Student Opportunity Act Evidence-Based Practice Grant
School Spotlight

Lunenburg Uses Grant Funding to Improve Differentiated Instruction at Turkey Hill Elementary School
(2026)



The Lunenburg Public School District, located approximately an hour northwest of Boston, serves 1,568 kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) students. Their high needs population represents 37% of their student body, with a steadily growing population of students with disabilities, numbers reflective of those at Turkey Hill Elementary School, the district's grades 3-5 school. As with most schools, growing student need has kept schools and districts busy adapting, but like schools in smaller, more rural districts, Lunenburg addresses these needs with limited resources to tackle them.

Nevertheless, in 2022, the district began implementing a new high-quality ELA and math curricula in grades K-5. During curriculum adoption, a data analysis revealed the additional need for intentional work to address gaps between their students with disabilities compared with students without. The district determined that improvement would only be realized if they strategically invested in building the professional practice of their teachers, supporting a co-teaching and inclusion model to focus work to close the gaps that existed for its students with disabilities.

To secure the necessary funding to provide teachers with sustained and meaningful support to improve instruction and student outcomes, the district applied for the Student Opportunity Act Evidence-Based Practice Grant. Analogous with Lunenburg's objective, the purpose of this multi-year grant is to assist districts and schools in addressing persistent disparities in achievement among specific student groups and improve equity and close achievement gaps by adopting evidence-based practices to enhance instructional delivery. With funding in place through fiscal year 2026 (FY26), the district could commit to enacting a plan to prioritize professional development and coaching to support practice and built long-term instructional capacity. The district hired a co-teaching coach to strengthen their team of special educators and general educators and, in tandem, strengthen Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) efforts to best ensure equitable access to grade-level learning.

As with the other schools in the district, teachers at Turkey Hill embraced the work, particularly, the school's grade 4 teachers. They quickly adopted a mindset of co-ownership for all learners' needs, so that classrooms became dedicated to "our kids" rather than students whose learning fell largely on special educators. With professional development and focused support from coaches, teachers found stronger footing in co-teaching and differentiating in the classroom.

We look at inclusion holistically. Every kid is our kid for each educator.

Admittedly, teachers note that it took some time to become proficient in inclusive instruction, but before long they felt empowered by their success in providing targeted support to students. Paraprofessionals also stepped in to provide additional differentiated instruction and in-class small group support, allowing students to remain in class for core instruction enhanced with more refined scaffolded instruction. As an added layer of support,

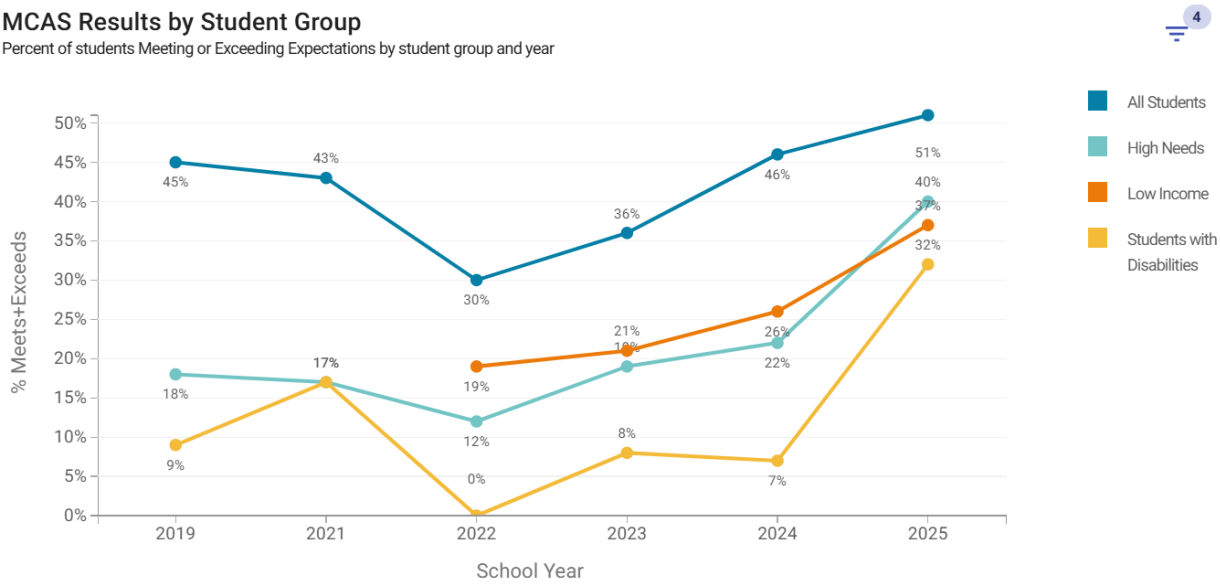
the school adjusted its schedule to allow for targeted intervention during two flex periods per day without keeping students from core academic time while receiving support.

Additionally, teachers are now engaging in “data dives” in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to inform instruction and identify intervention needs with more agility and urgency. Teachers at Turkey Hill explain that, during PLCs, they have strengthened their focus on interpreting data to “inform how we teach in the classroom for tiers I, II, and III,” noting that the inclusion of specialists (e.g. special educators, etc.) in PLCs is crucial as well, “so that all educators are on the same page.”

With new systems and a strengthened MTSS model in place, teachers are advancing higher-level thinking skills by pushing students to productively struggle with analysis and interpretation. For example, teachers model how to approach a math problem, demonstrating how to “think about your thinking,” understanding what the problem is about, then start picking away at it. Teachers also note that, in working with instructional coaches, they learned that part of driving student thinking is providing room for students to talk more than teachers.

The work is paying off, with the fourth-grade team of teachers leading the way in terms of gap closing and student group gains, especially in math. Students in grade four have steadily increased the frequency with which they meet or exceed expectations on MCAS, and gaps have closed in the school’s all students, low income, and high needs student groups since receiving the grant in FY23. After some inconsistent gains in math, students with disabilities made significant progress in closing gaps on MCAS in 2025, increasing the percentage of students meeting and exceeding expectations on math by 25 percentage points since 2024, far surpassing their pre-pandemic level of 9 percent (Figure 1).

Figure 1:



Data Source: [MCAS Data Trends | E2C Hub]

While gaps continue to close and progress trends upward, educators at Turkey Hill Elementary School continue to enthusiastically reflect and improve, having benefited from the capacity they have built through strategic work toward equity.