



2013-14 New Hampshire Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education Statewide Summary

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The New Hampshire Department of Education acknowledges that certain information in the 2013-2104 New Hampshire Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education Statewide Summary was provided by Gibson Consulting Group and New Hampshire Connections.



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New Hampshire Statewide Summary

Brief Background and Purpose Statement

In January 2014, the New Hampshire Department of Education (NHDOE), Bureau of Special Education, contracted with Gibson Consulting Group to conduct a statewide parent involvement survey. The goal of the contract was to provide data for reporting requirements for the Department of Education's Special Education State Performance Plan. The State Performance Plan (SPP) is required to be submitted from each State to the United States Department of Education (USDOE), Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Federal reporting requirements mandate that States report their progress relating to special education in their Annual Performance Reports (APRs). Specifically, NHDOE reports on Indicator B-8 by measuring "the percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities." In order to meet this requirement, as well as to collect data to help inform improvements at the district and State levels, New Hampshire annually surveys parents of every student receiving special education services in the State using the National Center on Special Education Accountability and Monitoring (NCSEAM) Parent Involvement Surveys. In 2013-14 over 31,000 surveys were sent to parents. Key findings from this statewide survey effort are highlighted below.

Responding Sample

- Overall, 5,935 responses were received (720 on the preschool instrument and 5,215 on the school age instrument). This represents a 19% response rate across the State, an improvement of four percentage points from the prior year.
- Parents provided some information on the characteristics of their children. According to their responses, students who had parents respond to the survey were mostly representative of the State's population of students receiving special education services. Similarities and differences included:
 - Sixty-six percent of surveys completed by parents were about a male student, while 66% of the State population of special education students were male. This means that the sample of students with responding parents is representative of the State's population of students receiving special education services as defined by gender.
 - The sample of students with responding parents was very similar to the State's population of students receiving special education services as defined by race/ethnicity, though the survey sample was somewhat under-representative of Hispanic students and over-representative of students identified as multiple races.
 - The survey sample was somewhat over-representative of students whose primary exceptionality was identified as Autism, Developmental Delay, and Multiple Disabilities and somewhat under-representative of students whose primary exceptionality was identified as Other Health Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, and Emotional Disturbance. However, these differences were small. As a whole, students whose primary exceptionality was identified as Specific Learning Disabilities, Speech or Language Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Developmental Delay, and Autism comprised 87% of the state's special education student population and 86% of the survey sample.

Key Findings

The items on the preschool and school age surveys each hold a position on a nationally validated scale. An item's position on the scale is referred to as its item location. Items with lower values (item locations) are easier to agree with; items with higher values are more difficult to agree with. A scale score is calculated for each survey. A scale score of 600 on the Parent Involvement Survey was recommended by NCSEAM as the threshold for determining whether a parent with a child receiving special education services reports that the schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving special education services. Using this threshold in New Hampshire led to the following results:

- Across the State, 37% of the parent surveys met or exceeded a scale score of 600, indicating that they believe their districts are facilitating parent involvement as a means of improving services for their child. This overall total was comprised of 43% of parents of preschool students and 36% of parents of school age children.
- Responses on the preschool survey were more variable but higher on average, ranging from 176 to 841 with an average scale score of 587.
- Responses on the school age survey ranged from 402 to 827 with an average scale score of 557.

Questions below the State's average scale score represent parent engagement practices/activities that families largely agree are occurring our State. These include:

Preschool:

- People from preschool special education give parents the help they may need, such as transportation, to play an active role in their child's learning and development.
- People from preschool special education give me options concerning my child's services and supports.
- People from preschool special education provide me with strategies to deal with my child's behavior.

School age:

- The school communicates regularly with me regarding my child's progress on IEP goals.
- My child's school gives me enough information to know whether or not my child is making adequate progress.
- Teachers and administrators seek out parent input.

Questions above the State's scale score represent parent engagement practices/activities that are areas for improvement. These include:

Preschool:

- I have been asked for my opinion about how well preschool special education services are meeting my child's needs.
- People from preschool special education explain what options parents have if they disagree with a decision made by the preschool special education program.
- People from preschool special education provide me with information on how to get other services (e.g., childcare, parent support, respite, regular preschool program, WIC, food stamps).

School age:

- Teachers and administrators at my child's school invite me to share my knowledge and experience with school personnel.
- The school gives parents the help they may need to play an active role in their child's education.
- I have been asked for my opinion about how well special education services are meeting my child's needs.

New Hampshire's Commitment to Parent Involvement in Special Education

Over 50 years of research demonstrates the beneficial effects of family engagement in children's education. When families and schools work together, children are more likely to experience success in school including: earning higher grades, earn credit, adapt well to school, attend regularly, graduate and go on to higher education. Additionally, students have better social skills and behavior when everyone works together. The NH Department of Education (NHDOE) recognizes the importance of family involvement and has an on-going commitment to support families and schools in working together.

To support the NHDOE's work in regards to the Parent Involvement Survey, a group of stakeholders was brought together to form the Indicator 8 Input Group; this input group has been in existence since 2007, as the State prepared for the first administration of the Parent Involvement Survey. Members include Special Education Directors and Administrators, the NH School Administrators Association, a representative from the State Advisory Committee on the Education of Students/Children with Disabilities (SAC), Parent Leaders, NHDOE personnel, and the Parent Information Center. The Indicator 8 Input group supports the NHDOE with reviewing the statewide data and identifying trends, needs and improvement activities. They support the NHDOE in making decisions about the survey administration process and State level activities to support the advancement of research based family engagement practices. Additionally the stakeholder group serves a vital link providing the field's perspective on the survey administration process and family engagement and serving as a conduit for communication and collaboration.

Based on the 2012-2013 Parent Involvement Survey data, the Input group supported the NHDOE to develop the subsequent priorities for the following year's survey administration:

- Increase the overall response rate
- Increase outreach and response rate for underserved, minority and ethnic groups
- Increase outreach and response rate for families whose children are in middle and high school
- Create professional development opportunities regarding family engagement

In addition to funding Gibson Consulting Group to administer the survey, the NHDOE, Bureau of Special Education funds the NH Connections Project to support family-school partnerships on the local level. A project of the Parent Information Center, NH Connections provides training, technical assistance and facilitation to school district personnel and families of children with disabilities to build, strengthen and sustain family-school partnerships in special education. NH Connections assists districts in using data from the Parent Involvement Survey to improve family-school partnerships in special education and outcomes for students with disabilities.

How Local School Districts are Utilizing the Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education Data

Sanborn Regional School District (SAU 17)

Jennifer Pomykato, Director of Student Services, attended a statewide training on the Parent Involvement Survey data and how to understand it. At this training, she learned how to read the data and determine focus areas for her district. She identified her focus areas. First, she prioritized the low percentage of parents who felt that, in preparing for transition planning, that they were given information regarding options after high school. She had not expected this and felt that it needed to immediately be addressed. Armed with a better understanding of what the data was (and was not telling her) she returned to her district and brought together staff to begin to address the issue. They started their work by concentrating on their IEP meeting practices. They began focusing their IEP meetings for transition aged youth on parent and student goals. In high school these conversations are frequent, starting in grade 9. The IEP goals focus on both the “soft skills” and the formal training needed for college/career readiness. Without the “soft skills” students are not able to interact productively, take direction, complete multi-step tasks, etc. The team places much more emphasis on this, especially as they move more toward “competency” and not “seat time”/letter grades.

Another area the data suggested to be an area of concern was parent resources. In their “semi-rural” area of New Hampshire, parents have limited resources. Working with their school counselors, area agencies and community resources, district staff began to identify such parent/family supports, materials, etc. The school staff may work with the family doctor or other family members to identify and locate resources. The teams make a concerted effort to provide background on “educational disabilities” so that parents may continue to support their child at home. This year, the teams are reviewing their evaluation reports and meetings to ensure they keep in mind that the parent is the audience. Sometimes acronyms and abbreviations are confusing and detract from the entire team creating the IEP. School staff firmly believe that this personal contact helps level the playing field of jargon and procedural steps that are very confusing at times. This personal contact by the case manager has been purposeful and more frequent with the purpose of ensuring their families feel more connected to their child’s special education program and the general education world.

Most of the work being done with the survey data was being done by school personnel. But soon, the work came to the attention of Parent Leaders who approached the Director with the idea of starting a parent group. The group’s mission is to get parents together in a positive and supportive environment where they can make connections, share resources and learn new things about the world of Special Education. With the support of NH Connections, parents not only started a parent group, but also began a more formalized partnership with the school district. This group supports the district in providing parent feedback and the district helps to connect families with resources and training opportunities. The district and group have collaborated on a number of initiatives, most recently supporting the district in hosting a workshop in collaboration with the PTA on anxiety in children.

SAU 19 (Goffstown and New Boston)

Armed with the results from their district's yearly Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education, the SAU 19 Special Education Administrative team felt that work needed to be done to ensure that parents felt comfortable participating in IEP Team meetings. The data showed that families were unsure of their role and how to participate. A follow-up survey was conducted that provided the administration additional information about concerns with how meetings were conducted. As a result, SAU wide **Meeting Norms** were developed. The meeting norms were developed to respect, honor and validate each participant's role and expertise in the IEP Team process, but have now become standard operating procedure for all meetings in the SAU. Today you can find **Meeting Norms** listed on the top of every meeting agenda as well as on all meeting room walls.

This work led administrators to have more questions – questions like “what does this mean for my school?” “How do I know if we are making an impact on parents in my building?” Because of the way the survey is administered, there were limits to what information it could tell districts, especially in districts where there are multiple elementary or middle schools. To try to address this, SAU 19 partnered with the NH Connections project and the parent involvement survey vendor to develop a pilot process to “track” data at a school level. Through this pilot, the survey vendor was able to provide each school in the two districts with data related the surveys returned. Additionally, this pilot provided important information to the NHDOE regarding the needs of districts to potentially have access to different ways to view the data so that it could be understood and used more effectively. This early pilot work led to the inclusion of an optional question in the 2013-2014 survey where parents could self-identify the name of their child's school.

With their school level data, administrators felt they had a better understanding of the needs and perspectives of their parents. Each school then developed a plan for reviewing their data and for developing activities to strengthen partnerships with their families. All are excited to see this year's survey results to see the benefits of their efforts!

Gorham Randolph Shelburne Cooperative School District (SAU 20)

The Gorham Randolph Shelburne Cooperative School District has a long history of utilizing their Parent Involvement Survey Data. Becky Hebert-Sweeny, Co-Director of Special Services, with the help of a NH Connections Facilitator, reviewed the survey results which led to the conclusion that two action plans were needed. Increasing the number of parents completing the survey (response rate) was seen as a goal due to the small sample size. Also, a pattern was detected that parents were not feeling involved in the IEP process. A small sub-committee met in the spring and drafted two action plans: to increase the response rate phone calls were made to families from the case managers about the surveys and flyers that were sent home; the second action plan detailed how to make families feel more involved in the special education process. To do this, two separate simple, six question strengths-based, forms were developed to go home with the IEP meeting notice.

This past year the sub-committee grew to include Parent Leaders from each school within the SAU and became the Parent Focus Group. Again the group reviewed their past activities and their Parent Survey data. A constant survey item that families report less confidence with is that they are provided with resources. Given the rural nature and limited resources of the communities in the district, the Parent Focus Group decided to create a simple resource binder that could be distributed by the school to any family whose child is newly identified for special education. Data also suggested families wanted more information on instructional methods being used with their children so a math night was developed. This provided an opportunity for families to learn more about the curriculum and for teachers to share ways they can support their children's math learning at home.

For More Information

If you'd like to learn more about how your district or school can utilize the Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education data, please contact NH Connections www.nhconnections.org. You can also find more stories of family-school partnerships in action on our website as well.

You can find this report and more information on the Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education on the NH Department of Education's website http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/special_ed/parent_involv.htm