

**Question 1: In the past five years have special education costs in your community risen faster than the rest of the school district's operating budget: If so, which parts of the program drove the increase?**

MASS (Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents) "The statewide data is a huge yes to the first major question" Paul Andrews (see attachment)

Concord-Carlisle: At the HS level our out-of-district #s have increased dramatically. We have had several severely emotionally disturbed students require intensive placements.

Sharon: Yes, tuitions for out-of-district placements, transportation, increasing requests for 1:1 instructional assistants.

North Andover: 1) North Andover has been in a particularly unusual situation during the past year due to extreme budget issues resulting in large class sizes and the public perception (parental) that students may not be receiving the support that was needed. As a result there was a flurry of both referrals to special ed. as well as unilateral placements that the District ended up paying for as part of legal agreements. This had an obvious impact on costs increases

Another impact that perhaps has been more universal to all districts is the increase in the costs of the actual tuitions charged due to "reconstruction" and salary upgrades for special education school (private 766 approved)

Additionally, the impact of the burgeoning population of students diagnosed on the autism spectrum coupled with the additional therapies (especially ABA programming) these students require has contributed to increase costs

And finally, we are seeing a significant increase in the number of young students diagnosed with serious emotional disturbances. These students can not be served in our district due to lack of space to host appropriate programming

Franklin: the costs of tuitions and transportation have both driven the cost of special education to rise at a higher percentage than other parts of the school budget. One of the factors is that we are finding an increase in significantly impaired students, thus requiring more specialized and expensive programs.

Wellesley: Yes, largely special tuition and transportation

Lexington: Last year we sent our school committee a comprehensive five-part report on our special education program. <http://Lps.lexington.org/SPED.html>

North Reading: In North Reading, the cost of special education services has risen at a rate higher than the regular budget. I can provide you with the specifics on this if you want. The primary reasons include:

Increased cost of tuitions

Increased legal costs related to BSEA hearings on unilateral placements (both at the Landmark School)

Increased staff costs due to new programs

Two Language-Based programs at our Middle School (2 teachers and 2 paraprofessionals)

A PDD / Integrated Pre-K program (1 teacher and 2 paras)

A co-taught K class / PDD program (1 additional teacher)

A 1-1 (student / teacher) plus a part-time para for student brought back from a collaborative)

An additional inclusion sped teacher at the High School

An additional speech language pathologist to service the preK programs

At least 5 paraprofessionals to support programs

An increase in summer services

Overall, the cost of these programs is associated directly to our commitment to implement inclusion. One of the 'indirect' costs has been the need to provide collaboration planning time (time for regular ed and special ed teachers to meet). This has come at the expense of increased class size (our middle school teachers now teach 4 vs. 5 regular classes) and use of paraprofessionals to free up elementary classroom teachers. Additionally, we have invested considerable money in professional development and hired an inclusion specialist on a consultant basis.

Orange: The out-of-district costs have risen a bit - initially the most for us. As we have tried to control or maintain those costs, we found ourselves having to hire more 1-1 aides for kids.

Spencer-East Brookfield: Both out of district tuition and transportation costs have been going through the roof. The SPED budget increases far exceed regular education increases.

Hingham: (1) Yes, Out-of-district tuitions and transportation; specialized services such as ABA and one-to- one specialized reading.

Nashoba: Nashoba has done a remarkable job of managing excellent programs at affordable expenses over the last few years. Our budget has either dropped or remained the same during this period of time.

Franklin: Yes, transportation costs for both in district and out of district students. Tuition costs for out of district/private placements. Personnel costs to hire Highly Qualified experienced teachers

Chelsea: No

Millbury:

1. Millbury's total budget has increased 22.2% over the past 5 years.

Over the same period our Special Education costs have increased 46.7%. Specifically Special Ed. transportation is up 67%, out of district tuitions increased 54%, Special Ed. salaries 49.7% and contracted services (therapy, etc.) 57.5%. Apparently the largest increase is in transportation. In looking at rates vs. the number of students it would appear that our rates have increased marginally whereas our number of students have increased 32%. We have been able to mitigate some of the potential increases in transportation by combining routes to various outplacements though this has increased travel time for some students. Also during this period we have added several placements that are a greater distance from town.

Dedham: Yes. The primary driving forces to these increases can be contributed to rising costs in out-of-district tuition and transportation, as well as an overwhelming increase in ABA therapy which is recommended by numerous hospitals and therapists as a therapy for students on the autism spectrum.

Sudbury: Yes, out-of-district costs/student out of district (we have tried hard to limit total out of district); Also, numbers and needs of preschool age students in integrated pre-school--we've added a section. Home consultations and extended year program costs have escalated.

**2. What program(s) or procedures has your district put in place that you feel are most effective at helping to control special education program costs while providing excellent service to students on IEPs?**

Concord-Carlisle-We have focused at the elementary level by increasing the number of services providers and specialized classes in order to keep our students in district and we have now been able to keep them all way through grade 12.

Sharon: in-district programming to address students on the (autism)spectrum and students with social emotional and behavioral needs across all levels.

North Andover: 2) on the positive side of the scale we have revamped our ESY program this year to provide more direct, explicit instruction (tutoring model) to students with moderate disabilities in lieu of the previous model which was more eclectic in nature. Oddly enough this resulted in a significant savings in the district (although the purpose was to provide better services for our children).

We have also provided district-wide training to our special education teachers in methodologies generally accepted for the remediation of reading difficulties. Twenty three teachers attended the 2-day Wilson overview in the spring in preparation for 10 of those teachers attending the Level I Wilson cert program next week. In addition we had three staff members trained in RAVE-O. We have a district reading consultant who has helped us to design programs for this coming school year and we have avoided at least 4 out of district placements to the Carroll and Landmark schools.

Our school committee is working with several neighboring school districts to evaluate how we can "join forces" to provide excellent programming while at the same time combining resources. Our collaborative is working with other collaboratives to achieve the same thing and we are piloting as part of the transportation initiative a new program this fall.

Franklin: We are constantly exploring the development of new in-district models and also working with collaboratives to build programs.

The challenge is having a large enough cohort of students with similar disabilities to make it cost-effective to develop new programs. Our best efforts are always placed in the direction of keeping students, to the greatest extent possible, in high quality in-district programs. Each year we assess the current population, expected, predicted population, and investigate the feasibility of developing new programs. In the past three years, we have developed four new in-district programs and have returned a number of students to the public schools. Hope these responses help.

Wellesley: We have increased the number of in district specialized programs, but that has only helped, but not covered, the additional increases.

Lexington: see link above

North Reading: We believe that our work in inclusion has helped to reduce tuitions in private schools and collaboratives and also reduced the cost of contract services for direct services by hiring our own staff.

Holyoke: We've been successful in providing services over the past five years. Please call if you would like some ideas.

Hampden-Wilbraham: We began a process two years ago and we have begun to see some results, i.e. fewer referrals. We focused on creating more effective team meetings and implemented differentiated instruction in the classrooms.

Hingham: (2) Greater focus on earlier literacy (identification of at risk children and defined interventions), new focus= working on benchmarks such as a better definition of effective progress at each level and clearer entrance and exit criteria for specialized services as at least starting points for conversations with parents; also planned is better legal advice to regular education teachers about extraneous comments at team meetings and their potential impact on IEP commitments

This is a good topic and one we are struggling with. Would really appreciate a summary of what others are doing.

Orange: . For our district (only PreK - 6) we funded and set up two Transition rooms. Roughly for grades K-2 and 3-5. The thought behind this was that most of our concerns involved explosive (very, very explosive) kids and too many kids who are just not socially and/or emotionally ready for school, or for an academic environment. These kids need more time to understand and internalize the structures and expectations of a public school.

Our first year seem to be a very positive step. We are hoping to control more costs - while better serving kids through having two rooms. This also means we can give children the space when they need without an out-of-district placement.

Spencer-East Brookfield: We have set up several new programs to help contain costs. They are a JHS behavior program, two moderate needs self-contained classrooms for kids who are primarily cognitively delayed, and an ABA program for autistic kids.

Nashoba: Nashoba has done a remarkable job of managing excellent programs at affordable expenses over the last few years. Our budget has either dropped or remained the same during this period of time.

I attribute this to a number of factors:

Leadership: The department has been lead for the last two years by two remarkable people who have made a concerted effort to recognize the strengths of our programs and their weaknesses and nurtured the former and strengthened the latter.

Continuum of Services: We finally have a continuum of services that provides a depth of opportunities for our students, parents and teachers that address almost all student needs. We do this predominantly in-house and have few outside placements. With the exception of three or four students, we have not made any outside placements during the past four years.

The latter point is a credit to our teachers who have embraced a focused professional development effort around differentiated instruction and have applied their learning across the board to meet student needs. We have really tried to provide access to learning strategies that help all children, but many help a significant need identified for language based learners.

We also did district wide training in the STAT process which is a clearing house for pre referral and problem solving for teachers by teachers and parents.

My last specific suggestion which was a conscious effort to standardize the identification process by having all team chairs / school chairs be under the supervision of the director of special education. This made a considerable change in the number of referrals and ultimate identification of students.

At the same time we have few appeals, fewer IEP's that go unsigned, and fewer issues with advocates being invited to the meetings.

All is not perfect, but many things are working when looking at your questions from a strict financial lense.

Franklin:

Cost Effective Programs: Develop programs within the district to keep special education students in educational settings within district schools.

Implement general education supports and programs in literacy to provide a wide range of educational services to all students.

Chelsea: In-district sped programs at all grade levels. Having alternative programs that target behavior available in grade 5-8 as an alternative to sped identification. Spending closely monitored by business office. Transportation closely monitored and re-bid every few years.

Millbury: Many of our increased costs are due to the explosion of children diagnosed on the autism spectrum. Four years ago Millbury began a program we refer to as Classroom IMAGINE to accommodate these children within our facilities. We have also tuitioned in students from surrounding towns.

Dedham: We have found ourselves needing to offer more substantially separate models of special education support for students with more intensive disabilities. In addition, we have been working very hard to increase our staffs' working knowledge and skills set in ABA and ABA techniques, as well as seek an autism specialist for our district.

Sudbury: We moved to CASE for transportation which saved us \$100,000 per year. We are developing programs in-house when a cohort of students reach a number that makes

such a program cost effective. For us this has meant 4 new programs in 3 years. We have gotten principals more involved in the child study process and feel like this has placed some constraints of identification of students and services delivered.