

## **REASONABLE INTERPRETATION**

### **Administrative Summary of Academic Areas of Ends #2**

Over the past three months, the board has reviewed the results of test scores in the areas of mathematics, reading, writing, science and social studies. As a part of the monitoring reports, the administrative team established indicators that could serve as evidence that the district is or is not successful in working toward the Ends Policies. In October of 2001, targets were set in each academic area expressing desirable trends that we may see over the next few years as a result of our efforts to improve programs and instruction. It is noted that few of the designated targets were met in the 2001-2002 monitoring reports.

Below are factors that the administrative staff identified as having affected the trends over the past couple of years:

#### **1. Changes in test administration procedures**

Over past years, most special education students were not included in group norm-referenced testing (ITBS). When special education students were included in the testing, the scores of those students were disaggregated out of the group scores for reporting purposes. The rationale for this was that special education students are tested more often through the IEP process. There was also a concern that the scores of special education students would have a negative impact on the group scores.

As we have gotten more and more involved in the school improvement process through Quality Performance Accreditation and North Central Accreditation, there has been more emphasis on looking at results including "all" students on district-wide assessments. As a result, all students that can participate are now included in the ITBS scores. This factor alone may have impacted scores of the last 2 or 3 years.

When the district first began testing special education students, accommodations were provided for students with IEP's and 504 Plans. The same procedures were followed for providing accommodations that were established for the Kansas Assessment Program. This procedure somewhat lessened the impact of the scores of special education students, but we were later informed that providing accommodations on a norm-referenced test invalidated the norms established for the test. Therefore, over the past couple of years, we have eliminated the accommodations on the ITBS. This again may have some impact on results.

As of this year, all qualifying students were tested with no accommodations. If in the future the district continues this practice, trend results should no longer be impacted by this factor.

#### **2. Increased percentage of students in special education.**

As the district has moved toward more inclusive testing practices, the building principals have also reported an increase in the percent of students qualifying for special education services. A large percent of new students enter the district with IEP's already in place.

Some classes are reporting that 26-28 percent of students have IEP's. A few years ago, it was unusual for a class to have over 15 percent of students in special education. The increase of special education population may have impacted test scores.

Special education programs today place great emphasis on helping students reach the same standards as regular education students. The crucial consideration is the rate at which students may reach these standards.

The district, of course, has no control over the number of students qualifying for special education. But in future years, there may be a need to monitor increases or decreases in special education populations and the impact they have on test scores.

### **3. Changing demographics**

Research shows that one of the greatest factors in predicting test scores is socio-economic status. The board can see evidence of this factor in the district's own disaggregated data. A few years ago, USD 244 reported less than 20 percent of its students qualified for free or reduced lunches. It is this factor that is used to determine the low socioeconomic group. This percent of students in the low socioeconomic group is now at 28.

The district also has no control over the number of students in the low socioeconomic groups. Certain programs can however help in providing more opportunities for children that may be at risk due to economic restrictions. If the percent of students in the low socioeconomic group continues to increase throughout the district, test scores may be affected.

On a positive note, the board should take a close look at the strategic plans that all three buildings are using to increase student achievement. We are looking at data more closely than ever before to judge the impact of these plans on learning. Teachers are also looking more closely at data to pinpoint at-risk groups. Curriculum mapping and monitoring will better ensure full implementation of programs so that all students will receive complete and equitable opportunities to meet district standards. Staff development is aligned to building improvement plans, which fully support the board's mission and ends policies. Teachers are placing more emphasis on coordinating their programs so students may receive maximum benefits from their efforts. As teachers and administrators get more and more into the implementation and evaluation of the improvement strategies, this board should begin to see the positive impact on student learning.

It is believed that as staff and board begin a partnership of focusing efforts on students achievement and meeting the board's ends policies, that there will be numerous instances where the targeted growth will need to be interpreted against other factors that may impact that growth. It is believed that the above factors have an impact on student performance scores. The board is asked to accept this report as "reasonable interpretation" of the Ends 2 policy concerning the academic portions for 2001-02.