



2015-16
New Hampshire
Parent Involvement Survey in Special
Education Executive Summary

August 2016



New Hampshire Department of Education

Information provided by Gibson Consulting Group and the NH Connections project was used in compiling this report.



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

Executive Summary

The New Hampshire Department of Education (NHDOE), Bureau of Special Education, has contracted with Gibson Consulting Group to conduct the NH Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education. The goal of the contract is 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 uses the National Center on Special Education Accountability and Monitoring (NCSEAM) Parent Involvement Surveys.

Starting with the 2015 school year, NH began conducting a census survey over two years. Gibson Consulting Group assisted the NHDOE to divide districts into two Survey blocks through a cluster stratified random sampling process to ensure each block was representative of the state. Survey Block A administered the Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education during the 2014-15 school year. Survey Block B administered the Parent Involvement Survey during the 2015-16 school year. Across the two year period, parents of special education students in all districts in the state have had the opportunity to participate. This report summarizes survey administration and results from responding parents of students attending schools in Block B districts from the 2015-16 school year.

In 2015-16, over 18,000 surveys were sent to parents in 94 school districts across New Hampshire. Key findings from this statewide survey effort are highlighted below.

Respondent Group

- Overall, 3,218 responses were received (344 on the preschool instrument and 2,874 on the school age instrument). This represents a 17.4% response rate from Block B districts. This rate represents an increase of .4 percentage points from the prior year's Block A districts.
- Parents provided 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 between the 2014-15 respondent group and the state's population of students receiving special education services included:
 - Sixty-six percent of surveys completed by parents were about a male student, and 66% of the state population of special education students were male.
 - The respondent group was similar to the state's population of students receiving special education services as defined by race/ethnicity. However, the respondent group was

over-representative of parents identifying their student as multiple races (8% in the respondent group, compared to 0.0% in the state). While 90% of the state's special education student population is white, 88% of the responding parent group reported their child as white, and while 3% of the state's special education student population is Black (Not Hispanic), 1% of the responding parent group reported their child as Black (Not Hispanic). All other differences were less than two percentage points.

- The respondent group varied in two primary ways from the state population as defined by the student's primary exceptionality/disability. First, a greater percentage of respondents reported their students' primary exceptionality was Autism (17% among the respondent group compared to 9% across the state). Second, a smaller percentage of the respondent group reported their students' primary exceptionality was Other Health Impairment (11% in the respondent group compared to 18% in the state).

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 and results. Using this threshold in New Hampshire led to the following results:

Overall Results

	2015-16 (Block B districts)	2014-15 (Block A districts)	2013-14 (All districts)
Percent met overall	41.5%	35.4%	36.9%
Percent met preschool	49.1%	47.6%	43.2%
Percent met school age	40.6%	33.7%	36.1%
Average scale score overall	575	560	561
Average scale score preschool	603	609	587
Average scale score school age	571	552	557

- Across the state, 41.5% of parents met or exceeded a scale score of 600, indicating that they believe districts are facilitating parent involvement as a means of improving services for their child.
 - This overall total was higher than in 2014-15 when Block A districts were surveyed and higher than 2013-14 when all districts were surveyed.

- This overall total was comprised of 49.1% of parents of preschool students scoring at or above 600 (an increase from 2014-15 and 2013-14) and 40.6% of parents of school age children scoring 600 or above (also higher than both 2014-15 and 2013-14).
- The average scale score across the state was 575 (compared to 560 in 2014-15 and 561 in 2013-14). Responses at the preschool level were higher on average (603) compared to school age (571), which was consistent across years.
- Scale scores varied by student and school district characteristics. Among school age parents (for whom there were more surveys submitted), scale scores ranged:
 - By grade: From a low of 532 in 7th grade to a high of 614 in kindergarten.
 - By school level: from 543 across all middle school grades to 571 across all high school grades to 588 across all elementary school grades.
 - By age: from a low of 544 among parents of 13-year olds to a high of 628 among parents of 5-year olds.
- At the district-level, preschool survey scaled scores ranged from 174 to 721
- At the district level, school age survey scaled scores ranged from 395 to 780



New Hampshire's Commitment to Family-School Partnerships 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, earning credit, adapting well to school and attending regularly, graduating and going on to higher education. Additionally, students have better social skills and behavior when everyone works together. The NHDOE recognizes the importance of family-school partnerships 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. 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, Parent Leaders, NHDOE personnel, and the Parent Information Center. The Indicator 8 Input Group assists the NHDOE by reviewing the statewide data and by identifying trends, needs and improvement activities. They support the NHDOE in making decisions about the survey administration process and state level activities to advance the research of family based engagement practices. Additionally the Input Group serves as a vital link by 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 2014-2015 Parent Involvement Survey data and input from the field and parents, the Input Group supported the NHDOE to establish the following priorities:

- Develop additional tools to market and encourage parents to complete the survey
- Create professional development opportunities regarding family engagement for school personnel
- Generate professional development opportunities for Parent Leaders

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. In 2015-2016, Gibson Consulting Group, the NHDOE and NH Connections partnered with the Indicator 8 Input Group to create a magnet to assist school districts in talking with families about the survey. Districts with higher Parent Involvement Survey response rates report that in their districts case managers, teachers and other school personnel who have regular interactions with parents talk with them about the survey and encourage them to complete it. The magnet was intended to serve as an additional mechanism to assist staff in talking about the survey and could be used and distributed to families in multiple ways.

Addressing the need for professional development for both school and Parent Leaders has long been a priority. During the 2015-2016 school year, NH Connections continued to partner with Dr. Batya Elbaum, who has consulted with NH for the last 9 years, to design and provide professional development opportunities to build the capacity of both school personnel and families of children with disabilities to work together more effectively to improve services and results for children with disabilities.

Building Capacity for Family-School Partnerships in Special Education

NH Connections works to build the capacity of both families of children with disabilities and school staff to work together in partnership by utilizing the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships. Developed by Dr. Karen Mapp and Paul Kuttner and released through a collaboration with SEDL and the U.S Department of Education, *the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships* lays out a structure for designing family-school partnership initiatives. Based in existing research and best practices, it is intended to act as a scaffold for the development of family-school partnership strategies, policies, and programs that are linked to student achievement and school improvement (SEDL). The cornerstone of Dual-Capacity Building Framework is the underlying premise that families and school staff have the desire to work together, but that they lack the opportunities to build their skills, knowledge, connections, and confidence to do so. Currently, the preponderance of available training opportunities related to family-school partnerships are directed towards parents. Parent trainings around the special education process and effective communication are frequently offered. However, very few, if any, professional development opportunities are available to school professionals to help build their skills to work with families. To address this unmet need, NH Connections partnered with Dr. Batya Elbaum to create several professional development opportunities to increase school personnel's skills and confidence in working with families in the special education process. Using the data from the Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education and feedback from school personnel and the Indicator 8 Input Group, NH Connections developed a set of the themes the professional development opportunities would cover:

- Effective communication strategies
- Managing challenging situations and conversations
- Supporting participation in the decision making process

NH Connections recognized the expertise of school professionals who are actively involved in family-school partnership efforts and tapped into that collective set of knowledge to create and evaluate several capacity-building activities. To do so, a multi-step pilot process was developed. The first phase involved staff from 6 school districts NH Connections actively supports in their efforts to improve family-school partnerships in special education. In the fall, staff from these 6 school districts were invited to a full day event called *NH Connections Family-School Partnerships in Special Education Professional Development Day* where staff had the opportunity to engage in a variety of carefully planned experiences related to working with parents/families facilitated by NH Connections staff and Dr. Elbaum. Opportunities to provide feedback both during and after each session was built in to assist in better understanding the needs of school staff and effective strategies to build their capacity to develop and sustain positive partnerships with parents.

Prior to the professional development day, staff from the districts were asked to submit situations or interactions with families that were especially challenging for them which were then used to develop a facilitated Case Study process. During the Case Study session participants were directed through a structured problem-solving process which included initial reactions to the situation, taking various perspectives, exploring options and approaches to resolving the issues. The second half of the day, participants were assigned to one of two prepared workshops: 1) *Using the Right Question Technique to*

Increase Effective Communication or 2) *Managing Difficult Conversations: Let's Agree on a Way Forward*. Feedback from the day was invaluable to the project and was used to modify and improve each session.

In January, a second, more extensive pilot of the *NH Connections Family-School Partnerships in Special Education Professional Development Day* was offered state wide. Fifty-three school personnel from across the state representing a variety of roles from Special Education Administrators, Case Managers, Special Education Teachers and Related Service Providers attended and participated in the revised experiences.

As a result of this pilot process, NH Connections finalized 3 professional development opportunities and is excited to be able offer them to school district staff. Each is designed to be interactive, hands-on learning opportunities. Each is offered on a statewide basis and can be provided to individual schools or districts. The 3 training professional development opportunities are:

- Building Capacity for Family-School Partnerships in Special Education: A Case Study Approach
- Using the Right Question Technique to Improve Communication
- Let's Agree on a Way Forward: Managing Difficult Conversations

Recognizing our responsibility is to build the capacity of both staff and families, NH Connections offered these 3 opportunities to parents. In the process, we learned that some formats and structures worked more effectively than others depending on the population. Using this information, NH Connections redevelop the *Parent Partnership Training Series*, incorporating the same 3 themes: effective communication strategies; managing challenging situations and conversations; and supporting participation in the decision making process. The intent of the *Parent Partnership Training Series* is to build the capacity of Parent Leaders to partner with professionals to improve services and outcomes for children with disabilities. A similar pilot process is being employed with the *Parent Partnership Training Series* as was done with the Professional Development Day. This past spring, the *Parent Partnership Training Series* was offered to parents who had participated in the Parent Information Center's Volunteer Advocates for Special Education Training Program. Ten parents were selected to participate in the 5 session series. Multiple opportunities for feedback were provided and as a result, a statewide pilot of the Parent Partnership Training will be occurring this Fall/Winter 2016-17.

Perhaps the most challenging area to address for NH Connections is in how to effectively support parents and professionals in working together in the decision making process. Dr. Elbaum shared with NH Connections and the NHDOE her passion around the approach known as *Shared Decision Making (SDM)*. Currently, many health care professionals, including here in NH, are using SDM to help patients make informed decisions in their medical care. This model supersedes older, authoritarian models of professional-patient interaction and has been shown both to build patient trust and improve patient outcomes. Application of the SDM model to decision-making in special education holds promise of achieving the goals of building family-school partnerships and improving results for students and their families. In May, Dr. Elbaum conducted a seminar on SDM that included a recent practice model of SDM that has clear applicability to school professionals' engagement of families in decision-making related to their child. Through interactive discussion and activities, school personnel, representatives from the NH DOE and community agencies from across the state discussed and explored how the three key steps in the practice —Team Talk, Option Talk, and Decision Talk —could be implemented in the context of IEP meetings. Currently, NH Connections continues to work with Dr. Elbaum to further develop how this

model can be used within the context of NH's special education system and by IEP Teams to improve family-school relationships within special education.

A Special Thank You

NH Connections would like to thank the Special Education Administrators, Staff and Parent Leaders of the Bedford, Hampton, Inter-lakes, North Hampton, Pelham and Portsmouth School Districts for the integral role they played in helping the project this past year. NH is indebted to Dr. Batya Elbaum for her tireless support and expertise as we work to improve family-school partnerships in NH.

For More Information

If you'd like to learn more about how NH Connections can help you to build capacity in family-school partnerships in special education, please visit www.nhconnections.org.

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/framework/>

The Right Question Institute <http://rightquestion.org/>

Shared Decision Making: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11606-012-2077-6>

