



## A First Step to a More Inclusion Based Special Education Model in Keene Elementary Schools

At the Public Hearing in January and First Session in February, there will be a lot of talk about the numbers of “tutors” Keene School District will employ for 2014-15. The purpose of this document is stating the facts to clear up misconceptions and misinformation.

### **A Change in Thinking – from Low Expectations to High Expectations**

Any change process first requires a change in how people think about reality and approach it. Right now, we unfortunately have a system that perpetuates low expectations when it comes to our Special Education students. We employ “tutors” to work with students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) in a regular classroom setting because we *expect* they cannot be successful in those academic tasks without it, and we *expect* they cannot behave in that setting without the need for tutorial help. We need to first raise our expectations and expect students with IEPs to do this work and to behave.

We also have low expectations for the general education teachers in charge of these students. We *expect* that the teachers don’t command the skill in differentiation and classroom management to meet the needs of all students. We need to *expect* more of our teachers, and support their growth. We can spend money on employing tutors and not solve the problem of *low expectations* or we can invest in the professional development of our teachers now to ensure they are prepared to meet the needs of all students.

These statements do not mean that the adults working with Special Education students in the Keene School District actually have lower expectations. Nor does it mean they do not care and work very hard for the success of all students. Nothing could be further from the truth.

However, the way our system is set up, *utilizing Shared Tutors for students with disabilities*, sets up lower expectations than the rigorous and challenging instruction and strategies that should be in place for their needs and to facilitate their success.

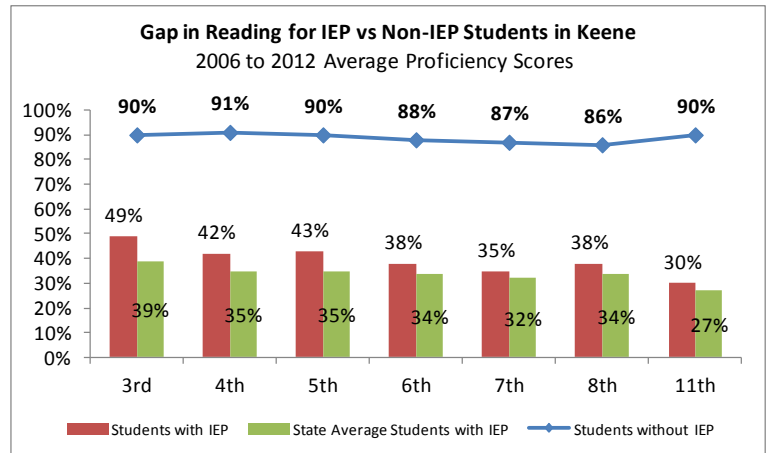
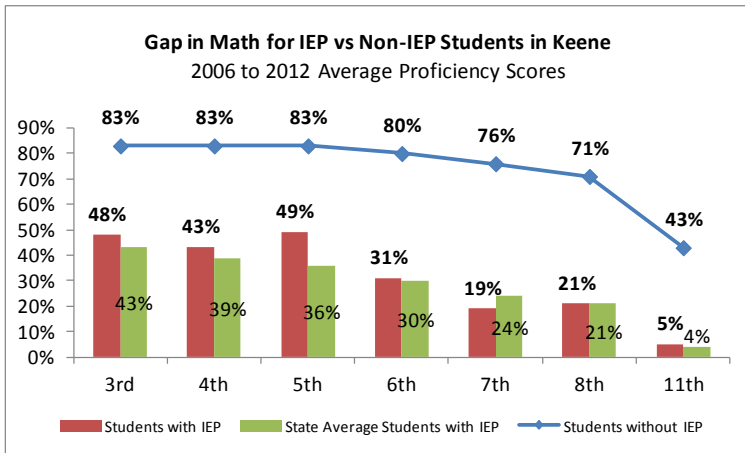
What we should have in place for every student with an IEP is:

- 1) A challenging and meaningful curriculum.
- 2) Differentiated daily lessons that target their specific needs and interests, and engages them in the instruction.
- 3) Modifications and accommodations in place that are outlined in their IEP and beyond those outlined.
- 4) A Multi-Tiered approach to culture and behavior in every classroom and school that reinforces the behavior we expect in classrooms, and responds appropriately to behaviors we don’t want.
- 5) A robust Response to Instruction (RtI) model that is embedded in all the systems of the School so that no student falls through the cracks in terms of academics or behavior.

Students certainly can choose to not be engaged and/or to fail, but we cannot allow this behavior on their part.

- 6) An inclusive classroom that partners General Education Teachers with Special Education Teachers to ensure the five strategies above are in place for every student.

**With our Low Expectations for IEP Students with Shared “Tutors” – we have created a system that disadvantages their growth and achievement.**



Over the last six years of available NECAP data, our district has perpetuated a large achievement gap between students with IEPs and their peers without IEP’s in both Reading and Math. This achievement gap is unconscionable. We can no longer invest in a strategy that targets our most vulnerable students with the least qualified adults in the building. Our IEP students deserve to be in a general education setting where they are challenged with the support of teachers – both General and Special Education.

**Investing Towards an Inclusion Model – Team Teaching with General and Special Education Teachers**

The 2014-15 Budget begins the first step towards supporting IEP students with Shared Tutors with a different model. Every student who has a shared tutor in their IEP keeps that support of the shared tutor in 2014-15. However, each Learning Center (Special Education) Teacher will partner with at least one General Education teacher in their Elementary School building to begin implementing a Co-Teaching (Team Teaching) model to support IEP students in the General Education setting for a small part of their day (both teachers involved). We are providing professional development over the summer for those teachers, including on-site, expert coaching visits throughout the year for feedback and growth. We would continue this transition for the next few years until we have a comprehensive Co-Teaching model in place for IEP students that have shared tutors currently in their IEPs.

We are also investing in the classroom management skills of our staff that want to gain more skills in 2014-15 and beyond. Also, every school will use a team-based approach to build a Multi-Tiered

Cultural Rtl system for their school. This approach must be in place to ensure that every student understands what is expected of them, and all the adults know how to consistently respond to students that do not meet expectations. We will also provide on-site professional development support for teachers that need more basic classroom management skills to be successful.

#### **Other Facts to Consider on this Issue**

- The current number of tutors budgeted for each Elementary School building has not been compared to the actual number needed based on the student's legal document – their Individualized Education Plan.
- All the adjustments in the number of tutors (-13) at the Elementary Schools bring each school back in line with their IEP needs – while still leaving a buffer of at least 1 to 2 tutors (based on hours available) to make this adjustment and handle a potential influx of new IEP students.
- Because of the two facts stated above - any student that currently has a *Shared Tutor* as part of their IEP during this school year will still have and be offered that service next year.
- We are not looking at changing any One-on-One Tutors as part of this process – so any student with those services will not be affected during 2014-15.
- Between 2011 and 2013 – 69 Tutors have left their positions district wide. Since the 2014-15 budget only proposes a net change of (-6); we do not believe that any Tutor will have to go through a Reduction in Force as part of this change during this budget cycle.

*January 14<sup>th</sup> 2014*

Keene School District Administration