

Summary of 2009 MCAS Performance of Special Education Students vs. Aggregate Student Population

Bill and I met with Sue Horn, Assistant Superintendent, and Liza Huber, Pupil Services' Director, last Friday to discuss and better understand the recent designation of Conant Elementary and R. J. Grey Junior High schools as "Needs Improvement" under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It is important to note that this designation only applies to the Students with Disabilities Subgroup at these schools; the general education student population continues to show Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as required under NCLB.

Bill and I learned that there are a number of factors that contribute to MCAS performance variation each year. First, each year's class of students is comprised of a different mix of individual students, with varying academic abilities. The composition of special education students within each class also varies by year, which can impact test performance. And finally, the difficulty of each MCAS test varies somewhat by year.

Liza Huber shared that students with language-based learning challenges and special education students who are also English Language Learners (ELL) tend to have the most difficulty with MCAS. In addition, Sue Horn noted that Acton has made a conscious decision to put emphasis on different subjects and/or teach certain subjects in a different sequence than that tested by MCAS when staff believes this curriculum organization improves foundational learning. In essence, Acton and AB are not districts that have chosen to "teach to the test." In addition, our school district as a whole is already performing at a very high level on MCAS, which makes annual improvement more difficult to show. Other school districts in surrounding towns are beginning to experience this same difficulty and the number of schools who find themselves in this position is expected to rise across the Commonwealth in the coming years.

While it's true that the aggregate score of our general education and special education students is quite high, there is still a significant gap in performance between Students with Disabilities and the general student population. NCLB presumes that this gap can be closed when students are given adequate supports or instruction and requires all students to score Proficient or above on MCAS by the year 2014. Bill and I believe that the district can continue to show Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) on MCAS by focusing on closing the pronounced performance gap that remains between general education and special education students in our school district. We will continue to analyze the MCAS data available on the DOE website to help support the district's efforts to improve the educational performance of students with disabilities in our school district.

We've included two charts below that compare students with disabilities' 2009 MCAS scores to the aggregate student population's 2009 scores, which reflect the performance of all students in the district.

In the following charts: P+ = Advanced/Above Proficient
P = Proficient
NI = Needs Improvement
W = Warning/Failing

Acton School District 2009 MCAS Results

	Students with Disabilities			All Students		
	% of Students at Each Level			% of Students at Each Level		
	P/P+	NI	W	P/P+	NI	W
Grade 3 ELA	33	57	10	74	24	2
Grade 3 Math	45	40	16	76	20	5
Grade 4 ELA	34	42	25	79	16	5
Grade 4 Math	28	49	23	71	25	4
Grade 5 ELA	47	45	7	87	12	1
Grade 5 Math	46	29	25	83	13	5
Grade 5 Sci &Tech	43	49	7	79	19	2
Grade 6 ELA	56	32	12	90	8	2
Grade 6 Math	41	40	18	85	11	3

Acton-Boxborough School District 2009 MCAS Results

	Students with Disabilities			All Students		
	% of Students at Each Level			% of Students at Each Level		
	P/P+	NI	W	P/P+	NI	W
Grade 7 ELA	53	31	17	90	8	3
Grade 7 Math	27	32	41	76	15	8
Grade 8 ELA	64	26	10	93	5	2
Grade 8 Math	33	35	32	83	11	6
Grade 8 Sci &Tech	34	42	24	74	21	4
Grade 10 ELA	73	20	8	95	3	1
Grade 10 Math	73	16	10	95	3	1
Grade 10 Sci &Tech	79	14	7	96	3	1