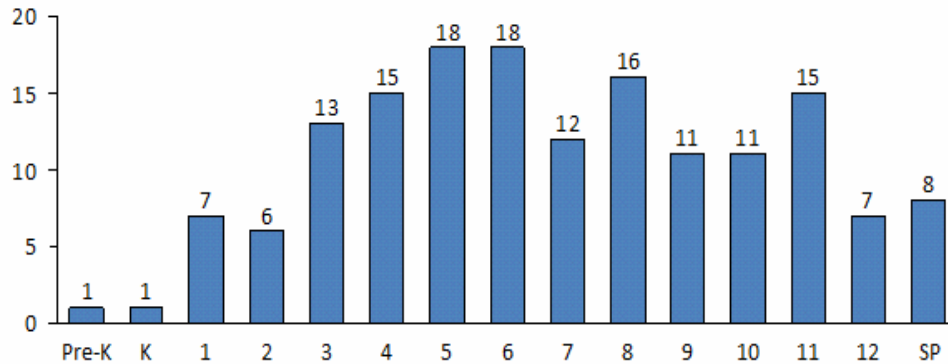
The second largest group of out-of-district students is children with emotional impairment. Other districts have had great success in meeting the needs of these students with small, safe, academically rigorous, yet therapeutically supportive environments.

When students leave the district is as telling as their type of disability.

**Out-of-district placements by grade first placed out**

<b>Grade placed out-of-district</b>	<b>Students placed out-of-district</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Percent</b>
PK	1	2	1%
K	1		
1	7	41	26%
2	6		
3	13		
4	15		
5	18	64	40%
6	18		
7	12		
8	16		
9	11	44	28%
10	11		
11	15		
12	7		
Transition (SP)	8	8	5%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Out-of-district placements by grade first placed out



It is not uncommon in some districts to see a significant number of students leave the district in pre-K or kindergarten. In the Newton Public Schools, virtually no students leave at this age range, because of the district’s significant commitment to inclusion.

Students instead leave the district in the largest numbers in grades 5 and 6, when full inclusion and a concern for the “big middle schools” becomes front and center.

The number of students who leave the district during high school, 28 percent, is very high, given the district’s commitment to inclusion and the broad array of programs it offers. Experience in other districts suggests that, if a student was able to remain in the district for nine or more years, then social and environmental issues, rather than academics or overwhelming demands for support from teachers or aides, explain why they ultimately leave the district.

The most compelling evidence that more small, safe, structured settings are needed is that the district has created some and they been in great demand.

The demand for these programs is high. The stabilization programs are intended for a short transition, but some students are reported to have been in the program two to four times, suggesting more permanent small, safe settings are needed.

Serving students with autism and related disabilities like Asperger’s requires a range of options, given the wide range of student needs. The district has relatively few students with autism served out-of-district, which can be explained by the extensive ABA-based programs and paraprofessional support provided. Current district-wide ABA programs at Countryside, Brown, and North provide intensive services to students with severe ASD. Students with more mild to moderate autism are typically served in general education with inclusion supports.

This strategy tends to be more effective for younger students and students with autism. Meanwhile, children with high-functioning Asperger’s, especially in the middle and high school

years, struggle socially and are distracted and overwhelmed by large, complex schools. They can be too aware and self-conscious to want high levels of paraprofessional support, and thus they struggle or flounder in a big school. The FOCUS program at Brown is well-regarded, but at the time of research was serving only 9 students.

Students with behavior and emotional issues have similar concerns. Parents and staff (as well as our consultants) noted that some classes at the secondary level that serve students with behavior issues tend to consist disproportionately of minority students. Any effort to expand offerings must be careful not to over identify any particular group of students.

Other districts have met the needs of these students by creating schools within schools. These programs often have a separate entrance, cluster classes in a small geographic portion of the building, provide alternative safe settings for lunch and studies, and ensure rigorous academic offerings as well as intensive therapeutic supports. The core subject teachers combine content expertise with a style that allows them to connect with this type of student.

The district could provide a more nurturing environment at the middle and high school levels by creating safe places that complement inclusion and by making available on-call support for behavior and emotional issues. The opportunity to expand alternative programs in light of limited capacity was a consistent theme across our interviews with both parents and staff. Undertaking such an expansion requires a change in mindset. Rather than treating alternative programs as a “tune-up” for students before they return to general education, the district should recognize that the high rate of return to these programs, the existence of “waiting lists,” and the type of students served out-of-district indicate the need for more permanent partially separate environments.

### **Financial Implications**

Small, safe environments are more about different locations than about changes in staffing levels. As such, these efforts are cost-neutral compared to existing inclusion efforts.

A small, safe setting is much more cost-effective than out-of-district placements. Based on the experience of similar districts in the state, the Newton Public Schools could provide alternatives to out-of-district placements for roughly \$25,000 - \$35,000 less per student including transportation. These are high quality programs with identical staffing levels and specialized expertise like therapeutic services, autism experts, behaviorists.

If 90% of students with specific learning disabilities and 50% of students with emotional disabilities were served in small, safe environments, savings of up to \$1.7 million are possible annually.

Developing high quality alternatives to out-of-district placements is, of course, difficult work and must be undertaken only after careful planning. Issues of finding and outfitting appropriate space and staff training must be thoughtfully addressed. However, such programs can serve students in

the community where they live, avoiding a long commute, with a comparable level of services to an out-of-district placement.

**Comparison of in-district and out-of-district program costs per student**

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Average out of district tuition</b>	<b>Typical in-district program</b>
Emotional disability	\$59,176	\$30,000
Specific learning disability	\$46,118	\$30,000

**Potential savings from building additional in-district programs for students with significant needs**

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Students returning to district</b>	<b>Savings in tuition (per student)</b>	<b>Savings in transportation (per student)</b>	<b>Total savings</b>
Emotional disturbance	17	\$29,000	\$10,000	\$663,000
Specific learning disability	40	\$16,000	\$10,000	\$1,040,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>			<b>\$1,703,000</b>

## **2. Consider alternative models of serving students with special needs that are as effective while costing less.**

As budgets tighten, state aid shrinks, and ARRA funds disappear, all districts are challenged to continue to serve students well, despite declining resources. Students deserve and the community demands that the district continue to provide an excellent education to all children, including those with special needs. At the same time, new approaches and service delivery models may be needed to maintain excellent results during difficult financial times. This is particularly true for the City of Newton, which faces significant budget pressures compared to years past.

### **2a. Believe that doing more with less is possible, without harming children.**

Given the dual realities that higher spending does not raise performance and that dwindling resources mean more must be done with less, districts must think in terms of cost effectiveness as well as academic effectiveness.

The Newton Public Schools has achieved the latter, but not the former. Certainly, the district has been effective. It is one of the 30 highest performing districts in the state. But it has not been similarly cost-effective. The Newton Public Schools ranks as Massachusetts' fourth highest spending (non-urban) district, by dollars per pupil, after Nantucket, Weston, and Brookline.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education calculates per pupil spending across all districts, taking into account all sources of funds, including grants, fees, and items for the schools not on the town budget. This is a very accurate apples-to-apples comparison, and it is the basis for the statement that the Newton Public Schools has one of the highest per pupil expenditures in the state.

Unfortunately, no similar measure is calculated for special education spending, and like district comparisons are very difficult-some districts include legal costs for special education in the legal line item, while others put it in special education; some districts exclude transportation, while others include it; and special education administrators can be included in either central office or special education line items.

Given the overall per pupil spending levels in the district the Newton Public Schools has an above average financial commitment to students with special needs (and all students), but feedback from parent surveys indicate that many in the community feel just the opposite.

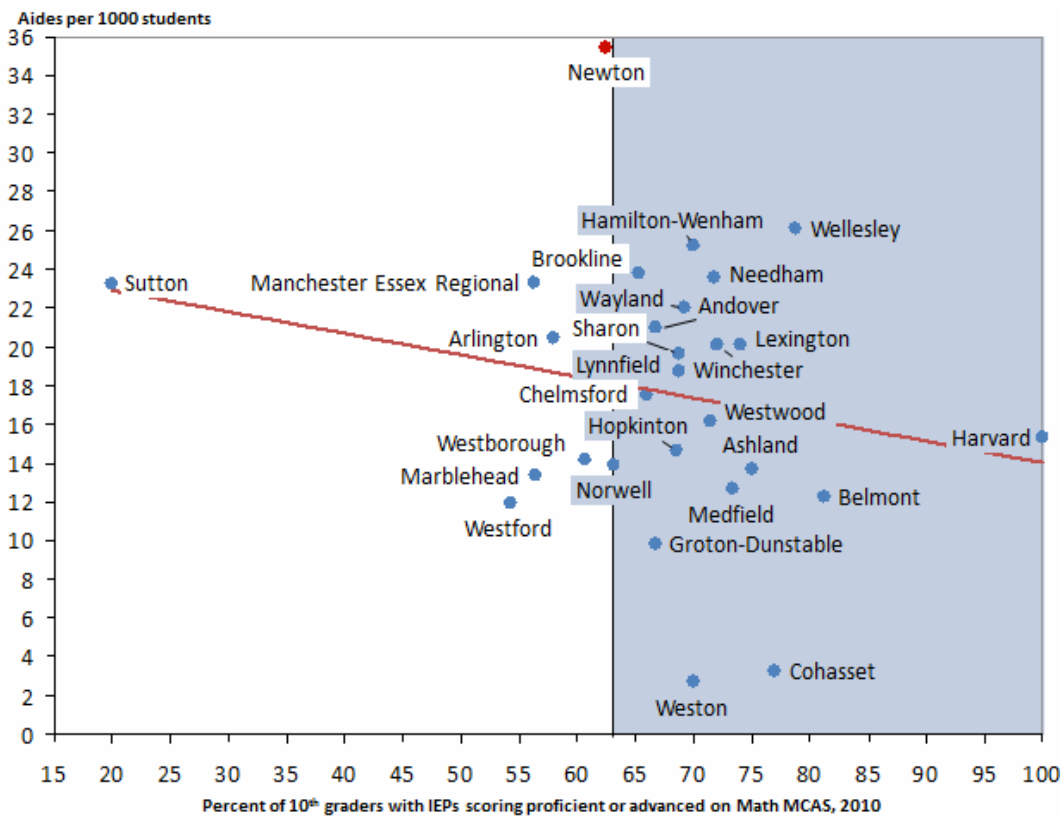
- 28% of parents are not satisfied with the amount of services provided and only a little over a third of parents strongly agree that they are satisfied with the amount of services. In many districts that provide less, more parents are satisfied.

- Open responses to the parent survey mirrored a sense of scarcity that many staff expressed. Comments such as “I wish they had the staff and budget to give my child everything that she needs” were common.

A drawback to a focus on inputs is, quite simply, that the philosophy that more is better for students does not hold true. In fact, not only do more resources not translate into higher achievement; more resources can actually work to the detriment of higher achievement.

- As the chart below illustrates, the Newton Public Schools has the most aides of any of the state’s highest achieving districts, but this does not produce the highest test scores.

**10<sup>th</sup> Grade Special Education Proficiency Rate versus Aide Staffing (top 30 districts)**



- Districts shaded in blue have achieved higher results for students with disabilities
- All of these districts had fewer paraprofessionals

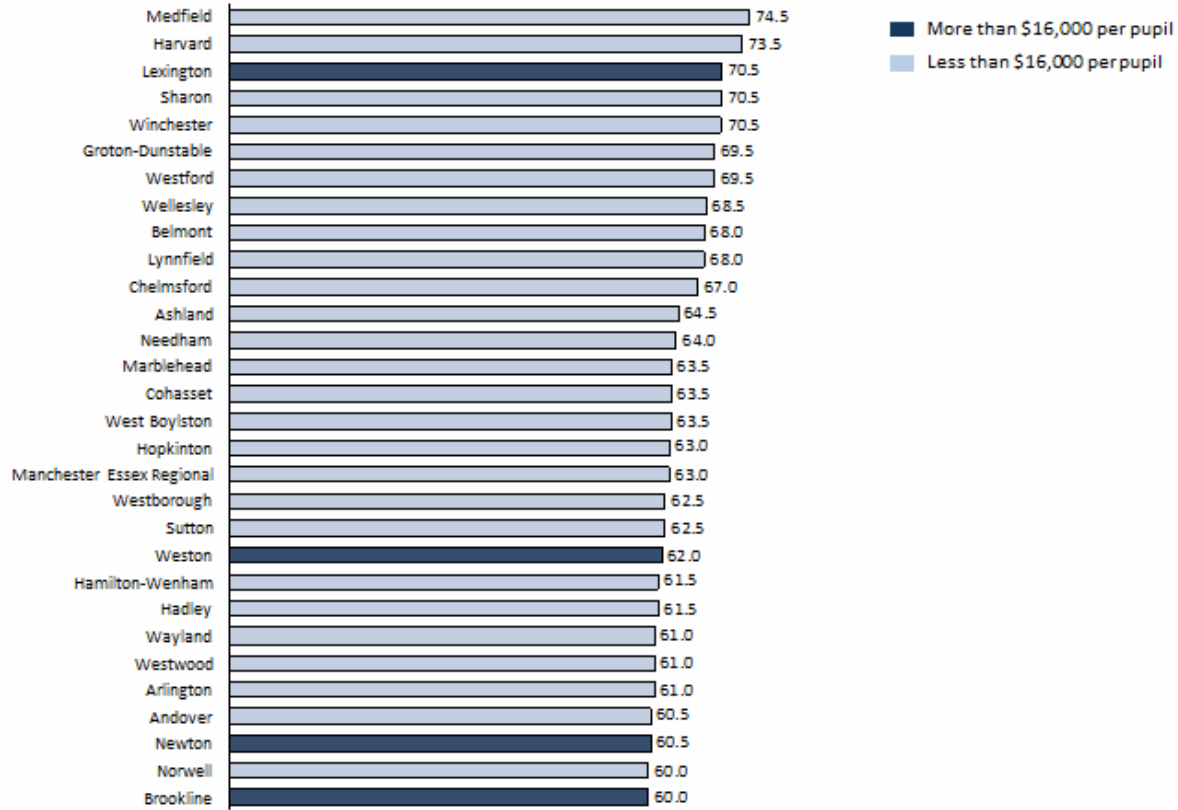
High spending districts do not out perform more moderate spending districts. This is true for both general education and special education students.

- 13 districts in the state outperform (all students) the Newton Public Schools while spending less than \$12,000 per pupil compared to Newton’s more than \$16,000.

- 15 districts in the state outperform (students with IEPs) the Newton Public Schools while spending less per pupil.

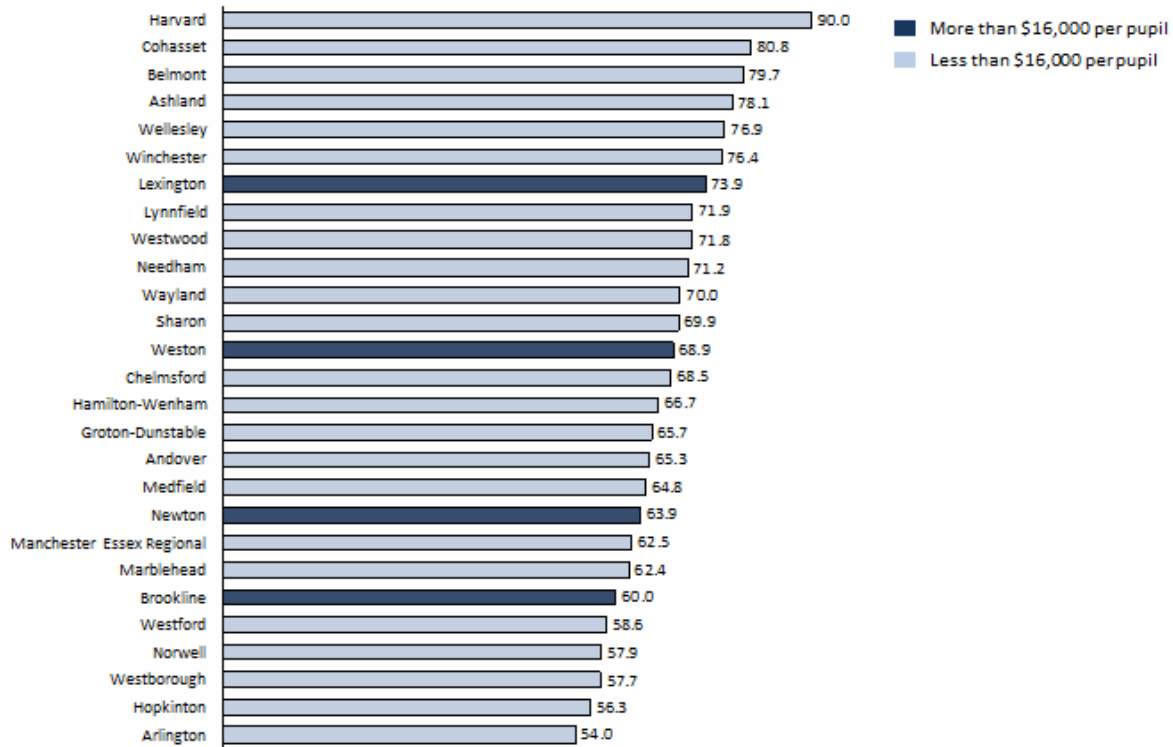
**10<sup>th</sup> Grade MCAS percent scoring advanced and per pupil overall spending**

Average of ELA and Math, 2010 MCAS



## 10<sup>th</sup> Grade MCAS proficiency for students with IEPs and per pupil spending

Average of ELA and Math, Spring 2010 MCAS



It is unlikely that the district will easily reduce spending if staff and parents don't sincerely believe that:

- 1.) The district spends much more than like communities.
- 2.) Lower spending won't harm children or reduce achievement.

Based on our interviews and focus groups, neither of these preconditions is in place. The district has a communication, as well as a financial, challenge.

The primary drivers of the district's high special education spending are its staffing levels. High staffing levels can be addressed in four different ways: 1.) guidelines for eligibility and service levels, 2.) guidelines workload and caseloads 3.) rethinking the role of paraprofessionals and 4.) creating different service delivery models. These strategies are, in fact, interrelated, though easier to understand separately.

### **2b. Create guidelines for eligibility and service levels.**

This topic will be addressed in other sections of the report.

## **2c. Create guidelines for staffing levels and workload.**

Assuming no changes to service delivery model, the district can establish expectations for how much staffing is required to meet current IEPs. In most districts, general education teachers have very explicit work expectations, such as elementary teachers serve 24 students, art teachers have 25 classes per week, and high school math teachers have five periods of 25 students, on average.

Special education staff don't have similar guidelines, but there is a widely held perspective that the district is "understaffed" when it comes to special education. The data suggests that the workloads are typical and reasonable, with some room to increase.

### **Caseloads**

<b>Area</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Typical</b>
Speech and language therapist	35.4	40-50
Occupational therapists	37.8	40-50
School psychologist (evaluations-estimated)	80	80-120

The bigger driver of higher spending is that more students receive services, receive them for longer than is typical, and that the IEP process takes longer than in other districts. The number of certified staff members for the way services are delivered today is reasonable

## **2d. Rethink the role and schedule of paraprofessionals.**

The Newton Public Schools is most distinct in its use of aides. Several data points illustrate this.

- The district has the highest number of paraprofessionals of any of the state's 30 highest achieving districts.
- The district's paraprofessional staffing is 35% higher than that of the next most staffed district among the state's 30 highest achieving districts.
- The district's paraprofessional staffing is 1.8 times higher than that of Lexington when adjusted for out-of-district placements.
- The number of students on IEPs also increased by 69. Especially noteworthy is the increase in the number of students in the autism (85 students, 41.7% increase) and neurological disability (60 students, 46.5% increase) categories, the disabilities most likely to need aide support.

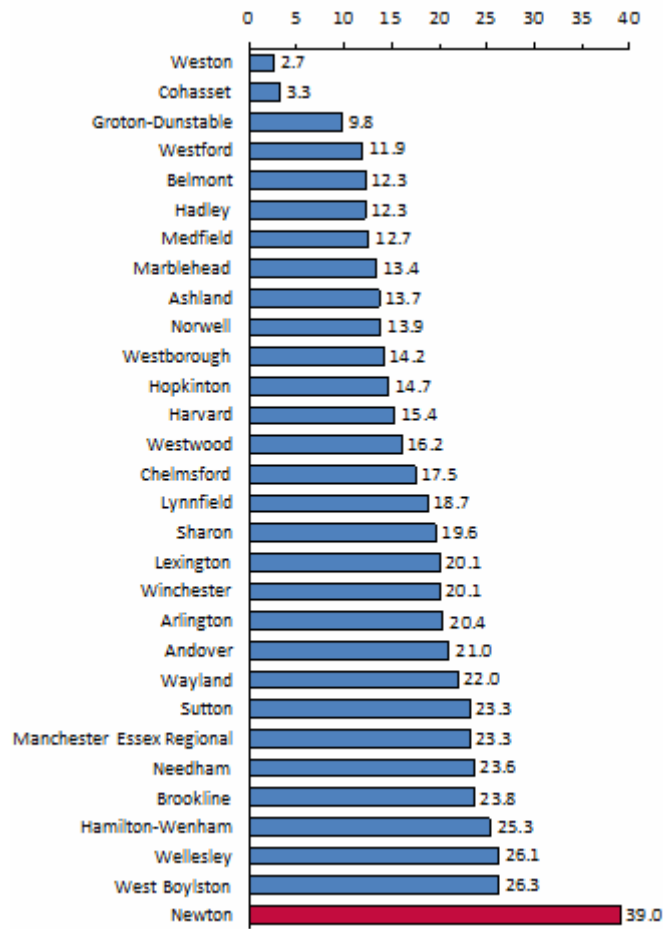
By almost any measure, the district has an unusually large number of aides. This statement is bound to generate controversy. Paraprofessionals serve as an important support for some significantly impaired students. Few issues in special education, however, create as much emotional debate. Many classroom teachers, parents, and principals see only the benefits of paraprofessional support. Meanwhile, academic research and results from best practice school districts indicate that too much of a good thing can actually be harmful to student achievement, independence, and socialization. The presence of an aide can reduce a student's contact with the certified teacher and prevent friendships from forming with classmates. Often an aide cannot address underlying academic issues.

The challenge is to find the right balance as to when aides are necessary and when they can be shared, scaled back, or eliminated in the pursuit of independence.

The district's service delivery model is highly aide-intensive. The district should not consider the higher than average number of paraprofessionals as purely positive or child-centered. The overuse of aides negatively impacts students in a number of ways.

- Social interaction is an important goal of inclusion, but aides tend to isolate a student from their peers. In interviews across the country, students and paraprofessionals both often report that they become "best friends," in place of social connections with their fellow students. As children grow older, a paraprofessional tends to repel other students, because it is "not cool to hang out with adults while at school."
- Student independence is also impacted by the overuse of aides. Most children with disabilities will go to college or work and live independently after graduation. Paraprofessional support won't continue under either these scenarios. Upon graduation the disability remains, but the aide doesn't.
- Academically, research indicates that classroom teachers spend less time with students who have the help of an aide. With an aide, struggling students thus get less time with their classroom teacher and more time with the aide, who typically lacks expertise in teaching reading or math.

**Aides per 1000 Students (30 Highest Achieving Districts)**



**Paraprofessional types**

Type	FTE
Special education (Pre-k through high school)	345.5
Substitute	17.0
Behavioral aide	104.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>467.4</b>

The total number of aides is high; it is also high at all levels. In many districts, regardless of how many aides work in the district, they are often concentrated in the elementary schools and they fall off at the secondary level.

- 39% of all aides are at the secondary level. This is twice the rate of many other similar districts.

**Paraprofessional grade level assignments**

<b>Grade level</b>	<b>FTE</b>	<b>% FTEs</b>
PreK	33.4	7%
Elementary	245.3	52%
Middle	94.5	20%
High	87.7	19%
Not listed	1.5	0%
Substitutes	5	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>467.4</b>	<b>100%</b>

The use of 1:1 aides is often detrimental to student independence and social interaction. Some districts have almost no 1:1 aides, while the Newton Public Schools have almost 100.

**Paraprofessional assignment**

	<b>Total FTE</b>	<b>% Total FTEs</b>
1:1	97.4	21%
Multiple Students	370.0	79%
<b>Total</b>	<b>467.4</b>	<b>100%</b>

It appears that the district can, by carefully reviewing the individual needs of each student currently receiving paraprofessional support, reduce the number of paraprofessionals and increase student achievement, independence, and socialization. It is important to remember that the students receiving paraprofessional support have legitimate needs. These needs can often be met through more effective and cost-effective alternatives. Any move forward should include:

a. Provide sustained, interactive professional development for teachers, administrators, and parents on alternatives to the overreliance on paraprofessionals.

Over 80% of both parents and staff believe that aides/aide specialists “are a critical component to a successful inclusion program.” Given the significant disconnect between the research on the most beneficial use of paraprofessionals and the feelings held by parents and staff, the district needs a process of learning and discussion before it can undertake changes that stakeholders will accept. Many parents and staff would be open to a transition to a new model, if it included more instruction from certified teachers. 60% of parents, 50% of general and special education staff and 80% of elementary administrators surveyed said they would prefer more instruction from certified staff even if it meant less assistance from aides. Such assistance could be provided via a co-teacher, as with the integrated classrooms already in place, or via supplemental instruction for struggling students with a reading or math specialist.

b. Have clear and differentiated, reasonable expectations for aides.

Aides are not equally appropriate in all roles. For example, if a student struggles in math or reading, it is not self-evident how an uncertified, untrained adult can help. Struggling students often require the best teachers who are certified in their subjects. We observed at one elementary school in the district that paraprofessionals were pulling students out of the general education class during RTI math. The paraprofessionals became the student’s math teacher. The district should reflect on what is expected of the aide in such a context and question what is expected of the aide when it comes to academic support. In a sampling of IEPs, 44% of those with aide support had the aide primarily for academic reasons. It was noted that several of the district’s aides are certified teachers, but data on aide’s certifications was not yet available as of September 2011.

c. Shift to partial day support, when appropriate, to increase independence and socialization.

Most students assigned a paraprofessional do need extra support, but not necessarily for the full day. A more detailed review of student needs will likely reveal that some students actually require support for just part of the day, such as during a particular subject or when arriving at school. Some districts have adopted a model in which aides move between three to six rooms per day, providing more targeted support at the times when the student most needs it.

d. Shift from 1:1 support to shared support, when appropriate.

Whenever possible, paraprofessional support should be shared by two or more students, in order to increase social interaction and independence. When individual support is needed, then the district should still consider an explicit goal to transition to shared support over time.

One particular area that might benefit from a review is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) support. Much of the district’s ABA support is administered via 1:1 staffing. This is common, but some ABA work takes place for just a few hours a day and full-time support creates dependency and isolation in children who struggle to interact socially. Well-designed ABA

programs can be staffed with less than 1:1 support during the part of the day that is not strictly ABA trials and feedback. As students get older, the student-to-aide ratio can increase. It is interesting to note that many specialized schools for students with autism staff at less than 1:1 support, especially after second or third grade.

e. Review the use of behavioral aides.

Students with behavior issues pose a special challenge for school systems. The number of students who act out has increased significantly in the last 10 years, and districts have taken different approaches to the issue.

Assigning an aide to support a student with behavior needs will typically help the student get through the day and not disrupt the class for others. This approach greatly minimizes the impact of problematic behavior. Unfortunately, it does not reduce the frequency of outbursts or teach the student coping skills. A behaviorist teaching coping skills will prepare students for a more successful career both in and beyond school, while a paraprofessional will merely contain the behavior. Investing in a few more behaviorists rather than a lot of aides not only is beneficial to students with behavior issues; it also is a more cost-effective strategy for the district.

The Newton Public Schools is not fully tapping the power of behaviorists. Instead of behavioral specialists, the district presently relies on an abundance of behavioral aides. The district does have some board-certified behaviorists, but they focus primarily on students with autism. Investing in board-certified behaviorists has the potential to address students' behavioral challenges rather than simply containing them; it would also be more cost effective.

**2e. Acknowledge and consider alternative service delivery models for inclusion.**

A first step to bringing about change is to accept that the Newton Public Schools' model is not the only approach for making inclusion successful. Upholding the principle of inclusion does not have to be bound to the high level of staffing that the district provides. There are alternative models that achieve inclusion just as effectively and far more cost-effectively.

The state of Connecticut, which is equally devoted to inclusion, executes it in a different way than the Newton Public Schools. In teaching students with disabilities, Connecticut expects more of the classroom and special education teachers. It relies far less on separate forms of support such as aides and inclusion specialists.

One district in Connecticut with which we have worked is a fitting parallel to the Newton Public Schools. The district has a comparable demographic profile and its parents have similarly high expectations. Like the Newton Public Schools, the district is also deeply committed to the principle of inclusion. In fact, it serves 65% fewer students out-of-district, adjusted for enrollment. Other than a program for young students with severe autism, the district has virtually no substantially separate instruction or classes.

Significantly, the district has achieved this even higher degree of inclusion through a far less staffing-intensive method. It has 50% fewer aides, and it believes that even this is too high and is being further reduced significantly in an effort to foster greater independence and more instruction from certified teachers. The district also has no inclusion specialists, a type of support that few, if any other, districts employ. And yet students with special needs are very well-served in this particular Connecticut district. Both parents and staff are satisfied with the special education services provided. In focus groups and interviews, parents actually expressed higher levels of satisfaction than in the Newton Public Schools. In this district, general education teachers play a larger role and principals are also very engaged in ensuring that students with special needs achieve.

### **3. Shift focus towards multiple measures of success and away from inputs.**

School systems have a natural tendency to focus on inputs, such as staffing or programs, rather than outcomes, such as student achievement or independence. Inputs are more controllable than outcomes. It is easier to assign more staff members or to allocate more dollars than to raise student achievement. In school districts, this bias is compounded by what type of success data is collected. Whatever the state requires or provides, districts tend to accept as their measure of success. The Newton Public Schools, as part of this review, proactively included a focus on developing methods for collecting and using multiple measures of social success and other non-test measures.

The Newton Public Schools differs from the majority of school districts by having a highly robust student data infrastructure that is capable of tracking individual student outcomes rather than just counting inputs. And, yet, the district still primarily focuses on inputs instead of outcomes. There was very little mention of results in our conversations, yet overwhelming discussion of inputs. The outcomes that the district does track are primarily MCAS scores rather than metrics of social success, success past high school, and other non-test goals that the district values. The district had, prior to this study, embraced a commitment to a wider range of measures of success.

Based on nearly all of our interviews, the district and community seem to subscribe to a belief system that “more is better” for students. Justifiably motivated by a love of children and a passion to help, teachers, administrators, and parents regard any reduction in inputs as harmful to children and their learning. They believe the conventional wisdom that special education is unavoidably expensive, and that more spending, more staffing, and more things will lead to greater levels of success.

#### **A sense of scarcity and a persistent desire for more staff and services**

The district displays an intense focus on maximizing inputs. This attitude is especially prevalent when it comes to staffing levels. Nearly 100% of all of our interviews and focus groups stressed the desire for more human resources despite the district already having some of the highest staffing levels in the state. The tone of the conversations suggested a district with barely the minimum level of staffing, great frustration with high expectations despite only modest resources, and almost no awareness that staffing and spending levels greatly exceed like communities.

### 3a. Overall special education spending is increasing

Special education spending in the district has grown at a markedly higher rate than has total spending in the five years through 2009-2010. Despite this, a pervasive feeling of scarcity lingers in the district.

- Special education spending has been growing 70% faster than total spending.

#### Spending growth for special education and total district

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	Total growth	Annual growth
Special education	\$39,746,164	\$43,238,464	\$49,197,496	\$50,694,241	\$53,915,541	35.6%	7.9%
Total	\$155,915,204	\$163,276,497	\$174,256,232	\$182,780,002	\$186,747,709	19.8%	4.6%

### 3b. High levels of paraprofessionals

The district has extremely high levels of paraprofessionals. This topic raised a great deal of anxiety during the interviews and focus groups. Some feel that this level is still insufficient, others feel it is critical to the inclusion model, and a few believe it is unreasonably high given the experience of other like communities.

- The district has the highest number of paraprofessionals of any of the state's 30 highest achieving districts, 35% more than the next highest and almost twice the median.

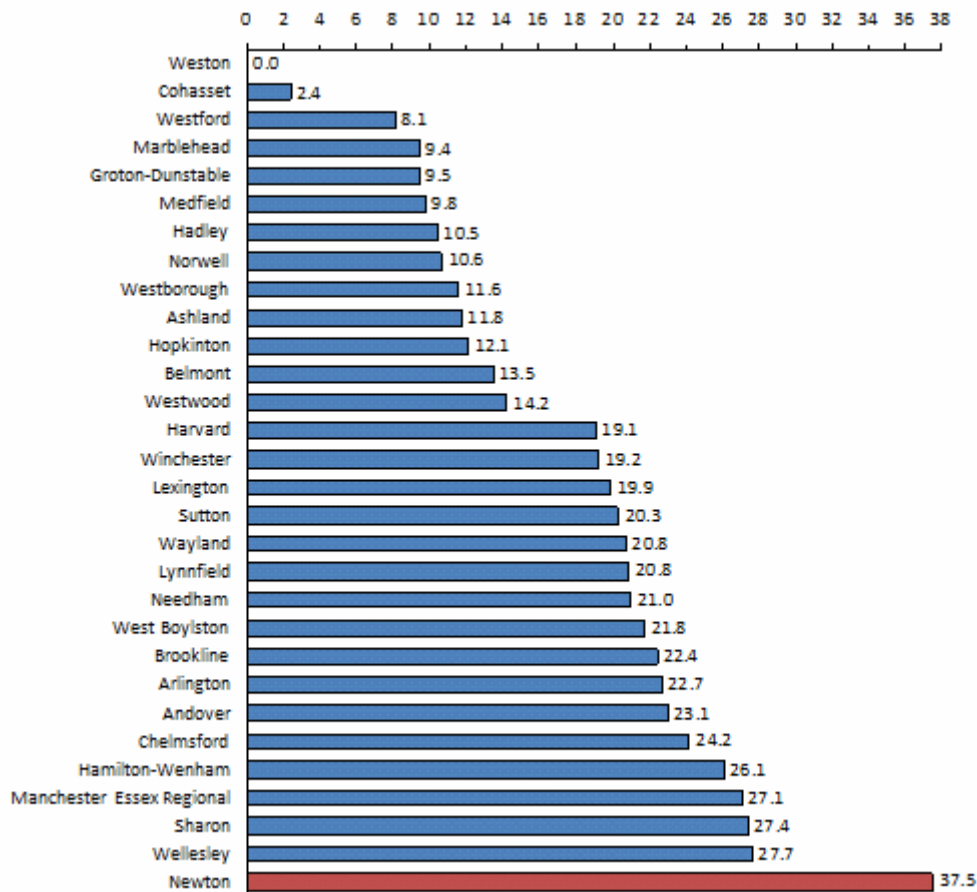
#### Paraprofessional staffing

(per 1,000 students)

	FTE	Comparison
Newton Public School	39.0	--
Top 30 performing MA districts	17.5	2.2x
All K-12 MA districts	15.0	2.6x
Similar districts nationwide	11.7	3.3x

Even when adjusting for differences in the number of students that are out-of-district, the Newton Public Schools have many more aides than other high performing districts. The assumption is that serving more high needs students in district will increase the number of aides required.

**Aides per 1000 students in 30 Highest-Achieving Districts**



*Note: Data is adjusted for out of district placements.*

**3c. Related services continue longer**

The district provides a typical level of speech and language services and occupational therapy at the elementary level, but higher levels at the secondary level. Services are less likely to be terminated in the district than at other school systems in the state.

- Speech and language services are twice as likely to continue into the secondary level as other districts in the state. OT continues at a 50% higher rate.

**Students receiving speech and language services**

	<b>Elementary</b>	<b>Middle school</b>	<b>High School</b>
District	10.5%	9.5%	3.8%
State	10.1%	4.7%	Very small
<b>Comparison</b>	<b>1.0x</b>	<b>2.0x</b>	

**Students receiving occupational therapy services**

	<b>Elementary</b>	<b>Middle school</b>	<b>High School</b>
District	6.5%	1.9%	0.7%
State	5.9%	1.3%	Very small
<b>Comparison</b>	<b>1.1x</b>	<b>1.5x</b>	

The district has a significantly higher than average number of speech and language therapists when compared to either like or highest achieving districts in the state.

**Speech and language staffing**

(per 1,000 students)

	<b>FTE</b>	<b>Comparison</b>
District	2.7	
Top 30 performing MA districts	1.9	1.4x
All K-12 MA districts	1.7	1.6x
Similar districts nationwide	1.7	1.6x

**Occupational therapy staffing**

(per 1,000 students)

	<b>FTE</b>	<b>Comparison</b>
District	1.1	
Top 30 performing MA districts	0.9	1.2x
All K-12 MA districts	0.6	1.8x
Similar districts nationwide	0.6	1.8x



### **3d. Create a focus on student growth, and social and emotional success.**

One of the reasons that the focus on inputs can be harmful is that it detracts attention from measuring important outcomes. There are two important outcomes that would benefit students and guide teachers and administrators: 1) academic growth and 2) social and emotional success.

**Academic Growth:** The district analyzes MCAS data on an annual basis, and principals freely quoted MCAS strengths and areas of focus. Based on MCAS, most students in the district do quite well. MCAS is an important, end-of-year benchmark, but it is not sufficient, especially for students with special needs. The shortcomings of MCAS data include:

- Results are available only once a year.
- Results are not very granular. There are only four major determinations.
- Results don't guide instruction during the course of the year.
- Results don't assess specific strategies, pedagogies, or programs.

Students with mild to moderate needs, especially specific learning disability, by definition have difficulty learning and usually struggle academically. Since each student who struggles may struggle in their own unique way, it is critical that frequent (monthly) assessment data (common formative assessments) provide feedback to staff, students, and parents as to whether the current strategies are being effective. Successful strategies should be shared and continued, as less effective efforts should be changed. There is no shame in ending a strategy that didn't work well, but it is unfortunate if the strategy is continued because the teacher didn't know that it was ineffective.

The district does have many interim assessments, but they vary building to building and they aren't often converted into measures of growth at the student, teacher, or strategy level of detail. The district's student data system and staff could provide this information without additional resources, if the assessments and reporting were district-wide.

**Social and Emotional Success:** Parents and staff both stressed that academics is not a sufficient measure of a student's success in the Newton Public Schools. A child's social and emotional experience is of equal importance and a key underpinning of the district's commitment to inclusion. Despite the district's regard for these non-academic measures, no such information is collected, analyzed, or acted upon. The old adage, "What gets measured, gets managed" suggests that a robust social and emotional monitoring system would in fact increase students' social and emotional success.

As highlighted in Opportunity #1, the current model of inclusion may not be creating the desired social success for some students, and if true, and hard data in this area might have surfaced this sooner.

Key areas that are worth tracking include:

- Does the student have someone to sit with at lunch?
- Does the student have friends to play with at recess?
- Does the student get invited to play after school, to classmates' birthday parties, or to sleepovers?
- Does the student participate in extracurricular activities?
- Does the student look forward to coming to school?
- Is there an adult whom the student can confide in?
- Does the student feel part of the class, isolated?
- Does the student feel "dumb," or think that they are improving academically?
- Does the student believe they can be successful?
- Is attendance a problem?
- Is the student cutting classes?

This data can be collected from the student themselves and/or parents, depending on the age of the child. The data can guide actions for individual student needs, and assess climate in classrooms and schools. See the appendix for sample social and emotional climate survey for children with special needs.

### **Financial impact**

The following analysis should not be interpreted to suggest that reductions in staffing can be made and not impact students. The current service delivery model, which:

1. Focuses on full inclusion for nearly all students.
2. Is supported by paraprofessionals, including many assigned 1:1.
3. Maintains a high level of related services at the secondary level; likely requires the current level of staffing.

The analysis below can be helpful to understand that other high performing, similar communities have embraced slightly different service delivery models that require less staffing. The figures are provided to show an order of magnitude impact of developing and implementing alternative service delivery models. The suggested savings could be redeployed towards providing supports to struggling students from certified teachers with expertise in reading, math, or whatever student the student struggles in.

In most districts inclusion is a cost effective service delivery model. The Newton Public School’s model appears to be a higher cost than typical approach. This is driven by a number of factors. The very high use of paraprofessionals is the largest contributor.

- Higher than average paraprofessional staffing increases costs by \$9.0 to \$11.7 million. At more typical staffing levels some of these funds could be redeployed.

The effort to serve even the neediest students in an inclusion setting creates the need for over 35 inclusion support facilitators. A study conducted some 15 years ago recommended the current model and called for inclusion facilitators. At the time the number of students with severe needs was much smaller than today.

- This is a position not found in most districts and increases spending by \$2.4 million. At more typical staffing patterns some of these funds could be redeployed.

If the district were to develop additional capacity in small, safe settings for students with significant disabilities, some staff to manage the programs would be necessary. It may not, however, be as great as the current staff of inclusion facilitators. These settings would also require fewer paraprofessionals than does the current model of inclusion.

**Paraprofessional staffing at typical levels**

<b>Funds available for redeployment</b>	
Top 30 performing MA districts	\$9,000,000
All K-12 MA districts	\$10,300,000
Similar districts nationwide	\$11,700,000

**Speech and language staffing at typical levels**

<b>Funds available for redeployment</b>	
Top 30 performing MA districts	\$700,000
All K-12 MA districts	\$1,000,000
Similar districts nationwide	\$1,000,000

**Occupational therapy staffing at typical levels**

<b>Funds available for redeployment</b>	
Top 30 performing MA districts	\$190,000

All K-12 MA districts	\$500,000
Similar districts nationwide	\$500,000

- Importantly, shifts to the staffing model are not “low-hanging fruit.” It would take time and careful planning to shift staffing models while respecting the district’s philosophy of inclusion.
- If realized, however, these savings could be redeployed towards teachers to support struggling students, both with and without special needs. As an example, shifting schedules to alleviate the need for two or three paraprofessionals would allow a school to hire an additional reading specialist to work with struggling students.

Since the spring of 2011, the district has begun to shift the staffing model. For the FY12 budget, the district utilized 5 aides and 2 behavioral therapists fewer at the elementary level, 3.3 aides and 0.6 behavior therapists less at the middle school level, and 3.8 aides fewer at the high school level.

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#### **4. Establish more productive methods of making decisions, especially hard decisions.**

Running an effective and cost-effective special education department is difficult. Special education is important and complex, with competing interests and views about how to best help children. This makes it all the more challenging, and all the more important, to establish productive methods of making decisions about services for children with special needs. The Assistant Superintendent for Student Services has put in place solid policies and procedures, but cultural and historic forces add extra complexity.

In the Newton Public Schools, our interviews with staff suggested that the decision making process is strained. Frequently, staff described a process whereby teams make decisions, only to have these decisions escalated beyond their control. The district's inclusion specialists are the frontline in handling cases and responding to parents. Yet the decision of inclusion specialists and the IEP team is often not the final word. Decisions are brought to progressively higher levels of authority: from inclusion specialists to principals, from principals to special education administrators, and from special education administrators to the special education director. Multiple staff members stated with a shrug, "Why make a decision when it will just be overruled by someone above me?"

Special education, based on the rules established by IDEA, has an adversarial component to the process. This is true in all districts, but it is more of an issue in Newton than in some other like communities.

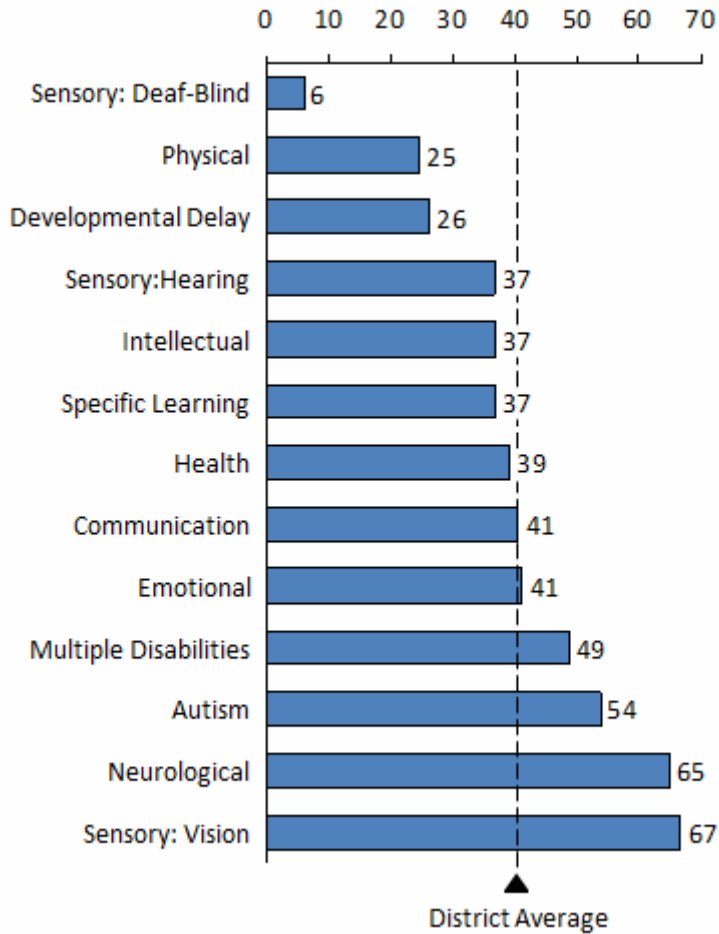
The impact is felt in a number of ways:

- The staff seem exasperated with the special education decision making process. There is less "joy" in the district than we find in many other high-performing districts. The staff love the children but not the system or the process. Staff spoke of frustration, burnout, and turnover. The inclusion specialist position, which is often the frontlines of the decision making friction, has seen a great deal of turnover.
- In the Newton Public Schools, it takes a very long time for an IEP to be signed, averaging 40 days from the time of the IEP meeting. Even relatively straightforward IEPs for students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) average 37 days.

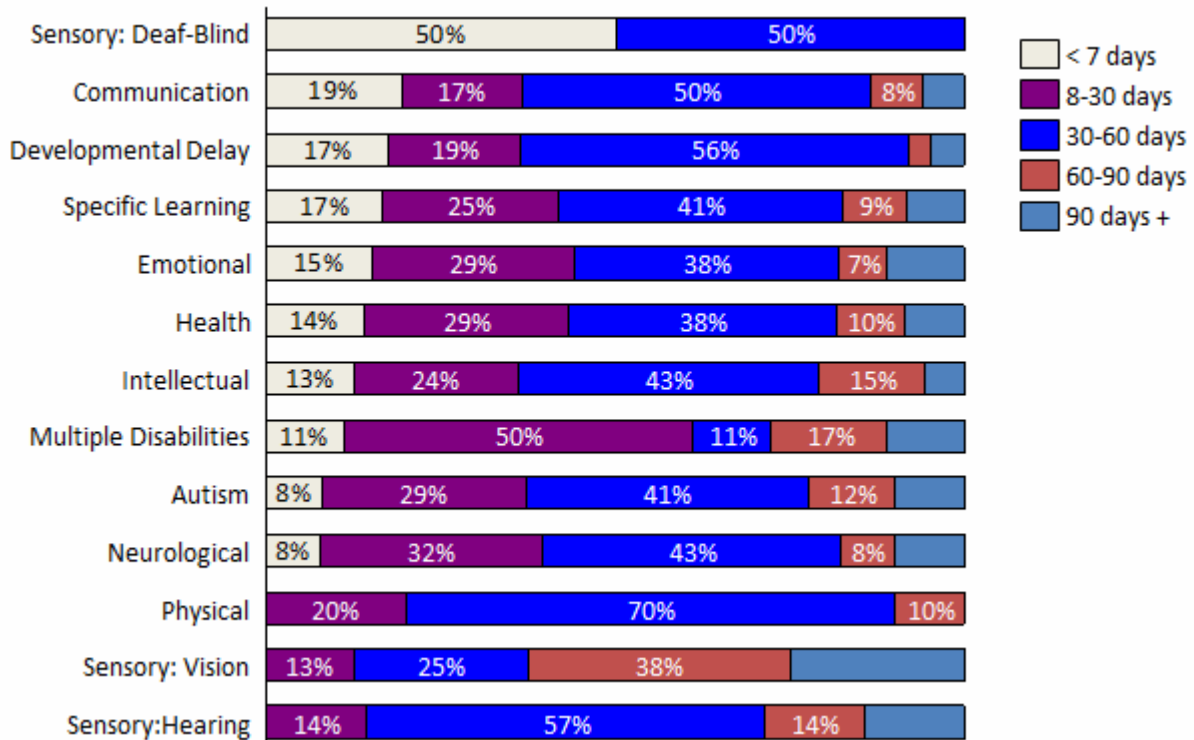
In most districts, nearly all IEPs are signed within five days of the IEP meeting. In Newton, less than 15% are signed this quickly. As part of this study, we shared the data concerning the time it takes to sign an IEP with three very experienced attorneys who work with many schools systems. All three indicated no other district they have worked with had a similar pattern. They believed that all but the most complicated cases are typically signed within a week of the IEP meeting. They estimated that only a handful of situations would extend beyond a month, perhaps none.

Furthermore they all expressed a sense that the long timelines was in indication of limited trust and a breakdown of decision making.

**Average time to sign IEP by disability category (2009-2010 school year)**



**Distribution of Time to Sign by Disability (2009-2010 School Year)**



In the Newton Public Schools, the IEP meeting is just the first step of a long process of writing an IEP. In many districts, most IEPs are completely worked out during a single IEP meeting. In these districts, the meetings are often 60 minutes, but frequently stretch to up to two hours when there is a significant disagreement. With some emotion and debate, they end with an agreed-upon IEP. In the Newton Public Schools, the meetings are 45 minutes and typically do not conclude with an IEP, but just a time to meet again.

While the district’s multi-meeting process could be viewed as parent-friendly, it seems to undermine trust between parent and school, while draining the staff’s energy. Even with such an iterative process, 23 (14%) of students out-of-district are unilateral placements by parents.

The current process does seem to meet the needs of many parents, however.

- Only 60% of parents reported accepting the initial IEP as proposed. This is lower than in many other districts, but nearly all reported working collaboratively to arrive at a final IEP.
- Fully 82.5% of parents believe their recommendations and/or concerns were considered when developing their child’s IEP. It may be a long process, but parents feel heard in the process.

The current process seems to create a great deal of collateral damage. If most parents are OK with the final product, there are two negative side effects. The first is staff burnout and the second is a higher than usual level of disrespect towards many staff members by some parents.

Staff reported that they sometimes feel pressured by individual parents. At times, staff suggested that services which may not be warranted are added to IEPs or that services are continued for much longer than the student's need would require. This creates a great deal of tension because heavy workloads get heavier.

From the parent perspective, the open response questions highlighted, at times, frustration and disrespect for some special education staff and administrators. The frequency, intensity and criticism of specific staff has not occurred in any of the similar surveys we have conducted around the country.

One way to address these issues is to create less ambiguous criteria for services and eligibility. When a decision is unclear, than power negotiations often settle the matter. If a decision is clear cut, then there are less hard feelings from the process. The current process is not clear cut.

- 40% of parents report that they do not understand the guidelines for when services should end.
- A third of IEP team members disagreed with the statement “In my building(s) we have clear criteria and a process for reducing or terminating special education services when appropriate”
- 65% of administrators reported at times they feel pressured by parents to provide an aide, even though they do not think one is warranted.

## 5. Refine the method of identifying students with disabilities.

Across the country, wide variation in the identification of students with disabilities is common. Some states have significantly higher rates of identification than others, ranging from less than 11% in a number of Western states to above 17% in Massachusetts. Both affluent towns and urban centers tend to have above-average rates of referral to special education. Much of the variation comes from the difficult to define area of “learning disabled,” or “communication impairment,” vague categories of disability that leaves room for local interpretation.

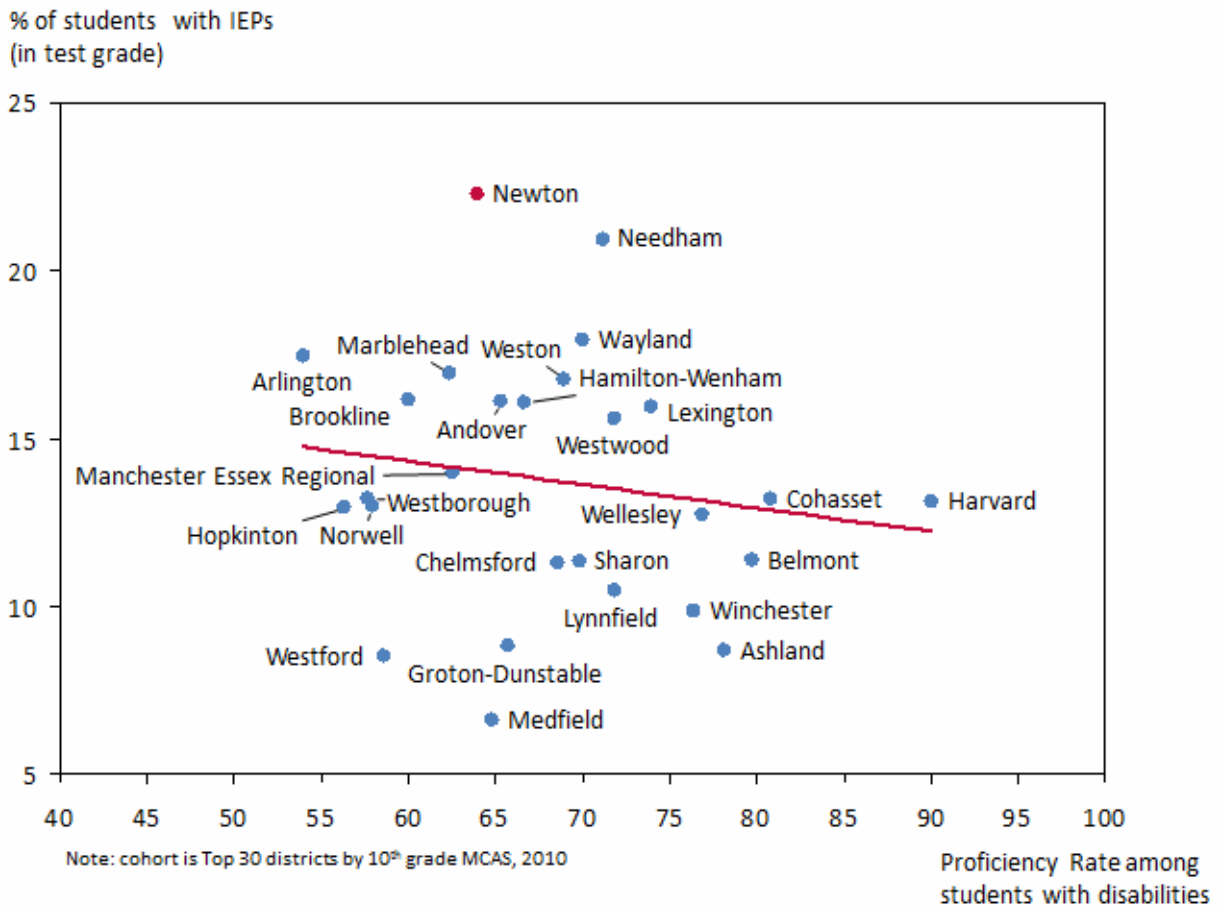
Compared to the state as well as national standard, the district has an above-average rate of identifying students with special needs. Indeed, several staff members voiced concern about over representation of special education students in the Newton Public Schools.

- The district’s identification rate of 20.5% is 20% higher than the state average, and 50% higher than the national average.
- The district has the highest percentage of students on an IEP in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade when compared to the state’s highest achieving districts.

### **Identification rate**

Newton	20.6%
Top 30 performing MA Districts	14.7%
Comparison	1.4x

**Identification rate versus proficiency among students with disabilities (10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS average)**



**State and national identification rate benchmarking**

Disability	Percentage of Students with IEP out of Total Enrollment			Comparisons	
	District	State	Nationwide	State	Nationwide
Specific learning disabilities	8.2%	6.4%	5.1%	1.3x	1.6x
Speech or language impairments	2.3%	2.6%	2.3%	0.9x	1.0x
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>10.6%</b>	<b>9.0%</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>1.2x</b>	<b>1.4x</b>
Autism	1.8%	0.8%	0.6%	2.2x	3.0x
Developmental delay	2.2%	1.1%	0.2%	1.9x	10.7x
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>2.0x</b>	<b>4.9x</b>
Emotional disturbance	1.7%	1.5%	0.9%	1.1x	1.9x
Mental retardation	0.4%	1.2%	1.0%	0.3x	0.4x
Other health impairments	2.9%	1.2%	1.3%	2.4x	2.2x
Multiple disabilities	0.2%	0.5%	0.3%	0.5x	0.9x
Orthopedic impairments	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	*	*
Traumatic brain injury	1.1%	0.7%	0.0%	*	*
Visual impairments	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	*	*
Hearing impairments	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	*	*
Deaf-blindness	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	*	*
<b>Total</b>	<b>21.2%</b>	<b>16.3%</b>	<b>12.0%</b>	<b>1.3x</b>	<b>1.8x</b>

\* denotes insignificant comparison

The district’s high rate of special education identification could reflect either more students in the Newton Public Schools having disabilities or the district using more generous criteria for assigning students to special education. Support for the latter is evidenced by the fact that much of the difference between the district and the state average results from the hardest to define category of “specific learning disability” (SLD).

- The district’s identification rate of SLD is almost 30% higher than the state average.

Another indication of an ambiguous system for identifying students with disabilities is the over identification of minority students.

- While 20.5% of the district’s overall student population is on an IEP, 37.1% of the district’s African American students have an IEP. Likewise, 34.1% of Hispanic students are enrolled on IEPs. On the opposite extreme, only 10.6% of the district’s Asian students are identified as having disabilities. It is very common for minority students to be over identified as needing special education services. The level of over identification in the district is very typical.

**Identification of Students by Race\***

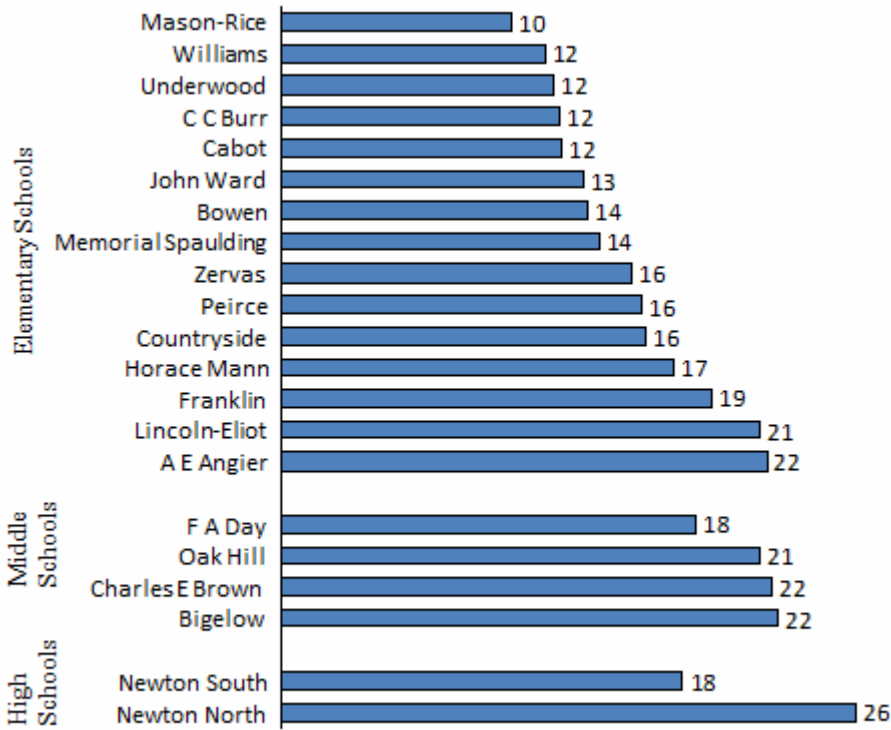
	<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>Students with IEPs</b>	<b>Identification rate</b>
Asian	2,217	234	10.6%
Black	833	309	37.1%
Hispanic	766	261	34.1%
White	9,494	1,982	20.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,978</b>	<b>2456</b>	<b>20.5%</b>

*\* Students of multiple races included in all applicable categories*

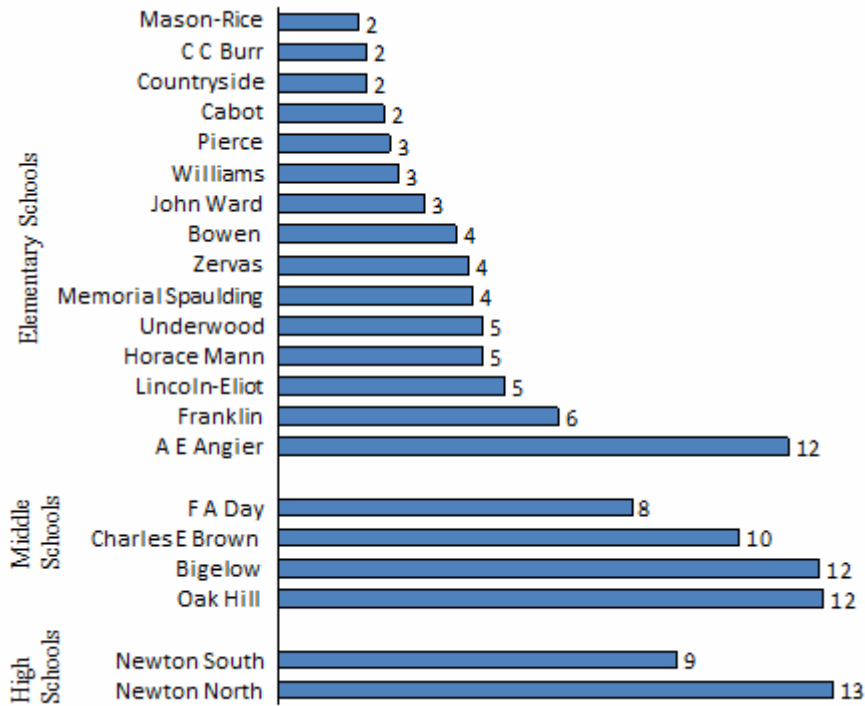
A more accurate method of identifying students with disabilities would ensure that curriculum shortcomings or less than effective teaching strategies are not confused with a true disability. All students correctly identified are certainly students who struggle and need extra help, but they may not all need an IEP.

The rate of identifying students with disabilities also seems to be influenced by what school a child attends. The location of certain programs will skew the results some, but the very large variation does not seem to be explained primarily by specialized programs, given the district’s commitment to neighborhood inclusion.

**2011 Special education identification rate by school**



**SLD identification rate by school**



## **Financial Impact**

Special education is the most expensive form of remediation and intervention. It requires extra testing, a great deal of report writing, many meetings, and it continues for years. General education intervention tends to start sooner and end at mastery. It is also more targeted.

Based on national estimates, and adjusting for local salary levels, general education support can be provided for roughly \$3,000 to 5,000 per student per year less than special education help.

If the district matched the state average, savings of \$1.2 to \$2 million could be realized, without reducing the number of children receiving extra help.

## **6. Reduce program variation from school to school, especially at the secondary level, in order to share best practices and reduce parent frustration.**

Enabling individual schools to experiment with different approaches and strategies to help struggling students and students with disabilities can promote innovation and customization. But variation can also produce parent frustration if the best practices are not disseminated or if the different options are not made available across the district. When different schools offer substantively different programs for similar students, parents want either a guaranteed common level of achievement or the choice to select which school, and therefore which program, best suits their child's needs. If the programs offered by different schools diverge only in appearance and not in essence, then the district should strive to minimize these superficial differences, which can seem significant from the outside.

The district does have some subtle program variation from school to school. Schools run programs serving the same kind of disability with their own flavor of instruction and culture. Some schools also make available options, such as weekend programming, that are not found at other schools. The district lacks a standard mechanism for guaranteeing that programs developed at one school are offered to all of the students in the district who may benefit from them. Geography largely drives school assignments, which in turn determine which programs a child has access to.

But, while some substantive program differences do exist in the district, the perception of variation is even stronger than the reality. The belief that North and South High schools offer fundamentally different programs for students with disabilities is an open secret. We heard a common complaint among parents that their student had gotten “stuck at the wrong school.” The schools' programs, in actuality, are generally comparable in quality, but North is considered “better for students with disabilities.”

In light of the disconnect between perception and reality, the district may want to project a greater sense of consistency. This will require cooperation between the high school principals to overcome superficial differences that reflect history and the personalities of individual staff. For example, the same program that Newton North calls “Pilot” is called “Southside” at Newton South. Removing such differences will go a long way to alleviating parents' concerns that their students are being denied the appropriate program. Certainly, some perceptions will persist. Newton North has a longer history of offering certain programs and supporting inclusion and it, unlike Newton South, has vocational education options.

Beyond the names of the programs, it is important that the substance be similar. Currently, programs are closely associated with their building. The personality of the program leader and school culture influence each program. If best practices are shared and adopted, the programs will become both better and more similar. If differences are real, then allowing a greater level of choice and matching of student need would be beneficial.

The district has already begun taking steps to address this issue.

## **Additional Topics**

The major findings of this report have been provided in high impact opportunities section with many interrelated topics woven into a complete picture. A few other areas of study are important, but the findings didn't rise to the level of a major focus area for the district. These areas are detailed in this section.

### **1. Assistive technology**

Assistive technology encompasses a wide range of devices and supports related to helping students access the curriculum. These can be either low or high tech.

#### **1a. Some are pleased, but not all**

Based on the survey results, in person interviews, and focus groups, a mixed picture emerges. The majority of parents and staff find the district's use of assistive technology to be acceptable. Few praised it as a strength, but many believed the current approach meets the needs of the children.

- Approximately 2/3 of administrators, general education teachers, IEP team members and parents believe that students have access to assistive technology that is appropriate for their needs.
- Most people surveyed, however, believe children would benefit from more assistive technology.

A sizeable minority, however, believe the current efforts are inadequate.

- Nearly 40% of IEP team members did not know what assistive technology is available for students.
- Similarly 40% of parents did not feel the staff working with their children knew how to support their child using their assistive technology.

#### **1b. More training and knowledge versus more stuff**

The concerns raised centered much more on the need for more training on how to use and integrate the existing options, rather than adding more options. The second most common desire was for a deeper understanding of what materials and options are available and when would they be appropriate. These both represent a knowledge gap, rather than a shortage of materials. Some, but fewer, did ask for more and different devices, especially text to speech options and digital text books.

**1c. A silo within a silo**

Feedback from parents and staff suggests that assistive technology is primarily the domain of the special education department, and within the department, the assistive technology specialists. Funding for the equipment comes from the special education budget and technical support also comes from the special education department. While this is common, it is not optimal.

The concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) suggests that many students, including general education students, can benefit from many assistive technology supports. This model integrates assistive technology into classroom or instructional technology. A merging of these efforts would provide more staff to provide training and to support teachers. It would also provide more access to these options for general education students.

From Administrators Survey

**The following statements concern assistive technology. Assistive technology is defined as low/medium/high technology tools or support to help access the general education environment. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
Students have access to assistive technology that is appropriate for their needs.	0.0%	30.0%	<b>30.0%</b>	50.0%	20.0%	<b>70.0%</b>
Staff in my building know how to support students in using their assistive technology.	10.0%	20.0%	<b>30.0%</b>	45.0%	25.0%	<b>70.0%</b>
Some students could benefit from more assistive technology.	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>	45.0%	55.0%	<b>100.0%</b>
I know what assistive technology is available for our students.	0.0%	35.0%	<b>35.0%</b>	45.0%	20.0%	<b>65.0%</b>

Number of Respondents 20

From General Education Teachers Survey

**The following statements concern assistive technology. Assistive technology is defined as low/medium/high technology tools or support to help access the general education environment. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
Students have access to assistive technology that is appropriate for their needs.	8.4%	18.9%	<b>27.3%</b>	45.5%	27.3%	<b>72.7%</b>
I know how to support students in using their assistive technology.	13.7%	26.0%	<b>39.7%</b>	42.5%	17.8%	<b>60.3%</b>
There are students in my class who could benefit from more assistive technology.	2.9%	13.8%	<b>16.7%</b>	39.9%	43.5%	<b>83.3%</b>
I know what assistive technology is available for our students.	16.9%	29.9%	<b>46.8%</b>	42.9%	10.4%	<b>53.2%</b>

Number of Respondents 154

**What aspects of special education in the district are you most pleased with?**

- I am pleased with the technology that has come out to support students with special needs.

**If the district could make one or two changes to better meet the needs of students with special needs, we should...**

- Provide more professional development opportunities in the technology available for students with special needs.
- Offer more aids for students who truly need additional support. Every classroom should be equipped with at least 1 aide. More professional development is needed for integrating technology that supports students with special needs. Offer more resources for reading and math to differentiate for students with special needs
- I feel that the district needs to do two things; one, we need to have more adaptive materials and training available and two, we need to not try to promise what we cannot deliver. As for adaptive materials, I have had to write grants to be able to truly reach my students and allow them to access the curriculum and do not think that this is adequate or that I am fully supported by the district. As for the promises being made, I feel that there

are some children who have such severe needs and often, we simply cannot meet those needs. I therefore worry that the child with special needs is not benefiting from the Inclusion model. These resources that are poured into and often exhausting the system take away from other needs in the school that need to be met. I am a very strong advocate for special needs and inclusion education, however I do not know that the district is truly able to meet the needs of all of the children who are walking into our classrooms. Sometimes children need to be placed out! Also, I feel quite strongly that if the district expects me to truly provide a full education to all students, we need adaptive materials to make this happen. Over my time teaching, I believe I have gleaned an array of skills however I do not think that there are enough opportunities and the learning should not stop on teacher's end if we truly want to be effective.

- provide more assistive technology

From IEP Team Survey

**The following statements concern assistive technology. Assistive technology is defined as low/medium/high technology tools or support to help access the general education environment. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
Students have access to assistive technology that is appropriate for their needs.	11.4%	22.1%	<b>33.6%</b>	51.7%	14.8%	<b>66.4%</b>
I know how to support students in using their assistive technology.	6.1%	27.9%	<b>34.0%</b>	53.1%	12.9%	<b>66.0%</b>
There are students on my caseload who could benefit from more assistive technology.	2.1%	13.2%	<b>15.3%</b>	49.3%	35.4%	<b>84.7%</b>
I know what assistive technology is available for our students.	11.4%	27.5%	<b>38.9%</b>	39.6%	21.5%	<b>61.1%</b>

Number of Respondents 150

**Do you have an idea that might help the district reduce special education costs while still meeting the needs of all children with disabilities?**

- I think that the district has multiple sources to assist children with special needs in the classroom and outside of it. I like being able to access the assistive technology consultant and learning about the available software.

**If the district could make one or two changes to better meet the needs of students with special needs, I wish we would**

- Have more technology devoted to programs rather than individual students  
More professional development for special education and general education staff around students with disabilities
- We need to think about how we determine eligibility. The process needs to be consistent across all schools in Newton. Training, equipment, and support staff to increase our use of assistive technology. The instructional technology staff in the schools don't seem to know about the assistive technology that is available for our students. We have 1 staff person for 21 schools to help us with assistive technology.
- I would like to see more technology available to my students. There is little funding for the special education departments at each school to purchase technology and curriculum to really support our students in the classroom.
- Implementation of assistive technology to facilitate their specific needs.
- -actually have viable assistive technology within special education classrooms and caught up to speed in this area. The district assistive tech. specialist has not helped because she has little ability to train others and resources are not there if she could.
- ....offer our students assistive technology with consistent in-house support and a technology instructor that actually likes children.
- I wish the district would provide more support staff for individual programs and working technology for the classrooms.
- Increased technology available in the classroom more aide support
- I wish that I could consult with the assistive technology consult more often and for a longer period of time.
- Provide more assistive technology and upgraded hardware so students can have access to these programs.
- More systematically describe/define what assistive technology supports are available to students, and provide the appropriate training to staff.
- Have more certified teachers providing direct instruction. There needs to be access to resources for students with severe disabilities. We've created a great climate for inclusion, but don't put aside any special resources for educating the most severe students in the district. Specifically, I think we need more instructional (including technology) and activities of daily living resources for students with severe disabilities.

- We need to improve the technology available to the students in the building. Develop therapeutic behavioral programs for students in the middle and elementary schools. Inclusion type programming is generally not effective for these students.
- Provide greater training to general ed teachers regarding differentiated instruction, accommodations/modifications, alternative grading and other strategies that support inclusion. Provide more solid instruction from an earlier age regarding executive functioning skills for all students so that more students can be independent at the higher grades. Provide increased assistive technology supports and training for students and teachers so that students can be more independent at higher grades, particularly in the area of all curriculums being available digitally for multiple modes of access. Provide more reading services at a younger age (and on-going) so that students can access the curriculum at higher grades with fewer supports (person supports, as well as accommodations) and be more independent. Actively plan from younger ages how to build skills for independence in order to fade staff support as students progress.
- Catalog and inventory all special education materials, including curriculum, assistive technologies, and other adaptive materials. Special Educators are buying their own materials, and this should not be happening. There should be a central bank from which to acquire needed materials.

From Parents Survey

**The following statements concern assistive technology. Assistive technology is defined as low/medium/high technology tools or support to help access the general education environment. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
My child has access to assistive technology that is appropriate for his/her needs.	13.4%	25.3%	<b>38.7%</b>	34.9%	26.4%	<b>61.3%</b>
Staff working with my child know how to support my child in using their assistive technology.	13.5%	25.7%	<b>39.2%</b>	36.3%	24.5%	<b>60.8%</b>
My child could benefit from more assistive technology.	6.9%	14.1%	<b>21.0%</b>	28.3%	50.7%	<b>79.0%</b>
Assistive technology was considered at my child's IEP meeting.	23.3%	15.3%	<b>38.5%</b>	29.5%	31.9%	<b>61.5%</b>

Number of Respondents 288

**What aspects of special education in the district are you most pleased with?**

- Assistive Technology Specialist is excellent.
- I am very pleased with the range of specialized services available to my child, i.e. assistive technology, vision and mobility..etc.
- Services for severely handicapped kids (ex. Affected with hearing loss for example). People with specialized skills such as Assistive Technology expert.

**If the district could make one or two changes to better meet the needs of students with special needs, we should...**

- Be more proactive and knowledgeable in understanding how assistive technology (and which technology) might benefit a particular's students learning style  
Elaborate on general special ed goals with concrete steps and milestones for measuring progress toward those goals
- more use of special technology to serve individual learning styles, especially as in digital textbooks based on universal design principals as developed by CAST (Center for Applied Special Technology) <http://www.cast.org/about/index.html>
- There is no assistance integrating what is used in school into the home - i.e. assistive tech devices, sensory input tricks during meals or relaxed moments through the day.  
Parent/home consultation is lacking and a result of this is differing home/school routines.

**Do you have an idea that might help the district reduce special education costs while still meeting the needs of all children with disabilities?**

- I think there could be some help in evaluating adaptive technologies such as speech to text software, books on tape.
- more use of assistive technologies
- Raise money from local businesses and parents to support special education services. Money raised could be used for assistive technologies, social groups, specialized equipment, etc. Cabot was successful in raising \$105k for computers in under 3 months. The two mothers who led the fundraising drive are experienced fundraisers and may be able to offer guidance.

## **2. Transition services**

Transition services and planning begins when students with an IEP turn 14. The goal is to both prepare and plan for life after high school.

### **2a. Differing opinions**

IEP team members and principals have a much more favorable view of the district's transition services than parents.

Overall, I am pleased with transition services offered by the district:

- Principals: 92%
- General education teachers: 88%
- Parents: 62%

All groups do worry about how some students will do when they leave the district.

### **2b. More support or less?**

In some districts a focus on transition services is a focus on providing planning, course work, and skills for students to function well after leaving the district. For students with significant needs this extra help is very valuable. Some parents in the district feel much more of this is required.

Feedback from administrators and IEP team members focused more on students with mild to moderate needs, and suggested that the district's high level of supports, paraprofessionals, and accommodations at the high school level actually harm a student's transition to life beyond high school. Since neither college nor work will provide such high levels of assistance, they fear that students will not be able to function successfully when the support ends. They believe that fading services starting in ninth grade would be beneficial.

It seems that the district, like all districts, will need different transition strategies for students with moderate special needs versus severe needs.

### **2c. No outcomes data**

The district does not track student outcomes after leaving the high school. It would be very valuable to collect data on student success 2-5 years after graduation or aging out. This would allow the district to better evaluate the effectiveness of its transition services and revise them as needed. Collecting the information with the ability to segment by disability and severity would allow for fine tuning of multiple strategies.

From Administrators Survey

**The following statements concern transition to post high school services. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
Overall, I am pleased with the transition services offered by the district.	0.0%	8.3%	<b>8.3%</b>	66.7%	25.0%	<b>91.7%</b>
The transition planning process begins at the appropriate time (14 years) for our students.	0.0%	8.3%	<b>8.3%</b>	50.0%	41.7%	<b>91.7%</b>
I am worried about some of the students after they leave the Newton Public Schools.	0.0%	23.1%	<b>23.1%</b>	61.5%	15.4%	<b>76.9%</b>

Number of Respondents 14

From General Education Teachers Survey

**The following statements concern transition to post high school services. If you work with children 14 and older, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
Overall, I am pleased with the transition services offered by the district.	4.6%	7.7%	<b>12.3%</b>	56.9%	30.8%	<b>87.7%</b>
The transition planning process begins at the appropriate time (14 years) for our students.	3.3%	16.7%	<b>20.0%</b>	50.0%	30.0%	<b>80.0%</b>
I am worried about some of the students after they leave Newton Public Schools.	1.3%	10.7%	<b>12.0%</b>	44.0%	44.0%	<b>88.0%</b>

Number of Respondents 75

**If the district could make one or two changes to better meet the needs of students with special needs, we should...**

- 1. Try to create teacher teams, so that gen ed teachers can collaborate and get to know students better, and special educators are dealing with less gen ed teachers, and able to better support students. 2. Try to involve South more in Tech/Voc Program and help facilitate transitions that are less college geared and more vocational focused.

From IEP Team Survey

**What aspects of special education in the districts are you most pleased with?**

- Newton is willing to understand that each student's need are, in fact, different. At our high school, we have programs that have fluid walls so that students can be transferred to a more academic or a more social/emotional based program depending on the current need.

**If the district could make one or two changes to better meet the needs of students with special needs, I wish we would...**

- I wish we could find a better way to fade support at the high school level. I feel we do a disservice to students by giving too much support and then when they go to college, work or an adult program there is nowhere near the amount of support they are used to.

**Do you have an idea that might help the district reduce special education costs while still meeting the needs of all children with disabilities?**

- There seems to be even less tracking when students move or transition. Equipment gets lost or just passed on.
- Tighter process for reevaluation of eligibility prior to students entering high school with students being transitioned off IEPs if they no longer are in need of services - while being advised of high school support options available for all students (teacher conferences, math/science lab, language lab, proper selection of course levels, counselor support, after-school support, etc.)

From Parents Survey – All Grade Levels

**The following statements concern the process of developing your child's IEP beginning when they turned 14. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Check "NA" if it does not apply to your child.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
When my child turned 14, the Team considered transition.	13.3%	14.8%	<b>28.1%</b>	33.6%	38.3%	<b>71.9%</b>
When my child turned 14, she/he was invited to the meeting, if appropriate.	3.7%	6.7%	<b>10.4%</b>	17.1%	72.6%	<b>89.6%</b>
My child is between ages 15 and 22, and the Team considers transition as part of the IEP process.	9.0%	16.4%	<b>25.4%</b>	30.3%	44.3%	<b>74.6%</b>

Number of Respondents 164

**The following statements concern the transition to post high school services. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Check "NA" if your child is not 14 or older.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
Overall, I am pleased with the transition services offered by the district.	15.5%	22.6%	<b>38.1%</b>	32.3%	29.7%	<b>61.9%</b>
The transition planning process began at the appropriate time for my child.	16.1%	22.8%	<b>38.9%</b>	28.2%	32.9%	<b>61.1%</b>
I am aware of a plan for what my child will do after he/she leaves the Newton Public Schools.	30.1%	29.4%	<b>59.4%</b>	18.2%	22.4%	<b>40.6%</b>

Number of Respondents 155

From Parents Survey – High School and Post High School Only

**The following statements concern the process of developing your child's IEP beginning when they turned 14. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Check "NA" if it does not apply to your child.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
When my child turned 14, the Team considered transition.	12.4%	15.0%	<b>27.4%</b>	34.5%	38.1%	<b>72.6%</b>
When my child turned 14, she/he was invited to the meeting, if appropriate.	3.4%	6.8%	<b>10.2%</b>	15.0%	74.8%	<b>89.8%</b>
My child is between ages 15 and 22, and the Team considers transition as part of the IEP process.	8.7%	16.5%	<b>25.2%</b>	29.6%	45.2%	<b>74.8%</b>

Number of Respondents 147

**The following statements concern the transition to post high school services. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Check "NA" if your child is not 14 or older.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
Overall, I am pleased with the transition services offered by the district.	15.7%	25.6%	<b>41.3%</b>	31.4%	27.3%	<b>58.7%</b>
The transition planning process began at the appropriate time for my child.	16.1%	26.3%	<b>42.4%</b>	28.8%	28.8%	<b>57.6%</b>
I am aware of a plan for what my child will do after he/she leaves the Newton Public Schools.	29.9%	29.9%	<b>59.8%</b>	17.9%	22.2%	<b>40.2%</b>

Number of Respondents 121

From Parents Survey – All Grade Levels

**If the district could make one or two changes to better meet the needs of students with special needs, we should...**

- Give the parents more info about transition planning. My son has had a very good experience in the Newton schools but I am concerned about life after high school.
- Stronger transition planning for kids graduating from High School.
- It might be helpful to begin post high school career options earlier including testing to see where a student's aptitudes and interests might direct them so that appropriate preparation could occur in high school
- Work to make sure that after high school, the student is not dropped like a hot potato (as was my first child with special needs). Work with the knowledge that both parents and school staff are trying to "work themselves out of a job" -- that the student they send forth into the world must be able to stand as independently as possible given their needs.

### **3. Home and school communication**

Staff communicating with parents/guardians about a child's progress or challenges is an important aspect of supporting children with special needs.

#### **3a. High levels of home and school communications.**

No published studies are available, but based on our work in other districts it appears that there is frequent communication between teachers and parents/guardians.

- Over 50% of general education teachers indicated they communicate with parents of students with special needs at least weekly.
- Over 70% of special education teachers indicated they communicate with parents of each student on their caseload at least weekly.
- Nearly 50% of parents indicated that they communicated with their child's special education service provider at least weekly.

The level of frequency is much higher than in some other districts. It is not uncommon in some districts for general education teachers to reach out only at each marking period and special education teachers only when there is a problem. The data suggests that more routine checking in and updating takes place.

#### **3b. Communication channels exist.**

The survey and focus groups suggest that when a parent/guardian wants to have input or communication they can.

- 87% of parents are satisfied with their ability to discuss a question or concern regarding their child.
- 82% of parents feel their recommendations and/or concerns are considered when developing their child's IEP.

#### **3c. A desire for more communication**

Despite higher than average levels of communication, many parents feel the amount of communication is only somewhat satisfying and a sizable minority feel it is inadequate.

- Only 38% of parents strongly agreed that they are satisfied with the communication they have with their child's general education teacher.
- Only 44% of parents strongly agreed that they are satisfied with the communication they have with their child's special education teacher.

- Few focus group participants listed frequent communication with staff as a district strength.

From General Education Teachers Survey

**In my role as classroom teacher I communicate with parents of students with disabilities:**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
multiple times per day	2.5%
daily	10.8%
weekly	37.6%
monthly	33.1%
less than once a month	15.9%
Number of Respondents	157

From IEP Team Survey

**For each student on my caseload, on average, I communicate with parents/families via email, phone, or in person:**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
multiple times per day	4.8%
daily	19.3%
weekly	46.9%
monthly	20.0%
less than once a month	9.0%
Number of Respondents	145

From Parents Survey – All Grade Levels

**I communicate by email, phone or in person with one or more of my child's special education service providers...**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
multiple times a day	0.8%
daily	12.7%
weekly	34.6%
monthly	19.4%
less than once a month	32.5%
Number of Respondents	520

**I prefer to receive information from special education service providers by:**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
email	61.4%
phone	11.6%
communication book or log	12.5%
in person	9.0%
scheduled meetings	5.6%
Number of Respondents	502

**The following statements concern your child's education during the 2010-11 school year. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
Overall, I am satisfied with the communication I have with my child's GENERAL education teachers.	8.5%	16.2%	<b>24.6%</b>	37.7%	37.7%	<b>75.4%</b>
Overall, I am satisfied with the communication I have with my child's SPECIAL education team (service providers).	9.2%	16.8%	<b>26.0%</b>	29.6%	44.4%	<b>74.0%</b>
Number of Respondents	562					

**Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
I receive specific information regarding progress towards meeting goals of the IEP with each progress report.	9.0%	16.4%	<b>25.4%</b>	34.2%	40.4%	<b>74.6%</b>
Number of Respondents	568					

**The following statements concern the process of determining eligibility and developing your child's IEP. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
My comments, recommendations and/or concerns are considered when developing my child's IEP.	7.5%	10.0%	<b>17.5%</b>	28.2%	54.3%	<b>82.5%</b>

Number of Respondents 522

**I am satisfied with my ability to.....**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
Access staff members to help make them aware of a problem with my child.	5.0%	10.9%	<b>15.9%</b>	32.2%	51.8%	<b>84.1%</b>
Access information regarding my child's class work and assignments.	6.8%	17.8%	<b>24.5%</b>	34.7%	40.7%	<b>75.5%</b>
Discuss a question or concern regarding my child.	2.7%	10.0%	<b>12.7%</b>	34.0%	53.3%	<b>87.3%</b>
Check in on how my child is doing.	3.5%	13.7%	<b>17.2%</b>	32.6%	50.2%	<b>82.8%</b>
Speak with staff because I do not get enough information from my child.	4.3%	14.5%	<b>18.8%</b>	36.3%	44.9%	<b>81.2%</b>

Number of Respondents 521

## **Online Survey Responses**

## Newton Public Schools Survey for Principals and Asst. Principals

### 1. I am:

	<b>Elementary School Level</b>	<b>Secondary School Level</b>
A Principal	72.7%	10.0%
An Assistant Principal	0.0%	40.0%
A Special Education Administrator	27.3%	50.0%
A Housemaster	0.0%	0.0%
Number of Respondents	11	10

### 2. I work at:

	<b>Elementary School Level</b>	<b>Secondary School Level</b>
Elementary School/Preschool level	100.0%	0.0%
Middle School level	0.0%	63.6%
High School level	0.0%	36.4%
Number of Respondents	11	11

### 3. I have been working in Newton Public Schools for:

	<b>Elementary School Level</b>	<b>Secondary School Level</b>
3 years or less	36.4%	10.0%
4-6 years	9.1%	0.0%
7-14 years	9.1%	40.0%
15+ years	45.5%	50.0%
Number of Respondents	11	10

**4. The following statements concern the child study or teacher assistance team process in your school. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Elementary Agree	Secondary Agree	Average Agree	Elementary Disagree	Secondary Disagree	Average Disagree
I attend at least 80% of child study team meetings.	63.6%	66.7%	<b>65.2%</b>	36.4%	33.3%	<b>34.8%</b>
Prior to making a referral for special education, in most cases we have tried multiple interventions over a six to eight week period.	90.9%	70.0%	<b>80.5%</b>	9.1%	30.0%	<b>19.5%</b>
Prior to making referral for special education, we have documented use of multiple interventions over a six to eight week period.	81.8%	55.6%	<b>68.7%</b>	18.2%	44.4%	<b>31.3%</b>
Many students are well served by the child study process and are not referred for a special education evaluation.	90.9%	50.0%	<b>70.5%</b>	9.1%	50.0%	<b>29.5%</b>
Following child study, referrals for a special education evaluation are appropriate.	81.8%	80.0%	<b>80.9%</b>	18.2%	20.0%	<b>19.1%</b>

Number of Respondents 21

**5. The following statements concern eligibility for an IEP. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Elementary Agree	Secondary Agree	Average Agree	Elementary Disagree	Secondary Disagree	Average Disagree
I regularly attend IEP Team meetings for students in my team/house/school.	90.9%	75.0%	<b>83.0%</b>	9.1%	25.0%	<b>17.0%</b>
The eligibility criteria are clear and well understood by all involved.	81.8%	88.9%	<b>85.4%</b>	18.2%	11.1%	<b>14.6%</b>
The eligibility criteria are applied consistently from student to student in my building.	81.8%	88.9%	<b>85.4%</b>	18.2%	11.1%	<b>14.6%</b>
In my school we have clear criteria and a process for reducing or terminating special education services when appropriate.	90.9%	77.8%	<b>84.3%</b>	9.1%	22.2%	<b>15.7%</b>

Number of Respondents 20

**6. The following statements concern the services included in a student's IEP. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Elementary Agree	Secondary Agree	Average Agree	Elementary Disagree	Secondary Disagree	Average Disagree
The determination of type/frequency of services are clear and well understood by all involved.	90.9%	77.8%	<b>84.3%</b>	9.1%	22.2%	<b>15.7%</b>
The determination of type/frequency of services are applied consistently from student to student in my building.	72.7%	88.9%	<b>80.8%</b>	27.3%	11.1%	<b>19.2%</b>
The assessment completed as part of the eligibility process yields recommendations that inform effective services and interventions for students.	100.0%	88.9%	<b>94.4%</b>	0.0%	11.1%	<b>5.6%</b>
I ask to reconvene the Team in response to a student's	81.8%	66.7%	<b>74.2%</b>	18.2%	33.3%	<b>25.8%</b>

continued lack of progress.						
Number of Respondents	20					

**7. The following statements concern aides/aide specialists for students on IEPs. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Elementary Agree	Secondary Agree	Average Agree	Elementary Disagree	Secondary Disagree	Average Disagree
Students in my school are adequately supported by aides/aide specialists.	81.8%	88.9%	<b>85.4%</b>	18.2%	11.1%	<b>14.6%</b>
On more than a few occasions, Teams have recommended an aide, even though I didn't agree.	18.2%	42.9%	<b>30.5%</b>	81.8%	57.1%	<b>69.5%</b>
On more than a few occasions, Teams have not agreed to provide the level of aide support that I thought was warranted.	9.1%	22.2%	<b>15.7%</b>	90.9%	77.8%	<b>84.3%</b>
At times I feel pressured by parents to provide an aide, even though I do not think one is warranted.	63.6%	66.7%	<b>65.2%</b>	36.4%	33.3%	<b>34.8%</b>
I would like to see more services provided by certified staff, even if it means less assistance from aides.	81.8%	50.0%	<b>65.9%</b>	18.2%	50.0%	<b>34.1%</b>
I am hesitant to recommend aide services because of their cost.	63.6%	22.2%	<b>42.9%</b>	36.4%	77.8%	<b>57.1%</b>

Number of Respondents 20

**8. The following statements concern the process of inclusion for students on IEPs. Inclusion is defined as educating students in their home school and community to the fullest extent possible and with the appropriate individual supports. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Elementary Agree	Secondary Agree	Average Agree	Elementary Disagree	Secondary Disagree	Average Disagree
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with mild special needs.	100.0%	88.9%	<b>94.4%</b>	0.0%	11.1%	<b>5.6%</b>
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with moderate special needs.	100.0%	88.9%	<b>94.4%</b>	0.0%	11.1%	<b>5.6%</b>
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with severe special needs.	90.9%	75.0%	<b>83.0%</b>	9.1%	25.0%	<b>17.0%</b>
Students with severe special needs would benefit from less inclusion than is the district's current practice.	27.3%	62.5%	<b>44.9%</b>	72.7%	37.5%	<b>55.1%</b>
Inclusion works well in the district.	90.9%	88.9%	<b>89.9%</b>	9.1%	11.1%	<b>10.1%</b>
Aides/aide specialists are a critical component to a successful inclusion program.	90.9%	88.9%	<b>89.9%</b>	9.1%	11.1%	<b>10.1%</b>
Most classrooms with 6-8 students with mild to moderate disabilities require a second adult for support.	100.0%	75.0%	<b>87.5%</b>	0.0%	25.0%	<b>12.5%</b>
I would like the district to continue its commitment to inclusion.	90.9%	100.0%	<b>95.5%</b>	9.1%	0.0%	<b>4.5%</b>
The co-teaching model works well.	100.0%	100.0%	<b>100.0%</b>	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>
I would like to see more co-taught classrooms/courses in my building.	100.0%	100.0%	<b>100.0%</b>	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>

Number of Respondents

20

**9. The following statements concern transition to post high school services. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Elementary Agree	Secondary Agree	Average Agree	Elementary Disagree	Secondary Disagree	Average Disagree
Overall, I am pleased with the transition services offered by the district.	100.0%	85.7%	<b>92.9%</b>	0.0%	14.3%	<b>7.1%</b>
The transition planning process begins at the appropriate time (14 years) for our students.	100.0%	85.7%	<b>92.9%</b>	0.0%	14.3%	<b>7.1%</b>
I am worried about some of the students after they leave the Newton Public Schools.	83.3%	71.4%	<b>77.4%</b>	16.7%	28.6%	<b>22.6%</b>

Number of Respondents 14

**10. The following statements concern assistive technology. Assistive technology is defined as low/medium/high technology tools or support to help access the general education environment. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Elementary Agree	Secondary Agree	Average Agree	Elementary Disagree	Secondary Disagree	Average Disagree
Students have access to assistive technology that is appropriate for their needs.	63.6%	77.8%	<b>70.7%</b>	36.4%	22.2%	<b>29.3%</b>
Staff in my building know how to support students in using their assistive technology.	63.6%	77.8%	<b>70.7%</b>	36.4%	22.2%	<b>29.3%</b>
Some students could benefit from more assistive technology.	100.0%	100.0%	<b>100.0%</b>	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>
I know what assistive technology is available for our students.	54.5%	77.8%	<b>66.2%</b>	45.5%	22.2%	<b>33.8%</b>

Number of Respondents 20

**11. The following statements concern support for students with emotional or behavioral disabilities. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Elementary Agree	Secondary Agree	Average Agree	Elementary Disagree	Secondary Disagree	Average Disagree
The district provides sufficient support and services to meet the needs of students with emotional or behavioral disabilities.	18.2%	66.7%	<b>42.4%</b>	81.8%	33.3%	<b>57.6%</b>
The number of students with emotional or behavioral disabilities has increased over the last five years in my building.	90.9%	77.8%	<b>84.3%</b>	9.1%	22.2%	<b>15.7%</b>

Number of Respondents 20

**12. Within the context of my staff meeting time or on a regular basis,**

	Elementary Agree	Secondary Agree	Average Agree	Elementary Disagree	Secondary Disagree	Average Disagree
I provide opportunities for general and special education teachers to collaborate around student achievement.	90.9%	88.9%	<b>89.9%</b>	9.1%	11.1%	<b>10.1%</b>
I consider special education teachers and related service providers when purchasing materials/resources for my building.	90.9%	87.5%	<b>89.2%</b>	9.1%	12.5%	<b>10.8%</b>

Number of Respondents 20

## Summary of school administrators' open response answers

*What aspects of special education in the district are you most pleased with?*

School administrators noted the overall high quality of staff in the Newton Public Schools, including both the teachers and aides. Administrators also noted the district's commitment to inclusion of nearly all students with disabilities as a point of pride, especially that students are able to be included in a general education setting in their neighborhood school.

*If the district could make one or two changes to better meet the needs of students with special needs, we should . . .*

Administrators shared a wide range of views on potential improvements to special education in the district. One broader theme was around strengthening mental health and behavioral supports, perhaps through the wider availability of psychologists and social workers. A second theme in administrators' comments focused on increasing the use of teachers rather than aides, either through co-teaching or by using literacy and math specialists to support struggling students. A final theme across administrators' responses focused on better preparing general education teachers to differentiate their instruction for students with disabilities, including through the use of modifications and accommodations.

*Do you have an idea that might help the district reduce special education spending while still meeting the needs of student with disabilities?*

Administrators provided a variety of ideas for increasing cost effectiveness. One common theme involved strengthening supports and interventions available to struggling students in general education. A second theme in comments focused on reducing the number of paraprofessionals, especially those supporting students on a 1:1 basis. Finally, administrators provided ideas for increasing the availability and size of programs such as the stabilization program to keep students in district schools rather than out-of-district placements.

## Newton Public Schools Survey for General Education Teachers

**1. I am:**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
An elementary classroom teacher	29.1%
Other certified elementary teacher (art/PE/literacy specialist/math coach)	8.5%
Middle school classroom teacher	21.5%
Other certified middle school teacher	3.1%
High school classroom teacher	30.9%
Other certified high school teacher	0.9%
Other (please specify)	5.8%
Number of Respondents	223

**2. I have been teaching in the Newton Public Schools:**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
3 years or less	15.7%
4-6 years	17.0%
7-14 years	43.9%
15+ years	23.3%
Number of Respondents	223

**3. During the current school year, I teach students (check all that apply):**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
who have a 1:1 aide or aide specialist	60.9%
who have a shared aide or aide specialist	58.6%
who have pullout supports provided by a special education teacher	67.7%
who have in-class supports provided by a special education teacher	63.2%
who have 504 plans	83.2%
who are in a co-taught or integrated class	30.5%
Number of Respondents	220

**4. The following statements concern the child study or teacher assistance team process. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
I am aware of the child study process in my building.	22.4%	9.7%	<b>32.1%</b>	26.1%	41.8%	<b>67.9%</b>
I have used the child study process.	34.4%	9.2%	<b>43.6%</b>	19.6%	36.8%	<b>56.4%</b>
Prior to making referral for special education, in most cases we have tried multiple interventions over a six to eight week period.	9.1%	6.5%	<b>15.6%</b>	31.8%	52.6%	<b>84.4%</b>
Prior to making referral for special education, we have documented use of multiple interventions over a six to eight week period.	11.2%	13.8%	<b>25.0%</b>	37.5%	37.5%	<b>75.0%</b>
The strategies recommended by the child study process have yielded successful results for my students.	18.5%	20.5%	<b>39.0%</b>	52.7%	8.2%	<b>61.0%</b>
I have a clear understanding of the guidelines and procedures for referring a student to the child study team.	21.5%	15.8%	<b>37.3%</b>	26.6%	36.1%	<b>62.7%</b>

Number of Respondents 166

**5. The following statements concern eligibility for an IEP. Please indicate the extent agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
I regularly attend the IEP Team meetings for students in my class.	5.4%	4.8%	<b>10.1%</b>	17.3%	72.6%	<b>89.9%</b>
The eligibility criteria are clear and well understood by all involved.	6.6%	13.9%	<b>20.5%</b>	38.0%	41.6%	<b>79.5%</b>
The eligibility criteria are applied consistently from student to student in my building.	9.1%	17.7%	<b>26.8%</b>	35.4%	37.8%	<b>73.2%</b>
In my building we have clear criteria and a process for reducing or terminating special education services.	14.2%	25.9%	<b>40.1%</b>	40.1%	19.8%	<b>59.9%</b>

Number of Respondents 169

**6. The following statements concern the services included in a student's IEP. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
The determination of type/frequency of services are clear and well understood by all involved.	4.8%	18.1%	<b>22.9%</b>	44.6%	32.5%	<b>77.1%</b>
The determination of type/frequency of services are applied consistently from student to student in my building.	11.7%	24.5%	<b>36.2%</b>	41.1%	22.7%	<b>63.8%</b>
The assessment completed as part of the eligibility process yields recommendations that inform effective services and interventions for students.	4.8%	15.2%	<b>20.0%</b>	51.5%	28.5%	<b>80.0%</b>
I ask to reconvene the Team in response to a student's continued lack of progress.	14.6%	21.5%	<b>36.1%</b>	34.2%	29.7%	<b>63.9%</b>

Number of Respondents 168

**7. The following statements concern support for students who receive special education services. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
Students in my class during this school year have adequate support by a certified special education teacher.	6.1%	18.2%	<b>24.2%</b>	46.7%	29.1%	<b>75.8%</b>
Students in my class during this school year have adequate support by related services providers (OT, PT, SLP, etc).	5.2%	14.8%	<b>20.0%</b>	52.3%	27.7%	<b>80.0%</b>
Students in my class during this school year have adequate support by an aide/aide specialist.	8.3%	16.0%	<b>24.4%</b>	44.9%	30.8%	<b>75.6%</b>
On more than a few occasions the Team has recommended an aide, even though I didn't agree.	74.5%	19.1%	<b>93.6%</b>	4.5%	1.9%	<b>6.4%</b>
On more than a few occasions, the Team has not agreed to provide the level of aide support that I thought was warranted.	35.9%	18.6%	<b>54.5%</b>	27.6%	17.9%	<b>45.5%</b>
At times, I feel pressured by parents to provide an aide even though I don't think one is warranted.	54.8%	24.5%	<b>79.4%</b>	13.5%	7.1%	<b>20.6%</b>
I would like to see more services provided by certified staff, even if it means less assistance from aides.	18.4%	29.7%	<b>48.1%</b>	33.5%	18.4%	<b>51.9%</b>
I am hesitant to recommend aide services because of their cost.	58.6%	25.0%	<b>83.6%</b>	11.2%	5.3%	<b>16.4%</b>

Number of Respondents

167

**8. The following statements concern the process of inclusion for students on IEPs. Inclusion is defined as educating students in their home school and community to the fullest extent possible and with the appropriate individual supports. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with mild special needs.	2.3%	0.0%	<b>2.3%</b>	12.9%	84.8%	<b>97.7%</b>
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with moderate special needs.	1.8%	8.8%	<b>10.5%</b>	28.7%	60.8%	<b>89.5%</b>
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with severe special needs.	17.1%	30.6%	<b>47.6%</b>	31.8%	20.6%	<b>52.4%</b>
Students with severe special needs would benefit from less inclusion than is the district's current practice.	20.6%	28.5%	<b>49.1%</b>	32.1%	18.8%	<b>50.9%</b>
Inclusion works well in the district.	8.3%	20.2%	<b>28.6%</b>	50.6%	20.8%	<b>71.4%</b>
Aides/aide specialists are a critical component to a successful inclusion program.	0.6%	1.8%	<b>2.4%</b>	15.1%	82.5%	<b>97.6%</b>
Most classrooms with 6-8 students with mild to moderate disabilities require a second adult for support.	1.2%	1.2%	<b>2.4%</b>	15.2%	82.4%	<b>97.6%</b>
I would like the district continue its commitment to inclusion.	2.4%	7.7%	<b>10.1%</b>	28.6%	61.3%	<b>89.9%</b>

Number of Respondents 171

**9. The following statements concern assistive technology. Assistive technology is defined as low/medium/high technology tools or support to help access the general education environment. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
Students have access to assistive technology that is appropriate for their needs.	8.4%	18.9%	<b>27.3%</b>	45.5%	27.3%	<b>72.7%</b>
I know how to support students in using their assistive technology.	13.7%	26.0%	<b>39.7%</b>	42.5%	17.8%	<b>60.3%</b>
There are students in my class who could benefit from more assistive technology.	2.9%	13.8%	<b>16.7%</b>	39.9%	43.5%	<b>83.3%</b>
I know what assistive technology is available for our students.	16.9%	29.9%	<b>46.8%</b>	42.9%	10.4%	<b>53.2%</b>

Number of Respondents

154

**10. The following statements concern support for students with emotional or behavioral disabilities. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
The district provides sufficient support and services to meet the needs of students with emotional or behavioral disabilities.	30.5%	25.0%	<b>55.5%</b>	31.7%	12.8%	<b>44.5%</b>
The number of students with emotional or behavioral disabilities has increased over the last five years in my classroom.	2.6%	8.6%	<b>11.3%</b>	25.8%	62.9%	<b>88.7%</b>

Number of Respondents

164

**11. The following statements concern transition to post high school services. If you work with children 14 and older, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
Overall, I am pleased with the transition services offered by the district.	4.6%	7.7%	<b>12.3%</b>	56.9%	30.8%	<b>87.7%</b>
The transition planning process begins at the appropriate time (14 years) for our students.	3.3%	16.7%	<b>20.0%</b>	50.0%	30.0%	<b>80.0%</b>
I am worried about some of the students after they leave Newton Public Schools.	1.3%	10.7%	<b>12.0%</b>	44.0%	44.0%	<b>88.0%</b>

Number of Respondents

75

**12. I have been offered professional development in differentiated instruction by Newton Public Schools in the past -- years. You may check more than one response if it applies.**

	Response Percent
1-2 years	56.4%
3-4 years	42.3%
5+ years	34.6%

Number of Respondents

156

**13. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement:**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
I collaborate with special education related service providers on a regular basis.	2.4%	8.3%	<b>10.7%</b>	29.2%	60.1%	<b>89.3%</b>
I regularly plan lessons with multiple points of entry to meet the range of learners in my class.	2.4%	6.6%	<b>9.0%</b>	38.3%	52.7%	<b>91.0%</b>
I have resources/on-going support in my building to meet the ranges of learning needs in my class.	1.8%	19.0%	<b>20.8%</b>	47.0%	32.1%	<b>79.2%</b>
The principal in my building creates a supportive environment for my work with children with special needs.	3.0%	6.6%	<b>9.6%</b>	33.7%	56.6%	<b>90.4%</b>

Number of Respondents 171

**14. In my role as classroom teacher I communicate with parents of students with disabilities:**

	Response Percent
multiple times per day	2.5%
daily	10.8%
weekly	37.6%
monthly	33.1%
less than once a month	15.9%

Number of Respondents 157

## Summary of general education teachers' open response answers

*What aspects of special education in the district are you most pleased with?*

General education teachers applauded the overall high quality of staff in the Newton Public Schools, with one representative comment describing NPS staff as “hardworking, committed, smart and kind.” The district’s commitment to inclusion was also noted as a point of pride, and general education teachers saw the current inclusion model as particularly effective for students with mild to moderate disabilities. A final theme in the comments of general educators cited as a strength the robust levels of support that students with special needs, including from related service providers, learning center teachers, inclusion facilitators, and aides.

*If the district could make one or two changes to better meet the needs of students with special needs, we should . . .*

General education teachers offered a wide variety of suggestions for improving service to students with special needs. One theme emerged around ensuring that special education staff members have the necessary content knowledge to support struggling students. A number of general education teachers lamented the relatively low content knowledge, especially in math, of the special educators in their buildings. In a similar vein, many teachers suggested hiring or training up aides with deeper content expertise, noting that it was difficult for them to effectively support students when they were not well versed in the content of the lessons. A second theme across many comments was the suggestion that the district consider exploring options other than full inclusion for students with more severe needs. An additional theme centered on a feeling of too few staff – learning center teachers, aides, and psychologists were all noted as understaffed positions. Finally, a number of teachers suggested strengthening the counseling and behavior supports available to students, especially students with behavioral disabilities or Asperger’s syndrome.

*Do you have an idea that might help the district reduce special education spending while still meeting the needs of student with disabilities?*

A substantial number of general educators did not believe that there were readily available options for reducing special education spending while still meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Others suggested developing a revised inclusion model to allow special educators to support a greater number of students. Another theme in general education teachers’ comments was to strengthen early intervention in math and reading to reduce the need for referrals for special education. Additionally, a number of respondents suggested increasing the number of integrated or co-taught classrooms, though several noted that they were not sure whether this would reduce costs. Finally, substantial numbers of general educators suggested that many of the most expensive special education supports were often dictated by parents’ preferences rather than educational need, and that there might be an opportunity for the district to towards standard criteria for assigning services and supports.

## Newton Public Schools Survey for IEP Team Members

### 1. My primary area is:

	<b>Response Percent</b>
Learning Center Teacher	20.6%
Inclusion Facilitator	14.4%
Special Educator - Other	25.6%
Social Worker	3.3%
Psychologist	8.3%
Speech/Language Pathologist	8.9%
Physical Therapist/Vision/OM	0.0%
Occupational Therapist	3.3%
Other (please specify - for example, BCBA, APE) teacher	15.6%
Number of Respondents	180

### 2. I work primarily at:

	<b>Response Percent</b>
Preschool level	0.0%
Elementary School level	46.4%
Middle School level	25.4%
High School level	24.3%
District Wide	3.9%
Number of Respondents	181

### 3. I have been working in Newton Public Schools for:

	<b>Response Percent</b>
3 years or less	22.1%
4-6 years	22.1%
7-14 years	35.9%
15+ years	19.9%
Number of Respondents	181

**4. The following statements concern eligibility for an IEP. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
I regularly attend the IEP Team meetings for students on my case load.	2.6%	2.0%	<b>4.6%</b>	2.6%	92.8%	<b>95.4%</b>
The eligibility criteria for services are clear and well understood by all involved.	4.6%	14.5%	<b>19.1%</b>	30.3%	50.7%	<b>80.9%</b>
The eligibility criteria are applied consistently from student to student in my caseload.	4.0%	12.6%	<b>16.6%</b>	30.5%	53.0%	<b>83.4%</b>
In my building(s) we have clear criteria and a process for reducing or terminating special education services when appropriate.	9.2%	22.2%	<b>31.4%</b>	37.3%	31.4%	<b>68.6%</b>

Number of Respondents 154

**5. The following statements concern the services included in a student's IEP. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
The determination of type/frequency of services are clear and well understood by all involved.	3.9%	14.4%	<b>18.3%</b>	41.8%	39.9%	<b>81.7%</b>
The determination of type/frequency of services are applied consistently from student to student within my caseload.	4.0%	13.2%	<b>17.2%</b>	32.5%	50.3%	<b>82.8%</b>
The assessments completed as part of the assessment process yield recommendations that inform effective services and interventions for students.	0.7%	5.9%	<b>6.6%</b>	39.5%	53.9%	<b>93.4%</b>
I ask to reconvene the Team in response to a student's continued lack of progress.	2.0%	6.7%	<b>8.7%</b>	27.3%	64.0%	<b>91.3%</b>

Number of Respondents 154

**6. The following statements concern aides/aide specialists for students on IEPs. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
In 2010-11 students in my caseload are adequately supported by aides/aide specialists.	6.1%	17.7%	<b>23.8%</b>	34.0%	42.2%	<b>76.2%</b>
On more than a few occasions the Team has recommended an aide, even though I did not agree.	72.1%	16.3%	<b>88.4%</b>	10.9%	0.7%	<b>11.6%</b>
On more than a few occasions, the Team has not agreed to provide the level of aide support that I thought was warranted.	50.3%	14.8%	<b>65.1%</b>	30.9%	4.0%	<b>34.9%</b>
At times, I feel pressured by parents to provide an aide even though I do not think one is warranted.	45.6%	19.0%	<b>64.6%</b>	29.9%	5.4%	<b>35.4%</b>
I would like to see more services provided by certified staff, even if it means less assistance from aides.	16.2%	35.8%	<b>52.0%</b>	38.5%	9.5%	<b>48.0%</b>
I am hesitant to recommend aide services because of their cost.	53.7%	21.1%	<b>74.8%</b>	17.7%	7.5%	<b>25.2%</b>

Number of Respondents 151

**7. The following statements concern the process of inclusion for students on IEPs. Inclusion is defined as educating students in their home school and community to the fullest extent possible and with the appropriate individual supports. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with mild special needs.	2.7%	2.0%	<b>4.7%</b>	5.3%	90.0%	<b>95.3%</b>
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with moderate special needs.	0.7%	4.0%	<b>4.7%</b>	21.3%	74.0%	<b>95.3%</b>
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with severe special needs.	4.0%	28.2%	<b>32.2%</b>	34.9%	32.9%	<b>67.8%</b>
Students with severe special needs would benefit from less inclusion than is the district's current practice.	22.1%	23.5%	<b>45.6%</b>	44.3%	10.1%	<b>54.4%</b>
Inclusion works well in the district.	4.0%	14.1%	<b>18.1%</b>	50.3%	31.5%	<b>81.9%</b>
Aides/aide specialists are a critical component to a successful inclusion program.	0.0%	0.7%	<b>0.7%</b>	14.0%	85.3%	<b>99.3%</b>
Most classrooms with 6-8 students with mild to moderate disabilities require a second adult for support.	0.0%	8.2%	<b>8.2%</b>	16.3%	75.5%	<b>91.8%</b>
I would like the district continue its commitment to inclusion.	1.3%	2.7%	<b>4.0%</b>	22.1%	73.8%	<b>96.0%</b>

Number of Respondents 150

**8. The following statements concern assistive technology. Assistive technology is defined as low/medium/high technology tools or support to help access the general education environment. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
Students have access to assistive technology that is appropriate for their needs.	11.4%	22.1%	<b>33.6%</b>	51.7%	14.8%	<b>66.4%</b>
I know how to support students in using their assistive technology.	6.1%	27.9%	<b>34.0%</b>	53.1%	12.9%	<b>66.0%</b>
There are students on my caseload who could benefit from more assistive technology.	2.1%	13.2%	<b>15.3%</b>	49.3%	35.4%	<b>84.7%</b>
I know what assistive technology is available for our students.	11.4%	27.5%	<b>38.9%</b>	39.6%	21.5%	<b>61.1%</b>

Number of Respondents 150

**9. The following statements concern support for students with emotional or behavioral disabilities. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
The district provides sufficient support and services to meet the needs of students with emotional or behavioral disabilities.	21.1%	36.8%	<b>57.9%</b>	32.3%	9.8%	<b>42.1%</b>
The number of students with emotional or behavioral disabilities has increased over the last five years.	0.7%	3.4%	<b>4.1%</b>	32.4%	63.4%	<b>95.9%</b>

Number of Respondents 151

**10. I have been offered professional development relative to my field of specialty by Newton Public School in the past:**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
1-2 years	8.0%	15.2%	<b>23.2%</b>	34.1%	42.8%	<b>76.8%</b>
3-4 years	7.1%	21.2%	<b>28.3%</b>	33.6%	38.1%	<b>71.7%</b>
5+ years	8.1%	21.6%	<b>29.7%</b>	29.7%	40.5%	<b>70.3%</b>
Number of Respondents	149					

**11. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement:**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
I collaborate with general education teachers on a regular basis.	0.7%	4.0%	<b>4.6%</b>	26.5%	68.9%	<b>95.4%</b>
I collaborate with special education teachers on a regular basis.	0.0%	6.6%	<b>6.6%</b>	23.8%	69.5%	<b>93.4%</b>
I have the resources and materials in my building to support students in my caseload.	7.4%	28.4%	<b>35.8%</b>	39.2%	25.0%	<b>64.2%</b>
General education teachers in my building are supportive of children on IEPs.	1.3%	11.3%	<b>12.6%</b>	53.0%	34.4%	<b>87.4%</b>
The principal in my building creates a supportive environment for special education staff working with children with special needs.	4.0%	6.7%	<b>10.7%</b>	24.7%	64.7%	<b>89.3%</b>
Number of Respondents	151					

**12. For each student on my caseload, on average, I communicate with parents/families via email, phone, or in person:**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
multiple times per day	4.8%
daily	19.3%
weekly	46.9%
monthly	20.0%
less than once a month	9.0%
Number of Respondents	145

## Summary of IEP team members' open responses

*What aspects of special education in the district are you most pleased with?*

IEP team members described a strength in the tight integration between special education and general education. This included both the integration of staff through common planning and PLCs, as well as the integration of curriculum through RTI and inclusion. Like their colleagues in other survey groups, IEP team members also cited the district's philosophy and practice of inclusion as a point of pride. Additionally, IEP members expressed a belief that NPS is able to meet each student's individual needs.

*If the district could make one or two changes to better meet the needs of students with special needs, we should . . .*

A number of IEP team members expressed interest in the district exploring additional options, beyond full inclusion, for some students, particularly those with the most severe disabilities. Several suggested that this might reduce the need for students to attend out-of-district placements. Another consistent suggestion from IEP team members was to make sure that there were substitutes and aides were not pulled away from their regular duties to serve as substitutes. IEP team members also expressed concern that their time was increasingly consumed with paperwork, rather than directly serving students. Finally, a substantial number of IEP members suggested ideas for strengthening support for students with emotional or behavioral challenges, such as increased direct counseling with a psychologist or support from a certified behaviorist.

*Do you have an idea that might help the district reduce special education spending while still meeting the needs of student with disabilities?*

Respondents suggested several possible solutions for decreasing costs through reducing the number of students placed out-of-district. One suggestion across a number of comments involved expanding the options in-district offered to students with severe disabilities. Other IEP team members suggested that therapeutic services could be reduced as the child grew older, or that the district shift the schedule and assignment of aides so that more students are supported by shared aides. Substantial numbers of respondents thought the most promising cost saving measure might be to strengthen interventions with struggling students before they are referred to special education.

Others expressed interest in what a representative respondent described as "consistent guidelines in practical layman's terms regarding eligibility, services, and out of district placements to streamline those processes and ensure that only those students who require the services are getting them". A related set of comments expressed concern that they saw some services provided more on the basis of parent demand than student need, and suggested that the district strengthen the consistency of its IEP meetings.

A sizeable number of IEP team members did not believe that special education costs could be reduced, and several suggested that they should be increased.

## Newton Public Schools Survey for Parents

### 1. I am:

	Response Percent
A parent/guardian of a student who is receiving special education services THROUGH AN IEP during the 2010-11 school year through the Newton Public Schools. (Includes students who attended out of district schools.)	94.5%
Other (please specify)	5.5%
Number of Respondents	641

### 2. My child has received special education services through the Newton Public Schools for:

	Response Percent
0-3 years	31.5%
3-10 years	50.4%
10-15 years	14.1%
15+ years	4.0%
Number of Respondents	647

### 3. My child's primary disability is...(select one)

	Mild	Moderate	Moderate to Severe	Severe
Autism or an autism spectrum disorder	5.6%	6.0%	2.7%	0.7%
Deaf-blindness	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%
Emotional Disturbance	3.0%	3.3%	2.5%	0.2%
Hearing Impairment (including deafness)	0.9%	0.3%	0.1%	0.5%
Intellectual Disability	2.1%	2.0%	2.1%	0.2%
Multiple Disabilities	0.3%	1.4%	3.0%	0.5%
Orthopedic Impairment	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.0%
Other Health Impairment	1.1%	2.3%	1.2%	0.3%
Specific Learning Disability	9.4%	13.9%	7.2%	1.4%
Speech or Language Impairment	5.5%	3.0%	2.5%	1.1%
Traumatic Brain Injury	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.0%
Visual Impairment (including blindness)	0.4%	0.8%	0.1%	0.1%
Developmental Delay	3.8%	3.4%	1.5%	1.0%

Number of Respondents

642

**4. Indicate the school your child is currently attending. (The term "Out of District" refers only to schools that are not run by Newton Public Schools.)**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
In District Pre-K	2.8%
In District Elementary School	37.8%
In District Middle School	20.9%
In District High School	29.4%
In District Post High School transition	0.3%
Out of District Pre-K	0.8%
Out of District Elementary School	1.9%
Out of District Middle School	3.3%
Out of District High School	4.2%
Out of District Post High School transition	0.3%
Number of Respondents	646

**5. Inclusion is defined as educating students in their home school and community to the fullest extent possible and with the appropriate individual supports. I feel that my child's learning needs are currently best served by:**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
Full inclusion (in the general education environment at least 75% of the day)	70.4%
Partial inclusion (in the general education environment between 25% and 75% of the day)	18.1%
Substantially separate programming (out of the general education environment 75% of the day or more)	11.5%
Number of Respondents	662

**6. The following statements concern your child's education during the 2010-11 school year. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
Overall, I am satisfied with the QUALITY of my child's education.	7.7%	10.3%	<b>18.0%</b>	39.0%	43.1%	<b>82.0%</b>
Overall, I am satisfied with the QUALITY of the special education support and services my child received.	11.4%	14.5%	<b>25.9%</b>	34.8%	39.3%	<b>74.1%</b>
Overall, I am satisfied with the AMOUNT of special education support and services my child receives.	11.4%	16.6%	<b>28.1%</b>	34.3%	37.6%	<b>71.9%</b>
Staff and school schedules impact my child's access to special education services.	19.9%	20.8%	<b>40.6%</b>	32.4%	27.0%	<b>59.4%</b>
School staff are adequately trained in the best educational practices for my child's special needs.	11.7%	21.3%	<b>33.0%</b>	34.2%	32.8%	<b>67.0%</b>
My child's teacher(s) has a system to collect data to track my child's progress toward IEP goals.	14.4%	20.7%	<b>35.1%</b>	35.3%	29.6%	<b>64.9%</b>
I feel that my child is accepted by school staff.	2.5%	5.4%	<b>7.9%</b>	20.8%	71.4%	<b>92.1%</b>
I feel that my child is accepted by peers.	4.5%	12.8%	<b>17.4%</b>	36.5%	46.1%	<b>82.6%</b>
School administration takes into account my child's disability when considering disciplinary decisions.	5.7%	10.7%	<b>16.4%</b>	36.8%	46.8%	<b>83.6%</b>
Overall, I am satisfied with the communication I have with my child's GENERAL education teachers.	8.5%	16.2%	<b>24.6%</b>	37.7%	37.7%	<b>75.4%</b>
Overall, I am satisfied with the communication I have with my child's SPECIAL education team (service	9.2%	16.8%	<b>26.0%</b>	29.6%	44.4%	<b>74.0%</b>

providers).						
Number of Respondents	562					

**7. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
My child's IEP is implemented as specified in the document.	10.1%	14.6%	<b>24.7%</b>	37.5%	37.8%	<b>75.3%</b>
I receive specific information regarding progress towards meeting goals of the IEP with each progress report.	9.0%	16.4%	<b>25.4%</b>	34.2%	40.4%	<b>74.6%</b>
If my child is not making progress on his or her goals and objectives, effective action is taken.	14.8%	24.3%	<b>39.1%</b>	36.5%	24.5%	<b>60.9%</b>
Special education teachers make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my child's IEP.	5.6%	9.3%	<b>14.9%</b>	38.8%	46.3%	<b>85.1%</b>
General education teachers make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my child's IEP.	9.9%	18.0%	<b>28.0%</b>	37.6%	34.4%	<b>72.0%</b>
Overall, my child benefits from the IEP services, programs, and accommodations provided.	7.0%	8.2%	<b>15.2%</b>	32.9%	51.9%	<b>84.8%</b>
Number of Respondents	568					

**8. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Check "NA" if it does not apply to your child.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
My child is making effective progress on their social, emotional and/or behavioral goal(s).	8.0%	16.2%	<b>24.2%</b>	40.5%	35.3%	<b>75.8%</b>
I am satisfied with the services my child receives to address their social, emotional and/or behavioral goal(s) so she/he can participate in class.	12.9%	15.3%	<b>28.2%</b>	36.7%	35.0%	<b>71.8%</b>
My child receives social facilitation services to develop and maintain good peer relationships.	15.8%	14.9%	<b>30.7%</b>	37.7%	31.6%	<b>69.3%</b>
I was satisfied with the functional behavioral assessment that was conducted for my child.	11.1%	15.5%	<b>26.5%</b>	31.9%	41.6%	<b>73.5%</b>
I am satisfied with the positive behavioral supports in place for my child.	10.4%	12.8%	<b>23.2%</b>	37.2%	39.6%	<b>76.8%</b>
I was satisfied with the response from the school team after my child was restrained.	19.0%	9.5%	<b>28.6%</b>	33.3%	38.1%	<b>71.4%</b>

Number of Respondents 425

**9. The following statements concern the process of determining eligibility and developing your child's IEP. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
The initial referral to special education was made at the appropriate time.	13.9%	13.1%	<b>27.0%</b>	21.9%	51.1%	<b>73.0%</b>
My comments, recommendations and/or concerns are considered when developing my child's IEP.	7.5%	10.0%	<b>17.5%</b>	28.2%	54.3%	<b>82.5%</b>
The evaluations conducted by Newton Public School staff accurately described my child.	7.5%	14.7%	<b>22.2%</b>	37.3%	40.4%	<b>77.8%</b>
In the evaluation process (initial and re-evaluation) the assessments used were comprehensive and answered the questions the Team had about my child.	9.5%	14.4%	<b>23.9%</b>	37.7%	38.5%	<b>76.1%</b>
I am aware that if I disagree with the findings of the school district's evaluation, the district must inform me of my right to an independent educational evaluation.	6.8%	7.9%	<b>14.7%</b>	20.8%	64.5%	<b>85.3%</b>
I understand how eligibility is determined for special education services.	4.4%	15.0%	<b>19.4%</b>	35.8%	44.8%	<b>80.6%</b>
I have a clear understanding of the process of IEP development.	2.7%	12.6%	<b>15.3%</b>	34.0%	50.7%	<b>84.7%</b>
I am considered an equal partner with teachers and other professionals in planning my child's program.	12.0%	13.7%	<b>25.7%</b>	31.1%	43.2%	<b>74.3%</b>
I understand the guidelines for when a student no longer needs services.	13.4%	27.8%	<b>41.2%</b>	30.5%	28.2%	<b>58.8%</b>

Number of Respondents 522

**10. The following statements concern the process of developing your child's IEP beginning when they turned 14. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Check "NA" if it does not apply to your child.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
When my child turned 14, the Team considered transition.	13.3%	14.8%	<b>28.1%</b>	33.6%	38.3%	<b>71.9%</b>
When my child turned 14, she/he was invited to the meeting, if appropriate.	3.7%	6.7%	<b>10.4%</b>	17.1%	72.6%	<b>89.6%</b>
My child is between ages 15 and 22, and the Team considers transition as part of the IEP process.	9.0%	16.4%	<b>25.4%</b>	30.3%	44.3%	<b>74.6%</b>

Number of Respondents 164

**11. Please select the statement that most accurately reflects your experience with your child's most recent IEP.**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
I was comfortable with my child's IEP and accepted it as initially proposed.	60.5%
I was not comfortable with my child's IEP and worked collaboratively with the district to make modifications.	30.3%
I was not comfortable with my child's IEP and went through the dispute resolution mechanism available.	6.1%
I have "stay put" on my child's previous IEP and am working to resolve the dispute.	3.1%

Number of Respondents 511

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**12. The following statements concern the process of inclusion for students on IEPs. Inclusion is defined as educating students in their home school and community to the fullest extent possible and with the appropriate individual supports. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with mild special needs.	1.6%	2.2%	<b>3.8%</b>	17.6%	78.7%	<b>96.2%</b>
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with moderate special needs.	3.0%	9.5%	<b>12.6%</b>	37.2%	50.2%	<b>87.4%</b>
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with severe special needs.	19.7%	33.7%	<b>53.5%</b>	31.1%	15.4%	<b>46.5%</b>
Aides are a critical component to a successful inclusion program.	2.8%	2.8%	<b>5.6%</b>	13.1%	81.3%	<b>94.4%</b>
Inclusion is working well for my child.	9.3%	5.8%	<b>15.0%</b>	23.5%	61.5%	<b>85.0%</b>
Inclusion works well in the district.	7.6%	15.0%	<b>22.6%</b>	35.3%	42.1%	<b>77.4%</b>
The school ensures that after-school and extracurricular activities are accessible to students with disabilities.	22.6%	15.9%	<b>38.6%</b>	32.7%	28.7%	<b>61.4%</b>

Number of Respondents 513

**13. My child...**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
Receives support from an aide through the learning center.	21.9%
Has aide support within a particular program (e.g. integrated/co-taught class).	18.0%
Has an IEP with support from a shared aide or aide specialist trained in ABA.	14.8%
Has an IEP with 1:1 support from an aide or aide specialist trained in ABA.	17.4%

Does not receive aide support.	40.1%
Number of Respondents	506

**14. The following statements concern aides (including aide specialists trained in ABA) for students with IEPs. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
For my child, I would prefer more instruction from certified staff, even if it meant less assistance from aides.	10.7%	29.3%	<b>40.1%</b>	30.0%	30.0%	<b>59.9%</b>
I understand how the IEP Team determines how much aide support my child requires.	12.5%	24.7%	<b>37.1%</b>	35.7%	27.1%	<b>62.9%</b>
Number of Respondents	361					

**15. The following statements concern assistive technology. Assistive technology is defined as low/medium/high technology tools or support to help access the general education environment. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Subtotal	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree Subtotal
My child has access to assistive technology that is appropriate for his/her needs.	13.4%	25.3%	<b>38.7%</b>	34.9%	26.4%	<b>61.3%</b>
Staff working with my child know how to support my child in using their assistive technology.	13.5%	25.7%	<b>39.2%</b>	36.3%	24.5%	<b>60.8%</b>
My child could benefit from more assistive technology.	6.9%	14.1%	<b>21.0%</b>	28.3%	50.7%	<b>79.0%</b>
Assistive technology was considered at my child's IEP meeting.	23.3%	15.3%	<b>38.5%</b>	29.5%	31.9%	<b>61.5%</b>
Number of Respondents	288					

**16. I am satisfied with my ability to.....**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
Access staff members to help make them aware of a problem with my child.	5.0%	10.9%	<b>15.9%</b>	32.2%	51.8%	<b>84.1%</b>
Access information regarding my child's class work and assignments.	6.8%	17.8%	<b>24.5%</b>	34.7%	40.7%	<b>75.5%</b>
Discuss a question or concern regarding my child.	2.7%	10.0%	<b>12.7%</b>	34.0%	53.3%	<b>87.3%</b>
Check in on how my child is doing.	3.5%	13.7%	<b>17.2%</b>	32.6%	50.2%	<b>82.8%</b>
Speak with staff because I do not get enough information from my child.	4.3%	14.5%	<b>18.8%</b>	36.3%	44.9%	<b>81.2%</b>

Number of Respondents 521

**17. The following statements concern the transition to post high school services. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Check "NA" if your child is not 14 or older.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree Subtotal</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>
Overall, I am pleased with the transition services offered by the district.	15.5%	22.6%	<b>38.1%</b>	32.3%	29.7%	<b>61.9%</b>
The transition planning process began at the appropriate time for my child.	16.1%	22.8%	<b>38.9%</b>	28.2%	32.9%	<b>61.1%</b>
I am aware of a plan for what my child will do after he/she leaves the Newton Public Schools.	30.1%	29.4%	<b>59.4%</b>	18.2%	22.4%	<b>40.6%</b>

Number of Respondents 155

**18. I communicate by email, phone or in person with one or more of my child's special education service providers...**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
multiple times a day	0.8%
Daily	12.7%
Weekly	34.6%
monthly	19.4%
less than once a month	32.5%
Number of Respondents	520

**19. I prefer to receive information from special education service providers by:**

	<b>Response Percent</b>
Email	61.4%
Phone	11.6%
communication book or log	12.5%
in person	9.0%
scheduled meetings	5.6%
Number of Respondents	502

## Summary of parents' open responses

*What aspects of special education in the district are you most pleased with?*

Parent comments reflected a wide possible range of views on special education within NPS. Many parents were pleased with the neighborhood inclusion model, commenting that, even with severe disabilities, they appreciated that their children were served in a neighborhood school. Some parents commented that they believed the level of services to be substantial, especially when compared to other districts. A sizeable number of other parents commented that the services were not to their expectations, and that they ended up paying for many services privately on their own. Many parents praised the responsiveness, empathy and skill of the special education staff, including with comments like “my daughter has learned more than I believed was possible”. Other parents saw few aspects of special education that they were pleased with. Substantial numbers of parents also expressed satisfaction with the related services that their children received.

*If the district could make one or two changes to better meet the needs of students with special needs, we should . . .*

Parent suggestions for improving special education included a wide range of ideas. Many encouraged higher levels of staffing, including for behavioral therapists, aides, inclusion facilitators, teachers, and speech pathologists. Another common suggestion was more frequent communication from teachers and from the school to parents. Relatedly, some parents expressed interest in opportunities to educate themselves about how to better support their students at home. A number of parents offered concern that the push in high school to make students independent led to lower levels of engagement with parents (and higher levels with the student by himself) than they would prefer. Many parents suggested additional reading and writing support for their children at the middle and high school level, particularly for those students reading below grade level. A sizeable number of parents also suggested that full inclusion may not be best for children with severe needs, and the district should consider options to structure additional settings to support students with severe disabilities.

*Do you have an idea that might help the district reduce special education spending while still meeting the needs of student with disabilities?*

A number of parents made comments to “value quality over quantity”, noting that they would prefer a highly effective therapist or aide serving their child in a group setting rather than 1:1. Many parents saw early identification of struggling students and immediate intervention as a strong option for savings. Some parents suggested savings in transportation – encouraging parents to take their children to school rather than busing them.

A sizeable number of parents did not believe that special education costs could be reduced, and several suggested that they should be increased, perhaps through a tax increase.

## Newton Public Schools Survey for Parents Grouped by School Level

### 1. I am:

	Response Percent				
	Pre-K	Elem.	Middle	High School	Out of District
A parent/guardian of a student who is receiving special education services THROUGH AN IEP during the 2010-11 school year through the Newton Public Schools. (Includes students who attended out of district schools.)	100.0%	95.8%	96.2%	93.6%	93.8%
Other (please specify)	0.0%	4.2%	3.8%	6.4%	6.2%
Number of Respondents	18	239	133	188	65

### 2. My child has received special education services through the Newton Public Schools for:

	Response Percent				
	Pre-K	Elem.	Middle	High School	Out of District
0-3 years	66.7%	48.8%	20.0%	16.1%	23.1%
3-10 years	33.3%	47.1%	57.0%	48.4%	58.5%
10-15 years	0.0%	3.3%	22.2%	24.0%	13.8%
15+ years	0.0%	0.8%	0.7%	11.5%	4.6%
Number of Respondents	18	242	135	192	65

### 3. My child's primary disability is... (select one)

Please see complete Parent Survey for responses.

**4. Indicate the school your child is currently attending. (The term "Out of District" refers only to schools that are not run by Newton Public Schools.)**

	<b>Response Percent</b>				
	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Out of District</b>
In District Pre-K	100.0%	0.4%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%
In District Elementary School	5.6%	100.0%	2.2%	0.5%	0.0%
In District Middle School	5.6%	1.2%	100.0%	1.0%	3.0%
In District High School	0.0%	0.4%	1.5%	99.0%	1.5%
In District Post High School transition	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	3.0%
Out of District Pre-K	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.5%	7.6%
Out of District Elementary School	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.5%	18.2%
Out of District Middle School	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	31.8%
Out of District High School	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	40.9%
Out of District Post High School transition	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Number of Respondents	18	244	135	192	66

**5. Inclusion is defined as educating students in their home school and community to the fullest extent possible and with the appropriate individual supports. I feel that my child's learning needs are currently best served by:**

	<b>Response Percent</b>				
	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Out of District</b>
Full inclusion (in the general education environment at least 75% of the day)	61.1%	77.5%	74.1%	76.0%	27.3%
Partial inclusion (in the general education environment between 25% and 75% of the day)	22.2%	19.3%	21.5%	17.7%	12.1%
Substantially separate programming (out of the general education environment 75% of the day or more)	16.7%	3.3%	4.4%	6.3%	60.6%

Number of Respondents                      18                      244                      135                      192                      66

**6. The following statements concern your child's education during the 2010-11 school year. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Agree Subtotal				
	Pre-K	Elem.	Middle	High School	Out of District
Overall, I am satisfied with the QUALITY of my child's education.	93.8%	85.8%	78.3%	79.9%	74.5%
Overall, I am satisfied with the QUALITY of the special education support and services my child received.	93.8%	77.7%	72.3%	66.5%	78.2%
Overall, I am satisfied with the AMOUNT of special education support and services my child receives.	75.0%	71.9%	71.4%	70.7%	78.2%
Staff and school schedules impact my child's access to special education services.	60.0%	61.4%	60.2%	55.7%	59.6%
School staff are adequately trained in the best educational practices for my child's special needs.	75.0%	72.0%	66.9%	57.1%	79.2%
My child's teacher(s) has a system to collect data to track my child's progress toward IEP goals.	80.0%	68.6%	62.1%	55.5%	80.8%
I feel that my child is accepted by school staff.	100.0%	95.7%	87.5%	90.9%	85.5%
I feel that my child is accepted by peers.	75.0%	81.9%	77.3%	84.4%	86.8%
School administration takes into account my child's disability when considering disciplinary decisions.	92.3%	88.7%	80.2%	77.2%	84.6%
Overall, I am satisfied with the communication I have with my child's GENERAL education teachers.	92.3%	82.8%	67.5%	71.4%	71.7%
Overall, I am satisfied with the communication I have with my child's SPECIAL education team (service providers).	68.8%	73.0%	73.3%	74.2%	76.9%



**8. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Check "NA" if it does not apply to your child.**

	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>				
	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Out of District</b>
My child is making effective progress on their social, emotional and/or behavioral goal(s).	80.0%	76.7%	72.4%	73.3%	80.0%
I am satisfied with the services my child receives to address their social, emotional and/or behavioral goal(s) so she/he can participate in class.	80.0%	71.3%	66.3%	71.6%	78.4%
My child receives social facilitation services to develop and maintain good peer relationships.	73.3%	76.3%	57.4%	53.0%	83.0%
I was satisfied with the functional behavioral assessment that was conducted for my child.	92.3%	75.0%	68.8%	69.4%	70.6%
I am satisfied with the positive behavioral supports in place for my child.	69.2%	75.4%	77.2%	75.0%	81.6%
I was satisfied with the response from the school team after my child was restrained.	33.3%	80.0%	60.0%	72.7%	61.5%
Number of Respondents	16	213	120	164	56

**9. The following statements concern the process of determining eligibility and developing your child's IEP. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>				
	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Out of District</b>
The initial referral to special education was made at the appropriate time.	93.3%	77.5%	71.6%	71.5%	60.0%
My comments, recommendations and/or concerns are considered when developing my child's IEP.	81.3%	80.6%	87.4%	85.8%	72.0%
The evaluations conducted by Newton Public School staff accurately described my child.	75.0%	79.4%	77.3%	79.2%	70.0%
In the evaluation process (initial and re-evaluation) the assessments used were comprehensive and answered the questions the Team had about my child.	66.7%	80.2%	72.9%	77.0%	66.7%
I am aware that if I disagree with the findings of the school district's evaluation, the district must inform me of my right to an independent educational evaluation.	68.8%	80.7%	86.2%	90.3%	91.8%
I understand how eligibility is determined for special education services.	73.3%	79.6%	82.0%	81.9%	80.0%
I have a clear understanding of the process of IEP development.	68.8%	81.3%	90.8%	85.0%	89.8%
I am considered an equal partner with teachers and other professionals in planning my child's program.	56.3%	72.9%	72.5%	80.4%	71.4%
I understand the guidelines for when a student no longer needs services.	33.3%	56.8%	57.3%	61.6%	70.0%
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>50</b>

**10. The following statements concern the process of developing your child's IEP beginning when they turned 14. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Check "NA" if it does not apply to your child.**

	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>				
	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Out of District</b>
When my child turned 14, the Team considered transition.	NA	NA	69.2%	73.0%	73.3%
When my child turned 14, she/he was invited to the meeting, if appropriate.	NA	NA	85.7%	90.2%	94.4%
My child is between ages 15 and 22, and the Team considers transition as part of the IEP process.	NA	NA	60.0%	72.7%	94.1%
Number of Respondents	16	195	112	156	52

**11. Please select the statement that most accurately reflects your experience with your child's most recent IEP.**

	<b>Response Percent</b>				
	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Out of District</b>
I was comfortable with my child's IEP and accepted it as initially proposed.	64.3%	55.3%	69.8%	62.9%	56.9%
I was not comfortable with my child's IEP and worked collaboratively with the district to make modifications.	14.3%	36.3%	25.5%	29.1%	25.5%
I was not comfortable with my child's IEP and went through the dispute resolution mechanism available.	21.4%	4.7%	2.8%	6.0%	13.7%
I have "stay put" on my child's previous IEP and am working to resolve the dispute.	0.0%	3.7%	1.9%	2.0%	3.9%
Number of Respondents	14	190	106	156	51

**12. The following statements concern the process of inclusion for students on IEPs. Inclusion is defined as educating students in their home school and community to the fullest extent possible and with the appropriate individual supports. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>				
	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Out of District</b>
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with mild special needs.	100.0%	96.9%	95.5%	97.9%	91.3%
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with moderate special needs.	91.7%	91.0%	89.0%	90.1%	62.2%
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with severe special needs.	75.0%	49.5%	43.5%	47.5%	34.8%
Aides are a critical component to a successful inclusion program.	100.0%	98.4%	96.3%	93.7%	75.0%
Inclusion is working well for my child.	83.3%	89.5%	88.7%	88.6%	43.6%
Inclusion works well in the district.	72.7%	84.4%	76.5%	81.2%	44.2%
The school ensures that after-school and extracurricular activities are accessible to students with disabilities.	33.3%	59.6%	63.5%	75.8%	33.3%
Number of Respondents	15	192	111	146	50

**13. My child...**

	<b>Response Percent</b>				
	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Out of District</b>
Receives support from an aide through the learning center.	18.8%	17.4%	30.0%	26.4%	4.5%
Has aide support within a particular program (e.g. integrated/co-taught class).	25.0%	12.6%	28.2%	22.3%	6.8%
Has an IEP with support from a shared aide or aide specialist trained in ABA.	6.3%	23.2%	14.5%	7.4%	6.8%
Has an IEP with 1:1 support from an aide or aide specialist trained in ABA.	31.3%	28.4%	11.8%	9.5%	9.1%

Does not receive aide support.	37.5%	28.9%	34.5%	46.6%	75.0%
Number of Respondents	16	190	110	148	44

**14. The following statements concern aides (including aide specialists trained in ABA) for students with IEPs. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Agree Subtotal				
	Pre-K	Elem.	Middle	High School	Out of District
For my child, I would prefer more instruction from certified staff, even if it meant less assistance from aides.	44.4%	59.2%	54.8%	65.4%	59.1%
I understand how the IEP Team determines how much aide support my child requires.	63.6%	59.4%	73.8%	62.9%	50.0%
Number of Respondents	15	191	109	144	49

**15. The following statements concern assistive technology. Assistive technology is defined as low/medium/high technology tools or support to help access the general education environment. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Agree Subtotal				
	Pre-K	Elem.	Middle	High School	Out of District
My child has access to assistive technology that is appropriate for his/her needs.	40.0%	64.5%	63.8%	48.2%	90.6%
Staff working with my child know how to support my child in using their assistive technology.	80.0%	59.1%	65.5%	51.4%	82.8%
My child could benefit from more assistive technology.	100.0%	80.2%	75.4%	77.5%	82.1%
Assistive technology was considered at my child's IEP meeting.	80.0%	55.8%	63.1%	60.4%	84.6%
Number of Respondents	15	193	110	151	49

**16. I am satisfied with my ability to.....**

	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>				
	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Out of District</b>
Access staff members to help make them aware of a problem with my child.	75.0%	87.0%	81.3%	85.5%	80.0%
Access information regarding my child's class work and assignments.	57.1%	85.4%	71.4%	67.1%	78.0%
Discuss a question or concern regarding my child.	93.3%	89.1%	88.3%	86.2%	82.0%
Check in on how my child is doing.	66.7%	83.9%	83.0%	83.3%	84.0%
Speak with staff because I do not get enough information from my child.	64.3%	81.8%	82.7%	81.5%	82.0%
Number of Respondents	16	193	112	151	50

**17. The following statements concern the transition to post high school services. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Check "NA" if your child is not 14 or older.**

	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>				
	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Out of District</b>
Overall, I am pleased with the transition services offered by the district.	NA	83.3%	72.0%	58.9%	58.8%
The transition planning process began at the appropriate time for my child.	NA	83.3%	73.9%	54.4%	77.8%
I am aware of a plan for what my child will do after he/she leaves the Newton Public Schools.	NA	33.3%	52.6%	38.6%	36.8%
Number of Respondents	16	191	111	149	50

**18. I communicate by email, phone or in person with one or more of my child's special Education service providers...**

**Response Percent**

	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Out of District</b>
multiple times a day	12.5%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
daily	31.3%	17.6%	14.4%	3.9%	10.0%
weekly	31.3%	25.4%	40.5%	35.9%	60.0%
monthly	6.3%	18.1%	16.2%	24.2%	20.0%
less than once a month	18.8%	37.8%	28.8%	35.9%	10.0%
Number of Respondents	16	193	111	153	50

**19. I prefer to receive information from special education service providers by:**

**Response Percent**

	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Out of District</b>
email	37.5%	45.1%	74.3%	76.2%	62.0%
phone	6.3%	8.8%	7.3%	15.0%	18.0%
communication book or log	25.0%	25.3%	7.3%	2.0%	4.0%
in person	18.8%	13.7%	6.4%	3.4%	10.0%
scheduled meetings	12.5%	7.1%	4.6%	3.4%	6.0%
Number of Respondents	16	182	109	147	50

## Newton Public Schools Survey for Parents Grouped by Severity Level

### 1. I am:

	Response Percent			
	Mild	Moderate	Moderate to Severe	Severe
A parent/guardian of a student who is receiving special education services THROUGH AN IEP during the 2010-11 school year through the Newton Public Schools. (Includes students who attended out of district schools.)	93.6%	95.9%	98.1%	97.8%
Other (please specify)	6.4%	4.1%	1.9%	2.2%
Number of Respondents	235	292	157	45

### 2. My child has received special education services through the Newton Public Schools for:

	Response Percent			
	Mild	Moderate	Moderate to Severe	Severe
0-3 years	38.0%	31.1%	25.9%	20.0%
3-10 years	42.2%	52.4%	54.3%	60.0%
10-15 years	16.0%	12.8%	16.7%	15.6%
15+ years	3.8%	3.7%	3.1%	4.4%
Number of Respondents	237	296	162	45

### 3. My child's primary disability is... (select one)

Please see complete Parent Survey for responses.

**4. Indicate the school your child is currently attending. (The term "Out of District" refers only to schools that are not run by Newton Public Schools.)**

	<b>Response Percent</b>			
	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
In District Pre-K	4.2%	2.7%	2.5%	4.4%
In District Elementary School	40.5%	35.7%	36.6%	35.6%
In District Middle School	22.4%	22.8%	15.5%	15.6%
In District High School	30.0%	32.0%	23.6%	24.4%
In District Post High School transition	0.0%	0.3%	0.6%	0.0%
Out of District Pre-K	1.3%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Out of District Elementary School	0.8%	0.7%	2.5%	8.9%
Out of District Middle School	1.7%	3.1%	8.7%	8.9%
Out of District High School	1.3%	3.7%	9.3%	2.2%
Out of District Post High School transition	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%
Number of Respondents	237	294	161	45

**5. Inclusion is defined as educating students in their home school and community to the fullest extent possible and with the appropriate individual supports. I feel that my child's learning needs are currently best served by:**

	<b>Response Percent</b>			
	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
Full inclusion (in the general education environment at least 75% of the day)	84.5%	72.1%	48.1%	34.8%
Partial inclusion (in the general education environment between 25% and 75% of the day)	11.7%	20.5%	25.9%	28.3%
Substantially separate programming (out of the general education environment 75% of the day or more)	3.8%	7.4%	25.9%	37.0%
Number of Respondents	239	298	162	46



**6. The following statements concern your child's education during the 2010-11 school year. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>			
	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
Overall, I am satisfied with the <b>QUALITY</b> of my child's education.	85.6%	82.8%	72.1%	76.9%
Overall, I am satisfied with the <b>QUALITY</b> of the special education support and services my child received.	77.3%	75.2%	66.4%	74.4%
Overall, I am satisfied with the <b>AMOUNT</b> of special education support and services my child receives.	76.9%	71.1%	64.1%	64.1%
Staff and school schedules impact my child's access to special education services.	58.9%	61.7%	54.9%	51.4%
School staff are adequately trained in the best educational practices for my child's special needs.	72.8%	64.8%	59.4%	64.1%
My child's teacher(s) has a system to collect data to track my child's progress toward IEP goals.	65.4%	59.7%	66.9%	82.1%
I feel that my child is accepted by school staff.	92.2%	92.9%	84.9%	94.9%
I feel that my child is accepted by peers.	83.9%	82.2%	75.5%	84.6%
School administration takes into account my child's disability when considering disciplinary decisions.	83.9%	84.9%	79.1%	85.7%
Overall, I am satisfied with the communication I have with my child's <b>GENERAL</b> education teachers.	84.7%	73.7%	67.9%	76.3%
Overall, I am satisfied with the communication I have with my child's <b>SPECIAL</b> education team (service providers).	75.3%	71.9%	71.0%	84.2%
Number of Respondents	195	268	147	39

**7. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

**Agree Subtotal**

	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
My child's IEP is implemented as specified in the document.	77.4%	73.9%	71.4%	77.5%
I receive specific information regarding progress towards meeting goals of the IEP with each progress report.	74.2%	73.2%	67.3%	90.0%
If my child is not making progress on his or her goals and objectives, effective action is taken.	67.7%	55.4%	56.6%	61.5%
Special education teachers make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my child's IEP.	83.8%	86.0%	81.5%	92.5%
General education teachers make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my child's IEP.	70.8%	70.8%	68.8%	86.8%
Overall, my child benefits from the IEP services, programs, and accommodations provided.	85.1%	85.4%	81.4%	82.5%
Number of Respondents	196	268	147	40

**8. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Check "NA" if it does not apply to your child.**

**Agree Subtotal**

	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
My child is making effective progress on their social, emotional and/or behavioral goal(s).	76.1%	77.4%	66.4%	75.0%
I am satisfied with the services my child receives to address their social, emotional and/or behavioral goal(s) so she/he can participate in class.	73.0%	73.3%	62.7%	65.6%
My child receives social facilitation services to develop and maintain good peer relationships.	67.6%	70.7%	70.6%	65.5%
I was satisfied with the functional behavioral assessment that was conducted for my child.	74.7%	79.3%	66.2%	60.0%
I am satisfied with the positive behavioral supports in place for my child.	72.2%	80.9%	72.9%	64.0%
I was satisfied with the response from the school team after my child was restrained.	65.0%	64.3%	68.2%	66.7%

Number of Respondents 196 268 147 40

**9. The following statements concern the process of determining eligibility and developing your child's IEP. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>			
	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
The initial referral to special education was made at the appropriate time.	78.0%	73.0%	64.1%	86.5%
My comments, recommendations and/or concerns are considered when developing my child's IEP.	82.2%	86.2%	78.5%	76.3%
The evaluations conducted by Newton Public School staff accurately described my child.	82.7%	77.9%	69.8%	69.4%
In the evaluation process (initial and re-evaluation) the assessments used were comprehensive and answered the questions the Team had about my child.	78.3%	78.2%	65.6%	74.3%
I am aware that if I disagree with the findings of the school district's evaluation, the district must inform me of my right to an independent educational evaluation.	84.8%	82.8%	87.8%	86.8%
I understand how eligibility is determined for special education services.	82.7%	78.3%	76.9%	86.8%
I have a clear understanding of the process of IEP development.	87.1%	85.7%	79.8%	81.6%
I am considered an equal partner with teachers and other professionals in planning my child's program.	77.7%	74.5%	70.2%	76.3%
I understand the guidelines for when a student no longer needs services.	60.8%	54.8%	60.8%	67.6%
Number of Respondents	180	253	131	39

**10. The following statements concern the process of developing your child's IEP beginning when they turned 14. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Check "NA" if it does not apply to your child.**

	<b>Agree Subtotal</b>			
	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
When my child turned 14, the Team considered transition.	73.2%	72.1%	58.8%	66.7%
When my child turned 14, she/he was invited to the meeting, if appropriate.	90.4%	91.3%	79.1%	81.8%
My child is between ages 15 and 22, and the Team considers transition as part of the IEP process.	68.8%	73.2%	65.9%	90.0%
Number of Respondents	184	254	134	38

**11. Please select the statement that most accurately reflects your experience with your child's most recent IEP.**

	<b>Response Percent</b>			
	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
I was comfortable with my child's IEP and accepted it as initially proposed.	68.4%	58.9%	48.9%	52.8%
I was not comfortable with my child's IEP and worked collaboratively with the district to make modifications.	24.7%	32.5%	35.1%	33.3%
I was not comfortable with my child's IEP and went through the dispute resolution mechanism available.	5.2%	6.5%	9.9%	8.3%
I have "stay put" on my child's previous IEP and am working to resolve the dispute.	1.7%	2.0%	6.1%	5.6%
Number of Respondents	174	246	131	156

**12. The following statements concern the process of inclusion for students on IEPs. Inclusion is defined as educating students in their home school and community to the fullest extent possible and with the appropriate individual supports. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

**Agree Subtotal**

	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with mild special needs.	95.5%	96.7%	94.5%	100.0%
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with moderate special needs.	87.6%	90.3%	82.0%	86.1%
Inclusion is beneficial for most students with severe special needs.	49.1%	43.5%	46.5%	47.2%
Aides are a critical component to a successful inclusion program.	97.1%	95.4%	89.1%	86.1%
Inclusion is working well for my child.	90.4%	90.0%	72.4%	54.3%
Inclusion works well in the district.	80.7%	78.5%	66.7%	73.5%
The school ensures that after-school and extracurricular activities are accessible to students with disabilities.	71.3%	60.0%	51.2%	41.7%
Number of Respondents	178	245	131	38

**13. My child...**

**Response Percent**

	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
Receives support from an aide through the learning center.	23.6%	24.2%	19.5%	19.4%
Has aide support within a particular program (e.g. integrated/co-taught class).	13.5%	18.9%	24.2%	25.0%
Has an IEP with support from a shared aide or aide specialist trained in ABA.	12.9%	13.9%	16.4%	8.3%
Has an IEP with 1:1 support from an aide or aide specialist trained in ABA.	11.2%	16.0%	26.6%	47.2%
Does not receive aide support.	46.1%	40.2%	28.9%	22.2%
Number of Respondents	178	244	110	36

**14. The following statements concern aides (including aide specialists trained in ABA) for students with IEPs. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

**Agree Subtotal**

	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
For my child, I would prefer more instruction from certified staff, even if it meant less assistance from aides.	64.6%	61.1%	58.6%	56.7%
I understand how the IEP Team determines how much aide support my child requires.	65.5%	62.1%	60.8%	66.7%
Number of Respondents	175	245	128	37

**15. The following statements concern assistive technology. Assistive technology is defined as low/medium/high technology tools or support to help access the general education environment. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

**Agree Subtotal**

	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
My child has access to assistive technology that is appropriate for his/her needs.	62.5%	54.8%	67.1%	71.0%
Staff working with my child know how to support my child in using their assistive technology.	70.3%	56.8%	62.7%	66.7%
My child could benefit from more assistive technology.	75.7%	77.5%	83.9%	78.6%
Assistive technology was considered at my child's IEP meeting.	60.3%	55.7%	69.8%	82.8%
Number of Respondents	180	247	132	38

**16. I am satisfied with my ability to.....**

**Agree Subtotal**

	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
Access staff members to help make them aware of a problem with my child.	83.0%	81.5%	84.2%	84.2%
Access information regarding my child's class work and assignments.	78.2%	71.9%	71.2%	76.3%
Discuss a question or concern regarding my child.	88.9%	85.5%	83.3%	92.1%
Check in on how my child is doing.	83.4%	80.7%	83.2%	89.5%
Speak with staff because I do not get enough information from my child.	77.8%	79.9%	84.0%	84.2%
Number of Respondents	182	249	133	38

**17. The following statements concern the transition to post high school services. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Check "NA" if your child is not 14 or older.**

**Agree Subtotal**

	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
Overall, I am pleased with the transition services offered by the district.	66.1%	58.6%	50.0%	60.0%
The transition planning process began at the appropriate time for my child.	58.5%	58.2%	57.1%	50.0%
I am aware of a plan for what my child will do after he/she leaves the Newton Public Schools.	37.8%	38.8%	36.4%	60.0%
Number of Respondents	179	246	132	38

**18. I communicate by email, phone or in person with one or more of my child's special education service providers...**

**Response Percent**

	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
multiple times a day	0.5%	0.8%	1.5%	2.7%
Daily	8.8%	12.9%	18.0%	27.0%
Weekly	25.3%	34.1%	45.1%	45.9%
Monthly	20.9%	21.3%	18.0%	13.5%
less than once a month	44.5%	30.9%	17.3%	10.8%

Number of Respondents 182 249 133 37

**19. I prefer to receive information from special education service providers by:**

	<b>Response Percent</b>			
	<b>Mild</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate to Severe</b>	<b>Severe</b>
Email	58.9%	67.9%	50.0%	43.2%
Phone	15.4%	9.3%	13.7%	13.5%
communication book or log	8.0%	10.6%	18.5%	27.0%
in person	12.0%	7.3%	9.7%	10.8%
scheduled meetings	5.7%	4.9%	8.1%	5.4%
Number of Respondents	175	246	124	37

# Appendix



## **Financial trends**

	<b>Actual 2005-2006</b>	<b>Actual 2006-2007</b>	<b>Actual 2007-2008</b>	<b>Actual 2008-2009</b>	<b>Budget 2009-2010</b>	<b>Growth Rate</b>
<b>Revenue:</b>						
City Appropriation	\$137,834,237	\$143,949,686	\$155,077,580	\$160,229,809	\$164,708,394	4.6%
Circuit Breaker & State/Federal/Private Grants	\$11,305,500	\$12,058,422	\$12,172,992	\$15,054,502	\$14,608,371	6.6%
Other Revenue	\$6,564,717	\$6,815,893	\$6,688,084	\$6,865,907	\$6,879,350	1.2%
Medicaid Reimbursement	\$159,283	\$379,857	\$299,556	\$438,594	\$438,594	28.8%
Reimbursements	\$51,467	\$72,639	\$18,020	\$191,190	\$113,000	21.7%
<b>Total spending - all services</b>	<b>\$155,915,204</b>	<b>\$163,276,497</b>	<b>\$174,256,232</b>	<b>\$182,780,002</b>	<b>\$186,747,709</b>	<b>4.6%</b>

### **Special Education Expenditures:**

Cost of special education certified staff	\$16,085,148	\$16,512,426	\$17,206,031	\$17,039,734	\$18,207,237	3.1%
Cost of benefits for special education teachers (estimated)	\$2,346,848	\$2,370,097	\$2,539,405	\$2,617,040	\$2,690,314	3.5%
Cost of in-district special education paraprofessionals	\$8,123,919	\$9,375,969	\$11,508,602	\$12,809,527	\$13,852,902	14.3%
Cost of benefits for in-district special education paraprofessionals (estimated)	\$1,380,339	\$1,987,882	\$2,518,343	\$2,824,853	\$3,065,013	22.1%
Cost of special education administration	\$1,043,669	\$1,059,834	\$1,443,956	\$1,211,708	\$1,352,360	6.7%
Cost of benefits for special education administration	\$121,296	\$124,907	\$156,674	\$120,621	\$149,060	5.3%
Cost of special education administrative support	\$182,836	\$189,322	\$198,725	\$190,030	\$182,768	0.0%
Cost of benefits for special education administrative support (estimated)	\$22,495	\$22,696	\$23,874	\$20,649	\$22,696	0.2%
Cost of staff stipends (includes teachers, other certified staff and paraprofessionals)	\$790,721	\$822,216	\$1,087,642	\$1,065,977	\$1,217,079	11.4%
Cost of out-of-district tuition payments	\$6,662,208	\$7,222,106	\$8,585,806	\$8,707,769	\$9,034,645	7.9%
Cost of out-of-district transportation	\$992,231	\$1,032,855	\$1,159,703	\$1,223,614	\$1,285,806	6.7%
Cost of in district special education transportation	\$995,711	\$1,086,130	\$1,298,858	\$1,370,438	\$1,392,957	8.8%

Special Education expense for assistive technology					\$117,270	
Other special education costs	\$998,743	\$1,432,024	\$1,469,877	\$1,492,281	\$1,345,436	7.7%
<b>Net special education spending by district</b>	<b>\$39,746,164</b>	<b>\$43,238,464</b>	<b>\$49,197,496</b>	<b>\$50,694,241</b>	<b>\$53,915,541</b>	<b>7.9%</b>

**Selected Figures**

Special education spending as % of total spending	25.5%	26.5%	28.2%	27.7%	28.9%	3.2%
Number of special education certified staff (FTEs)	285.4	230.3	238.1	228.9	242.7	-4.0%
Number of special education paraprofessionals (FTEs)	284.3	364.7	419.1	440.1	472.2	13.5%
Number of special education administration personnel (FTEs)	12.1	11.5	14.5	12.1	13.7	3.1%
Number of special education administrative support personnel (FTEs)	3.5	4.1	4.6	3.7	3.7	1.4%
Number of special education assistive technology staff (FTEs)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	
Number of out-of-district students	158	151	165	169	172	2.1%
District enrollment (PreK -12)	11,672	11,748	11,828	11,833	11,900	0.5%
Number of students on IEPs	2,307	2,231	2,250	2,294	2,315	0.1%
Average cost of in-district teachers with benefits	64,593	82,002	82,916	85,864	86,112	5.9%
Average cost of in-district paraprofessionals with benefits	33,425	31,156	33,469	35,524	35,829	1.4%
Average cost of out-of-district placement, including transportation	48,446	54,669	59,064	58,766	60,003	4.4%