



# CLASSICAL CHARTER SCHOOLS

## SPECIAL EDUCATION AT SBCCS

### **Introduction**

Charter schools face challenges in fulfilling their responsibilities to provide special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). For charter schools, the practical difficulty of providing special education (SPED) students with a quality education has tended to limit discussion to the number of such students served by the school, rather than the students' academic performance. This, of course, runs contrary to the results- and performance-oriented focus that most charter schools espouse.

Clearly, evaluation of a school's success must be based on the success of its entire student body, including both general and special education students. SBCCS has therefore looked at the performance of its SPED students beyond just the proportion of special-to-general or the absolute number of SPED students it serves. SBCCS has put in place numerous techniques and strategies to boost the performance and academic growth of this cohort.

### **Importance of English Language Proficiency**

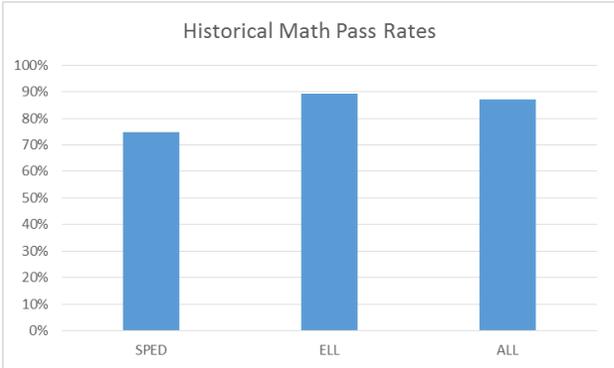
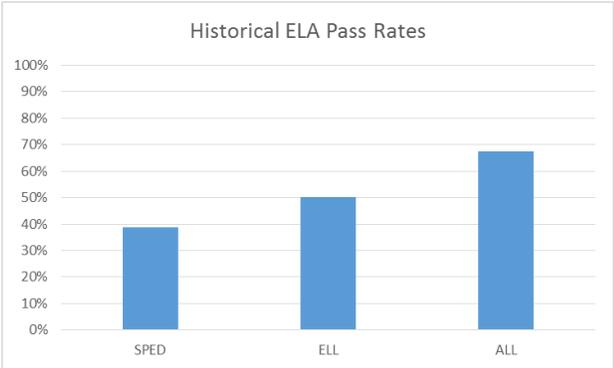
SBCCS' first priority is to ensure that all its students reaches proficiency in reading, writing and speaking English. This includes high-need, English language learners (ELL) and special education students. SBCCS believes that all its students, regardless of demographics, language, or disability, can achieve at high levels through a highly structured, disciplined environment in which expectations are clear and supports are ample.

Developing a strong proficiency in English as soon as possible enable high-need scholars to reach the academic goals established for all students. Therefore, SBCCS utilizes structured immersion (English-only instruction) to improve proficiency. The classroom teacher provides individualized, structured, and sequential lessons in English, and SPED students remain in the general education classroom with their peers during the school day. Teachers in structured immersion settings are provided with professional development tools to aid in improving scholars' comprehension and fluency. These include clarity of speech training, classroom noise control, use of native language when appropriate, maintaining positive outlook, setting academic goals, use of visual aids, remedial assistance, and planning toward total "mainstreaming" or declassification. Based on substantive research, and with these scholars' needs and goals in mind, structured immersion is a proven approach to achieving measurable academic success among ELL and SPED students.

### **Evaluating SPED Success**

Overall, SBCCS has a proven, and exceptional, academic achievement track record. In 2014, SBCCS won the National Blue Ribbon Award and was designated a "Reward" school by the New York State Education

Department. By isolating SPED students’ test scores, our commitment to providing this cohort with an education equal to that of general education students is apparent:



**Reading Level Attainment**

One of SBCCS’ specific goals for its students is to ensure that every scholar develops proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking in English. This goal does not change for special education students; in fact, it may be more important for SBCCS’ special education students to develop this proficiency quickly, as academic growth in future grades requires mastery of English. SBCCS evaluates students’ reading comprehension seven times each school year using the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. The assessments require students to read, analyze, and make predictions about short texts; each student is assigned a reading level from AA-Z based on the test results. Each letter also corresponds to a numerical grade equivalent: AA is equivalent to a pre-school reading level of -0.25 years of school, while Z corresponds to seven years of school. Each grade has a designated target reading level for the end of the year.

Grade	Kindergarten	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
Reading Level Goal	D	J	M	P	S	V

A student’s total growth during the school year is the difference between the student’s end of year (June) and start of year (previous August) reading levels. General education students at SBCCS achieve an average of 1.21 years of growth each school year and, impressively, SBCCS’ special education students average the identical 1.21 growth rate.

Much of this success among SPED students is a result of a commitment to bring high-need students to a high-performing level. At SBCCS, teachers work exceptionally hard with small groups of students, divided by reading level, to ensure that every scholar gets individual attention. Over the course of the school year, this small group approach allows a teacher to learn each scholar’s individual strengths and weaknesses, which the teacher can then target for improvement during the small group sessions.

**Summer Learning Loss**

One more basis of comparison with which SBCCS can assess special education students is the magnitude of their summer learning loss (“summer slide”) compared with that of general education students. This loss is calculated

using students' Fountas & Pinnell reading levels from the end of the school year, in June, and the first assessment of the next school year, the following August. The difference between these two reading level values quantifies the amount of learning each student has lost over the summer.

The average learning loss for SBCCS students is -0.22 school years of growth, while the learning loss for special education students at SBCCS is only -.017 school years of growth. This difference speaks to the tailored lesson plans that special education students receive, and it shows that the staff and teachers at SBCCS are delivering on the promise to ensure that SBCCS' special education students do not fall behind their peers.

### **Student Support Services**

SBCCS provides Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS) through a Special Education Coordinator. The Special Education Coordinator works exclusively with SPED scholars and provides additional push-in and pull-out services to these scholars per their Individual Educational Plan ("IEP"). Some special education scholars also receive related services per their IEP, for example: counseling, speech, physical or occupational therapy. (SBCCS also offers these services to scholars who do not have an IEP, but are projected to benefit from this extra support.)

### **Annual Attrition**

SBCCS has an average annual attrition rate of 14% among its special education scholars. This is largely due to special education students transferring out due to other services required by their IEP's, which SBCCS is not able to offer.