

Reducing Overidentification in Special Education and Increasing Student Achievement for All Students



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Lexington Demographics

- Lexington is a suburb of Boston. It is an affluent community with a population of 34,454 in 2020.
- In 2021, the median household income was \$202,852 and 7.7% of families were low income.
- In 2022, the school district had 6,790 students and 614 teachers.
- The racial composition in LPS was 42.8% Asian, 40.4% White, 3.9% African American/Black, 4.8% Hispanic or Latino, 8.0% Multi-race.
- In 2021, the high school graduation rate was 96.9%.
- In 2021, the per pupil expenditure was \$19,699.

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lexingtontownmiddlesexcountymassachusetts,MA/PST045222>

<https://reportcards.doe.mass.edu/2022/DistrictReportcard/01550000>

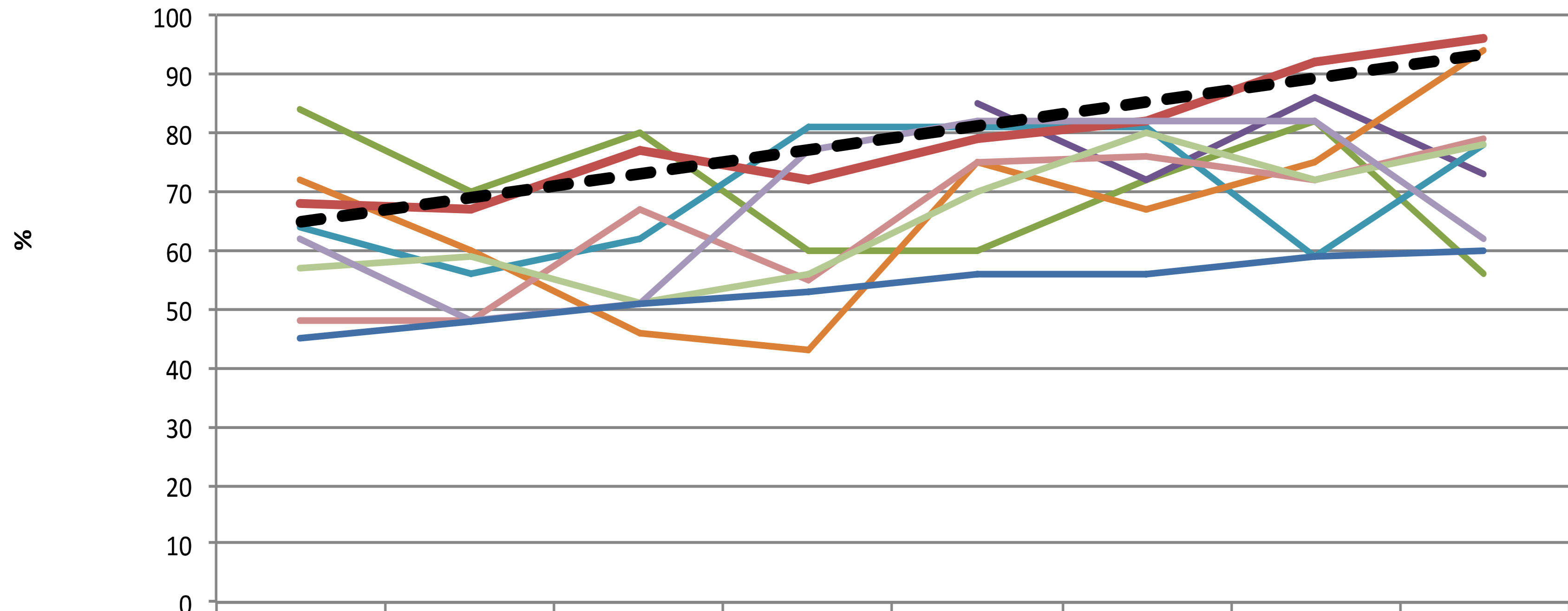
Just prior to my start on July 1, 2005, 4 of the 5 central administrators resigned. Their departments were dysfunctional.

- KEY PROBLEMS:**
- **Facilities:** Numerous school buildings were in poor condition; the budget lacked sufficient funds to maintain buildings and fix critical infrastructure (e.g., in one school, numerous heating units did not work properly).
 - **Finance:** \$550,000 in unpaid bills remained from the prior fiscal year; there was a \$1.3 million projected deficit in the current budget.
 - **Human Resources:** 72 of 600 teachers were unlicensed. No systematic processes existed for hiring, rehiring, evaluations, and tenure decisions.
 - **Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Learning:** No curriculum reviews had been conducted for 10 years; significant under-performance for the bottom 20% of students; ineffective professional learning programs.
 - **Special Education:** Out of control hiring of teaching assistants; over-placement of students in special education.

Percentage of Lexington Grade 10 Students in Special Education (2007-2015)

2007	17.0%
2008	18.3%
2009	14.5%
2010	15.8%
2011	14.4%
2012	17.1%
2013	11.8%
2014	13.3%
2015	11.2% (Three-year average = 12.1%)

Percentage decline = 4.9%
(2013/14/15 average - 2007)



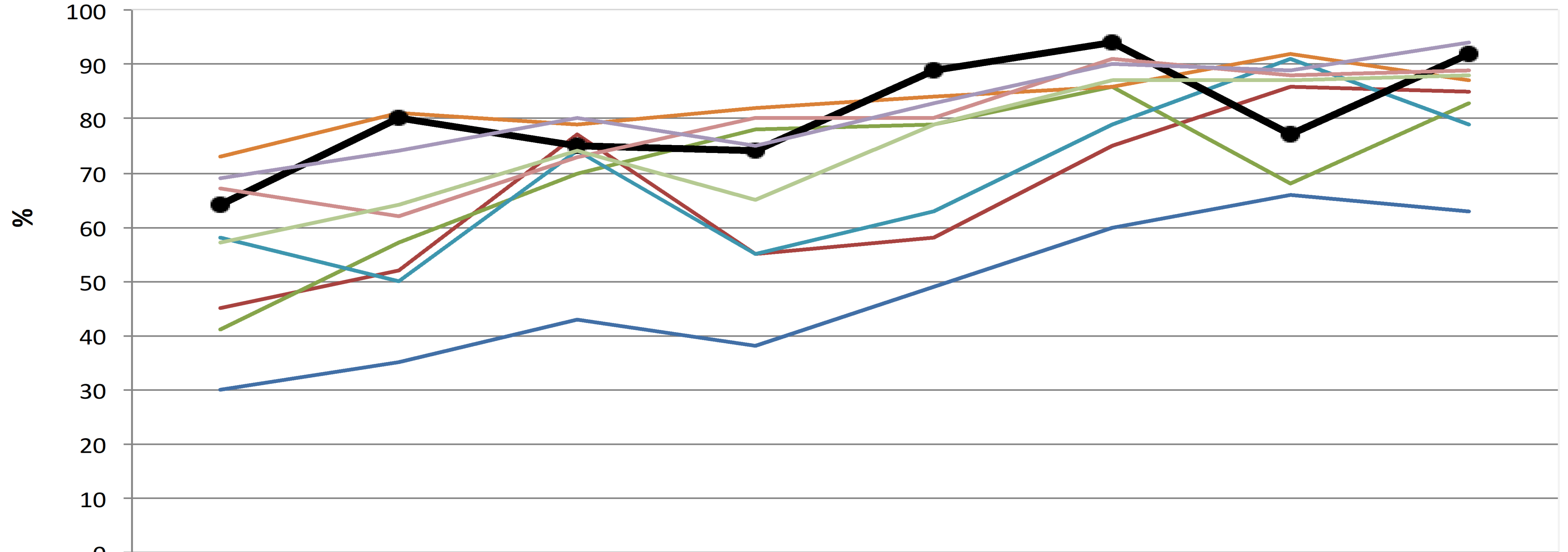
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bedford	84	70	80	60	60	72	82	56
Belmont	80		73		85	72	86	73
Brookline	64	56	62	81	81	81	59	78
Concord-Carlisle	72	60	46	43	75	67	75	94
Lexington	68	67	77	72	79	82	92	96
Lincoln-Sudbury	48	48	67	55	75	76	72	79
Newton	57	59	51	56	70	80	72	78
Wellesley	62	48	51	77	82	82	82	62
State	45	48	51	53	56	56	59	60

MCAS Mathematics: % Proficient and Advanced Grade 10 African American/Black



SOURCE: DESE Statewide reports

MCAS ELA: % Proficient & Advanced Grade 10 Special Education



	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bedford	45	52	77	55	58	75	86	85
Belmont	41	57	70	78	79	86	68	83
Brookline	58	50	74	55	63	79	91	79
Concord-Carlisle	73	81	79	82	84	86	92	87
Lexington	64	80	75	74	89	94	77	92
Lincoln-Sudbury	67	62	73	80	80	91	88	89
Newton	57	64	74	65	79	87	87	88
Wellesley	69	74	80	75	83	90	89	94
State Totals	30	35	43	38	49	60	66	63

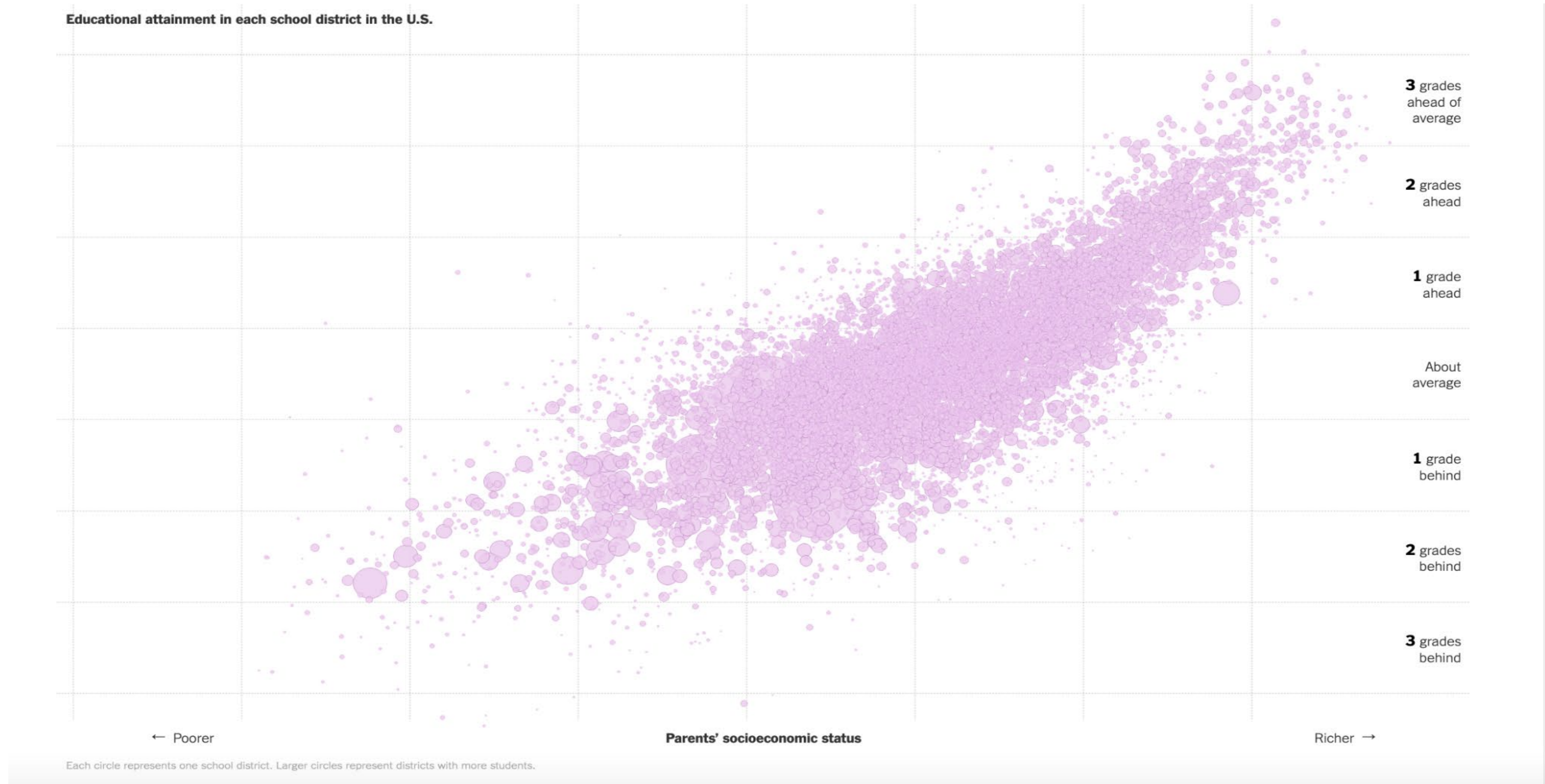
SAT Changes from 2006-2014*



*Based on a maximum of 2,400 points

Money, Race and Success: How Your School District Compares

(Stanford University study of approximately 12,000 school districts)



Implementing Lexington's Call to Action

THE PROBLEM:

In 2007, 49% of African American/Black high school students were in special education, and, as a group, performed significantly below White and Asian students (based on state/national tests, high school grades, and academic levels). The METCO Director told the superintendent that she believed that most METCO students did not have a disability.

KEY ACTION STEPS (FIRST FEW YEARS):

1. We examined the first IEPs for METCO students in order to identify why such students had been placed in special education, and in which grade.
2. I hired the retiring union president to conduct a comprehensive report (*See LaMura report*).

Quantitative Findings in the LaMura Report

- On the state assessment test (MCAS), significantly more White and Asian students scored at proficient or higher than African American and Hispanic students.
- The data showed that comparable METCO communities also have significant achievement gaps between White/Asian students and African American/Hispanic students.
- A significantly higher percentage of the METCO students in grades 1 and 2 received scores showing the need for special intervention in math and English language arts.
- METCO students were significantly under-represented in Honors/AP courses as compared with White and Asian students.
- 48.6% of METCO high school students were in special education. 33% of K-12 METCO students were in special education and 17.3% of all students were in special education.

Qualitative Findings in the LaMura Report

FOR STUDENTS WHO STRUGGLE:

- Inadequate system supports for struggling students
 - Teachers communicate low expectations
 - Students' and parents' low expectations
 - Ineffective/insufficient use of data to drive instruction
 - Over-reliance on special education
 - Weak literacy skills (especially vocabulary and composition)
 - Lack of mentors/role models for students
- Student lack of effort and attentiveness
 - Student belief that school is not a number one priority
 - Insufficient time to do schoolwork
 - Ineffective teaching styles and strategies

(Based on student surveys)

(Based on teacher surveys)

Implementing Lexington's Call to Action: Key Action Steps

3. Mr. LaMura and I held meetings in every school to discuss the results of the LaMura report.
4. In 2008, we established the K-12 Achievement Gap Task Force (AGTF) with teachers, administrators and parents. The AGTF met monthly for years.
5. We visited and researched schools that had significant success raising achievement for students of color, low income students and special education students.
6. The AGTF started its work by writing a detailed four-year action plan that identified specific strategies to close achievement gaps and build Tier 1 through 3 capacity. (See initial four-year plan)
7. The AGTF frequently communicated with all staff, board members and the public, and set up times for constituencies to share their ideas, recommendations and concerns.

Implementing Lexington's Call to Action: Key Action Steps

8. LPS hired its first K-12 Director of Professional Learning. We also redesigned our professional learning program to focus on student learning and student outcomes all year long. We encouraged great ideas to come from all directions (bottom up and top down) to expand teacher capacity and collective capacity, based on identified best practices and student needs.

Professional Learning - Three theories of action:

Creating a new professional learning model

Building collective teacher efficacy

Supporting teacher leadership are necessary components to reduce overidentification in special education and increase academic performance for all students

Implementing Lexington's Call to Action: **Key Action Steps**

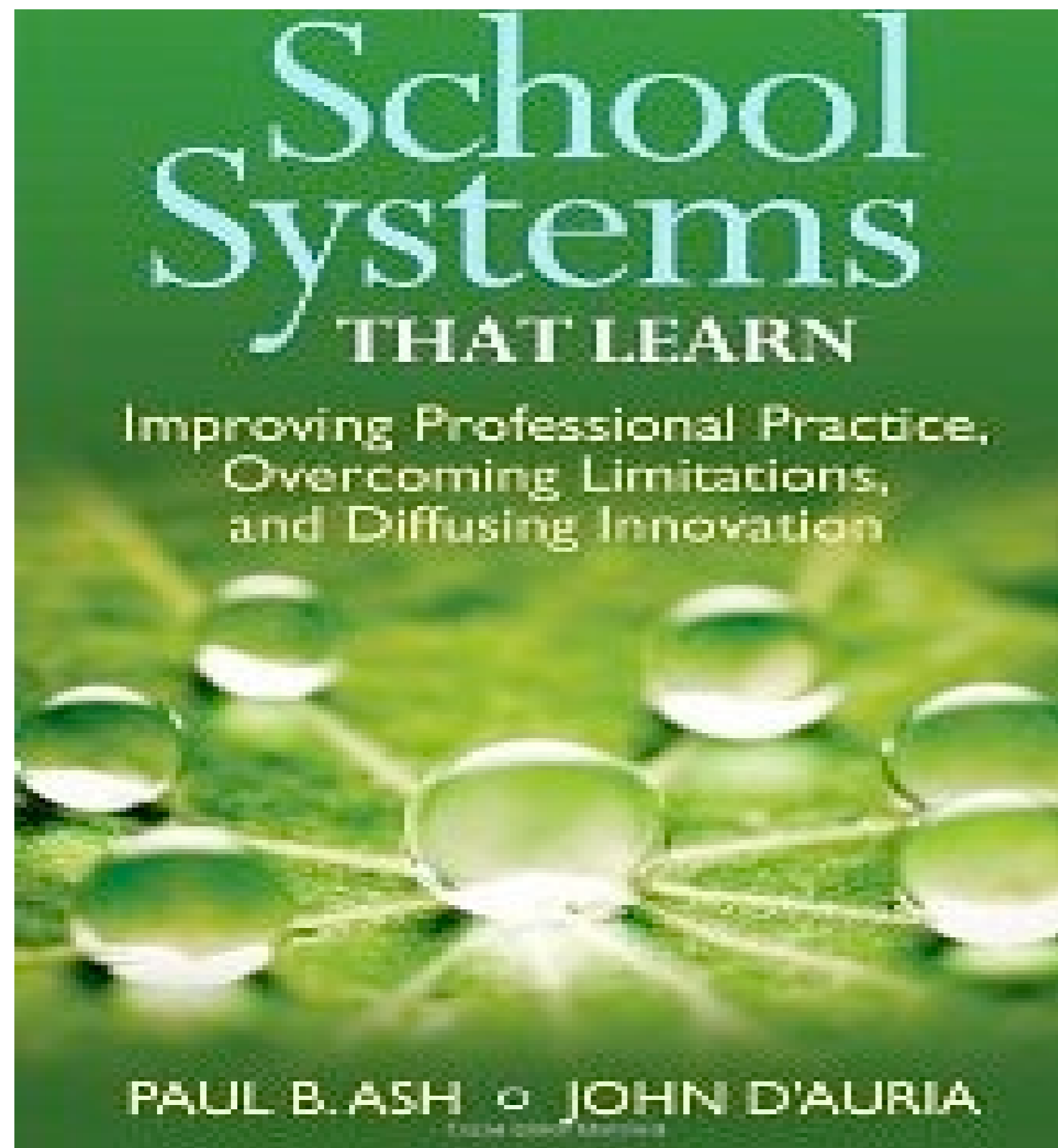
9. Beginning in year 2, all schools were required to annually develop multi-year, measurable goals and action plans that would strengthen Tier 1 teaching, assessment, student learning, and intervention strategies.
10. Beginning in year 2, schools began creating new TIER 1 through 3 initiatives that increased both student learning and reduced the percentage of students in special education. For example – Tier 1: expanded time for K-5 literacy & math instruction, created intervention blocks (K-12), instituted common teacher planning time (K-12), added K-12 literacy and math coaches); Tier 3 (*See 2007 proposal to the Lexington School Committee*).
11. In 2015, LPS hired a team of Harvard University researchers to examine LPS results. The report states, **“We find that Lexington has raised achievement among African American students as well as in the district overall.”** (See Ferguson report)

School Systems That Learn

Improving Professional Practice, Overcoming Limitations,
and Diffusing Innovation

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Questions?