

Tri-Town School Union:
Boxford, Middleton and Topsfield Elementary Schools

SPECIAL EDUCATION DATA - PRESENT AND PAST:

Please refer to the attached chart(s) detailing data from the past five years. The paragraphs below summarize (interpret) key findings from the data.

BOXFORD:

As of October 1, 2011, Special Education numbers by school are:

COLE: 41 (K-2) SPOFFORD POND (3-6): 86 PRESCHOOL: 14

* There are 54 students enrolled in the Integrated Preschool Programs

PRESCHOOLERS / THERAPY ONLY Services: 5

Publicly funded OUT of DISTRICT (PK-6): 8

(2@ Other Public Schools, 1@ Middleton LLC, 4@ Private Special Education Schools)

Cole School: 13.7 % of the K-2 population is designated as special education; this is a 2.5% increase from last school year.

Spofford Pond School: 18.4 % of the 3-6 students are in a special education program; this is a 0.95% increase in special education students enrolled at Spofford Pond.

Grades 2-4 tend to be common 'eligibility identification' years for students with disabilities, so it is not uncommon to see lower percentages in grades K-1, with an increase starting towards the end of the second grade year.

Number of students identified as eligible for special education but whose parents have opted to send their child to a private school and not access any (regular) or special education services in Boxford: 1

Number of students identified as eligible for special education but whose parents have opted to home school their child: 0

Boxford Percentage of Special Education students, K-6: 17.4 %.

The percentage of Special Education Students (K-6) reported at the district level includes the 8 students who require out of district programs.

MIDDLETON:

As of October 1, 2011, Special Education numbers by school are:

FULLER MEADOW: 45 (K-2) HOWE MANNING: 80 PRESCHOOL: 8

There are 73 enrolled in the Integrated Preschool Programs

PRESCHOOLERS / THERAPY ONLY: 1

Publicly funded OUT of DISTRICT: 7

FM School: 16.9 % of the K-2 population is designated as special education; this is a 0.1% increase from last school year.

HM School: 17.1% of the 3-6 population are in a special education program; this is a 0.3% increase in special education students enrolled at HM; the 3rd grade joined the Howe Manning School this year for the first time.

Middleton Percentage of Special Education students, K-6: 17.8 %.

The percentage of SWD (K-6) reported at the district level includes the 7 students who require out of district programs.

TOPSFIELD:

As of October 1, 2011, Special Education numbers by school are:

STEWARD: **47 (K-3)** PROCTOR: **53** PRESCHOOL: **13**

There are 43 enrolled in the Integrated and Intensive preschool programs, including one student enrolled in the Intensive PS program from a non-partner town (who is not included in our reported PS headcount as this student is not a resident.)

PRESCHOOLERS / THERAPY ONLY: **0**

Publicly funded OUT of DISTRICT: **4**

Steward School: **15.0 %** of the K-3 population is designated as special education; this is a 3.0% increase from last school year.

Proctor School: **20.6 %** of the 4-6 population is in a special education program; this is a 1.2 % increase in special education students enrolled at Proctor.

Topsfield Percentage of Special Education students, K-6: **17.96 %.**

The percentage of SWD (K-6) reported at the district level includes those **4** students who require out of district programs.

There is also one student tuitioned into a specialized program at the Steward School from a non-partner town for the 3rd consecutive year; (this student is not included in our K-3 headcount as this student is not a resident.)

The increase in the special education population at the Proctor School is due to a few move-ins since last year, as well as the decline in the overall student population but no noticeable decline in the special education numbers.

STATEWIDE and our DISTRICTS' STATISTICS:**Number and Percentage of Students with Disabilities 1999-2009**

*2009-2010 is the most recent year for which state data is readily available.

School Year	TOTAL Special Ed #	TOTAL Students	% of SWD
2009-2010	164,847	967,951	17.0%
2008-2009	166,037	970,059	17.12%
2007-2008	164,298	972,178	16.89%
2006-2007	163,396	979,851	16.68%
2005-2006	160,752	983,439	16.35%
2004-2005	157,108	986,662	15.92%
2003-2004	154,391	991,478	15.57%
2002-2003	150,551	993,463	15.15%
2001-2002	105,003	980,342	15.30%
2000-2001	160,369	986,017	16.26%
1999-2000	162,454	978,619	16.60%
LOCAL STATISTICS	as of 10/1/11:	Note: # of students enrolled in our schools does NOT include those placed out of district	Note: % of SWD includes those students placed out of district
BOXFORD	135 (K-6) + 14 PS	775 (K-6)	17.4 %
MIDDLETON	132 (K-6) + 8 PS	741 (K-6)	17.8%
TOPSFIELD	105 (K-6) + 14 PS	580 (K-6)	18.1 %

Our numbers hover just above the state average, with a greater percentage increase in Boxford and Topsfield (about a 2% increase in one year); this increase is the result of adding 7 students in each town to the special education program while also subtracting 35 and 33 students, respectively, to the overall school enrollment in the past year.

Generally speaking, the earlier that supplemental instructional supports are made available to students through the general education programs AND the more consistent instructional support and coaching is available to teachers to assist them in the analysis and interpretation of student performance data, the better prepared teachers are to adjust and more precisely target their teaching efforts; these factors combine to lower the special education referral and eligibility findings for a district. In short, the stronger the regular education program is, the less likely a student will need special education; we must continue to provide early intervening regular education support.

Percentage of Students with Disabilities Who Receive Services by Educational Environment

Special Education Students: Placement Type Distribution (AGES 6-21, only) STATE STATISTICS

% of Special Education Students by Placement Type (6-21)	Full Inclusion (80%+ in reg.ed)	Partial Inclusion (60-79% reg.ed)	Substantially Separate (>59% reg.ed)	Out of District Placement
2009-2010	57%	20.8%	15.4%	6.7%
2008-2009	56.8 %	21.1 %	15.4 %	6.8%
2007-2008	55.7 %	22.5 %	15.1 %	6.7%
2006-2007	53.0 %	25.0 %	15.3 %	6.7%
2005-2006	49.1 %	28.5 %	15.7 %	
*LOCAL STATISTICS	as of 10/1/11:			
<i>BOXFORD</i>	74.2%	13.3%	5.5%	3.1%
<i>MIDDLETON</i>	51.6%	40.5%	7.1%	2.4%
<i>TOPSFIELD</i>	60.8%	28.4%	7.8%	3.9%
	as of 10/1/10:			
<i>BOXFORD</i>	69.5%	20.3%	3.1%	3.1%
<i>MIDDLETON</i>	43.3%	45.5%	5.2%	1.5%
<i>TOPSFIELD</i>	62.2%	20.4%	7.1%	4.1%

Source for STATE statistics: Massachusetts Student Information Management System

* **Note:** Our Placement percentages do not add to 100% due to rounding and a few students' IEPs are under review or in process of change.

Definitions:

- Full Inclusion – at least 80 percent of the time in general education classroom
- Partial Inclusion – 40 percent to 79 percent of the time in general education classroom
- Substantially Separate – less than 40 percent in general education classroom

The percentage of Massachusetts students with disabilities placed in full inclusion environments, ages 6-21, has been slowly increasing for the past five years (see above chart). In contrast, the percentage of students in partial inclusion environments has been decreasing while that of students in substantially separate programs and out-of-

district placements has remained relatively constant. In this age group, students placed in full inclusion environments constitute more than half of all students with disabilities.

Our percentages reflect a much lower percentage of students in substantially separate programs and in out of district placements. We have developed programs over the years so that we have increased our capacity to educate a wide variety of students with a broad continuum of program options. Given we are also a PK-6 district, we do not have the full range of grades, and there are students whose needs require more substantially separate programs and/or an out of district program, so that, too, contributes to our lower percentages in those categories.

Our Full Inclusion programs provide services to the greatest proportion of students, especially in Boxford, where 74.2% of students are fully included compared with 57% statewide. Middleton's full inclusion percentage has increased by more than 8% points in one year, but is still below the state average and the other two towns.

Student Identification by Disability Category

For the fourth consecutive year, the percent of students reported under Specific Learning Disability has been declining across the state.

In contrast, across the state, the percentage of students with disabilities found eligible in both the Health Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder categories has continued to increase at steady rates. The increase in the Health Impairment group may be attributed to students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or possibly some of the students who would otherwise have been identified under the Specific Learning Disability category. The increase in students with Autism appears to parallel national trends and may represent an actual increase in this group of students.

Our local statistics do not align with the state percentage of students identified with an SLD identification, but do align with the increasing Health and Autism disability categories, and in all three of these categories, we exceed the state average. We are well below the state averages for the categories of Emotional and Intellectual disability categories. As we are relatively small school districts, 3-5 students in any one category can make an impact upon our percentages. Another factor to consider is that as our districts end at grade six, we do not have the older population added to our mix, which is sometimes when disability categories become better clarified and is also a grade range period during which some students with emotional disabilities and more subtle SLD are newly identified.

Our Intensive Needs Educational-Autism Specialist, Mary Thomas, is currently working with the educational teams of 100+ students, with a fair number of students whose official diagnosis is something other than Autism Spectrum Disorder but whose profile is consistent with some of the educational and social thinking features of students with ASD; not all students receive the same level of support, so the 'head count' is not the only factor we consider when determining what proportion of her time is funded by each school district.

% of SWD by Disability Category	Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)	Communication	Developmental Delay
2009-2010	33.5 %	17.6 %	10.5 %
2008-2009	35.8 %	17.3 %	10.1 %
2007-2008	37.6 %	16.7 %	10.0 %
2006-2007	39.0 %	16.6 %	9.7 %
10/1/11: BOXFORD	43.6% (65)	18.1% (27)	4.7% (7)
10/1/11: MIDDLETON	41.4 % (58)	16.2 % (23)	11.4 % (16)
10/1/11: TOPSFIELD	30.3 % (36)	22.7 % (27)	18.5 % (22)
	Emotional	Intellectual	Health (includes ADHD)
2009-2010	8.4 %	6.5 %	7.7 %
2008-2009	8.4 %	6.6 %	6.9 %
2007-2008	8.4 %	6.8 %	6.4 %
2006-2007	8.5 %	7.2 %	5.7 %
10/1/11: BOXFORD	6.0% (9)	0% (0)	12.8 % (19)
10/1/11: MIDDLETON	2.9 % (4)	0.7 % (1)	10.0 % (14)
10/1/11: TOPSFIELD	4.2 % (5)	0% (0)	10.1 % (12)
	Autism	Neurological	Other
2009-2010	6.5 %	4.3 %	4.9 %
2008-2009	5.9 %	3.9 %	5.0 %
2007-2008	5.3 %	3.7 %	5.2 %
2006-2007	4.6 %	3.4 %	5.3 %
10/1/11: BOXFORD	8.7% (13)	2.0% (3)	3.8% (6)
10/1/11: MIDDLETON	10.0% (14)	6.4% (9)	1.4% (2)
10/1/11: TOPSFIELD	6.7% (8)	4.2% (5)	2.5% (3)

Source for STATE Statistics: Massachusetts Student Information Management System

Financial Information:

CIRCUIT BREAKER:

This state reimbursement program was enacted by the Legislature and first implemented in FY 2004. This important financial assistance program was designed to provide additional state financial aid to school districts that incurred exceptionally high costs in providing education to students with disabilities. The law supports shared costs between the state and the school district when a student's individual education program costs rise above a certain level (i.e.: expenses in excess of 4 times the state average foundation budget); for FY12 that threshold will be **\$38,916**. Although the legislation allows for the state to reimburse cities/towns up to 75% of those educational expenses beyond the threshold figure, due to the budget crisis our state has faced the past few years, we have projected our expected CB reimbursement at a 40% reimbursement rate for the past two years. The actual figure ended up at a 65% reimbursement rate for FY '11 and is expected (at least at this point) to be at that level for FY '12. Each district is required to submit extensive detail documenting the expenses for any student/IEP implementation; each district is also subject to an audit at any time.

Boxford:

During FY '11 we claimed expenses associated with the implementation of one student's IEP whose net claim totaled **\$13,575** (after the 4X foundation expenditure was met.) The state awarded a CB reimbursement rate of 65% (plus a small supplemental payment of \$48) of the net claim, resulting in an actual reimbursement amount of **\$8872**. We are required to deposit this reimbursement into an account to offset the special education expenses the following year, i.e. FY '12 we will use this money to offset out of district tuition costs.

Middleton:

During FY'11 we claimed expenses associated with the implementation of 2 students' IEPs, with a net claim totaling receive **\$39,453** (after the 4X foundation expenditure was met.) The state awarded a CB rate of 65% (plus a small supplemental payment of \$138) of the net claim, resulting in an actual reimbursement amount of **\$25,782**. We are required to deposit this reimbursement into an account to offset the special education expenses the following year, i.e. FY '12 we will use this money to offset out of district tuition costs.

Topsfield:

During FY'11 we claimed expenses associated with the implementation of 3 students' IEPs, with a net claim totaling **\$83,063** (after the 4X foundation expenditure was met.) The state awarded a CB rate of 65 % (plus a small supplemental payment of \$291) of the net claim resulting in an actual reimbursement amount of **\$54,282**. We are required to deposit this reimbursement into an account to offset the special education expenses the following year, i.e. FY '12 we will use this money to offset out of district tuition costs.

MUNICIPAL MEDICAID REIMBURSEMENT:

Municipal Medicaid Reimbursement is a program where the Federal government reimburses municipalities for services provided to students who otherwise may qualify for these services through their public health insurance program; that is the Medicaid/MassHealth program.

During FY'11, Boxford received a total of **\$27,549** which was wired directly to the town for Medicaid reimbursement.

During FY'11, Middleton received a total of **\$32,242** which was wired directly to the town for Medicaid reimbursement.

During FY'11, Topsfield received a total of **\$25,279** which was wired directly to the town for Medicaid reimbursement.

We will continue to access Medicaid reimbursement to the extent possible during the 2011/2012 school year. Please note that all funds reimbursed are wired directly to each town's general funds; the towns are NOT required to re-appropriate that money to the school department.

GRANT PROGRAMS:

<u>Federal IDEA:</u>	<u>FY '12</u>	<u>FY '11</u>	<u>FY '10</u>
Boxford:	\$190,380	\$193,976	\$198,208
Middleton:	\$183,739	\$187,654	\$196,582
Topsfield:	\$119,520	\$119,806	\$121,712

The IDEA grant program is the money the federal government sends to each state to then distribute to the cities and towns to help offset the costs of operating special education programs. When the federal law was first passed in 1975, the federal government had intended to assist states, and thus school boards for the costs associated with operating quality special education programs at a 40% reimbursement rate; the federal government has never been able to appropriate that level of funding, with states (school boards) receiving reimbursement somewhere between 10 and 17 % of the program costs. The declining allocations the past few years are a disturbing trend.

We use most of our IDEA grant money to offset staff salaries, (which also means that about 10% of the salary costs must also be subtracted from the grant allocation for retirement and other benefits); this increasing reliance has affected our ability to implement other program enhancements the past few years and has had a significant impact this year. We have used money from this grant to pay for substitutes to cover for teachers during TEAM meetings in Boxford and Middleton and this is compromised this year; we have also used this grant to provide a small stipend to the Parent Coordinators in each town's DASH program (**Disability Awareness Starts Here**), an education program that introduces students at different grade levels to various disability types and is designed to promote understanding and tolerance for differences.

Early Childhood (262):

	<u>FY '12</u>	<u>FY '11</u>	<u>FY '10</u>
Boxford:	\$10,312	\$10,319	\$10,327
Middleton:	\$11,265	\$11,272	\$11,289
Topsfield:	\$ 3,039	\$ 3,039	\$ 3,042

The Early Childhood Grant program is used to offset one Preschool Teacher salary and associated benefits. This grant has had a less noticeable decline in allocation, but due to increasing staff salaries, it offsets a smaller salary percentage every year.

ARRA/ Stimulus Grant Program Updates:

This grant program was only available for two school years and no longer provides any funds for special education programs.

We used the money available through this program to offset some staff salaries and to fund professional development programs to improve and enhance our staff knowledge of working with students with disabilities.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE):

The Massachusetts DESE updated the special education regulations this past spring, however the changes are very minor and consisted mostly of some language changes to better align with federal requirements/ language.

SPECIAL and GENERAL EDUCATION COLLABORATION:

The federal special education regulations reference the consideration of Response to Intervention (RTI) data by evaluation teams to determine if a child is learning disabled and requires specially designed instruction; i.e.: special education. Because of this regulatory change, one will read quite a bit about RTI in special education literature; however, it is truly a regular education framework for determining which children receive early intervening assistance through the regular education support services prior to conducting a special education evaluation. By providing specific supports in general education, we hope to be able to control any additional increases to our special education percentage within the district.

The RTI framework supports our move towards more frequent ongoing formative assessment practices and group reviews of assessment data to share multiple perspectives/ interpretations regarding “the story of the data,” meaning what does the data tell us about groups of learners and individual student performance within those groups? A district must be able to provide well-reasoned and research-based intervention supports through the general education program prior to referring a student to special education. If a district does not have adequate regular education supports then teachers and parents feel that there is ‘no where else to go but special education’ when a student is struggling; therefore, districts that are short-sighted and cut regular education program supports often find themselves with increasingly frustrated parents and teachers because more students are struggling to learn within a ‘one size fits all’ model of curriculum and instruction.

There have been groups of teachers in our towns who have worked in teams to research information about RTI and have worked with Principals, the Director of Curriculum, and Curriculum specialists to develop and implement a framework for implementation. The RTI process remains a work in progress with Principals leading their schools and staff in broadening their understanding of how, where, and when this process is to be used to consider supplemental instructional supports for students. With an effective RTI framework and intervention program structure, the referrals for special education evaluations should decline as well as the overall special education numbers. Our staff is taking important strides towards ensuring students who require differentiation to their instruction, environment, or materials will be able to benefit from targeted and individualized instruction through a general education framework.

We have also developed a Social-Emotional-Behavioral framework for providing support to students whose social-emotional-behavioral health needs interfere with learning. This model of support services is also framed within an RTI or multi-tiered approach as a related service in order to support students in being able to access and participate in instruction. Our psychologist and guidance staff is very knowledgeable and skilled in supporting students with emotional social-emotional-behavioral health

needs and continue to assist both teachers and parents in developing and implementing appropriate plans, it is important for us to do so as support providers and not necessarily as the primary providers of mental health services to children and families. Our psychologist and guidance staff is working with Principals to review the RTI framework with staff over the next couple of months.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM and PLANNING NEEDS:

The different district Leadership Teams continue to work collaboratively in planning for all of our students. As the school committees continue to study and examine future administrative structures, it will be important to continue to examine how and when to consider special education program planning in a collaborative fashion.

We have at least one 'joint-district' program in each district.

Steward continues to operate an Intensive Pre-School program for students with various types of disabilities and currently the majority of students have diagnoses on the Autism Spectrum, but that is not always the case; there are 3 Topsfield students, 1 Middleton student and 1 student from a 'non-partner' town enrolled as IEP students.

Cole does not currently offer any 'joint-district' program, however, we do have a 'specialty' population emerging and will be examining the needs of a few Pre-School children as to whether there is a need for a more specialized Pre-School Program for a small number of Boxford students and if so, this program could be accessed by students in the other towns, should the needs emerge there as well.

Fuller Meadow has a program for students in grades K -2 whose disabilities impact language/communication, cognitive reasoning style (can be rigid and has gaps in learning that require remediation), and social skills; there is one Boxford student as a classmate with the Middleton students.

Spofford Pond has a program for students in grade 6 whose disabilities impact language/communication, cognitive reasoning style (can be rigid, relies on rote memorization, and has gaps in learning that require remediation), behavior regulation and social thinking skills; there are 4 Middleton students and one Boxford student. Middleton Schools also has assigned one full time special education teacher and one aide to work in conjunction with the Boxford special education teacher, Behavior Specialist, and aide.

All schools continue to offer inclusion, resource room, and a combination of therapy services.

Our Pre-School Programs have all noted a decline in enrollment over the past few years. We have added some program options in Topsfield last year, and in Middleton this year by including an extended day option for both an early morning hour, 'lunch

bunch, and later afternoon sessions to accommodate parents who need longer hours than a traditional preschool program offers. These added program options are accessed by a small number of families at this time, however, we anticipate the numbers will grow.

Boxford redesigned the 4-year old PS program this year by offering a 9:00-1:00 option for either 3-days/week or 5-days/week; Boxford also continues to offer a lunch bunch in the afternoon and added an earlier start (10:30) to the lunch bunch for the afternoon preschool students.

We will be providing information during future district School Committee meetings for action should there be any revisions to the program options and pricing for next year. We are planning Open Houses and Registration in all our preschool programs during November and December.

SUMMER PROGRAMS:

We operated several different summer programs this past summer. All programs were held at the Cole School in Boxford (PK-3) and Proctor School in Topsfield (Gr 4-6).

Boxford had **11** students in Pre-school programs, **6** of whom were peer models, and **36** students in the Instructional Skills program. Boxford also had the equivalent of **19** students receiving Speech, OT, and/or PT services over the summer months; some students may have received multiple therapies. There were a fair number of Boxford staff also worked the summer programs.

Middleton had **6** students in Pre-school programs, **2** of whom were peer models, and **56** students in the Instructional Skills program. Middleton also had the equivalent of **14** students receiving Speech, OT, and/or PT services over the summer months; some students may have received multiple therapies. There were a fair number of Middleton staff also worked the summer programs. There were a number of Middleton students who were offered a summer instructional program but declined for various reasons; such as private tutoring, schedule conflicts, or wanting to provide their child with a break.

Topsfield had **13** students in Pre-school programs, **2** of whom were peer models, and **44** students in the Instructional Skills program. Topsfield also had the equivalent of **13** students receiving Speech, OT, and/or PT services over the summer months; some students may have received multiple therapies. There were a fair number of Topsfield staff also worked the summer programs. There were a number of Topsfield students who were offered a summer instructional program but declined for various reasons; such as private tutoring, schedule conflicts, or wanting to provide their child with a break.

There were a fair number of students from all 3 towns who were offered a summer instructional program but declined for various reasons; some declined in the spring

when notified, but we also had another 20+ students whose parents never indicated that their child would not attend, despite a confirmation letter they were asked to return. Some reasons offered regarding the decline in summer program were private tutoring, schedule conflicts, distance from home, or wanting to provide their child with a break.

We had a three (3) Middleton and three (3) Topsfield students who attended our fourth year partnership with a recreational program at the Beverly YMCA; our students participated with the assistance of our own staff acting as social/ language/ behavior coaches as their IEPs called for an extended year program to continue working on skill development in these areas. These students attended the Sterling Woods YMCA/ Camp Star program 3 full weeks and our district Instructional Skills Program another 3 full weeks. By employing our own staff (coaches) to supplement the YMCA program staff, we were able to modify activities and routines on the spot in order to better accommodate the social, cognitive, sensory, and behavioral needs of our students. Continued reinforcement of academic as well as social-language-behavior gains has been important to these students, enabling them to return to school in September without a substantial regression of their progress.

We also continued a partnership program with the Topsfield Recreation Department. Ten (10) Topsfield, 3 Middleton, and 5 Boxford students attended this program. The Topsfield Recreation Department runs a summer camp program for six weeks, Mon-Fri, 9 -1, and uses the Proctor School playground and cafeteria as its site. Mary Thomas worked closely with the special education teams at our schools to clearly identify the focus for each child while we developed the program concept and staffing pattern to supplement what was already in place through the regular education Topsfield Recreation Program. We also worked with a small group of interested parents during the fall and winter of this past school year to gather more input regarding program enhancements that were implemented and highly successful. This program offered Instructional Skills 2 mornings/week, social-emotional skill development with a school counselor 2 mornings/week, and social coaching by our staff the remaining days/times. The Topsfield Recreation Department staff was terrific to work with and the program was very successful for our students.

We also offered an Early Childhood Program for students with a need for ongoing instruction in Social-Pragmatics and Academics, with two (2) sections at the Cole School; we had four (4) Boxford, ten (10) Middleton, and two (2) Topsfield students participate.

EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIVES:

According to the state DESE annual report on Special Education to the legislature , during FY10, nearly 6,300 students with disabilities received direct services through educational collaboratives. Additionally, over 3,700 general education students received aspects of their education in collaborative-sponsored programs, particularly through alternative school programs. Special education programs in collaboratives serve a full range of students with disabilities. In Massachusetts 30 Educational Collaboratives collectively serve 304 member districts, had FY10 budgets that amounted to over \$305 million, and employed more than 3,900 staff.

There has been quite a bit of news about several collaboratives this past year, in particular the financial dealings of the Executive Director of both the Merrimack Education Center (MEC) and its affiliated agency, the Merrimack Special Education Collaborative (MSEC); unfortunately, the alleged actions of this director has cast a dark shadow of doubt across other collaboratives, and launched investigations by several state agencies including the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). It is alleged that MEC siphoned money from MSEC using improper means and remains under investigation..

Commissioner Mitchell of the DESE has released a report (dated 9/9/11) with various links to the State Auditor's reports on this and a couple of other collaborative, as well as recommendations to the Board of Education regarding closer oversight and monitoring of educational collaboratives by DESE.

We belong to two collaborative, the Greater Lawrence Educational Collaborative (GLEC), and Northshore Education Consortium (NEC), whose main offices are in Methuen and Beverly, respectively. Both these collaboratives' primary mission is to operate programs for students with unique and challenging special needs, students who are considered a 'low-incidence' population. We have enjoyed positive relationships with both organizations, access programs in both, and are confident they remain strong and productive organizations.

SPECIAL EDUCATION STAFF CHANGES:

BOXFORD: We maintained our special education teaching staff at the Cole School, and increased our special education aide staff by 0.8 FTE. This increase was due to new students with needs beyond the existing capacity and program changes. We hired one new special education teacher, Alexandra Johnson, who replaced a teacher who moved out of state. We hired a new school psychologist, Courtney Eckhoff, at the Spofford Pond School, who has made a terrific adjustment to her new position.

MIDDLETON: We maintained our special education teaching staff at the same FTE, however, we had many re-assignments with the opening of our new schools and new grade configurations. Special education teachers and staff in both buildings are very happy with their new classrooms and assignments. We also continued to assign one of our Howe Manning special education teachers to work in a joint-town special education program located at the Spofford Pond School in Boxford and one of the special education aide FTE's from Howe Manning to this program as well. The Middleton students in this program are all sixth graders this year; we are in the process of examining what our program needs will be going forward.

TOPSFIELD: We maintained our special education teaching staff FTE ; we reconfigured the deployment of our special education staff at Steward reducing the number of employees by one while maintaining the special education FTE. We had to add 2 aides to meet the needs of students who were either new to us or whose program implementation required additional staff.

We hired Emily Gatchell as the Special Education Coordinator to replace Deborah Surdel who retired in June. Emily has been a School Psychologist at the Steward School for 12 years and is very familiar with our district, students and staff. We hired Meredith Edelstein as the School Psychologist to replace Emily. Both are doing a fabulous job in their new roles.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM EVALUATION:

Our program evaluations of our Preschool Programs last year resulted in some program changes for this year. In Boxford, we changed the 4-year old program to a 9:00-1:00 program, as many parents indicated a desire for a longer day than the 3-year old program time; this program is offered either 3 or 5 days/week. We also extended our lunch bunch time to include an earlier drop off (10:30) for parents wanting to access this program option for their children enrolled in afternoon preschool.

We added an Extended Day Preschool Program in Middleton, and parents may select from a 'lunch bunch' addition only, or extending a child's day to a 'full school' day; there are an average of 20 students participating in the 'lunch bunch' each day and 5-6 in the morning and 10-12 in the afternoon extended day program.

We expanded our morning preschool program in Topsfield to open at 7:00 a.m. in order to accommodate a few parents' work schedule demands.

Our special education evaluation team model was also reviewed last year and while there were positive indicators to support movement towards a more centralized evaluation team model, we did not implement this model fully at our schools; we had hoped to pilot the program in Middleton, but given all the other changes staff were undertaking, the timing of full implementation created too much stress for folks, so we partially implemented this model in Middleton by designating 2 teachers, one at each school, as the primary LD/Achievement evaluator for their building, rather than assigning one person for the district. We also continued to have our Psychologists provide a combination of direct services to students as well as test, by building, rather than assign 1.5 Psychologists as Evaluators only.

TRI-TOWN SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (SEPAC):

The Special Education PAC Board is relatively new this year. We had a new Co-President in Boxford last year and a new Co-President will represent Topsfield beginning this year. We have a small number of parents from all our towns that have attended the presentations regularly. The TTSEPAC Board typically meets with the Special Education Administrator a few times each year in order to advise/ inform her of any concerns/ issues raised by parents in the community. They also work in cooperation with the schools to ensure the safety and unique needs of students with disabilities are attended to and considered within the context of any district initiatives. Each town has one parent as a co-chair; we are always interested in any parents attending presentations and for any new parents to become more active with the Board. The SEPAC Board has over 100 names on their email contact list. The TTSEPAC has

put together a tri-fold brochure with essential information which our office mails to the parent of any child that has been referred for an initial evaluation.

We held our annual rights training for parents in conjunction with the Masconomet Special Education Department on 10/18. There were 8 parents that attended, reflecting a range of grades and interests. I will be working with our SEPAC Board to plan other trainings, and where appropriate, we will join the Masconomet SEPAC events.

We have planned a 3-part Parent Training series for November, which is Family Literacy Month in Massachusetts. Dr. Ilda King will present to parents on Nov. 2nd, 16th, and 30th, 7:00-9:00, on a topics related to connecting play to language and literacy skills, helping parents better understand how to support the neuro-developmental underpinnings of strong literacy skills and how important it is to stimulate the language centers of the brain beginning at a very early age. More details will be shared through the Principals' newsletters, so be sure to watch for the invitation to attend.

The TTSEPAC continues to have as a goal to increase the parent participation. They conduct one fund raiser and use the money raised to purchase supplies/ programs requested by staff to supplement the supplies/ materials purchased at buildings.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon D. Lyons, M. Ed.
Special Education Administrator

(Tri-Town School Union School Committee Meeting: 10/27/2011)