

TESTIMONY FOR THE COMMISSION ON NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

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New Orleans, Louisiana

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About North East Independent School District

Location: 144 square miles in San Antonio, Texas
Student population: 66,000 students
Demographics 53% - Hispanic
7% - African-American
11% - English Language Learners
43% - Economically Disadvantaged
10% - Special Education

Impact of No Child Left Behind on District

The impact of NCLB on students with disabilities in my district cannot be overemphasized. We have gone from being a district on a state improvement plan due to limited inclusion opportunities for students with disabilities to a district with almost 80% of our students included for close to 80% of the school day. Forty-three percent of such students are mainstreamed and not pulled from class for any special education services.

We have gone from being a district with a separate self-contained special education campus serving a population of students with severe emotional and behavioral disorders to being a district recognized by the State Education Agency for an inclusion support program for just that population.

North East has gone from being a district which measured the success of students with disabilities separately from that of typical students to a district in which campus principals brag about the pass rates of their students with disabilities on the state exam.

North East has created a year long district wide effort to support learning of the principles of differentiated instruction among all teachers and at all levels. This has been led collaboratively by a central office team of staff representing both curriculum and populations of at-risk students.

North East educates the majority of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with appropriate accommodations and other supports.

North East assesses 99% of students with disabilities on state tests and posts achievement scores which far exceed the state expectations. We have met AYP as a district in every year that it has been reported and last year every school in our district for the first time met AYP standards.

Would these accomplishments have been possible without the impetus of a high stakes accountability system that publicly held us accountable for the achievement of each and every student? I doubt it.

How the district focused intensely on data

We created a district process, Data Coaching, for engaging campus leadership teams in reflection on data and to improve their skill at using data to increase student achievement. The process created heterogeneous groups of central office staff to serve as data coaches with each team having approximately 10 schools to coach. Each data coaching team includes general education, special education, educational technology and ELL staff. Data coaching teams meet three times each year with campus leadership teams.

For each meeting campuses submit a data coaching template which summarizes student data, disaggregated by group, and presents the campus plan to address any gaps in the data necessary to raise overall student achievement. Assignment one asks each principal to prepare a power point presentation to share with their faculty at back to school inservice days which summarizes the data from the previous year, analyses the challenges therein and highlights the plan for addressing those challenges. Assignment two in October asks campuses to put a face to the data by creating disaggregated lists by name of students at-risk of failure and identifying their initial strategies for supporting those students. Assignment three in February reviews benchmark achievement and allows for fine tuning of the campus plan. We have moved from face to face meetings to the round just completed which was a Skype conference with each school. We like to say that these meetings are not a "got ya" but a "get you there" activity.

Support for data coaching has been supported by the creation of a district web based data management program named COMPASS which assists campuses in analyzing data by drilling down to each classroom teacher and finally down to the individual state standards which were assessed for their students. Central office staff, campus leadership teams and teachers all have access to COMPASS to allow review of individual student performance. Using ARRA funds we are at work this year aligning this data management system with our special education student data management system to allow general education teachers access to a student's list

of accommodations and behavior intervention plans through one Web based application.

Changes in the way that students with disabilities are instructed and assessed

- General education classroom has become the placement of choice for approximately 90% of students with disabilities.
- As Texas has slowly merged its state accountability system with the federal system, general education staff have assumed ownership of the achievement of all students.
- Coteaching and other forms of inclusion support has become the way in which we do business. A process for helping campuses determine needed special education resources necessary for student support has been implemented to help campuses make such decisions.
- A structured decision making process has been implemented to guide IEP teams in determining needed supports for students.
- Students with disabilities are identified by need and included in targeted interventions and tutoring focused toward closing gaps between student knowledge and the state standards. Early intervening services dollars from our federal IDEA-B budget has supported this effort.
- Alternate curriculums for students with disabilities has been eliminated for all but the most severely disabled students. The state standards and the district scope and sequence of curriculum are available to all students.
- District and all campuses achieved adequate yearly progress in the 2008-2009 school year. We estimate that in the 2009-10 school year IEP teams have increased expectations for students with disabilities by assigning fewer students to the modified version of the state test.

How federal policy can best promote effective accountability for increasing the achievement of students with disabilities

- Continue to hold states, districts and schools accountable for the achievement and performance of students with disabilities on rigorous assessments of state standards.
- Continue to monitor the progress of students with disabilities in comparison to their typical peers.
- Develop appropriate growth models which hold schools accountable for the progress of all students yet do not penalize them in the short term for the same scores.

- Support ending the separate parallel educational system created by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEIA) by integrating instructional programs and funding mechanisms for these students completely into the Reauthorized ESEA. Students with disabilities would be addressed through a specific Title arrangement as are economically disadvantaged students and second language learners.
- Consider increasing funding flexibility, which allows special education funding to be spent on support efforts to restructure general education to better meet the needs of a differentiated student population.
- Develop strategies which that will encourage and make possible collaboration and joint funding of initiatives which will benefit all students at risk including those with disabilities, those from economically disadvantaged homes and second language learners.