

# Nashua High School North

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*Home of the Titans*

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To the Titan Community:

Last year our school made modest gains in NECAP scoring and did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). As a result, we were placed on the list of Schools in Need of Improvement and subsequently submitted an improvement plan to the NH State Department of Education. We just recently finished our progress report for year one and believe we will make strides with our results. We will know for certain in late winter when the scoring of the upcoming NECAPs (October 6-8) are released.

Overall the scores improved between the 2007 and 2008 tests. The numeric Academic Performance Index (API) data show increases for all subcategories in both reading and math. Some people may be asking "if there were increases in the scores why is the school still in need of improvement?" The answer is in the Target Index (TI), a scaled number to which student scores must align or make a 10% increase toward (called Safe Harbor, or SH). The entire school may have reached the TI in both categories, which in North's case it did, but when the data is disaggregated, or broken down into specific subcategories as prescribed by the U.S. Department of Education, we see very different results. All subcategories must reach the TI or SH in order for the school to successfully reach AYP status.

What are the subcategories? Subcategories include race, gender, limited English proficiency status (LEP), socio-economic status (SES), students with an identified learning disability (IEP), migrant workers, and students receiving Title I services. It is critical to identify the different needs students from each category bring to the collective whole, and to find ways to tailor instruction that best fits each of the students. In a school as large as North, that is often difficult to do. It doesn't mean we aren't trying, however.

All of our students recently participated in a school-wide formative exercise. On September 10 our juniors completed a collection of NECAP release items while our freshmen, sophomores and seniors completed a set of Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) release items. Within each exercise was a series of objective content questions and



constructed response questions that were designed to illustrate student strengths and challenges in writing about something they had just read. On our first early release day our faculty scored every junior assessment, and from those data we were able to identify the constructed response as the primary challenge to our juniors, not content knowledge.

Constructed response activities are useful in any content area and in any academic circumstance. Teachers use both open and constructed response questions to assess students' levels of understanding about the content being taught in the classroom. The issue, then, is *how* the students approach the constructed response and subsequently answer the question.

For instance, a student will read a passage and then respond to the questions. The questions are directly related to the information in the passage. The student may answer the question correctly, that is, s/he has written the correct response, but s/he has done so without **exact text** from the passage.

A constructed response should be thought of as a building project: the passage is the wood and the answer to the question is the house. ***To build the house, you need to use the wood given to you.***

Our teachers have embedded more constructed response activities into their daily lesson plans to allow for more practice. Making inferences, drawing conclusions, and demonstrating comprehension through writing are key skills for success in all content areas, and according to all of the data we have seen are the skills our students need to practice most.

Please share this information with your child and emphasize the importance of the upcoming NECAP testing. We know we do not have a failing school; our students are a reminder of this every day. Our goal is to get off the list of Schools In Need of Improvement, and with your help I am certain we will be able to do just that.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Ryan" followed by a horizontal line.

David Ryan