

March 2012

Special Edition

# Each and Every Child

Quick news for Parents, Teachers and Students

An e-newsletter by the Iowa Department of Education's Bureau of Student and Family Support Services

## Special ed. survey results pour in

If the special education survey shows us anything, it reveals that Iowa's special education teachers are keenly aware of the opportunities and challenges facing them in the classroom.

The survey, conducted over the course of a month, was taken by a whopping 45 percent of those who receive *Each and Every Child*. That figure dwarfs other survey responses, in which a 30 percent response rate is considered good. Put another way, Iowa's educators are passionate in their work – and their work outcomes.

Because of the strong interest, it was decided to put out this special edition of *Each and Every Child* to give readers a quick view of the survey – from 30,000 feet, if you will.

Results show that a majority of educators agree that some students with disabilities can, with appropriate instruction, be taught to catch up with their peers. And they do that relying heavily on data that dictates proper intervention techniques.

Educators also are strong proponents of IEPs.

There also are challenges, in which a majority of teachers say there are problems effectively using data. Basic social-behavioral competencies also present dilemmas to today's educators.

The vast majority further believe that parents need to be involved in order to maximize the IEP and effective learning for students with disabilities, yet a majority also say that parents are not involved enough.

"This represents a starting point for us at the Iowa Department of Education," said the state's special education director Martin Ikeda. "The results show that our educators acknowledge some problems in the field. But far more important is that educators are united in working toward solutions."

In future *Each and Every Child* issues, we will continue to examine various issues that surfaced from the survey.

The following does not add up to 100 percent because "neutral" was omitted.

*Most students with mild disabilities can catch up to their typical peers with appropriate instruction.*

**68 percent either agree or strongly agree**

**18 percent either disagree or strongly disagree**

*Using student performance data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using teacher judgment alone.*

**78 percent either agree or strongly agree**

**13 percent either disagree or strongly disagree**

*We should rely on the evidence base to help us improve teaching and learning, including special education.*

**85 percent either agree or strongly agree**

## **4 percent either disagree or strongly disagree**

*The IEP is a roadmap for the education of students with IEPs and informs their education.*

**84 percent either agree or strongly agree**

**7 percent either disagree or strongly disagree**

*The IEP sets high expectations for students and measures their progress.*

**70 percent either agree or strongly agree**

**16 percent either disagree or strongly disagree**

*The majority of teachers know what to do with assessment data they collect, including universal screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring data.*

**32 percent either agree or strongly agree**

**52 percent either disagree or strongly disagree**

*Nearly all Iowa teachers have the knowledge and skills to teach all students to a level of basic social-behavioral competency.*

**37 percent either agree or strongly agree**

**46 percent either disagree or strongly disagree**

*Students respond better to interventions when their parent (guardian) is involved in the development and implementation of those interventions.*

**87 percent either agree or strongly agree**

**3 percent either disagree or strongly disagree**

*Parent (guardian) involvement in the IEP process is important for student success.*

**97 percent either agree or strongly agree**

**1 percent either disagree or strongly disagree**

## **Together, we have taken the first step**

By Marty Ikeda

Director of special education for the state of Iowa

There's been a lot of talk about the education gap in Iowa, from frustration, denial, and disbelief on one side of the spectrum to special education teachers and administrators in many districts immediately going into action to try to address the problem for children in their districts.

The news about performance of students with disabilities in Iowa that we have been hearing nationally for the past two years was surprising: Iowa is at the bottom of the pack nationally when it comes to the education gap between students with and without disabilities.

I had seen data on performance of students with disabilities since 2006, so the data were not all that surprising to me. What shocked me, though, was the magnitude of the gap, and the overall low performance of students with disabilities in Grade 4. The performance of students in Iowa indicated that students with disabilities could not read grade level-text and correctly respond to some simple questions about the passage. Students in Iowa were not able to write about events in stories, or characters, or plots. How could we here in Iowa – who have historically produced some of the most high-achieving students in the country on the general education side, and who have emphasized for at least 10 years, evidence-based instruction, quality supports for teachers, and effective IEPs for students with disabilities – have had this happen on our respective shifts?

Some historical context is relevant. Congress has long been interested in performance of students with disabilities, dating back to the original Education of All Handicapped Children Act first passed in 1975. With each re-authorization, the emphasis on performance has heightened, as we described in a recent issue of

Each and Every Child: Find students with disabilities, serve students with disabilities in a separate curriculum, include students with disabilities in the general curriculum and, today, focus on equitable school outcomes.

But before we could focus on results, we needed to make sure we were meeting the letter of the law from a procedural standpoint. After five years of working long and hard to build Iowa's infrastructure around compliance (general supervision, data, finance, due process), the performance evidence that emerged was irrefutable: Iowa's special education outcomes simply are not where they should be.

The evidence is a wake-up call as much as a challenge. I know from personal experience that Iowa has dedicated special education teachers and administrators who put in long hours. I know we have top-quality educators who passionately care about their work.

Yet there remains a disconnect somewhere. Could it be that we as a state – and trust me, I include myself and our Bureau in this, as well – have not properly evolved with ensuring students with disabilities receive core instruction plus supplemental supports? Have we erred in using data to set instructional level targets rather than grade-referenced performance levels? Have we focused too much on data collection and not enough on evidence-based instruction? Have we focused too much on finding students with disabilities and not enough on providing programs designed to create equity? Have we focused too much on completing an IEP to complete the IEP, and not enough on aligning our services across agencies to get students prepared for living, learning, and working after high school?

Perhaps we have pre-service gaps in IEP writing or use of data – there may be in-service gaps on how school teams use data to determine the best way to educate students with disabilities. Are students with disabilities REALLY general education students first, and students with disabilities second? These are the issues I wrestle with and the questions we are seeking answers to.

The first critical step – hearing from you in the field through our survey – is complete. We are still working through all of the data, and will share with you as we receive more information.

In the meantime, people are asking: What can we do now? Align your curriculum to the Iowa Core.

We have many more steps to make. The Bureau will take some, the Department will take some, AEAs will take steps, parents, teachers, students. One step is to humanize the educational process. Everyone in the system is doing their best to get their part of the job done. Everyone is well intentioned. But we are not efficient in how we work together. You need to trust us to lead and to learn, and we need to develop that same level of trust with all of you.

Down the road, we will be identifying best practices and, ideally, working directly with some schools. While some people respond to data, others – including many right here in the Department – prefer President Truman's favorite line: "show me." We intend to do just that.

## Question and answers from our readers

**Question.** If I compared my students' Iowa Basic Skills scores to the national averages you showed through the NAEP scores, my students fare far better than the national average. Is it a fair comparison?

**Answer.** No. That's because the NAEP content includes performance tasks in addition to multiple choice items, and the NAEP performance standards are described by NAEP as being more rigorous than the performance standards of most states' accountability test (including Iowa's). The fair comparison is, in 2010-2011, the percentage of 4th graders with IEPs who were proficient in reading on the Iowa Tests (not including students taking the alternate assessment) was 45.9%, the percentage of 4th graders without disabilities who were proficient in reading was 82.4%, making a gap of 36.5. Data for other grades and for mathematics, are in the State Report Card for No Child Left Behind (2010-2011):

[http://www.educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=670&Itemid=4434](http://www.educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=670&Itemid=4434)

**Question.** Is it possible that Iowa has more students in special education than other states, and that would contribute to the gap?

**Answer.** Iowa reflects the national average of those who are in special education at around 12 to 13 percent. As such, Iowa does not have more than its fair share of students in special education.

**Question.** Isn't this using an isolated statistic, mixing politics with education?

**Answer.** We leave the politics to those who work in the state Capitol. Instead, one responsibility of the State is to assess, and ensure effectiveness of, efforts to educate students with disabilities. We have assessed our efforts, and now need to ensure effectiveness – this is taken directly from the federal law. Iowa's education gap in reading for students with disabilities at Grade 4 is irrefutable and not isolated: We are at the bottom of the pack nationally. Data in math and in Grades 8 and 11 are not as dramatic but still reflect a significant inequity of results between Iowa's children without disabilities and Iowa's children with disabilities.

**Question.** Could the results be regional? For instance, how do the other Midwestern states fare?

**Answer.** Using the fourth-grade reading NAEP scores from 2011, the 10 states with the largest education gaps are, in descending order, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Colorado, New Hampshire, Idaho, Hawaii, Connecticut, Iowa, Rhode Island and Vermont. Other NAEP scores show very similar results; in the 2009 NAEP eighth-grade math scores, Iowa ranked dead last. All other Midwestern states fare far better than Iowa.

## Something to talk about

If you are a **superintendent**, how many hours per week are you with your leadership team, around teachers, and kids?

If you are an **administrator**, how many hours per week are you supporting teachers, families, and kids?

If you are a **teacher**, how many hours per week are you actively instructing students?

If you are an **AEA staff**, how many hours per week are you in classrooms observing or working directly with kids?

If you are a **parent**, how many hours per week are you spending supporting your child in developing their life independence and working with your child's teachers?

## Myth?

**Myth:** "We can't tell the bus drivers about Tommy's behavior intervention plan. That's confidential!"

### Reality:

All services providers must know:

1. Specific responsibilities related to implementing the child's IEP;
2. Specific accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided for the child in accordance with the IEP.

All services providers must have access to the child's IEP.

*Authority: Iowa Admin. Code r. 281—41.323(4)*

## Pursuing the Promise

2012 Statewide Special Education Conference

At the end of March, we will open registration for the Iowa Department of Education's *Pursuing the Promise* – a three-day conference bringing together special educators, parents, state and federal policymakers, school administrators and community partners this summer.

Speakers for the June 11-13 conference in Des Moines include Kevin Jennings, the former assistant deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, who headed up the department's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools.

Other confirmed speakers include Dan Reschly from Vanderbilt University and Jeanne Wanzek from the Florida Center for Reading Research.

Topics to be covered include ensuring that students with disabilities come to school ready to learn, go through school in safe and caring environments, achieve at high levels, and leave school ready for life.

More information on the seminar, including programming, registration and accommodations, will be posted on the Department of Education's website, [www.educateiowa.gov](http://www.educateiowa.gov).

We also will let you know when more information is available through *Each and Every Child*.