

Sample Public School District

SPECIAL EDUCATION 5-YEAR TRENDS

REPORT: 2012-2017

Overview

01 - Proficiency & Achievement
Academic Performance of Students with Special Needs

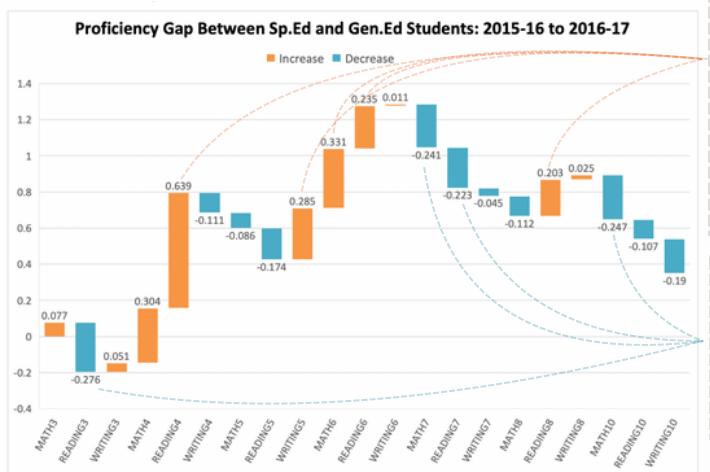
02 - Budgeting & Spending
Factors Driving the Increase in Special Education Costs

03 - Spending vs. Outcomes
Impact of Increased Spending on Academic Performance

04 - Recommendations
Opportunities and Further Research to Improve Outcomes and Reduce Costs

Proficiency & Achievement

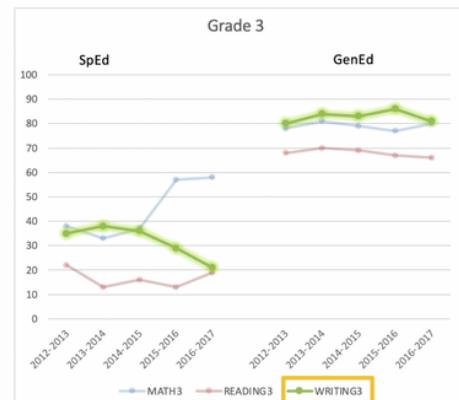
Sp. Ed student performance declines most notable in Grade 4 Math/Reading, Grade 5 Writing, and Grade 6 Math/Reading



On average, the proficiency gap has **increased** substantially in Grade 4 Reading and moderately in Grade 4 Math, Grade 5 Writing, and Grade 6 Math/Reading.

However, the gap has **decreased** moderately in Grade 3 Reading, Grade 7 Math/Reading, and Grade 10 Math.

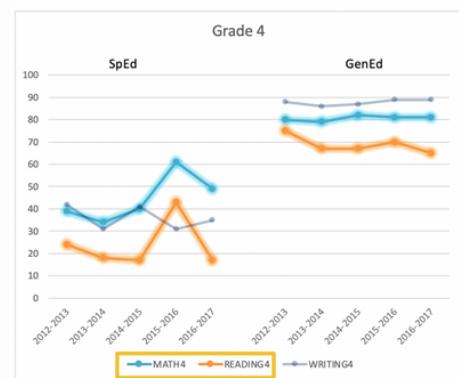
Below: 5-year trends show declines and changes in Sp. Ed student performance in Grade 3 Writing and Grade 4 Math/Reading



Notes: Proficiency gaps are measured using year-to-year probit-adjusted proficiency-based percentile differences. Effect size magnitudes are displayed in standard deviation units, and interpreted such that <.1 = small, .2-.5 = moderate, .5-1.0 = substantial (Cohen, 1988).

As referenced above, “proficiency gaps” denote the adjusted difference between the percentages of Sp. Ed and Gen. Ed students scoring proficient or above.

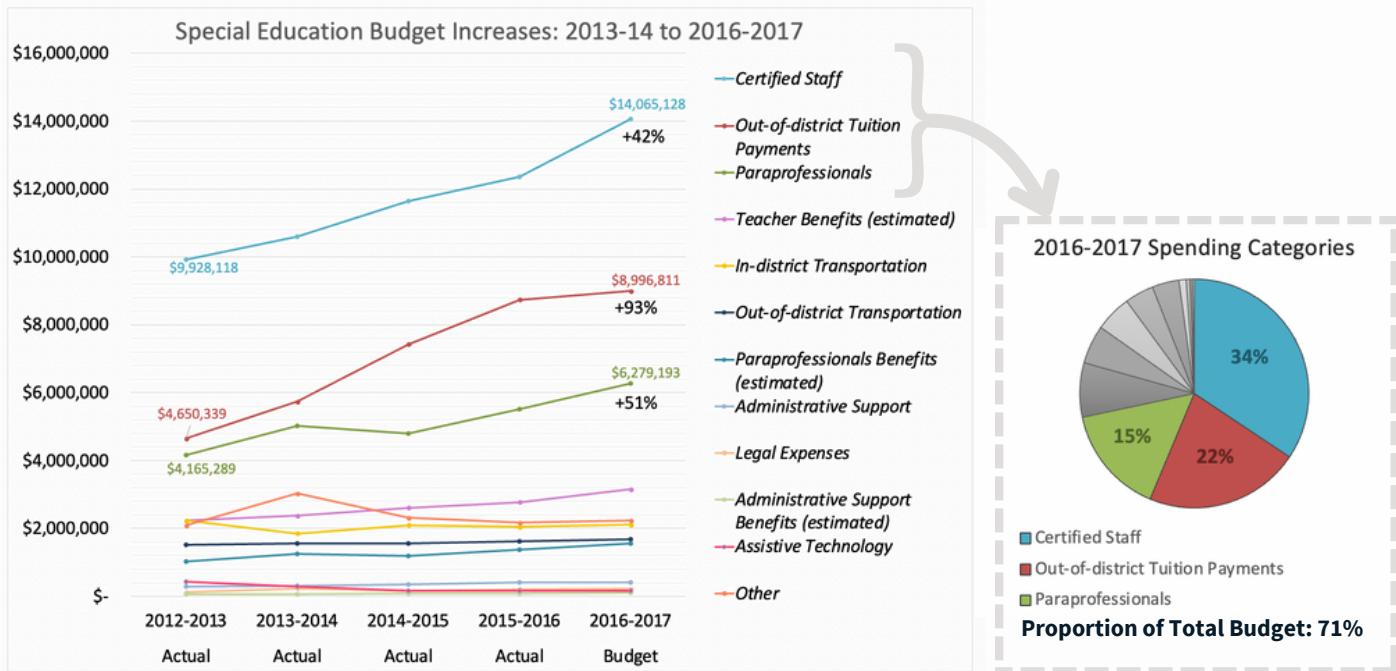
Positive effect sizes indicate that, from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017, the gap between Sp. Ed and Gen. Ed students increased, whereas **negative** effect sizes indicate that the same year-to-year gap has decreased.





Budgeting & Spending

Largest expenditures go towards Certified Staff, Out-of-district Tuition Payments, and Paraprofessionals, accounting for nearly three-quarters of the Total Budget

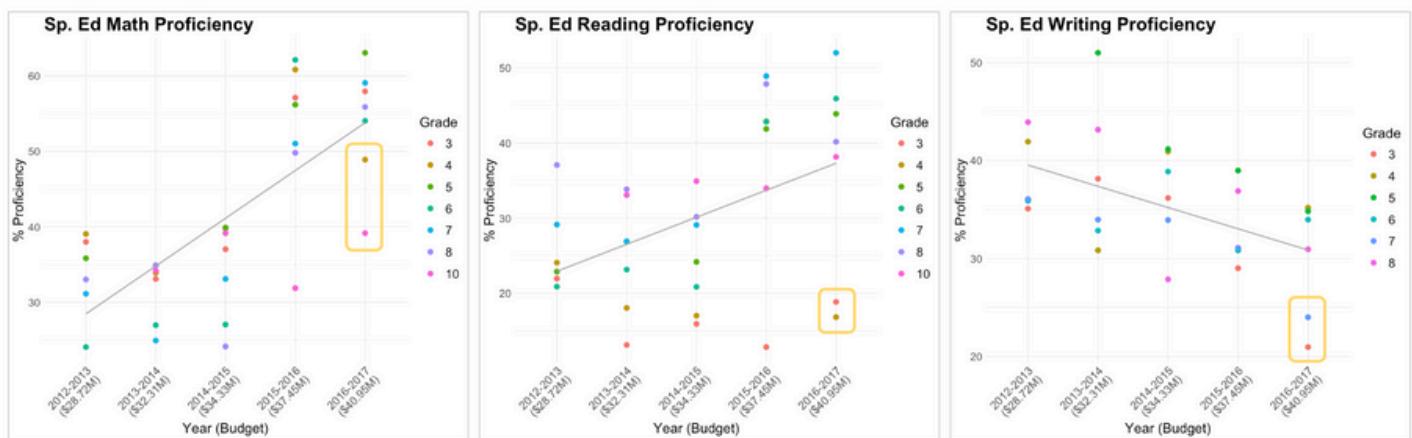


From 2013-14 to 2016-17, spending towards **Certified Staff** increased by +42%, **Out-of-district Tuition Payments** by +93%, and **Paraprofessionals** by +51%.

The substantial 5-year increase in spending towards **Out-of-District Tuition Payments** suggests that *Sample Public School District* schools are not adequately equipped to retain in-district students with special needs.

Spending vs. Outcomes

Increased Sp. Ed spending is related to increased proficiency across Math and Reading, but decreased proficiency in Writing



On average and across grade levels, as the total budget for Special Education increases, the percentage of students achieving proficient-and-above strongly **increases** in Math, slightly **increases** in Reading, and strongly **decreases** in Writing.



For 2016-2017, average student proficiency in Grades 4 & 10 Math, Grades 3 & 4 Reading, and Grades 7 & 3 Writing appears notably below the trend line.



Recommendations

1. Review Special Education staffing assignments across all district classrooms

Given that a large proportion of the current (2016-17) budget and associated budget increases come from staffing costs, further in-depth analysis should look into individual teacher and paraprofessional impacts on achievement. However, there are likely other factors associated with student proficiency outcomes, over and above fiscal changes or individual teacher effects. Reviewing the distribution of paraprofessionals and Special Education staff across the district and re-assigning experienced specialists to support in critical subject areas and grade-levels may off-set the increase in staffing costs, while avoiding layoffs and pay reductions.

2. Identify resources necessary to retain in-district students and implement targeted interventions in key areas

Declining proficiency outcomes for students with special needs were of particular concern in several key grade-levels and subject areas: Grade 3 Reading, Math, and Writing; Grade 4 Math and Reading; Grade 7 Writing; and Grade 10 Math. In addition, from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017, the achievement gap between Sp. Ed and Gen. Ed students had substantially increased in Grade 4 Math and Reading, Grade 5 Writing, and Grade 6 Math and Reading. Improving academic outcomes may help reduce costs incurred by out-of-district tuition payments, which account for nearly one-quarter of the 2016-2017 Sp. Ed budget. However, further investigation is needed to explain this steady cost increase and can help determine which resources and strategies are best-suited to provide successful instruction to in-district students with special needs.

3. Compile qualitative evidence and conduct strategic evaluations to determine factors associated with declining academic performance

Across all grade levels, Writing proficiency appeared to decrease over the 5-year period--while the Sp. Ed Budget increased. Conducting qualitative evaluations of individual teachers, curricula, and instructional methods can help pinpoint areas in need of improvement; teachers and classrooms that demonstrate success should be included to help determine staff training and potential re-assignment strategies. To triangulate the potential mechanisms driving disparate academic outcomes, qualitative findings should be paired with analyses of disaggregated individual student assessment scores (for each year they are available), as well as student and school-level socio-demographic information.

