



2014-15
New Hampshire
Parent Involvement Survey in Special
Education Executive Summary

September 2015



New Hampshire Department of Education

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

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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.

The NHDOE made changes to the way the Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education was administered. For the last 7 years, the NHDOE has conducted an annual statewide survey of all parents. 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 this year (March 2015). Survey Block B will administer the Parent Involvement Survey in FY'16 (March 2016). Across the two year period, parents of special education students in all districts in the state will have had the opportunity to participate. In 2014-15 over 14,000 surveys were sent to parents. Key findings from this statewide survey effort are highlighted below.

Respondent Group

- Overall, 2,359 responses were received (290 on the preschool instrument and 2,069 on the school age instrument). This represents a 17% response rate from Block A districts, a decrease of two percentage points from the prior year (among all school districts in the state).
- Parents provided information on the characteristics of their students. 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, and were comparable to the students of the respondent group from 2013-14. 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, while 68% of the state population of special education students were male.
 - Students with responding parents were similar to the state's population of students receiving special education services as defined by race/ethnicity, though the respondent group was over-representative of parents identifying their student as multiple races, which was counterbalanced by an under-representation of parents identifying their

student as white. The respondent group was somewhat under-representative of parents of Hispanic students.

- The respondent group’s students varied in small ways from the state population as defined by the student’s primary exceptionality/disability. The respondent group 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. These differences were small and comparable to last year’s respondent group. As a whole, 86% of the respondent group was comprised of parents of students whose primary exceptionality was identified as Specific Learning Disabilities, Speech or Language Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Developmental Delay, and Autism. These exceptionality categories comprise 87% of the state’s special education student population.

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:

Overall Results

Summary of overall results for both scaled score and percent meeting threshold:

	2014-15 (Block A)	2013-14 (Baseline)	Difference
Percent met overall	35.4%	36.9%	-1.5
Percent met preschool	47.6%	43.2%	+4.4
Percent met school age	33.7%	36.1%	-2.4
Average scale score overall	560	561	-1
Average scale score preschool	609	587	+22
Average scale score school age	552	557	-5

- The average scale score across the state was 560 (compared to 561 in 2013-14) Responses at the preschool level were higher on average (609) compared to school age (552).
- Across the state, 35.4% 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 1.5 percentage points lower than in 2013-14.
 - This overall total was comprised of 47.6% of parents of preschool students scoring at or above 600 (an increase of 4.4 percentage points from 2013-14) and 33.7% of parents of school age children scoring 600 or above (a decrease of 2.4 percentage points).

- Scale scores varied by student age, grade and grade level characteristics. Among school age parents (for whom there were many more surveys submitted), scale scores ranged:
 - By grade: From a low of 530 in 9th grade to a high of 579 in 1st grade.
 - By school level: from 536 across all middle school grades to 552 across all high school grades to 563 across all elementary school grades.
 - By age: from a low of 524 among parents of 13-year olds to a high of 625 among parents of 20-year olds. The next highest scale score was 580 among parents of 8 year olds.
- District averages on the preschool survey ranged from 491 to 842 with an average of 627.
- District averages on the school age survey ranged from 430 to 730, with an average of 557.

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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, 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 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, 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 2013-2014 Parent Involvement Survey data, input from the field and parents, the Input group supported the NHDOE to develop the subsequent priorities for the following year's survey administration:

- Explore option for survey administration that would help with survey fatigue and allow additional time for school districts and families to implement family engagement activities
- Explore options for collecting, disaggregating and reporting school level data
- Explore options related to collecting, disaggregating and reporting data based on age, grade and grade levels
- 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. Utilizing the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, NH Connections assists districts in variety of ways, including in using data from the Parent Involvement Survey, to improve family-school partnerships in special education and outcomes for students with disabilities.

How a Local School District is Building Capacity for Family-School Partnerships in Special Education

Pelham School District

In 2013, the Pelham School District left the Windham/Pelham Cooperative School Administrative Unit (SAU) and became an independent SAU. This meant the hiring of administration- Superintendent, Special Education Director, etc. Both were hired several months before the actual split occurred, in the hopes of creating as smooth of a transition as possible. The incoming Superintendent and Special Education Director were aware of challenges and specific issues related to preschool facing the Pelham School District. The new Administration saw these challenges as opportunities – opportunities to create dialogue and collaboration.

In hopes of proactively addressing issues raised by families at the preschool level, the incoming Superintendent began a small outreach group that included (in addition to herself and the Special Education Director) parents of preschool students and a school committee member. While a good first step, primarily those families who were angry or had perhaps pre-existing agendas were involved. The incoming Administration had prior experience working with the NH Connections project and asked NH Connections Facilitator to join in this process.

At the same time, a long standing parent support group, run by a strong Parent Leader, existed in Pelham. This Parent Support group had been meeting for quite some time and had a strong group of well-respected parents who were committed to supporting other parents. The Parent Leader had spent a considerable amount of time trying to engage the former SAU Administrators in the Pelham Parent Group, but only found superficial success. When the Administrative staff of the independent SAU was announced, the Parent Leader quickly outreached and invited them to her meetings where they came to speak about their views and vision for working collaboratively with parents. Additionally, the Parent Leader had prior experience working with NH Connections and the project had been supporting her in her efforts to gain administrative buy-in.

Both the new Administrators and Parent Leader had strong desire to work with the other to find collaborative solutions, but were working on parallel paths. NH Connections worked with the Special Education Director to help her in connecting to this pre-existing group and with both the Parent Leader and Special Education Director to begin to develop relationships. Quickly, they realized they shared a common goal and vision for their work, and agreed they could accomplish more together as a partnership than they could in their own silos.

Creating the Opportunities

As the first school year of the new SAU began, the group started by the Superintendent morphed from the original design targeted to address issues raised by families of preschoolers into a larger group they called the Pelham Special Education Focus Group. The Parent Leader was asked by Administrators to provide the names of parents throughout the district whom she thought could help in the work. Members of the Pelham Special Education Focus Group are seen as Ambassadors. The Ambassadors are tasked with being communication liaisons- help connect the work of the district to parents and vice versa. Members began to work together to develop and address goals designed to strengthen family-school partnerships in special education. With the support of a NH Connections Facilitator, this group

met monthly and developed goals and subsequent activities based on their parent involvement survey in special education data. To accomplish these goals they created several opportunities beyond simply the Special Education Focus Group.

One of the opportunities for partnership was the Spot Light on Special Education event. This district wide event was designed to provide information about the district's special education system, but also provided an opportunity to learn about the structure of administration at the SAU and meet the staff at individual school and grade levels, and who does what. However, this was more than just a districts sponsored event- through the work and coordination by the Focus Group, it truly became a community event. Students in the culinary program made food for the evening, elementary school students provided decorations for the event and the Future Educator's program at the high school provide child care. Additionally, community agencies were vendors and many community businesses provided sponsorship and contributions. This event reflected where the district was developmentally- at the very beginning stages of developing partnerships and getting to know one another. It provided a relaxed venue for face to face discussions outside of individual IEP meetings and an opportunity to network and develop relationships.

The Special Education Director also continued weekly special education staff meetings to address concerns in working collaboratively at the IEP team level and with parents. During these meetings, they also review and develop policies and practices that impact working with students and families. This strategy created a network of staff and a place to problem solve implementation issues and specific concerns when working with families. It also reflects the priority administration places on working collaboratively while providing a venue for support in the practice.

The Pelham Parent Support Group still holds monthly meetings and events. Some are co-sponsored by the school district and some are more designed for networking opportunities. These support oriented meetings are important for parents and provide an additional opportunity for collective and collaborative learning and a support network.

Year 2

During the summer following their first school year, the Special Education Director, Parent Leader and NH Connections Facilitator met to review the work of the Focus Group. As part of this, they needed to look at how to continue the momentum of the Focus Group's efforts- in other words, how to make the family-school partnerships in Pelham systemic, integrated and sustained. To continue this work and grow capacity, the Focus Group formalized its membership needs. Membership has grown to include both school staff and parents representing each school level – preschool, elementary, middle school and high school. This membership will be evaluated each year to ensure representation and the ability for those interested to participate. Additionally, the Special Education Director and Parent Leader are developing strategies to provide orientation and support to new members, both staff and families, as the group found that this was missing with new members who joined over the course of the year.

While the Focus Group continues to utilize the Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education data to guide their planning, they have created subcommittees to share the work. Members of the Focus Group have a role on a subcommittee and tasks to accomplish the jointly created goals. This strategy provides for ownership and shared responsibility in the process. It now is not just the Special Education Director's job to do the work, rather it is the collaborative we that will ensure that families and schools work together. One such committee is the website design committee. As the district works to develop their website to meet the needs of their community, the website subcommittee is working to build the special education section, determining and creating content, resources and information.

The first year consisted of several “district level” initiated opportunities. The second year saw the implementation of school building level family-school partnership opportunities. The elementary and middle schools implemented a Special Education Open House, very similar to the district-wide Spot Light on Special Education. This occurred an hour prior to the school-wide Open House to allow families the opportunity to meet with the special education staff and administrators in a way that protects confidentiality, promotes involvement of those families in the school community and maximizes resources and networking.

Additionally, year two saw the implementation of practices related to increasing family-school partnerships in special education. This year, a practice was implemented that all parents would be given access to drafts and other IEP related materials 5 days in advance of an IEP meeting. As part of the weekly staff meetings, the Special Education Director is working to problem solve and support staff in implementing this practice to ensure all have the same information and can participate fully in IEP meetings. Parent Ambassadors are also involved in this process. As members of the Communications sub-committee they are working to educate families about this practice and inform families of their equal responsibility - to review material and be prepared for meetings.

Perhaps one of the most impactful ways Pelham is ensuring the systemic, integrated and sustained efforts of family-school partnerships in special education is the connection with the larger community. The Pelham School District, Pelham Special Education Focus Group and the Pelham Police Department have partnered up in order to better assist law enforcement assist individuals with disabilities. Together they developed a voluntary registry (called S.O.A.R. - Special Outreach and Resource) designed to better accommodate members of the community that have disabilities such as; Autism, Schizophrenia, Dementia or any other mental, cognitive, or developmental disabilities. It is also designed to better assist first responders in the event that an individual with a disability becomes lost and are unable to verbally communicate. The registry was originally designed to be implemented for school aged children, however, as the program developed the police department decided to open the registry up to all residents. Caregivers and participants register with the police department and complete a registration questionnaire. Officers take a photograph and create a confidential file, and if necessary, assist in completing the form with emergency contact information. Each individual is given a S.O.A.R. identification card that includes a photograph, name and emergency contact information. The card is endorsed by the Pelham Police Department and enables the police department to serve as a contact the individual and their family.

An On-going Process

Along the way, however, there have been bumps in the road. Some families have struggled participating in the Focus Group. This is a higher level of engagement and not designed to provide the parent to parent support that some were seeking. One of the needs identified by the Focus Group based on their Parent Involvement Survey data was the need for training around special education issues so toward the end of that first school year, a workshop on Extended School Year (ESY) Workshop was held. Staff and parents were in the room, hearing the same information. However, following the workshop, there were some very difficult conversations at the IEP meetings. Staff were not perhaps aware of some of the information provided and not prepared for the strategies used by parents in advocating for ESY. There wasn't the capacity. In hindsight, developmentally, they were not all ready and perhaps there should have been additional strategies or supports in place to support staff.

Throughout this process NH Connections has provided support and coaching to both the Special Education Director and the Parent Leader – in their individual roles and in their collaboration. Both report that this support is vital and necessary to help each problem solve and be a sounding board when

issues arise. Additionally, having a neutral, outside person who is able to help keep all participants focused on the shared work, provide the outside perspective in the process and be their cheerleader, pointing out successes and encouraging is key to the success of the Focus Group. The NHC Facilitator worked to help all the Parent Ambassadors learn more about the special education system of the district, the process of working within such a system, and how to navigate the sometimes tricky world of partnerships. Likewise, the Facilitator supported school staff in understanding and navigating the multiple roles families play in the education system and in developing strategies to involve families in multiple levels.

Important Lessons Learned

There are some very important lessons learned in the Pelham Special Education Focus Group process. The first is that building family-school partnerships in special education takes time. While a great deal has been accomplished and data shows that partnerships are continuing to grow, the effort is still in the beginning stages. Work needs to continue to ensure that these accomplishments are fully integrated into “how we do business”.

The second is that no one “thing” is going to build family-school partnerships in special education. As you see, some of the opportunities created in Pelham were events, some are on-going opportunities and various ways to participate and work together. Some required a higher level of understanding and commitment to working with others, some are time-limited and task-oriented opportunities. Regardless, the family-school partnership opportunities are a “coordinated set of activities” to meet the goal of building capacity.

If asked, neither the Special Education Director nor the Parent Leader would tell you that their goal was to increase the capacity of school staff and families to work together. But in hindsight, both agree that it is happening and can see that this capacity-building is what will ensure the success of their collective passion and desire to improve services and outcomes for children with disabilities.

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.

