# Each and Every Child

# The 2014 survey: Beyond belief

The 2014 Special Education Survey revealed a lot about the state's special education community. For one, we're a passionate bunch. Another, we have strong opinions. But it's all good: We use those two attributes to move the special education community forward.

That's no small challenge, amid the historic education reform the state is experiencing.

Nearly 4,000 people took the survey, from special education teachers and parents to administrators and counselors. In addition, para-educators and school board members were well represented, as were general education teachers and the Area Education Agencies.

The survey focused on the belief system we hold about the special education community.

"I think that the survey is a reminder about how important beliefs and attitudes are to accomplish change,"

said Barb Guy, the state's special education director. "And we know that in order to change the trend line for students with disabilities that we are going to have to make changes."

Those changes are being facilitated by mechanisms such as Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and intensive literacy instruction, among
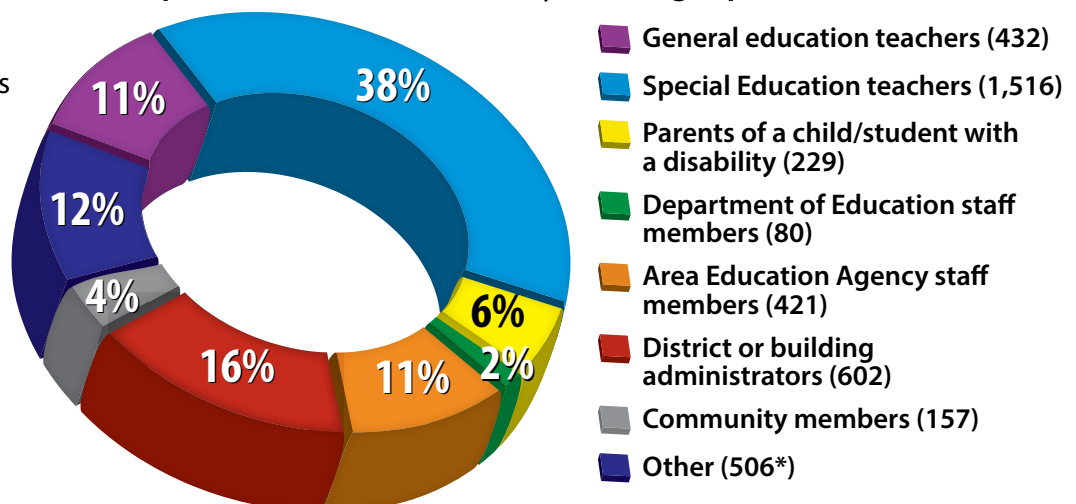
other things.

"We also are looking into how to build our partnerships to engage parents and outside agencies with our schools," Guy said.

The following include results from the 2014 survey, as well as some responses by Guy. Note that the

## 2014 special education survey demographics

- **General education teachers (432)**
- **Special Education teachers (1,516)**
- **Parents of a child/student with a disability (229)**
- **Department of Education staff members (80)**
- **Area Education Agency staff members (421)**
- **District or building administrators (602)**
- **Community members (157)**
- **Other (506*)**

38%

11%

12%

4%

16%

11%

2%

6%

*Includes self-identified counselors, paraeducators, school board members, nurses and others.*

*Barbara Guy*
*administrative consultant*
*Iowa Department of Education*

percentages don't add up to 100 percent because the "don't know" category wasn't included.

**The best way to determine what a student is capable of learning is to teach them challenging material and let them show you what they can do.**

55 percent agree/strongly agree
25 percent disagree/strongly disagree

*"Sure we should be showing challenging material to our students. What is important is to look at how students respond. Predetermining what is challenging to a student sometimes ends up in setting lower expectations. We want to continually challenge ourselves in setting goals for students. It is important to work with students to ascertain what is challenging. Some students may find challenging material, but they may not be motivated to do the work. As a parent or teacher, you have to use the student input to determine if it's challenging – or just boring. This has always got to be a partnership."*

**For students with IEPs, progress monitoring data should be collected weekly and used to inform instruction.**

64 percent agree/strongly agree
27 percent disagree/ strongly disagree

*"I was at a conference this summer and the keynote speaker said progress monitoring should not be confused with monitoring progress. His point is that progress monitoring has come to have a separate meaning around it, such as procedures and rules. What we really need to be talking about is monitoring a student's progress – the way you do that and the frequency you use depends on what you're trying to teach. For example, if you are working on a behavior that occurs every hour and you are only monitoring once a week, you may actually be increasing the wrong behavior. How can you tell if your instruction is effective? On the other hand, if you are monitoring only every two weeks and you want four points of data before you change your instruction, you could lose six weeks of instruction. It's essential you look at what you're trying to accomplish and set up a process to evaluate your success and make changes as soon as possible."*

**Currently, there are research- and evidence-based interventions available that will enable the majority of struggling students to reach basic proficiency in reading.**

68 percent agree/strongly agree
13 percent disagree/ strongly disagree

*"We believe the strategies are out there. Some of this is the work of our Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). Last year, 10 percent of the state's elementary buildings participated in universal screening through the*

Iowa TIER, *and now over 90 percent of elementary buildings are participating. Results from the universal screeners will help us focus our resources, get materials and support to teachers who in turn can use them with students before they experience great failure. In essence, we are trying to keep that gap from growing from the beginning. Where this is a benefit for us in special education is that students who need intensive instruction can be identified quicker, which will help when determining a student's need for special education. Our focus needs to be about changing the slope of a student's learning line – and MTSS will help with that."*

**Special education should only be provided to students with disabilities.**

40 percent agree/strongly agree
44 percent disagree/ strongly disagree

*"The federal law says that in order to receive special education, the learner must have a disability – and a need. The MTSS framework provides a mechanism to ensure students get supports when they need them, regardless of whether they have been identified for special education."*

**The appropriate time to set criteria for exit from special education is upon entry into special education services.**

43 percent agree/strongly agree
38 percent disagree/ strongly disagree

*"This should constantly be in the minds of people who are making decisions about learners in special education. This should never be a one-time only discussion. When a student is identified*

*for special education, there should be an articulation of expected performance. If that expectation is meant, then the question should be revisited as to whether the student continues to need services. Sometimes I think people are so eager to get a student into special education that they fail to clearly describe what the student should learn and what kind of performance should be expected. And once the student is identified for special education, we sometimes get myopic about what we're providing that we forget to step back to see how the student is accessing the general curriculum. Sometimes stepping back will result in exiting special education and sometimes in the identification of new needs."*

## The following are more results from the survey:

**Most students with mild disabilities can catch up to their typical peers with appropriate instruction.**

77 percent agree/strongly agree
11 percent disagree/strongly disagree

**We should rely on the evidence base to help us improve teaching and learning, including special education.**

86 percent agree/strongly agree
3 percent disagree/strongly disagree

**Using student performance data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using teacher judgment alone.**

80 percent agree/strongly agree
12 percent disagree/strongly disagree

**The IEP is a roadmap for the education of students with IEPs and informs their education.**

83 percent agree/strongly agree
8 percent disagree/strongly disagree

**The IEP sets high expectations for students and measures their progress.**

67 percent agree/strongly agree
18 percent disagree/strongly disagree

**The majority of teachers know what to do with assessment data they collect, including universal screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring data.**

32 percent agree/strongly agree
52 percent disagree/ strongly disagree

*Without the passion and expertise of Iowa's special education community, people like Erin Paterson, a senior at City High in Iowa City, wouldn't be looking forward to graduation and learning to work and live on her own.*

# Multi-Tiered System of Supports

The Iowa Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework is for all students, general education and special education alike, and is made up of five components:

1. Evidence-Based Curriculum and Instruction shall be provided at the Universal level

2. Universal Screening shall be used three times per year

3. Evidence-based, instructional interventions at the Targeted and Intensive levels shall be provided to each student who needs them

4. Progress Monitoring Data shall be collected and used to guide instruction

5. Data-Based Decision Making

# What *you* said in the survey...

**The following represents a cross section of comments made by survey takers.**

"In an effort to make data driven decisions we have a tendency to overburden the special educator with the responsibility of both collecting the data and implementing the data within the classroom. Utilizing a different individual to collect data and to drive discussion allows both tasks to be completed well, with fidelity, and truly assist students in becoming more successful!"

*"Many general education teachers are not well informed on accommodations/ modifications and using high, yet realistic expectations for students with disabilities. They need to realize that students with disabilities are capable of much more when given a chance and a challenge."*

"We are not finding ways to get students into the general education (inclusion). Special ed. is a service not a place!!"

*"Not all teachers are on-board yet with co-teaching. Some students need more intense/different curriculum than they receive in a co-taught class, yet they need the gen. ed. interaction. We need*

*more than all-or-nothing for many multi-cat kids."*

"Educators do not believe in their own ability to close the gap."

*"I think things are improving, and more schools and teachers are making data driven decisions. I also think more schools are instituting tiered support systems so that special ed. is reserved for only those students who need unique, specialized instruction."*

"In Iowa, we cannot do IQ testing. Some students just do not have the ability to succeed and/or close the gap!"

*"During the teacher education program there is not enough emphasis put on differentiation in the general education classroom. It is expected that special education teachers know how to differentiate, but not general ed. teachers. The emphasis needs to come during teacher training before licensure."*

"Lack of parent concern with some kids also hinders their progress in school. If a magic answer can be developed to get parents on board and wanting to work productively with their child's teacher, then much

progress would be made!"

*"Sufficient resources are not in place to help educate these students. This survey seems quite biased against special education in our state. The people making the decisions regarding special education/education in general need to actually be in a current diverse classroom before they pass judgment -- maybe then we could have a productive conversation."*

"Special education teachers are not given adequate time outside of the general education setting to work with Level 1 students to decrease the achievement gap. This time needs to be in addition to their time in the general education setting so they get additional assistance."

*"There are not enough special education teachers and there are not enough research based interventions available for us to use. General education teachers expect us to spend an inordinate amount of time in their classrooms co-teaching. However, most of this time is spent trying to help the kids keep up with the class. This is never going to close the achievement gap. Students need more intensive pull-out instruction in foundational skills in order to close the gap."*

# Coming soon: New Iowa Core website

The Iowa Department of Education will launch a new Iowa Core website this fall to help Iowans better access and use our state's academic standards, as well as give supporting resources that educators may use to implement the Iowa Core.

The website is part of a larger Iowa Core Resources project, which is designed to bridge the gap between the work to set rigorous standards at the state level and the work to put those standards into practice in classrooms.

The new Iowa Core website will have three sections: searchable standards, resources for educators, and resources for parents and the community.

Watch your email and the Iowa Department of Education's website, educateiowa.gov, for updates.