IMPROVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES IN THE FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT by the Strategic Support Team of the Council of the Great City Schools Summer 2018
# Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Council of the Great City Schools (Council) thanks the many individuals who contributed to this review of special education programs in the Fresno Unified School District (FUSD). Their efforts were critical to our ability to present the district with the best possible proposals for improving special education and related-services in the school system.

First, we thank Bob Nelson, the school district’s superintendent. It is not easy to ask one’s colleagues for the kind of reviews conducted by the Council. It takes courage and openness and a real desire for change and improvement. He has these in abundance.

Second, we thank the FUSD school board, which approved and supported this review. We hope this report meets your expectations and will help improve special education services across the school system.

Third, we thank Fresno staff members who contributed to this effort, particularly Brian Beck, Assistant Superintendent with Special Education and Health Services, who together with Kimberly Rodrigues, Marilyn Wood and John Howell organized and facilitated the interviews and provided the detailed data and documents requested by the team. The time and effort required to organize a review such as this are extraordinary, and their work was much appreciated. Fresno’s hospitality was exemplary and far exceeded expectations.

Fourth, the Council thanks the many individuals who met with us, including central office administrators, principals, general and special educators, paraprofessionals and aides, related-services personnel, parents, and representatives from the Fresno Teachers Association (FTA) and the California School Employees Association (CSEA). All work passionately to support children with disabilities and ensure the school district serves these students in the best possible manner. District staff we met were dedicated to their students and had a strong desire to improve.

Fifth, the Council thanks Marco Tolj, strategic planning and data-management director for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). His contributions to this review were enormous. We also thank LAUSD for allowing him to participate in this project. Also, thanks to Sowmya Kumar, former special education services assistant superintendent for the Houston Independent School District who contributed her time to participate in this important activity. The enthusiasm and generosity of these individuals and their districts serve as further examples of how the nation’s urban public-school systems are banding together to help each other improve outcomes for all urban students.

Finally, I thank Julie Wright Halbert, the Council’s legislative counsel, who facilitated the work of the team prior to and during the team’s site visit. And I thank Sue Gamm, a nationally recognized expert in special education and a long-time consultant to the Council, who worked diligently with Ms. Halbert to prepare the final report. Their work was outstanding, as always, and critical to the success of this effort. Thank you.

Michael Casserly
Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools.
CHAPTER 1. PURPOSE AND ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

FUSD’s superintendent, Bob Nelson, who was appointed to his position in September 2017 by the Board of Education requested that the Council of the Great City Schools review the district’s services to students with disabilities and provide recommendations to narrow the achievement gap between these students and their nondisabled peers and improve special education and related services. This report was designed to help FUSD achieve its goals and maximize the district’s capacity to educate all students effectively.

The Work of the Strategic Support Team

To conduct its work, the Council assembled a team of experts who have successfully administered and operated special education programs in other major urban school districts across the country. These individuals also have firsthand expertise with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and are well versed in best practices in the administration and operation of special education programming nationwide.

The Council’s Strategic Support Team (the team) visited the district on February 13-17, 2018. During this period, the team conducted interviews and held focus groups with more than 150 district staff members, parent and guardians, FTA and CSEA representatives, and many others. (A list of individuals interviewed by the team is presented in the appendices of this report.) In addition, the team reviewed numerous documents and reports, analyzed data, and developed initial recommendations and proposals before finalizing this report. (See the appendices for a list of documents reviewed.) On the final afternoon of its site visit, the team briefed the superintendent on the team’s observations and preliminary recommendations.

This approach to providing technical assistance to urban school districts by using senior managers from other urban school systems is unique to the Council and its members. The organization finds it to be an effective approach for several reasons.

First, it allows the superintendent and staff members to work with a diverse set of talented, successful practitioners from around the country. The teams provide a pool of expertise that superintendents and staff can call on for advice as they implement recommendations, face new challenges, and develop alternative solutions.

Second, the recommendations from urban school peers have power because the individuals who develop them have faced many of the same challenges encountered by the district requesting the review. No one can say that these individuals do not know what working in an urban school system is like or that their proposals have not been tested under the most rigorous conditions.

Third, using senior urban school managers from other urban school communities is faster and less expensive than retaining a large management consulting firm that may have little to no programmatic experience. The learning curve is rapid with Council teams, and it would be difficult for any school system to buy on the open market the level of expertise offered by them.

Members of the Strategic Support Team for this project included the following individuals:
Methodology and Organization of Findings

The findings in this report are based on information from multiple sources, including documents provided by FUSD and other organizations; electronic student data provided by the district; group and individual interviews; and legal sources, including federal and state requirements and guidance documents. No one is personally referred to or quoted in the report, although some school district titles are referenced when necessary for contextual reasons.

Chapter 2 of this report provides background information on the school district.

Chapter 3 presents an executive summary of the report.

Chapter 4 presents the team’s findings and recommendations. These observations and proposals focus specifically on areas that the superintendent and district leadership asked the Council’s team to address. These include the improvement of academic achievement and the incorporation of ‘universal design for learning’ for all students; the development and reinforcement of a culture of collaboration and connectivity throughout the system that supports the inclusion of students with disabilities; staffing shortages and concerns; disproportional outcomes and disciplinary rates among students with disabilities by race, gender and ethnicity; the improvement of cultural responsiveness; increased accountability and ownership in the success of students with disabilities; and attention to the concerns of community advocates and the effective involvement of parents.

A discussion of these areas is divided into four broad sections.

I. Framework for Accelerating Student Achievement
II. Disability Demographics and Referral/Identification of Disability
III. Achievement Data for Students with Disabilities
IV. Accelerating Achievement and the Wellbeing of Students with Disabilities
V. Support for Teaching and Learning for Students with Disabilities

The findings and recommendations in the report summarize relevant information, along with descriptions of district strengths, opportunities for improvement, and recommendations for change.
Guiding this inquiry was a desire on the part of district leadership to establish FUSD as the “gold standard” in addressing the needs of students with disabilities in California.

Finally, Chapter 5 lists all recommendations for easy reference, and provides a matrix showing various components or features of the recommendations.

The appendices include the following information:

- Appendix A compares special education staffing ratios in 79 major school systems across the country.
- Appendix B presents the district’s special education improvement plan
- Appendix C lists documents reviewed by the team
- Appendix D lists individuals the team interviewed individually or in groups and presents the team’s draft working agenda.
- Appendix E presents brief biographical sketches of team members.
- Appendix F presents a description of the Council of the Great City Schools and a list of Strategic Support Teams that the organization has fielded over the last 20 years.
CHAPTER 2. BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

Over decades of growth and a series of school district consolidations, Fresno Unified School District is now the fourth largest school district in California. The district is governed by a seven-member board of education with members elected in each of seven areas.

The district enrolls some 75,077 students in preschool through 12th grade. Some 7,983 (10.6 percent) of the district’s students have a disability. These figures include 4,742 children in preschool and transition kindergarten--with some 524 (11.1 percent) children having a disability. Furthermore, the district has a robust program for 402 infants and children under three years of age. This number includes 106 children with disabilities (26.4 percent).

Currently, the district operates 65 elementary schools, 13 middle schools, 10 high schools, 4 alternative schools, and 3 schools solely for students with disabilities.

At 68 percent of district enrollment, Hispanic students comprise the school system’s largest racial/ethnic category. This group is followed by students who are Asian (10 percent), white (9 percent), African Americans (8 percent), and others (4 percent). Some 15,075 students are English learners (ELs), including 5,030 who are long term ELs. Of all ELs, 2,395 (16 percent) have individualized education programs (IEPs), and 1,409 are long term ELs (28 percent). Students speak approximately 100 languages and dialects.

Fresno has a high poverty rate at 88 percent. This figure is especially high compared to FUSD’s two neighboring school districts: Clovis Unified (16 percent) and Golden Valley Unified (12 percent). At least twice as many Fresno Unified students qualify for free/reduced-priced meals compared to students in these districts (88 percent, 43 percent, and 34 percent, respectively).

Despite the economic challenges facing the district, the leadership of the school system takes a “no excuses” stand, aggressively pursuing four goals:

1. All students will excel in reading, writing, and math
2. All students will engage in arts, activities, and athletics
3. All students will demonstrate the character and competencies for workplace success
4. All students will stay in school on target to graduate

By partnering with groups like the College Board and the Long Beach Unified School District, the district has a strong desire that all students, including those with disabilities, will be career-ready graduates with the largest number of opportunities upon graduation.

1 The terms students with IEPs, students with disabilities, and students receiving special education all refer to students meeting the eligibility requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). When the reference is to students with disabilities eligible under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, that distinction will be clarified.

CHAPTER 3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Superintendent and Board of Education of the Fresno Unified School District asked the Council of the Great City Schools to review the school district’s special education programs and make recommendations on how to improve services for students with disabilities. To conduct its work, the Council assembled a team of special education experts from across the country with strong reputations for improving services in their own districts and special expertise in the Individuals with Disability Education Act. The Council team visited Fresno in February, conducted numerous interviews, reviewed documents, and analyzed data. At the end of the visit, the team formulated preliminary observations and recommendations, and discussed them with the district’s superintendent and assistant superintendent of special education and health services.

The Council has reviewed numerous special education programs in big city schools over many years. Unfortunately, the organization is not always able to point out positive features of each school district’s work with students with disabilities. In this case, however, the FUSD has many things it can be proud of.

The school system has a well-defined vision for student success and this vision generally includes all students. Personnel in the school district has also prepared well-regarded preliminary draft documents to guide MTSS practices. There is a clear expectation that schools will provide three tiers of instruction. Furthermore, the district has developed a well thought out EL Master Plan that includes components for ELs with disabilities.

The percentage of students with disabilities in FUSD is 10.6 percent, compared to 12 percent at the state level and 13.1 percent nationally, meaning that the district—unlike many others across the country—does not have a problem with over-identification of young people. In addition, there is little over-identification of students by race. However, there was some overidentification of African American males in special education. In general, overidentification in Fresno depend a lot on a combination of race, sex, and disability area. Overall rates are low, however.

In addition, initial evaluations and triennials are over 99 percent on time, suggesting an efficient IEP process. The school system is also under the 1.0 percent cap on the numbers of students with disabilities taking an alternative assessment, an accomplishment achieved by few other major city school systems. And the district has developed multiple initiatives to identify developmental delays in young students.

The district has also made headway over the years in bolstering its inclusive practices, although there are still larger than expected numbers of students in isolated settings. In addition, most graduates with disabilities were engaged in some sort of specific activity after leaving school that was tracked by the system. And the district and its students enjoyed a 96 percent special education teacher retention rate.

Moreover, the Superintendent has a strong knowledge of and expertise in special education, and he is dedicated to leading changes for FUSD’s students with disabilities. Immediately after the preliminary briefing by the Council team, the Superintendent and School Board took action to
add 59.5 FTE to the program in 2018-19 at a cost of approximately $5 million dollars. This included an additional 16 FTE for special education teachers, 24 FTE for special education paraprofessionals, 5 FTE for psychologists, 4.5 FTE for speech language pathologists, and 10 FTE for credentialed school nurses. This commitment by FUSD and its students with disabilities is to be commended.

Of course, the district has considerable challenges to making its special education programming all that educators, parents, and the public want. This report identifies multiple issues that the school system needs to attend to. Some 3.3 percent of African American students with IEPs were suspended more than 10 school days which means these students are 2.83 times more likely than their peers with IEPs to receive an OSS. The system’s multi-tiered systems of support for both academics and behavior needs to be fully fleshed out and its program descriptions need to be finalized. How the school system’s staff is organized around special education does not maximize coordination or information flow. Information for parents and the public about the nature of the program and who to call for information is not readily available. Classroom monitoring practices do not routinely include observations about students with disabilities. The achievement levels of students with disabilities is too low, and there have been a considerable number of staff vacancies historically. Finally, the district has been cited by the state for several issues.

The Council of the Great City Schools has prepared numerous recommendations to help the FUSD schools move forward on behalf of its students with disabilities. These proposals are largely in three big buckets: organizational, instructional, and operational. Many of the challenges that the district faces have been addressed at least in part by other urban school systems that Fresno can turn to as models.

FUSD clearly has the leadership, talent, and commitment to continue to do much better for its students with disabilities. The Council hopes that this report will help the district create an integrated set of services for its students that will be the envy of other urban school systems across the nation. The national organization is already pleased that the school system began to address its issues and some of the recommendations put forth by the Council team immediately after we had completed our debriefing with the district’s leadership.

The Council of the Great City Schools and its member districts stand ready to continue to help the Fresno Unified School District and its children moving forward. The public should know that it will take time to plan for and implement the many proposals that are contained in this report. Many recommendations can be implemented in the short term while long term objectives may take several years. And not every proposal will need to be done in the way we have articulated here. But the public should also know that the school system has the expertise and determination to carry through on its commitments to students with disabilities and improve a program that already has many positive features.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the Council team’s findings in five areas: framework for accelerating student achievement; disability demographics and referrals/identification of disabilities; achievement data for students with disabilities; accelerating achievement and wellbeing of students with disabilities; and supports for teaching and learning. In addition to these findings, each section includes a discussion of district strengths, opportunities for improvement, and recommendations for improvement.

I. Framework for Accelerating Student Achievement

As described in the Council of the Great City Schools report, Common Core State Standards and Diverse Urban Students, a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is an evidence-based framework for improving educational outcomes for all students. The framework focuses on prevention and early identification of students who may benefit from academic and behavioral interventions. These interventions are intended to remove barriers to learning or identify students who might benefit from acceleration. In addition, MTSS is intended for all students, including those who are gifted. The Council report stresses the importance of implementing a core curriculum with fidelity and doing so in a way that attends to the diverse needs of all students:

This imperative reflects the reality that regardless of how effectively school district leaders develop and implement high-quality curricula aligned with the new standards, some students will need additional support and interventions to be successful. Implementing [core curricular standards] within a framework of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) will help ensure that all students have an evidence-based system of instruction to assist them in achieving success.6

In an effective MTSS framework, schools have mechanisms in place to identify the needs of all students and procedures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the school year. Progress is monitored using multiple measures (e.g., district assessments, attendance, suspension, grades, number of office referrals, etc.); data are analyzed; and differentiated instruction and intervention are delivered based on results. Teachers and leaders regularly review and monitor

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4 The MTSS framework is a merger of two systems: 1) response to intervention (RtI), which focuses on academic achievement, and 2) Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) or other behavioral systems that support positive behavior and social/emotional wellness.

5 Evidence-based practices means delivering services to students (clients) in ways that integrate (a) best available evidence from data, research, and evaluation; (b) professional wisdom gained from experience; and (c) contextual knowledge of the particular classroom, school, district, or state that might impact the design or implementation of a program. California Part B FFY 2015 State Performance Plan/Annual Progress Report, March 27, 2018. Retrieved from https://osep.grads360.org/#report/apr/2015B/Indicator17/ImprovementStrategies?state=CA&ispublic=true

6 Id.
student progress to determine trends and make instructional adjustments with remediation, intervention, and acceleration.

When a student fails to make adequate progress on the district’s academic standards after robust core instruction has been delivered, interventions are put into place and effects are tracked. Without this system, it is unlikely that schools will have the information needed to determine whether underachievement is due to inappropriate instruction and intervention or something else. In these cases, there can be little confidence that students have been given the instruction, targeted interventions, and supports they need. Nevertheless, when teachers and parents observe students who are struggling academically or behaviorally, there is an understandable desire to seek additional supports and/or legally protected special education services. Yet these additional supports are not necessarily the ones that are most likely to prove effective.

Consequently, it is imperative that districts and schools have processes in place to help educators determine why a student is not performing or when they might need acceleration. When implemented as intended, MTSS focuses on rigorous core instruction and provides strategic and targeted interventions that are available without regard to any particular disability. In these circumstances, MTSS can lead to better student engagement, higher performance, and lowered disciplinary referrals, and it can provide appropriate referrals for students requiring special education services. The framework can also help reduce disproportionate placement into special education services of students from various racial/ethnic groups and those with developing levels of English proficiency.

**Council of the Great City Schools Guidance for MTSS**

The Council’s document describes three essential components of MTSS, including—

- Robust and valid core instruction delivered to all students;
- Universal screening and ongoing progress-monitoring to support problem-solving and decision-making to match instructional resources to students’ educational needs; and
- Use of increasingly intensive (time and focus of instruction) instructional supports and strategies.

To be successful, these components require—

- A well-defined district and school-based leadership and organizational structure;
- Written district policies and practices that align with and support a multi-tiered system;
- Technology sufficient to support instructional decision making (e.g., data) and implementation of instruction;
- Professional development to ensure fidelity of implementation of MTSS and the Common Core State Standards;
- An evaluation process that monitors both implementation and outcomes; and

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7 The term parent is used throughout this document and includes guardians, caregivers, and other family members.
The engagement of parents and caregivers.  

A critical component of MTSS involves ‘universal design for learning’ (UDL). UDL is defined as –

a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that (a) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (b) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient.

UDL is an evidence-based approach designed to meet the needs of students with a wide range of abilities, learning styles, learning preferences, and educational backgrounds, and includes those with low achievement, disabilities, and English learners. The approach is intended to meet student needs across the board, requiring fewer accommodations. Applying the principles of UDL means that students with varying abilities are better able to access high-quality instruction.

In fact, MTSS is codified in the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) as an appropriate systemwide framework for supporting student achievement and positive behavior, and it is listed as an appropriate use of Title I funds. The Act defines MTSS as “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision-making.”

**FUSD’s Approach**

In general, the school district has struggled to define a consistent approach to its instructional program. The chief academic officer (CAO) position was not filled consistently over a 10-year period, including two years with no individual in place. This variable leadership has made it difficult to guarantee that instruction would be the primary focus of the organization. The current CAO, who has been in her position for three years, partnered with The New Teachers Project (TNTP) to develop a five-year plan and a shared vision for instruction. The CAO’s instructional division now has the following vision for student success:

Fresno Unified is committed to preparing college and career ready graduates. To achieve this level of readiness, every student can and must learn at grade level and beyond. We have a deliberate, intentional culture of learning with high expectations where every day, every educator and every student seeks to learn and

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11 The “Elementary and Secondary Education Act” was reauthorized in 2015 as the “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA).
strives for growth. We support and challenge each other to stay focused on what matters most: ensuring that in every classroom our students are tackling relevant, challenging content, taking ownership for their learning and improving every day.

The division’s vision is to–

- Get the right people in the right work
- Invest all stakeholders in a shared vision of effective instruction that drives our work
- Establish a diverse, inclusive, accountable community that embraces a culture of learning with high expectations
- Ensure a coherent and effective instructional system to support schools in achieving our shared vision

First Teaching and Instructional Resources

To ensure a shared vision for instruction, the academic division has developed two excellent instructional practice guides for literacy and math.\(^{12}\) The purpose of the guides is to clearly articulate a consistent framework for skillful teaching and learning by describing four core instructional practices contributing to student learning: 1) lesson preparation; 2) reflecting within professional learning communities (PLCs) and accountable communities (ACs) on instructional practices contributing to student outcomes; 3) focused professional learning on standards-aligned practice; and 4) providing precise feedback/next steps on classroom practice.

The two guides share a common framework that are based on a series of thoughtful questions--each with indicators--relating to:

- **Culture of Learning:** Is there a culture of learning and high expectations in this classroom?
- **Challenging Content**
  - Is the lesson focused on high quality text(s)?
  - Does this lesson employ questions and tasks, both oral and written, which integrate the standards and build students’ comprehension of the text(s) and its meaning?
  - During foundational skills lessons, does instruction develop skills in service of comprehension?
- **Ownership:** Are students responsible for doing the thinking in this classroom?
- **Every Student:** When students are working to overcome reading gaps, does the lesson address what students need?
- **Improving Every Day:** Are students demonstrating their understanding?

The mathematics guide is based on a similar structure with content adapted for this curricular area. Also, the guides provide a template for showing teacher and student actions--and

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\(^{12}\) According to the division’s webpage, these guides of July 2017 are still in draft. Retrieved from https://www.fresnou.org/dept/instruction/Pages/I-am-a-Leader.aspx
coaching points. Through instructional practice walks, data are collected that respond to the various questions and indicators, and results are loaded into a districtwide database.

The academic division’s webpage has information and links to extensive and valuable resources. These resources are related to such areas as –

- Support for instruction aligned to the core curriculum, which is organized around eight topics related to assessment, each with various resources providing additional information.
- Grading
- Pre-kindergarten
- Information related to Wonders, SpringBoard, and other commercial adoptions
- English language arts (ELA), English language development (ELD), and math guidance
- Scope and sequence

These resources, which have many MTSS elements, provide a strong foundation for and is being incorporated by the district into the MTSS framework discussed below. However, the resources does not have any reference to UDL and its relevance to teaching.

**MTSS Development**

The district has a draft framework to guide the district’s implementation of MTSS. The goal is to have a framework, systems, and related professional learning in place through the district’s summer institutes for the 2018-19 school year. The draft documents shared with the Council team contain comprehensive information on the purpose of MTSS; related initiatives; a theory of action; definitions; relationships between response-to-intervention and positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS); teaming structures (in-depth roles and responsibilities and relationship to accountable communities); flowcharts; definitions of the three tiers, including curriculum/interventions, assessments, instructional strategies, universal screenings, and entry/exit criteria; progress monitoring (school-wide and student based that include metrics, a team problem-solving protocol, a data analysis calendar, and discussion of implementation integrity); and requests for assistance. This information was presented using a PowerPoint at a 2017 principal summer institute. The information was also used in training with department heads, school supervisors, and the CAO.

Finally, the draft documents include explanations for MTSS team structures and development of tiered instruction, and interventions and supports. Pertinent aspects of these documents are summarized below to provide the reader a context for what focus group participants discussed and for the team’s findings and recommendations.

**Team Structure**

The information below describes Fresno’s team structures at the district and school levels.

**District MTSS Team**

According to an PowerPoint document prepared for the August 2017 principal institute, the district MTSS team is composed of individuals having the following positions:
improving special education services in the fusd

prevention/intervention executive director and director; special education assistant superintendent and director; instructional leadership superintendent; early learning executive director; alternative education administrator; curriculum/instruction administrator; two principals (elementary and secondary); and teacher librarian. the team did not include the assistant superintendent for English learner services.

according to focus group participants, the mtss team is led by the executive director of prevention and intervention who reports directly and frequently to the CAO on the team's progress. however, this individual does not have oversight over all personnel areas having responsibility for mtss implementation. also, because the prevention/intervention unit has been providing leadership for behavior-related activities and because tiered instruction/interventions began with positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS), the leadership does not have the broad and comprehensive “voice and face” that MTSS needs to function comprehensively. although the team attempts to meet monthly, this schedule has been difficult to maintain. this may be a reflection of the executive director’s oversight authority. currently, the team is working on mtss guidelines for schools.

school team structures

multiple team structures are described to support the mtss framework.

Tier 1 Team Structures

Three team structures support Tier 1’s ‘first teaching’ and supports.

- **Instructional Leadership Team (ILT).** A group of site administrators and lead teachers from each grade level or content area, and instructional support staff meet at least monthly and bi-weekly (if needed) to improve student outcomes. The team uses a learning-by-doing rubric(s) and instructional practice guide for continuous feedback to promote tier I instructional fidelity. Data used by the ILT include state assessments, interim assessments, universal screeners, progress monitoring assessments [DIBELs, degrees of reading power (DRP), benchmark assessment system (BAS)], and common formative assessments (CFA). The team identifies patterns among students needing tier II supports to distinguish between individual student needs versus fidelity of tier I.

- **Culture and Climate Team (CCT).** An accountable community of four to six teachers, an administrator, and support staff, including at least one ILT member, meet at least monthly and bi-weekly (if needed). The CCT designs and supports implementation, and it assists with monitoring fidelity of universal school-wide and classroom practices to create and maintain a positive school climate and culture. The team utilizes the district’s tier I implementation rubric as part of a school’s ongoing cycle of continuous improvement. Data used by the CCT include office discipline referrals, suspensions, surveys, attendance, fidelity data, instructional practice guide culture/climate tenet 1 (principle/belief), and universal screeners. The team identifies students potentially needing tier II support and refers them to a tier II team.

- **Accountable Communities (AC).** Weekly, teams of elementary grade level teachers, secondary content teachers (and sometimes pathways and advanced placement teachers) work collaboratively on collective inquiry and action research to drive better results for their students. Four guiding questions are used to take collective responsibility for student learning:
1) What do we want students to learn? 2) How will we know they learned it? 3) How will we respond when they don’t learn? And 4) How will we respond when they’ve already learned it? Professional learning is pre-determined/pre-assessed by the teams and leaders using common assessment results. Data used by the AC are CFAs, statewide assessments, universal screeners, and progress monitoring assessments.

**Tier II Team Structures**

Two team structures support Tier II intervention and supports.

- **Intervention Support Team (IST).** Meeting at least twice monthly, an administrator and support staff (e.g., general and special educators, counselor, social worker, psychologist, TSA, coach) develops academic and behavior interventions. One designee coordinates five to seven team members. The IST is responsible for the overall management of supports for students who have not responded to tier I interventions and require tier II support. They develop targeted group interventions that are continuously available; match student needs with appropriately targeted interventions; communicate about interventions and student progress with appropriate staff; and monitor implementation of targeted interventions and student response-to-interventions; review data to monitor student progress and recommend future action (fade, maintain or intensify intervention). A cycle of review occurs every six to eight weeks. Data used include office referrals; suspensions; attendance; progress monitoring; and diagnostics.

- **Social, Emotional, Academic, Support Team (SEAST).** This team also supports tier II interventions/supports. The description of the two teams does not specifically differentiate responsibilities or address overlapping supports for students having both academic and behavior needs.

**Tier III Team Structure**

The student success team (SST) supports tier III activities. It includes an administrator, a student’s teacher, parent/caregiver, psychologist, counselor and/or social worker and other personnel based on student needs—and a designated coordinator/monitor. The SST has a single student focus to address academic, attendance, behavior and/or health/mental health concerns, and uses an educational action plan to document student needs. The team meets at least monthly, although interventions are monitored more frequently. Data sources include office referrals, attendance, interim assessments, and progress-monitoring assessments.

**Focus Group Participant Feedback**

Focus group participants also referred to other teams at their schools, including a coordination of services team (COST), professional learning communities, and safe and civil school teams. Most commonly, schools use safe and civil school teams and some type of academic team. The participants most frequently referred to the use of SSTs as the mechanism for determining whether a student would need a special education evaluation. Even with just two teams, the Council team found that schools inconsistently bridged between them in coordinating support for students each team has in common.

Participants also referred to the following challenges –

- Making evidence-based intervention recommendations;
• Following up on student progress based on a scheduled time frame;
• Having numerous SSTs, requiring many to be carried over into the following school year. When paperwork was lost, the student’s process must begin again.
• Infrequent use of ILTs.

Districtwide Tiered Instruction and Interventions

According to district representatives, every school is expected to have tiered interventions at three levels. While the use of increasingly intensive interventions was voluntary in the past, the structure is now required. Generally, interventions available throughout the district are: Corrective Reading; Reading Mastery; WonderWorks; Safe and Civil Schools (a PBIS practice); and Restorative Practices.

The draft MTSS Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment document describes (for literacy, math and behavior) tiered curriculum, instruction, screening, diagnostic and formative assessments by grade level. The same structure is used for English language development, but the content is less developed presently. While this work is not final, the work in progress is commendable and moving in the right direction.

Literacy

For purposes of illustration, Exhibit 1a provides information on literacy at Tiers II and III in grades TK-3 and 4-6.

Exhibit 1a. Table of Literacy Curriculum and Instruction for Tiers II and III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tier II</th>
<th>Tier III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Wonders</td>
<td>Wonders, WonderWorks; SRA Reading Mastery, Corrective Reading; and Reasoning and Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Reteaching/reengagement: Small group lessons (with detail)</td>
<td>Decodable readers—multiple reads (through second grade)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decodable readers (K-2); Multiple reads</td>
<td>WonderWorks; small group lessons (Foundational Skills Kit for Grades K-3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Apprentice Level Readers—Independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Approaching Level Readers—Independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Interactive Worktext—Shared Read, responding to reading and writing about reading (Starts in 2nd grade)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grades 4-6

| Curriculum     | WonderWorks; SRA: Reading Mastery; Corrective Reading                  | SRA Reading Mastery and Corrective Reading                               |
| Instruction    | Reteaching/reengagement: Small group lessons (with detail)             |                                                                         |
|                | Downloadables for: Phonics/Word Study, Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension |                                                                         |
|                | WonderWorks: Lesson plans in separate TE                               |                                                                         |
|                | • Small group lessons (Foundational Skills Kit)                         |                                                                         |
|                | • Apprentice Level Readers, Approaching Level Readers and Interactive Worktext (same as for K-3) |

It was unclear from this information how the described instruction/interventions teach close reading and more complex text. Although leveled readers may support independent reading, they do not have the rich vocabulary and require the close reading students must learn to master concepts. In other words, these readers most likely do not have the challenging content reflected
in the instructional practice guide for literacy at 2.A., which calls for challenging content, and text(s) “at or above the complexity level expected for the grade and time in the school year.”\textsuperscript{13}

Furthermore, the document does not stress that tiered interventions are expected to supplement and not replace tier I instruction. The excellent IPG introductory session handout and PowerPoint for literacy 2A, provides a structured tool to support challenging content.\textsuperscript{14} However, this document also lacks information, links, or references for teachers struggling to reach students reading substantially below grade level. Unless teachers can effectively engage these students, they are more likely to conclude that the students require special education to learn.

As with other school districts, Fresno’s challenge is to provide teachers the supports they need to –

- Understand the content behind grade level foundational skills and how to approach this systematically in the classroom using Wonders and other supplemental materials for struggling students.
- Building knowledge and vocabulary through content-rich materials.
- Have deep content knowledge around phonics, phonemic awareness, and related foundational skills content.
- How curricular materials and interventions can be used to apply these concepts in the classroom.

\textit{Focus Group Participant Feedback}

Focus group participants agree that FUSD has had a focus on good ‘first teaching’ (tier I), but some believed that there was a disconnect between this focus and practice--with schools relying on interventions rather than strengthening core instruction. Many teachers continue to have difficulty teaching students who are still working to overcome reading gaps.\textsuperscript{15} This issue is particularly challenging for schools with rigorous curriculum, such as those in pre-International Baccalaureate programs and students who are achieving below standards.

Other feedback from focus group participants included the following.

- \textit{Pockets of Excellence} The district has pockets of excellent tiered instruction/intervention at the elementary level. Although fewer examples were available at the high school level, one was using a tiered approach for ninth graders and using coaches and a library media center. As a result, fewer students were receiving Ds and Fs. Generally, however, the provision of interventions was viewed as inconsistent across the district.

\textsuperscript{13} See Instructional Practice Guide (IPG): Literacy, 2A. Challenging Content: Is the lesson focused on a high quality text(s)?

\textsuperscript{14} LIT 2A Intro Sessions.zip, retrieved from https://www.fresnou.org/dept/instruction/Pages/I-am-a-Leader.aspx/.

\textsuperscript{15} As referenced in the IPG at 4 for Every Student: the content being taught needs to address specific skills and knowledge that hold students back from reading grade-level complex text, such as decoding, fluency or factors that contribute to comprehension (i.e. vocabulary, complex syntax, cultural or literary knowledge, etc.)
• **Scheduled Intervention Period.** Elementary schools typically schedule a single period for the provision of interventions and enrichment. This model enables some schools to use all available staff for this purpose.

• **Psychologist Support.** Psychologists appeared to be very knowledgeable about MTSS activities. Based on a survey they conducted, most psychologists indicated that they would like to be more involved in MTSS activities. Barriers included conflicting priorities, training, resources, and administrative buy-in.

• **Wonders and WonderWorks.** There appears to be general support for the Wonders and WonderWorks programs. Overall, the availability for weekly assessment, progress monitoring, opportunity for enrichment and reteaching is appreciated. However, some interviewees indicated that they were having difficulty teaching the program because of insufficient training.

• **Interventions.** Examples of other tools schools were using to provide interventions included after school tutorials, the Kahn academy, teaching fellows from universities, part-time certified teachers, etc.

• **Multisensory Reading Instruction.** Currently, it does not appear that the district has supported multisensory reading instruction. This approach, which is based on an Orton-Gillingham methodology, has a high degree of success with students who have not been successful with more typical reading instruction/interventions.

• **Behavioral Support.** As with academics, the district has pockets of excellence in providing students with the supports they need to promote positive behavior and social/emotional wellness. Focus groups participants frequently mentioned use of safe and civil schools’ CHAMPS strategies, along with a data system for tracking student office referrals and related information. New teachers receive a half day of CHAMPS training. In addition, they attend training on social emotional learning and restorative practices. At some high schools there were discussions about the relationship between good first teaching and disruptive behavior, but it was difficult to get traction for this effort. One of the biggest challenges schools face is integrating supports for behavior with academic supports.

• **Social Emotional Learning (SEL).** In some schools, support is provided to teachers for the integration of SEL into lesson planning.

• **Progress Monitoring.** With the availability of on-line data to help monitor progress, there is more use of progress monitoring in academics and behavior.

**English Learner Support**

The *Master Plan for English Learner Success* provides direction and guidance to district and school leaders, teachers, paraprofessionals, and students on programs and services to support the academic success of English learners. It also sets the expectations the district holds for each school and classroom in which English learners are served. The plan specifically addresses the expectation that--

[s]chool leaders are responsible for carrying out the vision for EL success and lead schools with clear expectations for all English learner students. Professional learning is provided to ensure leaders understand the dynamics surrounding English
learner students, including the diverse typologies as well as the levels of English language acquisition pathway leading to English proficiency.

The Master Plan also states that all educators are expected to implement the plan with fidelity.

Although the Master Plan does not specifically address MTSS, it does include various MTSS components, such as core elements of first teaching, the need for interventions (although not increasingly intensive or what they might look like), and progress monitoring. The document does not reference any team structure that could be used to identify the needs of students who are not achieving as expected. It also does not mention the interconnection of social/emotional and behavioral issues unique to English learners and the implications of language and culture.

The Master Plan also contains many important instructional strategies that are relevant to students who are native English speakers, but it requires additional supports to enhance English language development. Frequently, these strategies are effective for students, including those with disabilities, who are underachieving in literacy. One such strategy described is scaffolding, which does not appear in the draft MTSS: Definitions of Tiers and Assessments document. The Master Plan includes a comprehensive definition of scaffolding, along with examples of its use. Some of these are –

- **Information systems** that capitalize on such modalities as graphic organizers, diagrams, photographs, videos, and interactive technology to provide meaningful ways to access content.
- **Connecting to prior knowledge** that originates from educational, cultural, family, and personal experiences.
- **Background building** to bridge the distance between student background and experience and information and content presented in texts.

**Guidance for Initiating Special Education Evaluation**

One of the most important functions of school teams is to determine whether there is sufficient information on a student to determine if he or she needs special education. This determination requires specific guidance to guard against inappropriate referrals. This issue is especially relevant for English learners for whom professionals often have difficulty determining whether underachievement is due to language acquisition or disability.

Nationwide, the referral of students for special education evaluations is increasingly embedded in the framework of MTSS. This trend is based on growing research showing that the framework can help determine whether a student’s academic/social emotional difficulties could improve with more intensive, evidence-based interventions within a general education setting or is based on a disability, requiring specially designed instruction, i.e., special education.

While some students have obvious physical disabilities, e.g., blind/visual impairments, deaf/hearing impairments, and physical disabilities, others have characteristics that are less obvious and involve more judgment, e.g., specific learning disabilities, emotional disturbance,
other health impairments (based on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), etc. In the latter category, there are large disparities in incidence rates within and between school districts and states nationwide. In addition, disparities by race/ethnicity and English language status can be large. Researchers have found that disparities increase inversely with the severity of the disability. In other words, the more severe a disability, the more likely students are to be proportionately represented across all races/ethnicities. Conversely, disparities are more likely among students with disabilities that require an element of judgment.

Need for Special Education Evaluation

Information from the district provides the following guidance on determining whether a special education evaluation should be initiated for a student.

- Ideally, all appropriate stakeholders attend an SST when the team (including the parent) discusses areas of concern and develops an intervention plan. The team collects data over the plan’s outlined time and schedules a follow-up meeting. If the intervention is not working, then the student may be referred for more intensive intervention or referred for a special education evaluation.

- The district’s Special Education Policy and Procedures (2014-15) explains that the SST is not a special education function; however, its role includes a review of special education referrals and documentation of interventions used prior to referral. (Ed. Code, § 56303.) The document specifies that other student intervention teams may also carry out this function.

A district representative wrote that Fresno Unified was working to develop an articulated multi-tiered system of supports that includes a redefinition of the process for referring students for a special education assessment. This statement included a reference to the draft MTSS Team Structure. However, the document does not include any reference to special education evaluation referrals or guidance for reviewing progress-monitoring data to distinguish between the need for more intensive interventions or a special education evaluation. Similarly, the Master Plan for English Learner Success makes no mention of this issue.

Focus Group Participant Feedback

There was a perception among interviewees that decisions were made too quickly to accurately evaluate a student for special education rather than substantiating that a student had been provided with evidence-based interventions (with fidelity) or that progress-monitoring data was used to track a student’s progress. It was also perceived by staff who were interviewed that evaluations are too quickly initiated when outside agencies were involved in a parent’s referral and that too frequently students did not qualify for services.

Areas of Strength

The following were areas of strength in the district’s draft MTSS framework and practices relevant to the acceleration of student achievement.

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• **Vision and Resources for Student Success.** The district has a well-defined vision for student success. Over the last few years, the instructional division has produced several high-quality documents to support this vision. These include instructional practice guides for literacy and math, and many worthwhile resources to support stronger practices. Through instructional practice walks, data are collected that respond to various questions and indicators, and results are loaded into a districtwide database. These and other activities focus on good first teaching.

• **Draft MTSS Framework Guidance.** Fresno Unified has a draft MTSS framework with documentation to guide the district’s implementation beginning in the 2018-19 school year. This information was presented during a 2017 principal summer institute.

• **Draft MTSS Team Structure.** The district is developing uniform team structures to carry out MTSS activities.

• **Professional Learning.** The district has provided MTSS/RTI professional learning to principals and 2-5 teachers from their schools, department heads, school supervisors, and the CAO.

• **Contract with Collaborative Learning.** The district has been working under a contract with Collaborative Learning’s Jon Eyler for the last two years; and the work includes MTSS.

• **English Learner Master Plan.** This document provides an excellent framework for providing education to English learners, including a directive for all school leaders to carry out the district’s vision for EL success. The plan calls for all educators to implement the plan with fidelity. Although the Master Plan does not specifically address MTSS, it does address core elements of first teaching, progress monitoring, and the need for interventions (although they are not increasingly intensive nor does the plan say what the elements might look like).

• **Use of Interventions.** There is an expectation that every school will have three tiers of instruction and interventions in place for students. The instructional division is developing a framework for these interventions, including those for English learners, their availability, and use. There was also positive feedback from interviewees on the use of *Wonders* and *WonderWorks*. Overall, the district’s work is commendable and moving in the right direction. There are pockets of schools that appear to be modeling excellent MTSS practices. Several schools schedule a single period for interventions and use all available personnel to support instruction/intervention.

• **Behavior Support.** The use of safe and civil schools’ CHAMPS strategies support PBIS, is well known, and appears to be practiced to some degree throughout the district. Training, which has been in place over several years, is ongoing and includes restorative practices and social/emotional learning.

• **Electronic Data Platform.** With use of an electronic data platform, a mechanism is now available to help teachers track and monitor student progress.

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**OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The following areas present opportunities for improvement.

• **District MTSS Team Leadership.** The district MTSS team is led by an executive director of prevention/intervention who lacks authority over other departments in this area and does not
have the personnel necessary to carry out some MTSS activities. Perhaps because of this limitation, it has been difficult for the team to meet monthly. Although the team has a broad range of staff, it does not appear to include the English learner assistant superintendent, a professional development administrator, or a technology services representation, which would be necessary to implement UDL practices.

- **School Team Structure.** Draft documents describe the use of three teams to provide academic and behavior supports at the first-tier level, two teams at the second level, and an SST for the third level. In addition, focus group participants referenced other team structures used in their schools. There were concerns that there were too many team meetings, many times with the same personnel. This structure made it difficult to meet and coordinate activities across teams who serve the same children but for disparate purposes, e.g., academics versus behavior.

- **MTSS Team Challenges.** These include (a) identifying evidence-based interventions; (b) following-up on student progress; (c) difficulty supporting numerous students; and (d) maintaining progress-monitoring data over the summer.

- **Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.** The draft MTSS Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment does not yet include the following areas –
  - **Universal Design for Learning.** Use of UDL and its instructional supports for broad groups of students and delivery of first teaching. Also, the instructional division’s webpage does not mention UDL.
  - **Scaffolding.** Use of scaffolding and other strategies included in the English Learner Master Plan to support instruction with close reading and complex text. Teachers continue to struggle to provide classrooms with students with diverse needs access to challenging content, and text(s) “at or above the complexity level expected for the grade and time in the school year.”
  - **Supplement Core Instruction.** Any explanation that tiered interventions are expected to supplement and not replace tier I instruction.
  - **English Learners.** Information relevant to English learners.
  - **Differentiating Instruction.** Information, links, or references for teachers struggling to reach students reading substantially below grade level.
  - **Multisensory Reading Instruction.** Research-based multisensory reading instruction that is beneficial for students who have not progressed using reading approaches such as the Orton-Gillingham methodology.
  - **Use of Personnel.** Any reference to personnel who might help implement interventions, e.g., psychologists, librarians, part-time certified teachers, trained paraeducators, etc.

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17 See Instructional Practice Guide (IPG): Literacy, 2A. Challenging Content: Is the lesson focused on a high quality text(s)?
18 If teachers can effectively engage these students, they are more likely to believe they require special education to learn.
• **Behavior Supports.** The document references three behavior contexts (PBIS, restorative practices, and social/emotional learning), though the PBIS umbrella is broad enough to incorporate restorative justice and SEL.

• **English Learner Master Plan.** The *Master Plan* does not reference any increasingly intensive interventions appropriate for English learners.

• **Need for Special Education Evaluation Guidance.** Current guidance relevant to MTSS, special education, and the *Master Plan for English Learner Success* do not provide sufficiently specific information for team members to use in determining whether a student’s interventions were appropriate; that interventions were implemented with fidelity; that data were collected to monitor progress; and a determination of whether the sum of information collected on a student supports an evaluation that the student requires special education.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **Systemwide MTSS Framework, Implementation Plan, and Oversight.** Expedite completion of the district’s draft MTSS framework and supporting documents to ensure they are available for feedback and use in professional learning over the summer of 2018. This work needs to reflect a sense of urgency among stakeholders to improve educational outcomes for all students. Support this effort with a board policy on MTSS, reinforcing its importance, purpose, etc., and how instructional strategies and activities fit within the overall framework.

2. **District, Network and School Leadership Teams.** Review leadership teams at the district, regional, and school levels that support MTSS planning and implementation with consideration of the following –

   • **District MTSS Leadership Team.** Have the chief academic officer become the face and voice for MTSS, with support from all instructional division leaders and principals, including their staff members, and other stakeholders.

   • **Regional MTSS Leadership Teams.** Have each network establish an MTSS leadership team with principals and a diverse group of school personnel responsible for implementation.

   • **School-Based Leadership Teams.** Establish one school-based leadership team (SBLT). Have the SBLT be a multi-disciplinary team of professionals who create and support school-based decision making; establish and monitor schoolwide learning and development goals; coordinate the delivery of services to all students (academic, behavior, student engagement); allocate resources needed to fully implement plans with fidelity; and monitor the effectiveness of core (Tier 1) and supplemental (Tier 2) instruction and intervention. SBLT subgroups should address and report back on such focused work as literacy, positive behavior supports, school resources, etc.

   SBLT responsibilities include –

   - Ensuring critical MTSS elements are understood by school staff, including curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices.

   - Actively engaging staff in ongoing professional learning and coaching to support MTSS implementation.
- Actively facilitating implementation of MTSS as part of the school improvement planning process.

Have Tier 3 Problem Solving Groups meet based on SBLT Tier 2 outcomes, to develop and revise individual problem-solving plans for individual students. Include specific and individualized data and other information, and grounds upon which to refer a student for a special education evaluation. Incorporate specific information on English learners to appropriately address language acquisition needs. Include this information in all relevant documents, e.g., MTSS, special education policies and procedures, and English Learner Master Plan.

b. Implementation Plan. To the greatest extent possible, have the MTSS leadership team provide guidance in the following planning documents to promote broad application of universal language, e.g., LCAP, SPSA, SQIS, Accelerating Achievement for African American Students in FUSD, Core MTSS Elements, etc.

- Draft MTSS Framework Guidance and MTSS Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment Document. Address the following areas in one or both documents, as appropriate –

  - **Universal Design for Learning (UDL).** Actively incorporate UDL principles in the MTSS framework and incorporate them into all guidance documents to support its implementation. Include the technology chief and executive directors in this effort.

  - **Focus on literacy.** With city agencies and community-based organizations, establish a citywide initiative to support early reading and standards attainment by third grade. Include activities designed to promote talking with infants and toddlers, such as used in the Thirty Million Words project.\(^\text{19}\)

  - **Scaffolding.** Include scaffolding and other strategies, which are included in the English Learner Master Plan, that are useful in supporting close reading and complex texts for all students. Include accommodations when needed.

  - **Tiered Interventions.** Emphasize increasingly intensive interventions but clarify that they should be used to supplement--not replace--first teaching instruction aligned with the core curriculum. Also--

    o Include reference to multisensory reading program(s) based in Orton Gillingham’s methodology, which is beneficial for students who are not progressing using other reading approaches.

    o Obtain feedback from schools on additional evidence-based programs that are necessary to meet student needs. Ensure that all instructional divisions are involved in reviewing materials and guiding purchasing decisions.

  - **English Learner Students.** Embed guidance on MTSS into the English Learner Master Plan, and, as appropriate, embed new guidance into the Master Plan.

\(^{19}\) Retrieved from http://tmwcenter.uchicago.edu/.
– Under PBIS embed descriptions of restorative practices and social/emotional learning rather than simply listing these as three separate and unrelated initiatives.20

- **Document Alignment.** Require each department to review their current documents to ensure their alignment with the MTSS framework and its components.

- **Posting.** When finalized, prominently post the MTSS implementation plan on the district’s website, along with relevant links to district information and publicly available resources.

c. **Differentiated Professional Learning.** Incorporate into the district’s professional learning program specific information targeted on each critical audience, e.g., central office personnel, principals, vice principals, general and special educators, teachers of English learner students, related-services personnel, paraprofessionals, and parents. Ensure that professional development is consistent with the MTSS framework, implementation plan, and expectations. To the extent possible, provide at least four to five days each year of training for school-based leadership teams over the next two years. Base training on the district’s High Quality Professional Learning Guidelines. Consider how training will be budgeted, e.g., through stipends, funds for substitute coverage, incentives for after-school and Saturday training, summer training, etc. Consider having a summer boot camp for this purpose.

Embed the following components into the district’s MTSS implementation plan (See Recommendation 1b) —

- **Cross-Functional Teams.** Cross-train individuals from multiple departments to ensure common language and understanding of MTSS. This will help align and support schools as they work on implementation.

- **High-Quality Trainers.** Identify staff members at all levels who are knowledgeable about and are experienced in various MTSS components and deploy them as professional developers. As necessary, supplement these staff members with experts outside the school district.

- **Access to Differentiated Learning.** Ensure that professional learning is engaging and differentiated based on individual skills, experience, and need. Have professional learning and technical assistance continue for new personnel and those needing additional support.

- **Multiple Formats.** Use multiple formats (e.g., videos, webinars, and narrative text) and presentation approaches (e.g., school-based, small groups) to provide professional development on MTSS.

- **Assistance.** Develop a plan for providing technical assistance to principals and school-

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based leadership teams along with mentoring, modeling, and coaching to teachers and other staff members to reinforce training and materials.

- **School Walkthroughs.** Establish or embed into current walkthrough\(^ {21}\) protocols core MTSS provisions. Make the observations with a diverse team that includes the instructional superintendent, principal, and instructional division representatives like special education, English learners, prevention/intervention, etc. Consider including an employee who liaisons with parents. Analyze results of the walk-throughs to identify trends, strengths, and action items. Use electronic tablets to the extent possible.

- **Exemplary Implementation Models.** Provide regional forums where schools can highlight and share best practices, lessons learned, victories, and challenges in implementing MTSS for all students (e.g., gifted, English learners, students with IEPs, and students who are twice exceptional). Identify exemplary schools by region and enable staff from other schools to visit.

- **District Website.** Develop a highly visible, well-informed, and interactive web page highlighting the district’s MTSS framework. Include links to other local and national sites. Highlight schools within the district that are showing results with the approach and share stories and data on the impact of MTSS on student outcomes.

**d. Data Analysis and Reports.** Review current data collection, analyses, and reports and supplement them with indicators or metrics that would be useful to determining schools’ use of MTSS practices and the relationship to student achievement, e.g., growth based on appropriate instruction and intensive interventions.

**e. Monitoring and Accountability.** Evaluate the implementation, effectiveness, and results of MTSS, and include the following as part of the assessment –

- **Self-Monitoring.** Include benchmark and other regular districtwide and school-based progress monitoring tools into the evaluation of MTSS implementation. Consider using the Self-Assessment of MTSS Implementation (SAM) guide for this purpose. Incorporate these elements into instructional leadership team visits and other instructional walk throughs.

- **Baseline Data and Fidelity Assessments.** Use/adapt the Self-Assessment of MTSS (SAM)\(^ {22}\) to help schools self-assess their MTSS practices. Have regional and districtwide leadership teams periodically review these self-assessments for validity. Incorporate SAM results into school observations to assess fidelity to the framework.

- **Data Checks.** Using data and reports proposed in Recommendation 1d, have the CAO host regular data conversations with departments, network leaders, and principals to discuss results, anomalies, needed supports, follow-up activities, and outcomes.

- **Timely Communication and Feedback.** Assign responsibility for communicating the

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21 The term “walkthrough” is used generically and applies to all school observation models and protocols used by the district.

MTSS work to stakeholders through a variety of channels, e.g., website, television, radio, social media, etc. Design feedback loops involving the central office, school personnel, parents, and the community to assess problems and successes. Use this feedback to provide regular and timely feedback to the district’s MTSS leadership team about barriers or where schools require additional assistance.
II. Disability Demographics and Referral/Identification of Disability

This section describes the district’s practices related to special education referrals, evaluations, and determinations of need. It also describes demographic characteristics of the district’s students with disabilities. When available, Fresno Unified data are compared with students at state and national levels, and with other urban school districts across the country. In addition, data are analyzed by race/ethnicity and EL status.

**IDEA Disability Demographic Information**

The 7,983 students with IEPs in preschool through grade 12 constitute 10.6 percent of the district’s enrolled students in these grades. Below, we compare this information to other urban school districts across the country and to the nation. The data are also disaggregated by grade band, race/ethnicity, and English learner status.

**Comparison of FUSD, Urban Districts, State, and National Special Education Rates**

A smaller percentage of FUSD students are identified as having a disability compared to the state, other urban districts, and the nation (10.6 percent, 12.0 percent, 13.4 percent, and 13.1 percent, respectively).

![Exhibit 2a. Percentage of Students with IEPs by District, State, and Nation](image)

**Comparison of FUSD, State and Nation Rates by Major Disability Areas**

We also compared FUSD’s disability rates to the state and nation in the most common disability areas. The district’s 11 percent rate for intellectual disability (ID) is more than twice as high as the state’s 5 percent rate and higher than the nation’s 6 percent rate. It is also important to note that the district’s speech/language impairment (SLI) rate of 23 percent is higher than the

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23 Students receiving special education are also referred to as students with individualized education programs (IEPs), or students with disabilities who do not receive Section 504 services unless noted otherwise.

24 Unless otherwise stated, all FUSD data were provided by the district to the Council’s team and are for the 2017-2018 school year.

25 The urban district percentage is based on 79 districts reporting data to the Urban Special Education Collaborative and the Council of the Great City Schools.

state’s 15 percent and the nation’s 20 percent; and its autism rate of 12 percent is higher than the 9 percent rate for the state and nation. (See exhibit 2b).

District’s rates are lower, however, than the state and nation in the areas of emotional disturbance (ED) (2 percent, 6 percent, and 5 percent, respectively) and other health impairment (OHI) (11 percent, 13 percent, and 14 percent, respectively). For specific learning disabilities (SLD), the district’s 37 percent rate is lower than the state’s 49 percent but somewhat higher than the nation’s 35 percent.

**Exhibit 2b. Percentage of Students with IEPs by District, State, and Nation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Nation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHI</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLD</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLI</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disability Rates by Grade

Data in exhibit 2c show the district’s identification rate by grade. The higher preschool figure of 12.7 percent (431 students) is related to the low overall enrollment at this grade level (3,390 students). By comparison, the transitional kindergarten for students with IEPs (487 students) is only 6.9 percent of total student enrollment (7,243). The percentage of students with IEPs continues to increase to 12 percent (7th grade) and then decreases to 10.4 percent in 11th grade. The 12.9 percent figure for 12th grade includes students with IEPs who remain in school to receive transitional services through age 21.

**Exhibit 2c. Percentage of Students with IEPs by Grade**

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Disability Incidence by Race/Ethnicity

This subsection discusses the extent to which district students from each of the most common racial/ethnic groups are proportionately identified as having a disability.

Race/Ethnicity Prevalence for Students with Disabilities

According to CDE’s latest FY 2014 State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report of July 1, 2016, the agency uses an E-formula to determine racial/ethnic disproportionality, which according to the report falls under the broad category of composition measures. It is not always possible for persons without substantial expertise, which includes many administrators, to calculate this measure. (Exhibit 2d)

Exhibit 2d. Percentage of Students with IEPs by Grade²⁸

\[ E = A + \sqrt{\frac{(A (100-A))}{N}} \]

Where: \( E \) = Maximum percentage of the total special education enrollment (or special education enrollment in a disability category or service delivery environment) in a district allowed for a specific racial/ethnic group

\( A \) = Percentage of the same racial/ethnic group in general education in the district

\( N \) = The total special education enrollment (or special education enrollment in a disability category or service delivery environment) in the district, as defined in \( E \).

On December 12, 2015, the United States Department of Education (USDOE or ED) issued a final rule that established a uniform national measurement of significant disproportionality. The department developed the risk ratio measure (and alternative risk ratio for small cell numbers) to measure the likelihood that students from one racial/ethnic group compared to other groups have the characteristic being measured. Under the regulation, by 2018-19 states must use this measure to identify the threshold of risk they will use to determine significant disproportionality. Recently, the U.S. Department of Education published a notice in the Federal Register asking for comments by May 14, 2018 on its proposal to delay the regulation’s implementation for two years.

Nevertheless, it would be wise for FUSD to use the risk ratio measure, which is very easy to calculate, to analyze disproportionality. In general, a risk ratio of “1” means that students from a racial/ethnic group are as likely as others to be identified. Higher risk ratios denote over-representation and those below a “1” denote under-representation. The district should take note of any racial/ethnic groups having a risk ratio of 2 or higher or under 0.5.

Using the risk ratio (RR) measure to determine disproportionality among all students with disabilities, the likelihood of any racial/ethnic group receiving special education is generally not

disproportionate: African American (1.21 RR), Hispanic (0.31 RR), and white (1.24 RR). With a risk ratio of 0.31, however, Hispanics may be underrepresented. Risk ratios for English learners are provided further below.

**Race/Ethnicity Risk Ratios by Major Disability Areas**

The district’s proportion of students with disabilities by race/ethnicity changes significantly when examining data on the six most common disability areas. Data in exhibit 2e show the likelihood that African American, Hispanic, and white students would be qualified for special education under one of the district’s six most common disabilities compared to all other students. These risk ratios show that white students have the greatest risk of being identified for emotional disturbance (3.51) and autism (2.57) followed by African American students for other health impairments (2.05). All other risks are less than 2.0. None of the risk ratios are less than 0.5. Note that CDE has not cited Fresno Unified as having disproportionate rates in this area.

**Exhibit 2e. Risk Ratios by Race/Ethnicity and Most Common Disability Areas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Autism</th>
<th>ED</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>OHI</th>
<th>SLD</th>
<th>SLI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentages and Risk Ratios by Gender and Race/Ethnicity: All Students with IEPs**

Figures in exhibit 2f show percentages of African American, Hispanic, and white male and female students with IEPs as a percent of total student enrollment. It also shows for each racial/ethnic group the likelihood that males receive special education compared to females. Overall, for each of these racial/ethnic groups males are about twice as likely as females to have an IEP.

- **African American Students.** 18 percent of males and 9 percent of females have IEPs; males are 1.97 times more likely than females to receive special education.
- **Hispanic Students.** 14 percent of males and 7 percent of females have IEPs; males are 2.02 times more likely than females to receive special education.
- **White Students.** 17 percent of males and 8 percent of females have IEPs; males are 2.16 times more likely than females to receive special education.
Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

Exhibit 2f. Percentages and Risk Ratios by Gender and Race/Ethnicity: All Students with IEPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Male Percentage</th>
<th>Female Percentage</th>
<th>M to F RR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages/Risk Ratios for Males by Gender and Race/Ethnicity by Disability Area

Figures in exhibit 2g show the likelihood of African American, Hispanic, and white males to have one of the most common disabilities compared to females in the same racial/ethnic group. These figures show that autistic males are much more likely than females to be identified in every racial group. To a lesser degree, males have higher risk ratios for other health and speech/language impairments. Risk ratios for each of the male racial/ethnic groups is much less than 2.0 in the areas of emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, and specific learning disability. Information on each of the disability areas with high male risk ratios is provided below.

- **Autism.** African American and Hispanic males are 5.65 and 5.64, respectively, more likely than females to be identified as having autism; white males’ risk ratio is 3.34. Most sources report a gender ratio for autism of 4.2 (male)-to-1 (female), although new analyses have lowered that to 3.25-to-1. 29

- **Other Health Impairment.** All three racial/ethnic groups have about the same male risk ratios in OHI: 2.53 (African American), 2.23 (Hispanic), and 2.88 (white).

- **Speech/Language Impairment.** White males have the highest risk ratio (3.02) in SLI, compared risk ratios among African American (2.19) and Hispanic (2.51) students.

Exhibit 2g. Percentages and Risk Ratios for Males by Race/Ethnicity and Disability Area

English Learner Students

Among all students in kindergarten through 12th grade, English learners\(^{30}\) comprise 20 percent of student enrollment and 30 percent of all students with IEPs. Compared to 10.6 percent of all FUSD students having an IEP, 16.4 percent of all ELs have an IEP. Of all ELs, 33 percent are long term. In general, ELs are 1.77 times more likely than non-long term ELs to have an IEP, and long term ELs are 2.94 times more likely than long term ELs to have an IEP.

Student proficiency in English language development has been measured in FUSD by the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). The district will be transitioning to a new assessment, the English Language Proficiency Test for California (ELPAC). English language proficiency for students with moderate/severe disabilities will be assessed through the Ventura County Comprehensive Alternate Language Proficiency Survey (VCCALPS), which measures the same domains as the CA English Language Development Test (CELDT)/ELPAC. The district has developed a matrix to address the re-designation of English learner students with disabilities.

Percent of English Learners and of Long Term English Learners with IEPs by Grade

Figures in exhibit 2h show the percentages of English learners generally and long term ELs with IEPs by grade.

- **ELs.** Overall, ELs constitute 10 percent of all students with IEPs. Rates for ELs with IEPs increase from 5 percent (kindergarten) to 19 percent (5th grade), and steadily decrease to 6 percent (11th grade). The higher rate in grade 12 likely reflects students remaining in school for transition services.

- **Long Term ELs.** Overall, long term ELs constitute 28 percent of all students with IEPs. Rates are much higher—by definition—for long term ELs with IEPs in 4th to 12th grades—with rates ranging from 28 percent (4th grade) to 33 percent (9th and 12th grades).

**Exhibit 2h. Percent of English Learners and of Long Terms ELs by Grade**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>English Learner</th>
<th>Long Term EL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KG</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Risk Ratios for ELs Compared to Non-ELs by Disability Areas

Using the risk ratio measure, long term ELs are not much more likely than ELs who are not long term to have one of the more common disabilities. The highest long term EL risk is with

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\(^{30}\) Figures for English learners include long-term ELs unless otherwise stated.
significant learning disabilities (1.59 RR), and the lowest risk is with emotional disturbance (0.34). (See Exhibit 2i.)

Exhibit 2i. Risk Ratios for ELs Compared to Non-ELs by Disability Areas

![Graph showing risk ratios for ELs compared to non-ELs by disability areas.]

**Disability by All Students with IEPs, ELs, Long Term ELs, and Non-ELs**

Figures in exhibit 2j show by disability area risk ratios for English learners compared to non-ELs, and long term ELs compared to ELs who are not long term. These data show that long term ELs are twice as likely as non-long term ELs to have an emotional disturbance or specific learning disability.

Exhibit 2j. Disability Risk Ratios for ELs to Non-ELs, and Long Term to Not Long Term ELs

![Graph showing disability risk ratios for ELs to non-ELs and long term to not long term ELs.]

**Section 504 Eligibility**

Based on FUSD data provided to the Council team, 750 district students have a Section 504 plan and 936 have a health plan (1.07 percent and 1.33 percent of all students, respectively). As shown in Exhibit 2k, the number of Section 504 plans and health plans increased through 8th grade. Numbers in both areas are lower in high school except at 12th grade. District personnel are revamping the district’s Section 504 operations. As part of this process, the district should examine students with health plans and/or SST-developed educational action plans and determine whether there is any reason to believe they have a disability that substantially limits a major life activity, which includes reading, concentrating, thinking, breathing, etc. This consideration should exclude

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31 FUSD Student Information System, November 7, 2017.
the effects of mitigation measures that students are using, e.g., medication, educational accommodations and supports, etc.

Exhibit 2k. Number of Section 504 and Health Plans by Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>504</th>
<th>Health Plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KG</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AREAS OF STRENGTH

The following are areas of strength in the district’s demographics and referral/identification rates.

- **Disability Incidence Rates.** The district’s 10.6 percent disability rate does not suggest, in general, that Fresno Unified students are being over-referred or over-identified as having a disability.

- **Special Education Risk Ratios by Race/Ethnicity.** Using the risk ratio (RR) measure to consider disproportionality for all students with disabilities, the likelihood of any racial/ethnic group receiving special education is not disproportionate: African American (1.21 RR), Hispanic (0.31 RR), and white (1.24 RR). However, with a risk ratio of 0.31, Hispanics may be underrepresented.

- **Re-designation of EL Students.** District personnel have developed a matrix to better address the re-designation of English learner students with disabilities. English language proficiency for students with moderate/severe disabilities will be assessed through the Ventura County Comprehensive Alternate Language Proficiency Survey (VCCALPS), which measures the same domains as the CELDT/ELPAC.

- **Risk Ratios for Long Term ELs by Disability Area.** Long term ELs are not much more likely than ELs who are not long term to have one of the more common disabilities. The highest long term EL risk is with significant learning disabilities (1.59 RR), and the lowest risk is with emotional disturbance (0.34).

- **Section 504 Eligibility.** District personnel are revamping the district’s Section 504 operations.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The following areas present opportunities for improvements.

- **Variant Disability Rates.** The district’s identification rate of intellectual disabilities is much higher than state and national rates (11 percent, 5 percent, and 6 percent, respectively) and its
rate with emotional disturbance is much lower than state and national rates (2 percent, 6 percent, and 5 percent, respectively).

- **Disability Rates by Grade.** The percentage of students with IEPs increases from 3rd grade (10.6 percent) to 4th grade (11.5 percent) and peaks at 5th and 7th grades (12.3 percent and 12.0 percent, respectively).

- **Disability Risk Ratios by Race/Ethnicity.** White students have the greatest risk of being identified for emotional disturbance (3.51), and African American have the highest risk of being qualified for other health impairment (2.05).

- **Special Education Risk Ratio by Gender and Race/Ethnicity and Gender.** Overall, twice as many Fresno Unified males as females receive special education. This risk ratio changes somewhat for males with the most common race/ethnicities: white (2.16 RR), Hispanic (2.02 RR), and African American (1.97 RR).

- **Disability Risk Ratios by Race/Ethnicity and Gender.** Compared to females, males in the following racial/ethnic groups have risk ratios higher than 3.00 for the following disability areas: African American males with autism (5.65), Hispanic males with autism (5.64), white males with autism (3.34); and white students with speech/language impairment (3.02).

- **EL Students with IEPs.** English learners32 comprise 20 percent of the student enrollment and 30 percent of all students with IEPs. Compared to 10.6 percent of all district students with IEPs, 16.4 percent of all ELs have IEPs.

- **EL to Long Term EL Students with IEPs.** ELs are 1.77 times more likely than non-ELs to have IEPs, and long term ELs are 2.94 times more likely than long term ELs to have IEPs.

- **EL and Long Term EL Students with IEPs by Grade.** The percentages of long term EL students peak in 4th grade (28 percent), drop at 5th grade (20 percent), and then peak again at 7th grade (29 percent) and continue to increase through 12th grade (33 percent). The percentages of ELs who are not in long-term status increase from kindergarten (5 percent), peak at 5th grade (19 percent), and then continuously decrease to 12th grade (10 percent).

- **Section 504 Eligibility.** Only 1.07 percent of all students have a Section 504 plan.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

2. **Disability, Demographics, Referral and Identification of Disability.** Strengthen the consistency and appropriateness of referrals, assessments, and eligibility decisions in special education.

   a. **Data Review.** With a multi-disciplinary team of instructional division leaders, principals, and others like the executive director for accelerating achievement for African American students, review data like that displayed in exhibits 2a, 2b, and 2d through 2j (along with CDE’s latest SPP report and other relevant data) and develop hypotheses about the pattern of results. Focus attention on variant disability rates; grades leading up to those with highest disability rates; disproportionate identification by race/ethnicity; conditions leading to the high proportion of males by race/ethnicity with disability; and English learner students and

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32 Figures for English learners include long-term ELs, kindergarten through grade 12.
those who are long term. To the extent possible, sort data by regions, schools, and other variables to help identify and focus on areas of concern. Identify other data that might help further target areas for action and specific schools needing more assistance.

b. **Implementation Plan.** Based on these data and hypotheses about why the patterns look like they do, modify the MTSS implementation plan to include activities designed to address these issues. (Coordinate this activity with Recommendation 1b.) Consider reviewing health plans at annual reviews of Section 504 criteria to determine whether students with such plans may qualify under Section 504. As part of this process, address whether a student’s health constitutes a physical or mental impairment, and whether the results suggest that the impairment substantially limits a major life activity.

c. **Written Expectations.** For areas the multi-disciplinary team identifies as problematic, review/revise district guidance on first instruction, interventions, and progress monitoring; and modify processes for special education referrals, assessments, and eligibility.

d. **Differentiated Professional Learning.** Plan for and provide all relevant district stakeholders with the professional learning they need to implement the recommendations in this section. As part of this process, have personnel from special education, English learner, and acceleration of African American students’ achievement departments, etc., collaborate on the referral and assessment needs of EL and African American students. (Coordinate this activity with Recommendation 1c.)

e. **Data Analysis and Reports.** Develop and provide user-friendly summary reports to district leadership showing data like exhibits 2a, 2b, and 2d through 2j. Share data by region and by school. Consider how these data should be handled and reviewed by district leadership on a regular basis.

f. **Monitoring and Accountability.** Develop a process for the ongoing monitoring of referrals, evaluations, and eligibility practices. Rather than using a traditional record-review compliance model, review data with schools so that school-based personnel are aware of problems, so they are better prepared for follow-up action. Enable staff to observe best practices and receive coaching that will improve their knowledge and skills. (Coordinate this activity with Recommendation 1d.) Consider folding relevant outcomes into school accountability measures.
III. Achievement Data for Students with Disabilities

For more than a decade, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has relied on a set of 14 performance and compliance indicators for which every state educational agency (SEAs) has established targets and collected/reported outcome data. Before that, ED issued local and state Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) determination ratings based on compliance outcomes alone. This compliance focus changed several years ago when ED’s Office of Special Education Programs’ (OSEP) communicated its vision for results driven accountability (RDA), which has as its primary focus improving outcomes for students with disabilities.  

SPP Achievement Standards

Under RDA, IDEA determination ratings now include the following:

- Statewide reading and math assessment participation rates (4th and 8th grades);
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) participation rates and percentage of basic/above scores (4th and 8th grades); and
- Graduation and dropout rates.  

State Systemic Improvement Plan

More recently, a 17th indicator was added to the SPP. This indicator requires each state to develop a state systemic improvement plan (SSIP). The California Department of Education’s SSIP was developed to align with and be a component of the state’s “One System” approach to education. This approach is based on a commitment to ensuring that all students, including students with disabilities, have access to instruction and resources that provide the greatest opportunity to succeed. The SSIP’s focus is on measuring the achievement of three student groups, all of which have a relatively large statewide percentage of students with disabilities. Fresno Unified’s lower disability rates overall compared to the state (10.6 percent vs. 12.0 percent) has also resulted in smaller disability rates in FUSD among these three groups: low income (8.4 percent vs. 14 percent), English learners (16.4 percent vs. 23 percent), and foster youth (22.2 percent vs. 33 percent).

The One System approach incorporates the state’s local control funding formula (LCFF) and local control accountability plans (LCAP). The LCFF provides significant supplementary funding to school districts that serve large numbers of high-needs students, which includes low income, English learners, and foster youth. The LCAP requires the development of overall school district plans and goals for improvement, including how resources will be used to implement those plans and achieve goals. These provisions require a close alignment of SSIP and LCAP activities.

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33 April 5, 2012, RDA Summary, U.S. Department of Education at www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rdasummary.doc
34 Section IV. Supporting Achievement of Students with Disabilities addresses SPP indicators for racial/ethnic disproportionate representation (all students with IEPs and six major categories) due to inappropriate identification and secondary transition. Section V. Support for Teaching and Learning for Students with Disabilities addresses SPP indicators for timely and accurate state-reported data; special conditions; and uncorrected identified noncompliance.
CDE uses outcome measures for all students with disabilities, which are aligned with CDE’s general local educational agency accountability measures.

The SSIP recognizes three general evidence-based strategies for improving student performance. These are –

- Student engagement (supported by increased time in class through reduced absences);
- Student discipline (supported by decreased suspensions and expulsions); and
- Students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum and education with same-aged peers, which positively correlates with increased achievement. CDE supports this strategy by providing LEAs with guidance and resources on effective instructional strategies and structures such as UDL and MTSS.

In the previous section, the value of UDL and MTSS was described. Unless FUSD operates in a way that is consistent with “One System” and leverages all available strategies to promote and support all students, then the district’s efforts on behalf of students with disabilities is not likely to improve performance much.

The information below provides outcome data for the district related to achievement data, including for young children. Data and other information related to several SPP indicators associated with student discipline and access to the general education curriculum are provided in section IV. Support for Achievement of Students with Disabilities.

**Young Children Ages Three to Five Years**

One SPP indicator involves the achievement of young children with disabilities. The indicator has three components: appropriate behavior, acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, and positive social/emotional skills. For each component, calculations are made of the percentage of children in two areas:

- **Substantially Increased Skills.** Children who entered an early-childhood program below developmental expectation for their age but who have substantially increased developmentally by age six when they exit a program (substantially increased skills), and
- **Within Age Expectations.** Children functioning within expectations by age six or who attained those expectations by the time they exit the program.

As figures in exhibit 3a show for the ‘substantially increased skills’ category, outcomes ranged from 56.3 percent to 58.4 percent; and percentage points below targets ranged from 13.8 to 16.6. In the ‘functioning within age expectation’ category, outcome rates were somewhat lower (49.2 to 54.5 percent), and percentage points below targets were larger (27.7 to 30.1).

**Substantially Increased Skills**

Among district children who entered early childhood programs below developmental expectations for their age but who increased developmentally by age six when they exited the program, the rate of those who consistently met standards fell between 7.3 and 7.9 percentage points below state targets in 2014-15.
A. **Positive Social/Emotional Skills.** 56.7 percent met standards, which was 16 percentage points below the state’s target.

B. **Acquisition/Use of Knowledge/Skills.** 56.3 percent met standards, which was 13.8 percentage points below the state’s target.

C. **Appropriate Behavior to Meet Needs.** 58.4 percent met standards, which was 16.6 percentage points below the state’s target.

**Within Age Expectations**

Among children functioning at age-level skill expectations by six years of age or who had met those expectations by the time they exited the program, those who met standards at the following rates in 2016-17 are compared to state performance targets for that year.

- **Appropriate Behavior to Meet Needs.** 49.2 percent met standards, which was 29.8 percentage points above the state target.

- **Acquisition/Use of Knowledge/Skills.** 52.4 percent met standards, which was 30.1 percentage points above the state target.

- **Positive Social/Emotional Skills.** 54.5 percent met standards, which was 27.7 percentage points below the state target.

**Exhibit 3a. 2014-15 Outcomes for District/State Children Three to Five Years of Age with IEPs**

**Student Achievement on NAEP and Statewide Assessments**

Beginning in 2015, ED used an IDEA determination rating based in part on the results-driven accountability framework described earlier. Two matrices are used for this purpose: 50 percent of the ratings are based on results and 50 percent are based on IDEA compliance. The results are calculated using the following indicators:

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35 For a full explanation of ED’s methodology, see “How the Department Made Determinations under Section 616(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2015: Part B”

• **State Assessment Participation.** Fourth/eighth graders participating in regular statewide assessments in reading and math;

• **NAEP Outcomes.** Fourth/eighth graders scoring at or above basic in reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP);

• **NAEP Participation.** Fourth/eighth graders included in NAEP testing in reading and math;

• **Graduation Rate.** Students exiting school by graduating with a regular high school diploma; and

• **Dropout Rate.** Students exiting school by dropping out.

This subsection discusses the achievement of FUSD students with disabilities on the NAEP assessment, as well as statewide assessments. In addition, graduation and dropout rates are assessed.

**NAEP Achievement Rates for Fourth, Eighth, and Twelfth Grade Students with IEPs**

In partnership with the National Assessment Governing Board and the Council of the Great City Schools, the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) was created in 2002 to support and measure student achievement in the nation’s large urban school districts. In 2015, 21 urban school districts voluntarily participated in TUDA and were able to measure achievement by student subgroup on a single comparable assessment. Admirably, FUSD has participated in TUDA since 2009.

Data in exhibits 3b through 3e show the percentages of students with disabilities in 2015 who scored basic/above in reading and math in all states, all large city (TUDA) districts, and each TUDA district (including Fresno Unified). The exhibits also show the percentage point differences between 2015 and 2009 in all states, all TUDA districts, and each of the TUDA districts that participated in 2009.

**Reading**

**Fourth grade** 2015 reading at basic/above levels among students with disabilities averaged 33 percent for the nation and 23 percent among all TUDA districts, a change in 2009 of -1 percentage points for each. For Fresno Unified, 11 percent of students with disabilities scored at basic/above levels, a change of -6 percentage points since 2009.

In 2015, TUDA averages ranged from 53 percent at basic/above levels in reading to 7 percent. Of all the large cities, the highest averages were posted in Hillsborough County (53 percent), Duval County (50 percent), and Miami-Dade County (47 percent)—all districts with lower poverty rates than Fresno. Miami-Dade’s average increased the most, the 17 percentage points.

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36 TUDA scores include students who are Section 504-qualified. TUDA 2003-2013 results were retrieved from [http://www.advocacyinstitute.org/blog/](http://www.advocacyinstitute.org/blog/); and 2015 results were retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/](http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/).

37 Since this report was prepared, NCES announced NAEP results for 2017.
Exhibit 3b. Reading Grade 4

**Eighth grade** 2015 reading at basic/above levels among students with disabilities averaged 36 percent for the nation and 30 percent among all TUDA districts. While the nation’s average fell by 1 percentage points between 2009 and 2015, TUDA districts increased by an average of 5 percentage points. For Fresno Unified, 11 percent of eighth graders with disabilities scored basic/above, a change of -1 percentage points since 2009.

In 2015, TUDA averages ranged from 53 percent to 8 percent at basic/above levels. Of all large cities, the highest averages were posted by Miami-Dade County (53 percent) and Duval County (49 percent). Miami-Dade and New York City’s average scores increased the most, 14 percentage points.

Exhibit 3c. Reading Grade 8

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38 Legend Names: All States, Urban Cities, Albuquerque, Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore City, Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, District of Columbia, Duval County (FL), Fresno; Hillsborough FL, Houston, Jefferson City (KY), Los Angeles Unified School District, Miami-Dade County, New York City, Philadelphia, and San Diego.
**Math**

**Fourth grade** 2015 math at basic/above levels among students with disabilities averaged 54 percent for the nation and 44 percent among all TUDA districts, a change of -5 and -1 percentage points, respectively, since 2009. For Fresno Unified, 17 percent of students with disabilities scored at the basic/above level, a change of -7 percentage points since 2009.

In 2015, large city averages ranged from 75 percent at basic/above levels to 14 percent. Of all TUDA districts, the highest averages were posted by Duval County (75 percent), Hillsborough County (66 percent), Austin (63 percent), and Miami-Dade County (62 percent). Detroit increased the most, 12 percentage points.

**Exhibit 3d. Math Grade 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>Pt. Gap w/2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albuquerque</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charleston</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleve</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duval</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillsborough</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KY</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAUS D</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philly</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San D</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Eighth grade** math at basic/above levels among students with disabilities averaged 32 percent for the nation and 24 percent among all TUDA districts, changes of -4 and 0 percentage points, respectively, since 2009. For Fresno Unified, 6 percent of students with disabilities scored at the basic/above level, a change of -7 percentage points since 2009.

In 2015, large city averages ranged between 34 and 4 percent at basic/above levels. Of all the large cities, the highest averages were posted in Boston and Duval County (34 percent in each), and Miami-Dade County (33 percent). New York City increased the most, 11 percentage points.

**Exhibit 3e. Math Grade 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>Pt. Gap w/2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albuquerque</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charleston</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleve</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duval</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillsborough</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff KY</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAUS D</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philly</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San D</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statewide Assessments

The California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) System is based on the Smarter Balanced Assessments. Optional interim assessments and a digital library with tools and practices are available to help teachers use formative assessments improve teaching and learning in all grades. CDE requires districts to complete a performance indicator review (PIR) and develop an improvement plan based on each district’s state performance plan outcomes, which include the achievement of students with disabilities on statewide assessments.

Participation in Assessments

The third SPP indicator measures the percentage of students with IEPs who participate in statewide assessments. Figures in exhibit 3f show participation rates among these students of 81.62 percent in English language arts (ELA) and 80.88 percent in math. Both figures are below the state’s 95 percent target by 13.38 and 14.12 percentage points, respectively.39

Exhibit 3f. Participation Rate for FISD Students with IEPs and State Target40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ELA</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation Rate</td>
<td>81.62%</td>
<td>80.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alternate Assessments

According to district data submitted to the Council team, 248 students took an alternate assessment. Based on the 37,938-student enrollment in grades three through eight and grade eleven, some 0.7 percent of students in these grades took an alternate assessment. These figures are not precise, but as a guide, it appears that the district’s participation rate is below the 1 percent state cap for students with IEPs—a good thing.

Meeting/Exceeding Proficient State Standards

Figures in exhibit 3g show the percentage of students with IEPs meeting/exceeding proficiency standards on statewide assessments from 2014-15 to 2016-17. Between these two dates, the percentage of students who met/exceeded standards in reading increased from 4.8 percent to 5.7 percent. The figures are similar in math, with rates increasing from 4.3 to 5.5 percent.

39 Source: 2015-16 California SPP report for FUSD.
Exhibit 3g. Percentage of Students with IEPs Meeting/Exceeding Statewide Assessments

Data posted in the latest 2015-16 District Level Special Education Annual Performance Report for students with IEPs meeting/exceeding achievement standards showed district rates in ELA and math far below those that the district shared with the Council team. FUSD personnel should look at the two sets of data in exhibits 3g and 3h to ascertain the differences.

Exhibit 3h. SPP Percentage and Target: Students in Level 3 and 4 on Statewide Assessments

Indicator 17’s State Systemic Improvement Plan and LCAP Student Groups

SPP’s indicator 17 measures the achievement of students with IEPs for the three student groups that are the focus of the LCAP. This indicator compares current and prior year assessment scores for students with IEPs in the groups measured by the LCAP (English learners, low income, and foster youth) who achieved or met the standard on ELA and math assessments. Figures in exhibit 3i show 4.61 percent of these students met the standard for ELA in 2015-16, a small increase from the previous year’s 4.45 percentage. Students realized a larger increase in math, 4.09 to 4.48 percent.

Exhibit 3i. Achievement of Students with IEPs (ELs, Low Income, and Foster Youth)

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41 Data Source: FUSD – from FUSD Student Assessment System
42 Data source: FUSD Student Assessment System. The test results for the last 3 years was based on SBAC Test scores.
Graduation and Dropout Rates

Two SPP indicators measure rates for graduation (indicator 1) and dropouts (indicator 2).

Graduation Rates

SPP indicator 1 measures the percentage of exiting students with disabilities in 12th grade and exiting ungraded students 18 years of age and over who graduate from high school with a regular diploma.

Figures in exhibit 3j show five years of FUSD graduation data (2011-12 to 2015-16). For 2015-16, the 57.7 percent rate among students with IEPs increased by 11.6 percentage points since 2011-12, although the rate was flat the last two years. By comparison, the 2015-16 rate among all students was 85.5 percent, a 10.5 percentage point increase. The gap between all students and those with IEPs decreased from 28.9 to 27.8 points over the period. The SPP target for students with IEPs is 90 percent. CDE requires FUSD to complete a performance indicator review (PIR) and develop an improvement plan based on its state performance plan outcomes related, in part, to graduation rates.

Exhibit 3j. Graduation Rates for Students with IEPs and All Students (2011-12 to 2015-16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students with IEPs</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Completion Rate

Although they haven’t graduated with a regular diploma, a sizeable group of students with IEPs completed their studies. Data shown in exhibit 3k show that 11.2 percent of students completed school in 2015-16, the same as in 2011-12. During these years, the rates varied from 14.6 percent (2013-14) to 6.7 percent (2014-15).

Exhibit 3k. School Completion Rates for Students with IEPs (2011-12 to 2015-16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completion Rate</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Alternate Diplomas**

Under the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, states may now establish criteria for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who participate in alternate assessments to earn an alternate diploma.\(^{43}\) The criteria must be based on standards aligned with state requirements for a regular high school diploma. Indiana’s House of Representatives, for example, has approved such a diploma and the bill has moved to the Senate where it is expected to pass.\(^{44}\) Such an approach may be one that FUSD, along with other districts, may wish to support in California.

**Dropout Rates**

SPP indicator 2 measures the percentage of students in 9th grade and higher and ungraded students 13 years and over, who exit special education by dropping out of school. Data shown in exhibit 3l show FUSD-provided dropout rates among students with IEPs and all students over a five-year period (2011-12 to 2015-16). With a 2015-16 dropout rate of 24.7 percent among students with IEPs, the district saw its rate decrease by 1.8 percentage points since 2011-12. By comparison, the 10.7 percentage among all students was 14 points lower than the IEP rate, and the all-student rate decreased by 4.4 percentage points over the five-year period.

CDE’s posted SPP data for 2015-16 shows FUSD with a 10.14 percent dropout rate for students with IEPs, which met the state’s 13.72 percent target. However, this rate is much lower than the figure shared with the Council team by FUSD.

**Exhibit 3l. Dropout Rates for Students with IEPs and All Students, 2011-12 to 2015-16**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Students with IEPs</th>
<th>All Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AREAS OF STRENGTH

The following describes areas of strength in the achievement of students with disabilities in FUSD.

- **Participation in Alternate Assessment.** Based on available data, it appears that 0.7 percent of students in the grades assessed took an alternate assessment. This rate is below the 1 percent state cap for students with IEPs.

- **Graduation Rate.** From 2011-12 to 2015-16, the graduation rate gap between students with IEPs and all students decreased from 28.9 to 27.8 points.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The following areas present opportunities for improvements.

- **Early Childhood Outcomes.** Among young children in FUSD with IEPs (three to five years of age), in the category of ‘substantially increased skills,’ outcomes ranged from 56.3 percent to 58.4 percent; and the percentage points below targets ranged from 13.8 to 16.6. In the category of ‘functioning within age expectation,’ outcome rates were somewhat lower than in the first category (from 49.2 to 54.5 percent), and percentage points below targets were larger (27.7 to 30.1).

- **Fresno NAEP Disability Scores.** Overall, FUSD students with disabilities had lower basic/above percentages on NAEP in 2015 than in 2009.

- **Reading 4th Grade.** Some 11 percent of students with disabilities scored at basic/above levels, a change of -6 percentage points.

- **Reading 8th Grade.** Some 11 percent of eighth graders with disabilities scored basic/above, a change of -1 percentage points.

- **Math 4th Grade.** Some 17 percent of students with disabilities scored at the basic/above level, a change of -7 percentage points.

- **Math 8th Grade.** Some 6 percent of students with disabilities scored at the basic/above level, a change of -7 percentage points from 2009.

- **Participation in Statewide Assessments.** Students with IEPs had participation rates in 2015-16 of 81.62 percent in ELA and 80.88 percent in math. Both figures were below the state’s 95 percent target, with percentage point gaps of 13.38 and 14.12, respectively.

- **Percentages of Students with IEPs Meeting/Exceeding Assessment Standards.** Between 2014-15 and 2016-17, FUSD students with IEPs increased their meet/exceed rates for reading and math. Reading rates increased from 4.8 percent to 5.7 percent, and math rates increased from 4.3 to 5.5 percent. Note, however, that these rates were below those posted in the state’s 2015-16 District Level Special Education Annual Performance Report. (See exhibits 3g and 3h.)

- **SPP Indicator 17, State Systemic Improvement Plan Performance.** Assessment scores among students with IEPs in the various LCAP groups (i.e., English learners, low income, and foster
youth) who achieved or met the standards in ELA and math assessments showed: 4.61 percent students met ELA standards in 2015-16, a small increase of 0.16 percentage points over the previous year; and 4.48 percent met math standards, a 0.39-point increase.

- **Graduation Rates.** Between 2011-12 and 2015-16, the 57.7 percent rate among students with IEPs who graduated increased by 11.6 percentage points, although the rate was flat for the last two years. In comparison, the 2015-16 rate among all students was 85.5 percent, an increase of 10.5 percentage points. The SPP target for students with IEPs is 90 percent. CDE has required the district to complete a performance indicator review (PIR) and develop an improvement plan based on its SPP outcomes, including graduation rates.

- **Dropout Rates.** Between 2011-12 and 2015-16, the 24.7 percent among students with IEPs who dropped out of school decreased by 1.8 percentage points. In comparison, the 10.7 percentage among all students was 14 points lower than the IEP rate, and the all-student rate decreased by 4.4 percentage points over the five-year period. CDE’s posted SPP data for 2015-16 shows FUSD with a 10.14 percent dropout rate among students with IEPs, which met the state’s 13.72 percent target. However, this rate is much lower than the above-referenced figure shared with the Council team.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

3. **Achievement Data for Students with Disabilities.** With a multi-disciplinary team of instructional division leaders, including principals to the extent feasible, review exhibits 3a through 3l, benchmark them against future data as the district implements the Council team’s recommendations, and develop hypotheses about the patterns relating to the following areas –

- Early childhood outcomes based on SPP indicators and other relevant district indicators;
- TUDA/NAEP reading and math scores;
- Participation in statewide assessments by disability area and economically disadvantaged and foster youth. Reconcile district data with discrepant state-posted SPP data;
- Chronic absences;
- Suspension/expulsion rates based on number of days suspended, grades in school, and risk ratios by disability status and race/ethnicity. Calculate risk ratios for African American males by disability area and other groups of concern; and
- Graduation and dropout rates. Reconcile FUSD data with discrepant state posted SPP data.

These hypotheses and steps to address them should guide implementation of Recommendation 5 and the provision of inclusive, high-quality instruction for students with disabilities.

**Criteria for Graduation for Students Taking Alternate Assessments.** Under the *Every Student Succeeds Act,* states may establish criteria for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who can participate in alternate assessments to earn an alternate diploma. The criteria must be based on standards aligned with state requirements for the regular high school diploma. Indiana’s House of Representatives, for example, has approved such a diploma and

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45 Data provided by FUSD.
the bill has moved to the Senate where it is expected to pass.\textsuperscript{47} Consider having CORE districts and others study this issue and lobby for such an approach in California.

IV. Accelerating Achievement and Wellbeing of Students with Disabilities

This section addresses how Fresno Unified supports teaching and learning among students with disabilities to improve their academic attainment and social/emotional well-being. Information in this section covers support for effective and inclusive education, including educational settings for young children by demographic characteristics and students in kindergarten through 12th grade. California’s state systemic improvement plan (SSIP) recognizes three general evidence-based strategies for improving student performance. Given its positive correlation with increased achievement, one of these strategies involves the degree to which students with disabilities receive general education instruction with their same-aged peers. CDE requires the district to complete a performance indicator review (PIR) and develop an improvement plan based on FUSD’s state performance plan outcomes and placement of students in a least restrictive environment (LRE). Information in this section also includes how FUSD provides and supports effective education in specialized programs and other supports for high quality education.

Young Children with Disabilities

Most 3- to 5-year-olds with disabilities learn best when they attend preschools alongside their age-mates without disabilities to the greatest extent possible. These settings provide both language and behavioral models that assist in children’s development and help all children learn to be productively engaged with diverse peers. Studies have shown that when children with disabilities are included in the regular classroom setting; they demonstrate higher levels of social play; are more likely to initiate activities; and show substantial gains in key skills—cognitive skills, motor skills, and self-help skills. Participating in activities with typically developing peers allows children with disabilities to learn through modeling, and this learning helps them prepare for the real world. Researchers have found that typically developing children in inclusive classrooms are better able to accept differences and are more likely to see their classmates achieving despite their disabilities. They are also more aware of others’ needs. The importance of inclusive settings is underscored by the federal mandate, which requires that the extent to which young children (three to five years of age) receive most of their services in regular early childhood programs be included as a state performance-plan indicator.

Educational Settings for Young Children Three to Five Years of Age

Data in exhibit 4a show the percentages of FUSD students receiving most of their special education services in general education and in special classes and schools. District data are from the fall of 2017 and SPP indicator 6 data are from December 2015. In addition, the chart shows SPP state targets. District personnel should follow up on a possible discrepancy between these two

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sets of data for the first regular preschool-setting indicator, so staff members are using the most reliable information to review progress.

- **Regular Preschool Setting.** District data show that 37.3 percent of young children with IEPs were educated with their nondisabled peers in the regular preschool setting. This figure is 21.9 percentage points lower than the December 2015 SPP indicator data, and 4.5 percentage points higher than the SPP minimum target. Reportedly, some 30 of 67 preschool classrooms are inclusive to some degree.

- **Separate Classes/Schools.** District data show that 27.4 percent of young children with IEPs were educated in separate classes and schools. This figure is only 1.1 percentage point higher than the December 2015 SPP indicator data, and 7 percentage points higher than the SPP maximum target.

**Exhibit 4a. Percentage of Students by Educational Setting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Setting</th>
<th>FUSD (11/17)</th>
<th>SPP #6 (12/15)</th>
<th>SPP Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Majority of SpEd Services in General Education</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
<td>41.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate Classes and Schools</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>34.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Early Support for Young Children**

The district uses several initiatives to identify developmental issues in young children.

- **Help Me Grow.** Fresno has been engaged in the Help Me Grow (HMG) national model for young children that promotes help for families to identify and treat developmental and behavioral issues. The program does not provide direct services. Rather, it is designed to leverage existing resources within communities to identify vulnerable children, link families to community-based services, and empower families to support their child’s healthy development. Children with unaddressed behavioral/developmental problems are more likely to perform poorly than their peers and experience ongoing delays and poorer outcomes in education.\(^5^0\) Fresno Unified is one of 11 city/county agencies engaged in this effort.

- **Saturday Preschool Screening Center.** The district is piloting a Saturday preschool screening center modeled after one used by LAUSD. The clinic is designed to reach parents with concerns about their children at the earliest moment, and it offers families the opportunity to ask questions without initiating a formal assessment. According to LAUSD’s preliminary cost analysis, Saturday clinics can reduce expensive special education assessments and services.

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because staff members are often able to resolve concerns that do not require an evaluation in just under half of the children served.

- **Infants and Toddlers.** In addition to providing childcare and support for young children of parenting teens, the district sponsors early intervention services for infants and toddlers under IDEA’s Part C program.

**Focus Group Participant Feedback**

Focus group participants provided the following feedback on the district’s support for effective and inclusive education for young children and the district’s practices involving separate instruction.

- **Transition from Infants/Toddlers Early Intervention to School-based Special Education.** Sometimes it was difficult for children to transition from early intervention to school-based programs because of differences between the two programs.

- **Opportunity for Inclusive Instruction.** There were limited opportunities for preschool children to receive special education services in regular preschool classes. Half-day classes for students with and without IEPs were limited to 20 students, including a maximum of 7 students with IEPs. Two teachers (one general and one special), assisted by two paraeducators, teach these classes. With limited space and few co-teaching classes, it was difficult to expand this model, although there was a strong desire to do so.

- **State Grant.** Students in a few special day classes (SDCs) located in some schools may receive education in preschool classes. The use of a state grant for supporting inclusive practices provides targeted professional learning for site teams to promote inclusive instruction for students in prekindergarten to 3rd grade.

- **Special Day Classes.** Preschool SDCs that are relatively full at the beginning of the school year are likely to exceed maximum class-size guidelines, because children are assessed throughout the year, and those receiving Part C early intervention services must have an IEP to receive services by their third birthday. Large class sizes cause problems for children, staff, and schools. Furthermore, only one school has preschool children with moderate/severe disabilities. Here, children aged three to six years are sometimes educated in the same class. This age span is too large for children with such different developmental levels.

- **STAR Curriculum.** Specialized classes for students with autism (preschool through primary grades) use Strategies for Teaching based on Autism Research (STAR) curriculum. This highly recognized curriculum, which is aligned to the common core state standards, uses applied behavior analysis (ABA) instructional methods, lesson plans, teaching materials, data systems and a curriculum-based assessment for six curricular areas. The use of this curriculum supports consistency throughout the district, however, fidelity of implementation of the model was a concern.

**Educational Setting Rates for District, State, and Nation**

As required by the U.S. Department of Education, each SEA must report and collect from school districts data showing the number of students educated in various educational settings. Three SPP indicators relate to educational settings: all students with IEPs; students with IEPs by
race/ethnicity; and six disability areas by race/ethnicity. These indicators have universal measures and state-set targets for students receiving their education in one of three settings.51

- **Inclusive Class.** Instruction in general education 80 percent or more of the day;
- **Special Day Class (SDC).** Instruction in general education less than 40 percent of the day, i.e., in separate classes; and
- **Special Schools.** Instruction in separate schools and residential facilities.52

Data in exhibit 4b show rates for these three settings compared to the state, national, and SPP targets. District students were educated inclusively at about the same rate as the state, but at a lower rate than the nation. SDC and separate school rates were higher than state and national rates.53

- **Inclusive Class.** The district’s 52 percent rate for students was about the same as the state rate (54 percent), 4 percentage points below the SPP minimum target, and 9 percentage points below the national rate.
- **SDC.** The district’s 31 percent rate was 9 percentage points above the state rate, 18 points above the national rate, and 6 points above the SPP maximum target.
- **Separate School.** The district’s 4.4 percent rate met the SPP maximum target, but it was above state and national rates (0.8 and 1.4 percentage points, respectively).

**Exhibit 4b. Percentage of Students by Educational Setting (District, State and Nation)**

The information below provides additional data on the district’s educational settings, compared to state and national averages. Data are disaggregated by grade, race/ethnicity, and English/non-English learner status. Additional educational-setting data will be provided and analyzed throughout the sections below.

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51 The titles associated with the three measures (inclusive class, special day class and special schools) are used to facilitate understanding of the terms.
52 The number of students educated in a fourth educational setting, i.e., in general education between 79 percent and 40 percent of the time, is included in the measures’ denominator but the SPP indicators do not establish targets for this setting.
Inclusive Instruction

Research has consistently shown a positive relationship between effective and inclusive instruction and better outcomes for students with disabilities, including higher academic performance, higher likelihood of employment, higher participation rates in postsecondary education, and greater integration into the community.

The 10-year National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS 2) described the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of a nationally representative sample of more than 11,000 youth ages 13 through 16 who were receiving special education services in grade seven or above when the study began in 2001. The study found that, while more time spent in general education classrooms was associated with lower grades for students with disabilities compared to their non-disabled peers, students who spent more time in general settings were closer to grade level on standardized math and language tests than were students with disabilities who spent more time in separate settings. \(^{54}\) Research also shows that including students with a range of disabilities in general education classes does not affect the achievement of their non-disabled peers. \(^{55}\)

Similar results were found in a comprehensive study of school districts in Massachusetts. Students with disabilities who were in full-inclusion settings (spending 80 percent or more of the school day in general education classrooms) outperformed similar students who were not included to the same extent in general education classrooms with their non-disabled peers. On average, these students earned higher scores on the statewide assessment (MCAS), graduated high school at higher rates, and were more likely to remain in their local school districts longer than students who were educated in substantially separate placements (spending less than 40 percent of the day in a general education classroom). These findings were consistent across elementary, middle, and high school years, as well as across subject areas. \(^{56}\)

In addition, a fundamental goal of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) was to create a culture of high expectations for all students. In a statement on the application of the common core to students with disabilities, the CCSS website clarifies its inclusionary intent:

Students with disabilities … must be challenged to excel within the general curriculum and be prepared for success in their post-school lives, including college and/or careers.” These common standards provide historic opportunity to improve access to rigorous academic content standards for students with disabilities. \(^{57}\)

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The statement emphasizes the supports and accommodations students with disabilities need to meet high academic standards and it underscores the importance of having students with disabilities demonstrate their conceptual and procedural knowledge and skills in ELA (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) and mathematics. These supports and accommodations should ensure that students with disabilities have full access to the common core’s content and allow them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. These expectations for students with disabilities include the following elements:

- **Instruction and related services** designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities and enable them to access the general education curriculum.

- **Teachers and specialized instructional support personnel** who are prepared and qualified to deliver high-quality, evidence-based, and individualized instruction and support.

- **Instructional supports for learning** that are based on the principles of universal design for learning (UDL), which foster student engagement by presenting information in multiple ways and allowing diverse avenues of action and expression.  

- **Instructional accommodations** that reflect changes in materials (e.g., assistive technology) or procedures that do not change or dilute the standards but allow students to learn within the CCSS framework.

The general education curriculum refers to the full range of courses, activities, lessons, and materials routinely used by a school or school district. Students with disabilities have access to the curriculum when they are actively engaged in learning the content and skills that are taught to all students. To participate successfully in the general curriculum, a student with a disability may need additional supports and services, such as instructional supports, accommodations, scaffolding, assistive technology, and services. Applied with a universal design for learning (UDL) approach, a curriculum will articulate multiple and diverse avenues of learning and expression.  

When special educators teach students from multiple grades in a single self-contained class, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for teachers to focus on each grade’s content standards with any depth or effectiveness. When schools are organized in an inclusive manner, however, they are better able to support students with varying disabilities and enable them to attend their school of choice. Also, this approach supports a more natural distribution of students with disabilities across schools. Still, general education instruction must be meaningful for students with disabilities, and their presence in the classroom, alone, is insufficient to make it so.

School districts that operate without an effective MTSS framework often organize special education programming around a theory of “specialization” for student groups with perceived characteristics in common. Such programs, however, often include students with a range of disabilities.  

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58 UDL is defined as “a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that (a) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (b) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient.” by Higher Education Opportunity Act (PL 110-135). See the National Center on Universal Design for Learning at [http://www.udlcenter.org/](http://www.udlcenter.org/).

achievement and behavior, as well as students with characteristics that fall in between program types. Such specialization can sometimes perpetuate the myth that student needs will be met fully with the right program match, based on these perceived characteristics. If a student is failing, then it is presumed to be because he or she is in the wrong program. The consequence is that a new match is sought. In such instances, there is pressure to create more specialized programs rather than designing a broad framework for general-education instruction and behavioral supports, which incorporate student needs.

Inclusive Setting Data

Overall, 52 percent of students with IEPs in FUSD receive their education in an inclusive setting (i.e., general education classes at least 80 percent of the time). This rate is about the same as the state rate (54 percent), 4 percentage points below the SPP minimum target, and 9 percentage points below the national rate. The district’s overall rate changes significantly, however, when data are disaggregated by grade, disability, race/ethnicity, and English/non-English learners.

By Grade

When analyzing data for students educated in inclusive settings by grade, one finds that the highest rates are in kindergarten through 2nd grade in descending order (74 percent, 69 percent, and 62 percent, respectively). The rates continue to decline with small increases in 7th and 8th grades (48 percent to 53 percent) and 9th and 10th grade (49 percent to 51 percent). The lower 31 percent rate at the 12th grade is affected by students who continue in school until age 21 to receive transition services. (See exhibit 4c.)

Exhibit 4c. Percentage of Students Educated Inclusively by Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KG</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By Disability Area

When examining students educated inclusively by disability category, one finds that FUSD students with specific learning disabilities and other health impairment have the highest rates, each at 57 percent. These rates are about the same as those at the state level, but they are much lower.
than national rates (72 percent and 68 percent, respectively). This pattern is generally the same for autism and intellectual disability. However, district and state students with an emotional disturbance have higher rates in this setting (27 percent and 28 percent, respectively) than the nation (19 percent). (Exhibit 4d)

**Exhibit 4d. Percentage of Students Educated Inclusively by Disability Category**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Fresno</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Nation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SLD</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHI</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**By Race/Ethnicity and English Learner**

Exhibit 4e shows the percentages among the district’s three major racial/ethnic student groups and by status as either a long-term EL or non-ELs. Inclusive class rates are highest among English learners (55 percent), Hispanics and non-ELs (54 percent), and white students (51 percent). They were lowest for students who are African American (47 percent) and long-term ELs (46 percent).

**Exhibit 4e. Percentages by Race/Ethnicity, EL, Long Term EL, and Non-ELs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Learner</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Term EL</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not EL</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Support for Inclusive Practices**

FUSD has taken various steps to improve its inclusion of and effective instruction for students with disabilities in general education classes. The district has formed a ‘a best practice inclusive education focus group’ to develop a series of promising but still draft documents. Much of this work has been supported by a grant from CDE.

**Best Practice Inclusive Education Focus Group**

Beginning in the spring of 2017, the best practice inclusive education focus group (BPIE) met to guide the planning, expansion, and evaluation of high-quality inclusive learning options...
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throughout the district. The BPIE focus group includes administrators, special and general educators, paraeducators, psychologists, speech and language pathologists, parents and community members. The group has developed a mission, vision, written a definition of inclusion, and reviewed and modified the Florida Inclusive Network’s districtwide assessment of best practices for inclusive education for local use. The focus group also has identified baseline data to monitor continuous improvement. Also, the group will develop an assessment of practices at the school site level. After the assessments are conducted, the team will analyze the data and create an action plan to support inclusive education.

Best Practice Inclusive Education Mission, Vision, and Definition (Draft)

Draft documents provided to the Council team showing the district’s mission, vision, and definition of high-quality inclusion articulate the following.

- **Mission.** To provide equal access to high quality inclusive educational options with comprehensive services that support student academic and social-emotional achievement, family, and community engagement.

- **Vision:** All students have equitable educational options to engage in high quality instruction in the least restrictive environment with high expectations, individualized for each student to be college, career and community ready.

- **Definition.** Inclusive education is educating ALL students in age-appropriate general education classes in their neighborhood schools, with high quality instruction, interventions and supports so all students can be successful in the core curriculum. Inclusive schools have a collaborative and respectful school culture where students with disabilities are presumed to be competent, develop positive social relationships with peers, and are fully participating members of the school community. (The 2014-15 California statewide special education task force established this definition.)

Supporting Inclusive Practices Project (SIP) Grant

CDE awarded a ‘supportive inclusive practices’ (SIP) grant to FUSD, which provides research, evidence-based practices, training, and technical assistance to support students with disabilities in the least restrictive environments (LRE). As part of this process, the district will look at barriers and challenges that negatively impact students with disabilities’ participation in general education. Identified areas of work include: climate and culture; facilities; access to general education; leadership–policies and supports; program development and evaluation; and instructional support and pedagogy.

The district began its root cause of barriers analysis focusing on seven elementary sites, one in each region. A site administrator survey is being used, with support from an assigned program manager, regional instructional manager, and a teacher-on-special-assignment.

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60 At the time of the Council team’s visit in January, these documents were not yet finalized.
Inclusive Programs

According to information Fresno Unified provided to the Council team, the district “runs the following inclusive programs” to ensure students access core instruction with supports and they spend most of the day with their general education peers: orthopedic impairment inclusion; emotional disturbance inclusion; and autism inclusion. According to information provided by the district, an additional inclusion program is designed for students with mild/moderate disabilities through co-teaching at middle and high school levels. Exhibit 4f shows the number of schools with SDC programs by grade level. The area of autism leads with the largest number of schools with inclusive programs (11). This area is followed by emotional disturbance (8), orthopedic impairment (3), and mild/moderate (1), which includes students with specific learning disabilities and other health impairments.

Exhibit 4f. Number of Schools with Inclusion Programs by Grade Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Levels</th>
<th>Autism</th>
<th>Emotional Disturbance</th>
<th>Orthopedic Impairment</th>
<th>Mild/Moderate</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elem/Middle</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid/HS/Adult</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Council team’s experience, inclusive education is neither defined nor implemented as a “program.” Rather, inclusive education reflects a vision and practice that enables students with disabilities to receive meaningful differentiated instruction within general education classes and supplemental interventions either inside or outside the general education class. Because each student has different needs, instruction and services should be flexible and not provided inside a fixed programmatic structure. This perspective is one reflected in the district’s draft definition of inclusive education referenced above.

Relying on a programmatic vision to support inclusive instruction makes it more difficult for Fresno Unified to increase inclusive options for students with disabilities who would otherwise receive services in an SDC. This model also makes it more difficult for schools to keep and effectively educate students who would otherwise be sent to another school’s SDC because the model was not based on this approach. Furthermore, comparing figures in exhibit 4f and 4j, below, 4 schools have SDCs with an associated inclusion program and 75 schools do not.

- **Mild/Moderate SDC.** With 66 schools hosting mild/moderate SDCs, only one has an associated inclusion program.
- **Autism.** With 11 autism SDCs, only three have an associated inclusion program.
- **Emotional Disturbance.** At the elementary level there are two SDCs for students with emotional disturbance and neither have an associated inclusion program.
Furthermore, as discussed below under the section pertaining to SDCs, there are schools with no separate day classes and others have as many as three SDC programs. Limiting the support for inclusive education to schools with an associated SDC program does not alleviate the educational impact on schools having a larger number of students with IEPs requiring more intensive supports. Also, it does not promote equity by enabling these students to attend the school they would otherwise attend if they did not have a disability. This goal can only be accomplished by having more schools utilize high quality inclusive practices instead of sending students somewhere else. To the extent that teacher certification or union barriers would prevent such an inclusive education approach, these situations need to be addressed to provide a more flexible service delivery system.

**Co-Teaching**

In addition to the inclusive programs referenced above, schools use co-teaching models to varying degrees. According to district representatives, Fresno Unified began to implement co-teaching in 2014-15 to provide students with more inclusive educational opportunities in ELA and math classes at both the middle and high school levels. In applying co-teaching in FUSD, no more than one-third of a class may have an IEP. Two teachers on special assignment are used to support two middle schools’ co-teaching.

**Curriculum and Instruction**

The special education department developed a draft on September 6, 2017 documenting curriculum alignment for various special day classes. However, the document does not reflect any supplementary interventions in ELA or math for students not educated in SDCs.

**Focus Group Participant Feedback**

Focus group participants provided the following feedback to the Council team on the district’s inclusive practices and instruction for students educated in general education classes most of the day. Generally, some teachers believed that students were better served elsewhere especially when teachers were struggling to support students who are far below grade level with core instruction. This thinking may go undetected when instructional leadership team visits do not include special education representatives, and the protocol does not specifically address effective inclusion.

- **Curricular Materials.** The team concluded that collaboration between special education and curriculum/instruction (C/I) was insufficient. Absent such interaction, decisions are made with unintended consequences. For example, Corrective Reading was not available past the 6th grade, and SpringBoard was not sufficiently adaptable to students reading significantly below grade level. Similarly, there was a belief that special education was not involved in the decision to purchase GoMath, which is difficult to adapt.

- **Planning Time.** For general and special educators who are co-teaching or providing resource services, there was generally no expectation of having a structured planning time for teachers teaching or supporting the same students.

- **Elementary School Resource Model.** Typically, elementary schools rely on a traditional resource model, using pull-outs or push-in practices to provide special education services to
students. Some interviewees believed that some resource service providers (RSPs) were using strategies from 30 years ago that do not help students accelerate learning.

- **Caseloads.** Many elementary schools have only one resource teacher. Even with the assistance of paraeducators, caseloads for many teachers are over caseload limits. Reportedly, RSP caseloads number 30 students and it was expected to grow to 40 if students awaiting evaluations were qualified for services. This makes it difficult for RSPs to effectively support the education of students in general education classes.

- **Co-Teaching.** Generally, there was support among interviewees for co-teaching, and several teachers reported students having success with this instructional model, including higher graduation rates. Concerns included—

- **Parameters.** Other than the percent cap on students with IEPs being included in co-taught classes, there were no other guidelines for co-teaching, which was used primarily at the middle and high school levels.

- **Support.** Generally, there was a perception that co-teaching opportunities were limited, and more support was needed for this practice. Other than for several SDC inclusion programs, co-teaching appeared to be used primarily for students who would otherwise receive instruction under the traditional resource model.

- **Resources and Training.** There was a need for operational resources and professional learning to support inclusive education. In some cases, co-teaching special educators were not valued and were viewed as glorified aides. In addition, some educators were struggling to understand the core curriculum because they had previously only taught content areas outside the regular classrooms. The district offered training for co-teaching in the past, but it has not offered it more recently.

- **Challenging Behavior and Safety.** There was a perception that students were moved to more restrictive placements because technical assistance, coaching, modeling, and other supports were not available to help students with challenging behaviors and safety concerns.

- **Students with Orthopedic Impairments.** Two teachers of students with orthopedic impairments reportedly had caseloads of more than 100 students each over 66 schools. This circumstance arose due to a decision to close associated SDCs and educate these students at their neighborhood schools. While the team did not hear criticisms of this decision, there were significant concerns that these high itinerant caseloads make it difficult to meet student needs. In some cases, students were unable to make progress and were consequently placed in programs with alternate curriculum. It was also reported to the team that there was a problem with delays in ordering and receiving IEP-specified equipment for these students.

### Special Day Classes

This section includes demographic data on students educated in SDCs for less than 40 percent of the time. Also, information is provided on the district’s teaching and learning support for these students.
Special Day School Setting Data

The district’s 31 percent rate of students educated in SDCs was 9 percentage points above the state’s rate, 18 points above the national rate, and 6 points above the SPP maximum target. The district’s overall percentage of 31 percent changes significantly when data are disaggregated by grade, disability, by race/ethnicity, and English/non-English learner status.

By Grade

When analyzing data on students educated in an SDC by grade, one sees that the rate is lowest in kindergarten (24 percent) but increases through 6th grade (36 percent). In 7th grade the rate decreases (33 percent) until 10th grade (28 percent), when it increases again at 11th grade (33 percent). (See exhibit 4g.) The 12th grade rate is lower because a high percentage of students remain in school to receive transition services are in separate schools.

Exhibit 4g. Percentage of Students Educated Inclusively by Grade

By Disability Area

When examining students educated in SDCs by disability category, one finds that--except for ED and SLD--district rates are 16 to 24 percentage points higher than national rates. (See exhibit 4h.)

- **Intellectual Disability.** The district’s 74 percent rate is only four percentage points higher than the state’s rate, but it is 24 points higher than the national rate.
- **Autism.** The district’s 58 percent rate is 16 percentage points higher than the state’s rate and 24 points higher than the national rate.
- **Emotional Disturbance.** The district’s 36 percent rate is only 4 percentage points higher than the state’s rate and 2 points higher than the national rate.
- **Other Health Impairment.** The district’s 25 percent rate is 8 percentage points higher than the state’s rate and 16 points higher than the national rate.
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- **Specific Learning Disability.** The district’s 24 percent rate is 15 percentage points higher than the state’s rate and 19 points higher than the nation’s low 5 percent rate.

### Exhibit 4h. Percentage of Students Educated in SDCs by Disability Category

![Percentage of Students Educated in SDCs by Disability Category](chart.png)

#### By Race/Ethnicity and English Learner

Exhibit 4i shows SDC percentages for the district’s three major racial/ethnic groups and by English learner status—both long term ELs and non-ELs. The SDC rates vary by only three percentage points. English learners have the highest rates at 33 percentage, followed by African American, white, and long term ELs (32 percent). Hispanic students and non-ELs each have the lowest rate, 30 percent.

### Exhibit 4i. Percentages by Race/Ethnicity, EL, Long Term EL, and Non-ELs

![Percentages by Race/Ethnicity, EL, Long Term EL, and Non-ELs](chart.png)

#### Special Day Classes by Grade Level

According to information the district provided to the Council team, Fresno Unified operates the following SDCs: mild/moderate, emotional disturbance, autism, autism intensive behavior program (IBP), moderate/severe, deaf/hard of hearing, and visual impairment. Exhibit 4j shows the numbers of each program by grade band.

Programs for students with mild/moderate disabilities have the largest number of schools with SDCs. This program includes students with specific learning disabilities and other health impairments (66). This area is followed by moderate/severe (20), autism (15), autism intensive behavior (5), deaf/hard of hearing (4), and emotional disturbance and visual impairment (2 each).
Exhibit 4j. Number of SDC Programs by Grade Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>M/M</th>
<th>ED</th>
<th>Autism</th>
<th>IBP</th>
<th>M/S</th>
<th>D/HH</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>ALL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elem/Middle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid/HS/Adult</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALL</strong></td>
<td><strong>66</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>114</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Department of Special Education Curriculum Alignment

Based on a September 6, 2017 draft special education curriculum-alignment document, the materials listed in exhibit 4k below are for SDCs associated with mild/moderate (MM), emotional disturbance (ED), autism, and autism intensive behavior.

Exhibit 4k. Draft Special Education Curriculum Alignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>SDC</th>
<th>ELA</th>
<th>ELA Supplemental</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Math Supplemental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>MM, ED</td>
<td>Wonders*</td>
<td>1-3: Reading Mastery</td>
<td>GoMath!</td>
<td>Number Worlds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4-6: Corrective Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>MM*</td>
<td>Springboard*</td>
<td>SpringBoard Foundational Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unnamed supplemental resources</td>
<td>TransMath-VMath Intro to Algebra VMath Algebra 1-Big Idea</td>
<td>Unnamed supplemental resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>STAR</td>
<td>Handwriting Without Tears PCI Reading Program</td>
<td>STAR</td>
<td>Touch Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>Unique News2You**</td>
<td>PCI Reading Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-12</td>
<td>Autism Intensive Behavior</td>
<td>Unique</td>
<td>PCI Reading Program</td>
<td>Unique</td>
<td>No Information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Students must have access to the grade level in which they are enrolled.

**News-2-You is a weekly newspaper used in special education classrooms for beginning readers and students with special needs.

Focus Group Participant Feedback

Focus group participants provided feedback to the team on the following areas related to teaching and learning of students in special day classes.
• **Curriculum/Program**
  - *Unique Learning System.* The pilot for this program for teaching students with materials aligned with a modified curriculum has been successful and its use is now moving to scale across the district. There were concerns, however, that the program does not address students’ social engagement and this important area of need is not addressed consistently in other instructional methods.
  - *WonderWorks Pilot.* There was support for WonderWorks, but some interviewees worried that the reading program would not show students making progress because not all teachers had been sufficiently trained and had not been given sufficient time to implement it.
  - *Wonders.* More training was needed for teachers to use the Wonders reading program for students with mild/moderate disabilities who have skill levels significantly below grade level.
  - *Handwriting without Tears.* Purchased without the input of occupational therapists, this program to improve handwriting raised concerns that the materials were not appropriate for certain groups of students and, as a result, should not being used.

• **Instruction and Interaction with Peers Without Disabilities.** In some cases, students educated in SDCs would benefit from participation in general education classes. Depending on principal leadership, it may be difficult to attain this participation with the support students require.

• **SDCs Aligned with Student Needs.** Numerous comments were heard by the team about the alignment of student needs with SDC placements. Most comments related to students with skills above an SDC’s functional curriculum. In other cases, students with wheelchairs who could be educated in general education classes are instead placed in SDCs to receive support for mobility. Although resolved administratively in most cases, the team was told that the time frame could be lengthy.

• **Caseloads.** The district uses a staffing framework for SDCs with standard teacher-to-paraeducator ratios, which are increased based on student needs. However, the team heard numerous concerns about teacher caseloads that were excessive and above the staffing framework.

• **Age Range.** Currently, SDCs have students with ages that span three grades. There was support in the focus groups for the district’s pilot that reduces the grade span to two. This reduction would better support instruction aligned with curricular standards.

• **Standard Materials.** There was a desire to develop and implement standard equipment and materials for each SDC program type.

• **Location of SDCs.** Like many school districts, FUSD has placed SDCs in schools having space to host the program rather than according to a master plan. As a result, students are frequently educated at some distance from their homes and outside their feeder regions, making transportation routes unnecessarily long and expensive. Reportedly, at least one SDC for students with autism was in a mobile unit that was a football field’s distance from the school.Interviewees voiced a desire to have a master plan with a gap analysis showing what changes would be necessary to have students attend SDCs located within their regions and then have the district act on that analysis.
• **Articulation Planning.** The Ziggurat and underlying characteristics checklist (UCC) are used to support the transition of students with autism. Also, regional instructional managers are expected to attend lateral and vertical grade-level IEP transition meetings. Interviewees indicated that there were gaps in supporting these transitions, and that a protocol for this purpose was not in use. When transition activities were not in place, it was difficult for new schools and teachers without adequate notice and information to prepare for incoming students.

• **Instructional Practice Walks.** Interviewees indicated that instructional learning team visits did not consistently include special education administrators and observations of special day classes. Such observations could highlight or uncover issues raised above.

**Special (Center) Schools**

This section includes demographic data on students educated in special day classes (or center schools), which are attended only by students with disabilities. Also, information is provided on the district’s supports for teaching these students.

**Special Day School Setting Data**

The district’s 4.4 percent rate met the SPP maximum target, although it is 0.8 percentage points above the state’s rate and 1.4 points above the national rate. The district’s overall percentage of 4.4 percent changes significantly when data are disaggregated by grade, disability, race/ethnicity, and English/non-English learner status.

**By Grade**

When analyzing data on students educated in special schools, one sees that the rates are lowest at kindergarten through 2nd grade (about 1 percent). Rates increase gradually until 8th grade (2.4 percent) and 11th grade when they increase to 2.4 percent and 3.4 percent, respectively. Although not included in exhibit 4l, the rate is highest in 12th grade (3.6%) where many students remain in school until the age of 21 years to receive transition services. (See exhibit 4l.)

**Exhibit 4l. Percentage of Students Educated in Separate Schools by Grade**
By Disability Area

District students are educated in separate schools at higher rates than the nation in every disability category, except for SLD. (See exhibit 4m.)

- **Emotional Disturbance.** FUSD’s 23 percent rate is the same as the state’s rate but both are 4 points higher than the national rate.
- **Intellectual Disability.** The district’s 18 percent rate is double the state’s rate and 12 percentage points higher than the national rate.
- **Autism.** The district’s 5 percent rate is 2 percentage points lower than the state’s rate but 3 points higher than the national rate.
- **Other Health Impairment.** The district’s 3 percent rate is 1 percentage point higher than the state and national rates.
- **Specific Learning Disability.** The district’s 0.7 percent rate is about the same as the state and national 0.5 percent rates.

**Exhibit 4m. Percentage of Students Educated Inclusively by Disability Category**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Fresno</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Exh 4n</th>
<th>ED</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Autism</th>
<th>OHI</th>
<th>SLD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHI</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLD</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By Race/Ethnicity and English Learner

Exhibit 4n shows percentages according to FUSD’s three major racial/ethnic groups and by English learner status--both long-term EL and non-ELs. These rates vary by 4.6 percentage points, with white students having the highest rate (7.1 percent) and English learners the lowest (2.5 percent). Between these two student groups in ascending order are African Americans (5.3 percent), non-ELs (5.0 percent), Hispanics (3.9 percent), and long-term ELs (3.7 percent).

**Exhibit 4n. Percentages by Race/Ethnicity, EL, Long Term EL, and Non-ELs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>English Learner</th>
<th>Long Term EL</th>
<th>Not EL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus Group Participant Feedback

Focus group participants shared comments on the following.

- **Transition from Special to Regular Schools.** Various concerns were raised by interviewees about the difficulties students faced when attempting to transition from SDCs to regular schools, including low expectations and insufficient supports. An example involved Addicott school. This pre-K through middle school educates students with moderate/severe disabilities. Interviewees indicated that assigned students were likely to remain at the school through completion of middle school. Focus group participants also reported that more proactive administrative support was needed to advocate for and facilitate transition. This circumstance was reported to be especially frustrating for students who were higher functioning and had learned skills enabling them to be educated in a less restrictive environment.

- **Previously Incarcerated Foster Youth.** These youths have significant needs that are not always addressed on their IEPs according to interviewees. The single nonpublic school (NPS) in Fresno was full at the time of the Council’s visit, which presented instructional and service challenges for students who needed such a placement.

Support for Student Behavior

Fresno Unified has developed and implemented various strategies to address disproportionate suspensions among students with IEPs. The SDCs associated with students having emotional disturbance were present at two elementary schools, two middle schools, and a separate school, Fulton, for high school students with severe emotional needs. SDCs for students with autism, including the autism intensive behavior program, incorporated specific supports and interventions to address the behavior of these students having challenging behaviors.

Students engaging in behavior that resulted in out-of-school (OSS) suspensions will likely see their inclusive education affected. Information in this section provides data on two state performance indicators related to out-of-school suspensions (OSS) for students with IEPs. The first measures OSSs that are disproportionately high compared to state rates; and the second measures OSSs that are disproportionately high based on race/ethnicity. Suspension data are also provided for English learners with IEPs compared to non-EL students with IEPs. In addition, the section describes how Fresno Unified has supported students’ positive behavior and social/emotional wellbeing.

**FUSD and State Rates for Students with IEPs Suspended for More than 10 Days**

The SPP indicator 4a compares the district’s percentage of students with IEPs suspended for more than 10 days to the statewide rate to determine if the district’s suspension rate is disproportionately high. Using this measure, using FFY 2015 SPP data, Fresno Unified’s 1.25 percent rate was smaller than the state’s 2.43 percent rate and not disproportionally high.

**Students With/Without IEPs: Suspension Rates and Risk Ratios**

Figures in exhibit 4o show percentages and risk ratios for OSSs in 2016-17 of 11 to 20 days, 21 to 30 days, more than 10 days, as well as all suspensions for students with/without IEPs.
In each category, students with IEPs were much more likely than students without IEPs to be suspended for 11 to 20 days (5.39 RR), 21 to 30 days (7.66 RR), over 10 days (5.51). The risk ratio was smaller when considering all suspensions (2.45). Note that the 1.5 percent rate for OSSs over 10 days is substantially smaller than the 3.67 percent rate reported in the FFY 2015 SPP.

**Exhibit 40. For IEPs/No IEPs: Percentages of Suspensions and Risk Ratios**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>11 to 20 Days</th>
<th>21 to 30 Days</th>
<th>&gt; 10 Days</th>
<th>All Suspensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No IEP</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Ratio</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>7.66</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of Students with IEPs Receiving an OSS totaling More than 10 Days by Grade**

Figures in exhibit 4p show the number of students with IEPs suspended more than 10 days in 2016-17 by grade. This data show that the largest numbers of students in this category were in 7th grade (23 students) and 8th grade (29 students).

**Exhibit 4p. Percentage of OSSs Over 10 Days by Grade for Students with IEPs**

**Risk Ratios for Students with IEPs by Race/Ethnicity**

Figures in exhibit 4q show that 3.3 percent of African American students with IEPs were suspended more than 10 school days. This rate was somewhat less than the 3.67 percent reported in the FFY 2015 SPP in exhibit 4r. These students were 2.83 times more likely than their peers with IEPs to receive an OSS. Small percentages of Hispanic and white students received OSSs (1.3 percent each), much lower than data reported by the FFY 2015 SPP in exhibit 4r.
Improve Special Education Services in the FUSD

Exhibit 4q. Percentages/Risk Ratios by Race/Ethnicity of OSS Over 10 Days (Students with IEPs)

English Learners’ Suspensions

In 2016-17, of all English learners with IEPs, 0.75 percent (18 students) were suspended for more than 10 days. Of all non-ELs with IEPs, 1.9 percent were suspended for this period. The risk ratio for ELs compared to non-ELs for suspensions was low (0.40).

CDE Notice of Disproportionate Representation and Significant Disproportionality

In a letter dated August 3, 2017, CDE notified FUSD of its “needs intervention” status for meeting IDEA requirements for 2016-17. This determination was based on monitoring activities related to disproportionality and significant disproportionality. The letter provided no more specific information on monitoring activities and their results. Although not cited in CDE’s notice, the 2015-16 SPP reported suspension rates on OSSs of more than 10 days for students with IEPs by race/ethnicity. (See exhibit 4r). These data show OSS percentages for African American (3.67 percent), American Indian (2.56 percent) and multi-ethnic students (3.14 percent) that were larger than the state’s average rate of 2.43 percent. Note that the number of suspended/expelled American Indian and multi-ethnic students totaled only eight students, while the number of African American students (47) was higher.61

Exhibit 4r. Percent Students with IEPs Received OSSs of More than 10 Days by Race/Ethnicity

Plans to Address Disproportionate Suspensions

Fresno Unified has taken steps to address the disproportionate suspensions of African American students with IEPs by initiating coordinated early intervention services provided using an MTSS framework to promote positive behavior interventions and supports. These activities are

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61 FUSD data for 2016-17 reported two OSSs over 10 days for multi-racial and American Indian students together.
embedded in the district’s plan and related activities to accelerate the achievement of African American students.

- **Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS).** To address its finding of significant disproportionality in the suspension of African American students with IEPs for more than 10 days, the district has been required to use 15 percent of its IDEA funds to provide CEIS to students without disabilities. Using a cross functional team working with a CDE representative, the district used an MTSS framework to establish and implement PBIS.

- **Accelerating Achievement for African American Students in FUSD.** Motivated by a 2014 Council of the Great City Schools’ call to action to increase the academic outcomes for males of color and President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper initiative, the district in 2017 established a broad instructional leadership team to address this issue in a serious manner. The district hired an executive director to develop and lead a detailed plan to drive this work. Resource counseling assistants are supporting students and teachers at seven pilot elementary schools and providing personalized academic support and monitoring for middle and high school students. The initiative is also being designed to provide professional learning for teachers, which includes cultural responsiveness, implementation of instruction standards, and research-based social-emotional strategies.

**Focus Group Participant Feedback**

Focus group participants shared several concerns about the district’s support for students with challenging behaviors.

- **BIPs.** It was perceived by interviewees that general educators were “spread thin” and that some did not have time or the desire to implement behavior intervention plans (BIP) for students with IEPs.

- **Knowledgeable Support.** While training was provided on crisis prevention, less training was focused on behavioral management. There appeared to be little structured assistance to help teachers who had exhausted their expertise in addressing students’ challenging behavior. There was a strong desire among focus group participants to have more active involvement of personnel having knowledge and experience with children demonstrating unmanageable behavior.

- **Manifestation Determinations.** Examples were provided of manifestation determinations that appeared to rule out a relationship between behavior and a student’s disability, even when there were few supports and no specific behavioral intervention plan.

- **Phoenix School.** This alternative school has two campuses, one elementary and one middle/high school, for students who are expelled or who voluntarily transfer. The school educates students with/without IEPs, although reportedly about 40 percent of students have disabilities. According to a three-year data analysis that the elementary school provided to the Council team, about 55 percent of students voluntarily transfer to the school. Based on school site data, some schools transferred a disproportionately high number of students. Two schools transferred more than 20 students, and in one of these schools students had been expelled. Four schools transferred 0 students, and 12 schools transferred 10 or more students.
English Learners with Disabilities

The district’s Master Plan for English Learner Success provides direction and guidance to district and school leaders, teachers, paraprofessionals, and students on the programs and services available to spur the academic success of ELs. It also articulates the expectations the district holds for each school and classroom in which English learners are served. The Plan stresses the need to establish a culture of shared responsibility for providing rigorous and engaging instruction for all English learner students. The district is moving away from the philosophy that ELs learn best in specialized and isolated classrooms and now embraces an approach to academic language development that acknowledges the importance of rich language acquisition in tandem with content acquisition. The Master Plan specifies that this shift requires all teachers and leaders to understand and foster rigorous learning environments for English learners in all classrooms throughout the district.

The Master Plan has the following references to students with IEPs or special education.

- District competencies for school leaders includes their ability to provide professional learning on ways to differentiate instruction for subgroups of English learner students, including those with IEPs.
- English learners with disabilities require services that address their English and home language learning needs, as well as their special and general education needs.
- The district will invest significantly in preparing all teachers to instruct EL students in all classes, including special education.

There is no apparent information in the Master Plan, however, that provides models for educating EL students with IEPs in a manner that addresses their English and home language learning needs in addition to their special and general education needs.

Access to High Quality Education

Focus group participants also raised a variety of other issues. Most of these issues involved supports for high-quality education that incorporated assistive technology, postsecondary transition activities and services, professional learning, and parent support and engagement.

Assistive Technology and Augmentative/Alternative Communication

According to the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, assistive technology (AT) and augmentative/alternative communications (AAC) increase a student’s opportunities for a high-quality education, social interactions, and meaningful employment. These provisions also support student learning in a least restrictive environment.

The AT team in FUSD is comprised of two specialists and one assistant, and it supports school sites in addressing students’ AT needs. Speech/language pathologists are in the second year of assessing student needs for AAC and providing support and direct services. In collaboration with the Central Valley Diagnostic Center, the district is providing a program that enables speech/language pathologists to receive AAC certification. The special education department has a draft Assistive Technology Guidebook for teachers to support student assessment of and access
to appropriate AT. The Guidebook includes legal parameters, considerations of AT when developing IEPs, assessments and trial steps, and examples of AT to support different areas of student need.

**Focus Group Participant Feedback**

Focus group participants provided feedback on students’ access to appropriate AT and AAC. The following major themes emerged.

- **Support for AT.** A small AT team collaborates with OTs and others, but it has difficulty supporting school-based personnel, students, and their parents with all requested technical assistance. Support for AAC has strengthened with the certification and assistance of SLPs, but the program addresses assessments and not implementation. The AT team provides this training after school. The team has been able to attend only one conference in eight years, so it has been difficult for them to keep up with evidence-based research and new devices on the market.

- **Resources.** Reportedly, about $15,000 to $20,000 is available to purchase AT/AAC equipment and materials, which is too small to cover high-cost AT equipment. Purchase requests must go through the low-incidence and special education leadership teams, which is described as a cumbersome and lengthy process. The following were cited as areas of need.

- **Lending library** resources have not been updated to reflect new technology.

- **iPads.** Information technology will not approve the use of iPads to download apps that are viewed as most appropriate for AAC. Fewer apps are developed for tablets, and they offer fewer options than iPads.

- **Text to Speech.** Although the district spent a considerable amount of money to purchase thousands of Kurzwell licenses to support text-to-speech capability, the licenses were not renewed, and the program was available only on older computers. Five licenses have been bought for the Capti Narrator, but this number does not meet all IEP-specified needs. Although Wonders and SpringBoard have text-to-speech features, they are not as broad and useful as those offered by Kurzweil or Capti. The Co:Writer Universal app was available on Chromebooks, which was expected to expand access.

- **AAC Assessment Kits.** Only one assessment kit is available for speech/language pathologists conducting AAC assessments, which is not sufficient for all qualified pathologists.

- **Implementation Issues**
  - **Training.** While it is more effective and efficient to train a teacher, the student, and parent together, it is difficult to do so, which increases time for this activity. Most training in the district for each group is done separately
  - **Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).** PECS is an evidence-based AAC for many children with autism. It is present in classrooms but not consistently implemented as designed.
  - **SMART Boards.** Although many SDCs have SMART boards, little training is currently available, and teachers are not consistently using this equipment to facilitate communication for students needing AAC.
Postsecondary Transition Activities and Services

In California, school districts are to start transition planning for students with disabilities no later than the first IEP that is in effect when the student is 16 years of age (or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team). The planning process includes age-appropriate transition assessments, transition services, courses of study that will reasonably enable students to meet postsecondary goals, and annual IEP goals on each student’s transitional needs. Transition services and supports prepare students for employment and independent living through coordinated activities that promote the changeover from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation.

IEP Compliance and Post School Experience

Indicator 13 of the SPP measures the percent of students aged 16 and above with an IEP that had all eight coordinated, measurable, annual IEP goals and transition services that would reasonably enable the student to meet their postsecondary goals. According to the state’s 2015-16 report, 100 percent of the district’s IEPs met this criterion.

Indicator 14 has targets for the percentage of students with IEPs engaged in various activities within one year of leaving high school. Exhibit 4s compares district outcomes among former student respondents on the SPP targets. This information shows that the district met all of targets set by the SPP.

- **Enrolled in Higher Education.** Some 55.7 percent of former district students with IEPs met this indicator, exceeding the 54.3 percent SPP target.

- **Enrolled in Higher Education or Competitively Employed.** Some 75.4 percent of former district students with IEPs met this indicator, exceeding the 74.4 percent SPP target.

- **Enrolled in Higher Education, Competitively Employed, or Engaged in Other Postsecondary Education or Training Program.** All the district’s former students with IEPs met this indicator, which exceeded the SPP’s target of 83.0 percent.

Exhibit 4s. Postsecondary Outcomes for Students Who Had IEPs Upon Leaving High School
Importance of Community-Based Work Experiences for Students with Disabilities

Based on data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, students with IEPs often have poor postsecondary outcomes in employment, education, and independent living. For instance, based on data from 2009 (the most recent available), 60 percent of national survey respondents across multiple disability groups indicated that they were currently in a paid job, and 15 percent indicated that they were attending postsecondary education. Large numbers of students with disabilities who were able to work or participate in higher education did not participate in these post-school activities. According to an American Institutes for Research study:

Previous studies have demonstrated that students with disabilities who have work experiences while in high school are more likely to be employed after high school. Often the work experience in which they were enrolled led directly to a postsecondary job for a student. For these students, it is important to have occupationally specific CTE programs, with appropriate instructional and adaptive support services and accommodations, available in high school.

The National Collaboration on Workforce and Disability affirmed this finding by reporting that “while work experiences are beneficial to all youth, they are particularly valuable for youth with disabilities. Among youth with disabilities, one of the most important research findings shows that work experience during high school (paid or unpaid) helps them get jobs at higher wages after they graduate.” The National Collaboration research showed that effective high-quality, work-based learning experiences have the following features:

- Experiences provide exposure to a wide range of work sites to help youth make informed choices about career selections.
- Experiences are age and stage appropriate, ranging from site visits and tours to job shadowing, internships (unpaid and paid), and paid work experience.
- Work-site learning is structured and links back to classroom instruction.
- A trained mentor helps structure the learning at the worksite.
- Periodic assessment and feedback is built into the training.
- Youth are fully involved in choosing and structuring their experiences.
- Outcomes are clear and measurable.

Transition Supports in Fresno

The district has various programs to support students with disabilities in having successful transition services and activities. These programs include the following.

63 National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, 2011.
64 “Improving College and Career Readiness for Students with Disabilities,” American Institutes for Research
65 http://www.newd-youth.info/work-based-learning
• **Career Technical Education (CTE).** CTE programs include students with IEPs. These programs involve college class transitions at all comprehensive high schools in partnership with Fresno City College; access to the campus’s career center; college eligibility packets for 12th grade students; and spotlight career packages for 9th through 11th grades. Also, students receive guidance and counseling, and interest inventories. CTE personnel monitor the program’s involvement with various subgroups, paying attention to gender equity. A committee meets with the goal of including more students with disabilities in program options and reviewing practice effectiveness.

• **WorkAbility.** Students with IEPs who can work independently at work sites can participate in the district’s WorkAbility program, which is available at all district high schools as well as transitional and adult schools. With CDE funding, the program provides comprehensive pre-employment training, employment placement, and follow-up. Students earn a subsidized salary as employees of the district. WorkAbility partners with such businesses as CVS, Walgreens, Footlocker, Home Depot, KFC, etc.

• **CA Rehabilitation Department Grant.** Under this grant, high school and adult students with moderate/severe disabilities can participate in community-based instruction. In partnership with community businesses, students have an opportunity for training in such businesses as Applebee’s, Burger King, CVS, etc.

• **Specialized Transition Programs.** Center-based special education schools each host transition services.

**Focus Group Participant Feedback**

Focus group participants voiced several concerns about Fresno Unified’s provision of postsecondary transition services and activities, including community-based work experiences.

• **Challenge.** Interviewees recognized that there were many good programs to support transitions for students with disabilities, but also reported that planning with students and awareness of opportunities and services could improve. This was especially important given the prominent language on the district’s webpage--

> The core work of Fresno Unified School District is to prepare all students to be career-ready graduates, that is being done through the equity and access work. Equity and access is about giving students the greatest number of opportunities from the widest array of options upon graduation. 66

• **Counselors.** Counselors do not participate in IEP team meetings when transitional services are addressed. Their involvement and additional training to support their effectiveness for this student group would be beneficial.

• **Postsecondary Education.** Additional professional learning was needed to encourage students with IEPs to attend college or other postsecondary educational programs.

• **Homeless and Foster Youth.** Attention to students with disabilities who are also homeless or in foster care have unique and challenging transition needs that require greater attention.

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• **Credit Recovery.** Students who receive their instruction in general education classes have access to online courses and summer credit recovery programs. Three alternative education sites have a limited number of spots for credit recovery, and a fifth year of education is available at the Adult Transition school. Credit recovery classes targeted for students with disabilities were recently implemented in high schools. The special education department recognizes that credit recovery options are limited for students educated in SDCs. There is a committee of general and special education program managers who are currently working to develop additional credit recovery options for these students.

**Professional Learning**

The professional development association, Learning Forward, has developed its third version of *Standards for Professional Learning*, outlining the kinds of professional learning that would result in effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results. The standards are based on seven elements listed in Exhibit 4t.67

**Exhibit 4t. Standards for Professional Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards for Professional Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Communities.</strong> Occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources.</strong> Requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Designs.</strong> Integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes.</strong> Aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership.</strong> Requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data.</strong> Uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation.</strong> Applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Professional Learning in FUSD**

According to a district representative, the following professional learning (PL) is required.

• **Teachers.** All teachers are required to participate in 54 hours of PL during the school year.

• **40 Sites.** Teachers at 40 designated sites are required to attend 80 hours of additional mandatory training per year.

• **Temporary Permits.** Interns and staff on temporary permits are contractually required to attend PL for two days before the beginning of school, and monthly weekend training.

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67 As a trainee, however, students may be paid less than the minimum wage and still meet state standards. Retrieved from [https://www.learningforward.org/standards#.UMvVD7Y0kU](https://www.learningforward.org/standards#.UMvVD7Y0kU).
**Special Education.** Special education teachers and service providers attend three days of PL at the district level. Site administrators meet with their regional instructional manager at the beginning of each year on information related to special education, with on-going meetings throughout the year as needed. Recent instructional-practice walks for site leaders have had a special education focus.

Professional learning on special education is provided throughout the year on such areas as curriculum, classroom management, and IEP development. District support staff (teachers on special assignment and others) and regional instructional managers provide follow up support to teachers. Last school year, a steering committee formed to discuss district expectations for professional learning. Team members gave updated information on specific professional learning occurring within various departments. During the spring semester (2017), a professional learning team comprised of staff from each department collaboratively developed PL opportunities for 2017-18. To support professional learning activities, the district developed an electronic system, iACHIEVE, which enables each employee to design a customized PL plan, work with supervisors on goal setting, and connect to district PL resources.

**High Quality Professional Learning Guidelines**

All professional learning is expected to follow the district’s “High Quality Professional Learning Guidelines.” These comprehensive guidelines include what is taught in the PL session (content); how PL is taught (process); what district, site, and classroom conditions will ensure implementation of the PL (context); and how PL comes alive in the system. For example –

- Student and teacher needs determine content that is based on current/relevant data; aligned to district-identified priorities; designed to meet the needs of special populations; etc.
- District and site leaders have the knowledge and skill set to support the implementation of teaching content, pedagogy, and practice.

**EL Master Plan**

The EL Master Plan includes references to a districtwide teacher academy focused on high-quality, effective instruction for English Learners. Ninety hours of in-depth PL provided through the academy leads to a District Certificate of Expertise in EL Instruction. Tailored professional learning is based on site needs, including site-based, online, and/or centralized professional learning. Other notable elements of the professional learning includes the following –

- **Content.** Targeted grade-level content areas related to effective practices for EL students.
- **Capacity.** Teacher instructional capacity supported through instructional coaching, peer support within accountable communities, and co-teaching in all disciplines at all levels.
- **Effective Practices.** Facilitated teacher co-planning, shadowing, and observations of FUSD classrooms implementing effective practices.

The extent to which professional learning under the EL Master Plan addresses the needs of English learners with IEPs is not clear. Instructional strategies for educating English learner students have many elements in common with the education of students with disabilities. Many students with IEPs (and students without IEPs) are native English speakers who also need...
Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

instruction in English language development. The instructional strategies that have been developed for EL students are beneficial for these students as well. When professional learning is focused on EL students, instructional strategies that have broader application are not always appreciated and accessed by teachers and administrators who do not have this focus.

Focus Group Participant Feedback

Various focus group participants appreciated training they received in their specific disciplines and specialty areas, such as blind and visual impairments. Comments referenced the opportunity to build shared beliefs and values together, and that presenters talked with and not at them. Concerns about professional learning opportunities included the following –

- **Insufficient PL.** There was a great need for PL at the central office and school levels, and for parents.
- **UDL.** Although various special education personnel have accessed training on universal design for learning methods, many general educators have not chosen to participate.
- **SpringBoard.** Not all special educators have been trained to use *SpringBoard*. Some were told they had no need to participate.
- **Feedback Loops.** Some participants were unaware of any feedback loop to suggest additional PL classes to offer.

Paraeducator Professional Learning

Focus group participants provided inconsistent information on the availability of and access to professional learning for paraeducators. Some indicated that iACHIEVE had many PL offerings for this group, including a 13-week course focused on supports for students with autism that was provided after school one day each week. Others were concerned about the lack of opportunities for paraeducators who had little training/experience in working with children with disabilities. It was difficult for paraeducators to access site-based PL because their working hours ended at 2:30 pm.

Parent Support and Engagement

A large body of research demonstrates the positive effects of parent-professional collaboration on outcomes for students with disabilities. Effective collaboration is often grounded in a strong staff-parent relationship and the combined expertise of parents and professionals in helping students with disabilities meet their goals. Many parents want to fully participate in planning for their child(ren) and support changes in services. Nonetheless, collaboration tends to be more difficult when parents are new to the country, when language

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differences present barriers, and when parents come from poor or low socioeconomic environments.

The district has various programs to spur parent engagement, which includes advisory roles and training opportunities.

- **Community Advisory Committee (CAC).** FUSD has an active CAC for special education. The CAC has the required state capacities and it serves in an advisory role to the district’s board of education and special education administration on the implementation of the local special education plan. Although the CAC nominates candidates, the board appoints them. Any parent of a student in the district, staff, or community member may attend and participate in CAC meetings. Fresno’s SELPA director and CAC chair meet monthly to set the content of CAC meetings, which includes program recommendations, policies, and review of the local plan and special education budget.

- **Parent University.** Fresno’s parent university offers information on a variety of topics, which includes a module on special education law and services. A regional instructional manager attends the trainings to answer questions not specifically addressed.

- **District Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE).** This team includes parents in addition to FUSD staff to guide the planning, expansion and evaluation of high-quality inclusive learning options throughout the district.

- **Significant Disproportionality.** A community forum was held in the fall of 2017 and another will be held in the spring of 2018. The forum’s goals are to inform the public and receive feedback on the district’s efforts to reduce the suspension and expulsion of African American students with disabilities.

Fresno Unified has two additional groups that enables parents to provide advice to district administrators and gain leadership skills. These groups are described below.

- **District Advisory Council (DAC).** The DAC advises FUSD administrators about the development, implementation, and effectiveness of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and related budgets. The council is required to include students in need (e.g., low income, English learners, and foster youth).

- **Parent University's Parent Leadership Academy (PLA).** The PLA gives parents opportunities to become leaders at their child's school(s) and in the district and community overall. The PLA meets monthly to provide parents with leadership-specific trainings and skillsets focused on trust-building, relationships, and advocacy for their children. At the end of each school year, parent leaders throughout the district can convene at the Parent Leadership Camp and take their leadership skills to the next level with Inter-Act.

It is not clear that any parents of students with disabilities participate in the DAC or PLA, or the extent to which information about these opportunities have been shared with the CAC.

**SPP Indicator for Parent Involvement and Focus Group Participant Feedback**

The state performance plan indicator 8 measures the percentage of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement in
improving services and results for children with disabilities. According to the report for 2015-16, nearly 100 percent (99.78 percent) of 9,759 parents gave a positive response.

Still, during the team’s focus group with parents, the team heard a myriad of concerns about how the district engaged parents with the education of their children with IEPs. Several of the issues presented below are discussed at greater length in other portions of this report.

- **CAC.** Many parents indicated that they were not aware of the CAC and its activities. There were also significant concerns about how CAC information was shared with parents. Although district personnel send notices of CAC meetings to schools, they were not consistently posted within the state-required 72 hours before the meeting. Furthermore, when posted, the notices were not consistently in locations accessible to and frequently used by parents. For example, notices were seen in faculty lounges, copy rooms, etc. Communicating with parents in their native language was also problematic. To some, these circumstances were symptomatic of the district’s disconnect with parents and special education, and the lack of understanding that school personnel had of the importance of engaging parents.

- **Special Education Department Organization.** The special education homepage does not list the special education department’s organization and people to contact for assistance by area of need. Parents report that they do not consistently receive timely answers to their questions and they may be sent from person to person for answers.

- **Parent University.** There is a strong desire to have Parent University include more training for parents of children with disabilities. In addition, some parents in the focus group believed that many CAC recommendations had not been implemented.

- **Principal Leadership.** Parents also reported that principals were not consistently respectful of and engaged with parents and their children with disabilities. Various examples were given to support this concern. Participants believed that their concerns should be part of the training that principals received.

- **Student Achievement.** Parents reported that they do not believe that their children are consistently making progress. Some reported that children who used to love school no longer do so. They see understaffed and overcrowded classrooms, and examples of small related-services minutes (e.g., 20 minutes for speech therapy) that include time walking to and from the provider’s location.

- **IEP Teams.** IEP team meetings are not consistently parent-friendly, with school personnel facilitating parents’ active involvement. Also, parents indicated that they believed that vice principals did not consistently have the familiarity with special education requirements on IEP development that they needed to have.

- **Parents with Limited English Proficiency.** Parents who had limited English proficiency did not have consistent access to IEP meeting information in their native language. Also, language and cultural barriers sometimes affected their interaction with school or district personnel when they had compliance concerns or other concerns about their children’s education.
AREAS OF STRENGTH

The following were areas of strength in the district’s support for equitable access to school choices and high-quality education for students with disabilities.

**Young Children with Disabilities**

- **Early Support for Young Children.** The district has several initiatives to identify developmental delays early among young children, such as the citywide *Help Me Grow* initiative, the Saturday preschool screening center, and the IDEA Part C infants and toddlers program.

- **State Grant.** A state grant is supporting inclusive practices and providing targeted professional learning for site teams to promote more inclusive instruction for students in prekindergarten through 3rd grade. A Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE) team supports this effort.

**Inclusive Instruction**

- **Inclusive Education.** The percentage of students with emotional disturbance who are educated in general education is about the same as the state rate but higher than the national rate (27 percent, 28 percent, and 19 percent, respectively). Rates are highest among English learners (55 percent), Hispanics and non-ELs (54 percent), and white students (51 percent).

- **Support for Inclusive Practices.** The district has taken various steps to improve its inclusive practices for students with disabilities. These include a best practice inclusive education focus group and the use of a state grant to support inclusive practices.

- **Co-Teaching.** Depending on the principal, there is support for co-teaching, which some interviewees reported as contributing to higher graduation rates.

**Special Day Classes**

- **Emotional Disturbance.** The 36 percent rate among students with emotional disturbance being educated in SDCs is only four points higher than the state and two points higher than national rates. Since this is the only area where district’s rates were comparable to national rates, one must conclude that the district’s focus on supporting students with behavioral challenges may be having a positive impact. However, note that the absence of SDCs at the middle and high school levels could be contributing to higher rates of students being educated in separate schools or being sent/ transferred to alternative schools.

- **By Race/Ethnicity, English Learners, Long-Term ELs and Not ELs.** SDC rates among students in these categories ranged from 30 percent to 33 percent, which were about the same as the district’s overall 31 percent rate for all students with IEPs. While these rates are higher than state and national rates, they were not disproportionate to each other.

- **Draft Special Education Curriculum Alignment.** A draft special-education curriculum-alignment document lists materials for SDCs to use with students with mild/moderate (MM), emotional disturbance (ED), autism, and autism intensive behavior.

- **Focus Group Participants.** Positive comments were provided about the use of the Unique Learning System; the *WonderWorks* pilot; the two-year age span pilot; the intent to have
standard equipment and materials for each SDC program type; the master plan for region-based SDC classes that promote equitable school locations; and tools to support the transfer of students with autism from one grade-level school to another.

**Special Schools**

- **Overall Rate.** The district’s 4.4 percent special-school rate met the SPP maximum target, although it exceeded state and national rates by 0.8 and 1.4 points, respectively.

- **Rates by Disability Area.** Students with other health impairments and specific learning disabilities were educated in separate schools at rates comparable to state and national rates. The district’s autism rate was lower than state and national rates.

- **Race/Ethnicity and English Learners.** Hispanic students and English learners were educated in separate schools at rates below the overall 4.4 percent rate.

**Student Behavior**

- **Suspension Rates.** The 1.5 percent rate for suspensions over 10 days in 2016-17 was substantially lower than the 3.67 percent rate reported in the FFY 2015 SPP. Except for African American students, most racial/ethnic groups and English learner students did not have disproportionate rates in this category.

**English Learners**

- **Master Plan for English Learner Success.** This excellent plan provides guidance on programs and services available to improve the academic success of ELs. It also articulates the district’s expectations for each school and classroom in which English learners are served. There is an expectation of shared responsibility for rigorous and engaging instruction for all English learners. The district has moved away from a philosophy that suggests that ELs learn best in specialized and isolated classrooms to an approach that emphasizes the importance of rich language and content acquisition. This plan specifies that the shift requires all teachers and leaders to understand and foster rigorous learning environments for English learners in all classrooms throughout the district. This message is relevant to students with disabilities as well.

- **English Learners with IEPs.** The *Master Plan* has several references to ELs with IEPs: professional learning for school leaders in the differentiation of instruction that includes English learners with IEPs; students receive services addressing their English and home language needs as well as their special and general education needs; and the district’s significant investments in preparing all teachers, including those educating ELs with disabilities.

**Access to High Quality Education**

- **Assistive Technology and Augmentative/Alternative Communication.** The district has a team to support AT/AAC in schools. In collaboration with the Central Valley Diagnostic Center, the district is providing a program that enables speech/language pathologists to receive AAC
certification. An *AT Guidebook* includes legal parameters, use of AT when developing IEPs, assessment and trial steps, and examples of AT to support differing kinds of student needs.

**Postsecondary Transition Activities and Services**

- **Compliant IEPs.** According to the state’s SPP report for 2015-16, 100 percent of the district’s IEPs met this criterion.

- **Post School Outcomes.** One hundred percentage of students with IEPs engaged in specified activities within one year of leaving high school.

- **Transition Supports.** The district has numerous programs to support students with disabilities who are in transition, including Career Technical Education programs; WorkAbility; a California Rehabilitation Department grant; and center-based specialized programs.

**Professional Learning**

- **System to Support PL.** The district has a robust system in place to support professional learning, including a PL team with instructional-division personnel; an electronic platform; and comprehensive guidelines for PL.

- **EL Master Plan.** The plan references a districtwide teacher academy with multiple components, including a District Certificate of Expertise in EL Instruction, which stresses effective instruction, academic content, teacher capacity, and effective practices.

- **Autism SDC Paraprofessionals.** A 13-week course (once each week after school) is required for paraprofessionals in the autism SDC.

**Parent Support and Engagement**

- **District Parent Advisory Groups.** The district has various avenues for supporting parents, including the Community Advisory Committee (CAC), Parent University; a Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE) team, which includes parents on its advisory team; and community forums to inform the public and receive feedback on the district’s efforts to reduce suspensions and expulsions of African American students with disabilities.

- **Parents of Students with IEP Survey Results.** According to the SPP indicator report for 2015-16, nearly 100 percent (99.78 percent) of 9,759 responding parents indicated that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The following areas present opportunities for improvement.

**Young Children with Disabilities**

- **Educational Environments for Young Children.** Some 21.8 percent of all district children with disabilities were educated inclusively in regular preschool classrooms. This figure was 30.4 percentage points below the state’s minimum target. At the same time, some 71.9 percent were educated in separate settings, 33.4 percentage points higher than the state’s maximum.
target. Reportedly, some 30 of 67 preschool classrooms were inclusive to some degree. These data were different from those reported by CDE for the district, with 59.2 percent educated most of the time in general education. (See exhibit 4a.)

- **Concerns.** Focus group participants voiced concerns about the transition for infants/toddlers to school-based instruction; limited opportunities for inclusive instruction at the preschool level, including the opportunity for students in SDCs to receive some instruction in general education classrooms; teachers with caseloads that were excessively large, especially as new students transition from Part C and other newly qualified students are added throughout the school year; the age span among young children in SDCs does not account for their large age-related developmental differences; and inconsistent implementation of the STAR curriculum.

### Inclusive Instruction

- **Overall Percentage.** The district’s 52 percent of students with disabilities who receive their education in an inclusive setting (i.e., general education classes at least 80 percent of the time) is about the same as the state’s rate (54 percent) and is 4 percentage points below the SPP minimum target. However, the rate is 9 percentage points below the national rate. The district’s overall rate changes significantly when data are disaggregated by grade, disability, race/ethnicity, and English/non-English learners status.

  - **By Grade.** Percentages of students educated inclusively decrease from kindergarten (74 percent) to middle school grades (range of 48 percent to 53 percent). At the high school level, 10th grade has the highest rate of inclusive education (51 percent).

  - **By Disability.** Generally, students having one of the most common disability areas are educated inclusively at rates that are much lower than the nation’s, e.g., specific learning disabilities (57 percent to 72 percent); autism (49 percent to 40 percent); intellectual disability (2 percent to 17 percent).

  - **By Disability and Race/Ethnicity.** Inclusive education rates are lowest among students who are African American (47 percent) and long-term ELs (46 percent).

- **Support for Inclusive Practices.** Various documents supporting inclusive education have been developed by the district, but they are still in draft form, e.g., mission, vision, and definition. It is not apparent that the general education leadership is actively involved in work associated with inclusive practices. Mostly, this work appears to be focusing on the area of autism at one elementary school in each region. Although this focus has merit, one would expect that the larger group of students with specific learning disabilities would also be a focus of the work.69

- **Inclusive Programs.** Contrary to the draft definition of inclusive education, the education function of the SDC program effectively limits students’ participation in general education classes to the schools they are currently attending. Also, the practice does not prepare personnel in schools not having an associated SDC (and in the 17 schools with no SDC) for the opportunity to get training and supports to include students in their home schools. In general, this approach does not support a systemwide focus on establishing “high quality instruction, interventions, and supports so all students can be successful in the core curriculum. Inclusive

69 For students educated in SDCs, the area of SLD has 684 students (24 percent and 19 points higher than the nation); while the area of autism has 401 students (58 percent and 24 points higher than the nation.)
schools have a collaborative and respectful school culture where students with disabilities are presumed to be competent, develop positive social relationships with peers, and are fully participating members of the school community.”

- **Curriculum Alignment.** The special education department’s draft document on curriculum alignment for various SDCs does not reflect any interventions in ELA or math for students who receive instruction but who require additional support to address skills no longer taught at the student’s grade.

- **Focus Group Participants.** Generally, there was persistent thinking among some teachers that students were better served elsewhere, especially when teachers were struggling to support students who were achieving far below grade level. This circumstance may go undetected when the district’s instructional leadership visits do not include special education representatives, and site-visit protocols do include indicators of inclusive education. Other issues included: (a) the need for more collaboration between special education and curriculum/instruction to address reading instruction beyond 6th grade; (b) the lack of structured planning time for co-teaching; (c) the overreliance on a traditional resource model; (d) teachers with caseloads too large to support co-teaching or instruction within general education classes; (e) co-taught classes with limited guidance; (f) too little training available to support inclusive instruction; (g) insufficient coaching/modeling, technical assistance, and other supports for students with behavioral challenges moving to SDCs or separate schools; and (h) caseloads among teachers of students with orthopedic impairments as high as 100 over 66 schools make it difficult to support each student, and has negative consequences.

**Special Day Classes**

- **Overall Percentages.** The district’s 31 percent rate for students educated in SDCs was 9 percentage points above the state’s rate, 18 points above the national rate, and 6 points above the SPP maximum target. However, the district’s overall percentage of 31 percent changes significantly when the data are disaggregated by grade, disability, race/ethnicity, and English/non-English learner status.

- **By Grade.** Students in sixth grade have the highest SDC rate (36 percent), and first grade has the lowest rate (29 percent).

- **By Disability.** The following disability areas have SDC rates that exceed state and national rates: autism (58 percent rate is higher by 16 and 24 points than state and national rates, respectively); specific learning disabilities (24 percent rate is higher by 15 and 19 points than state and national rates, respectively); other health impairments (25 percent rate is higher by 8 and 16 points than state and national rates, respectively); and intellectual disabilities (74 percent rate is 24 points higher than national rates).

- **SDC Programs by Grade Level.** The district has seven program models for SDCs, including one each for vision and deaf/hearing impairments. These programs are not distributed in an equitable manner across schools. When examining schools without SDCs, they number 19 districtwide--with the following percentages by grade level: 15.6 percent in elementary; 40.0 percent in elementary/middle; 15.4 percent in middle; and 41.7 percent in high schools.
Focus Group Participants. Concerns were raised about the following issues: (a) The Unique Learning System does not address students’ social engagement; (b) the Wonder Works pilot may not show sufficient gains because of insufficient training and short implementation timeframe; (c) more training is needed to use Wonders with students with mild/moderate disabilities; (d) Handwriting without Tears was purchased without considering students for whom the program may not be appropriate; (e) some principals do not actively support general education instruction for students educated in SDCs; (f) student needs are not always aligned with their SDC placement and resolutions are not always timely; (g) caseloads are often above the staffing framework; (h) SDC placements are not always available by region, necessitating longer transportation routes; (i) classes were sometimes placed in mobile units far from the main school; (j) the articulation of students transitioning from one school to another was not consistently supported; (k) instructional-learning team visits did not consistently include special education administrators and observations of SDCs; (l) a lack of standard equipment and materials for each SDC program type; and (m) the need for a master plan for region-based SDC classes that would promote equitable school locations.

Special Schools

Rates by Grade. The percentage of students educated in special schools increases from 0.9 percent in kindergarten to 3.4 percent in 11th grade.70

By Disability. Students with an emotional disturbance or an intellectual disability have separate school rates that exceed national rates (23 to 19 percent, and 18 to 6 percent, respectively).

By Race/Ethnicity. Compared to the overall special school 4.4 percent rate, the rate for students who are white, African American, and not-English learning were 7.1 percent, 5.3 percent, and 5.0 percent, respectively.

Focus Group Participants. Concerns included (a) barriers for students transitioning from special to regular schools, including students not needing a modified curriculum; and (b) access of previously incarcerated youth to appropriate services.

Support for Student Behavior

Suspension Risk Ratios (With/Without IEPs). In 2016-17, students with IEPs were more likely than those without IEPs to be suspended for 11 to 20 days (5.39 RR), 21 to 30 days (7.66 RR), over 10 days (5.51 RR), or to have a suspension of any length (2.45).

More than 10 Days Suspensions by Grade. The largest numbers of suspended students were in 7th grade (23 students) and 8th grade (29 students).

African American Student Suspensions. Some 3.3 percent of African American students with IEPs were suspended more than 10 days last school year. These students were 2.83 times more likely than their non-African American peers to be suspended for this length of time. CDE gave the district a “needs intervention” designation in 2016-17 for its status in meeting IDEA requirements, including monitoring activities related to disproportionality and significant disproportionality. Fresno Unified has taken positive steps to address this issue, including the

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70 Students in grade 12 include those remaining in school to receive transition services in a separate school, which raises the separate school rate for this grade.
Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

use of CEIS funds to support MTSS activities to implement PBIS and initiate actions to accelerate achievement among African American students.

- **Focus Group Participants.** Concerns included: (a) implementation of behavior intervention plans; (b) training, modeling and coaching to handle challenging student behavior; (c) appropriate consideration of manifestation determinations; and (d) the disproportionately high transfer of students from some schools into the Phoenix alternative school.

**English Learners**

- **Master Plan for English Learner Success.** The Master Plan includes an expectation that the education of EL students with IEPs will include their English and home language learning needs in addition to their special and general education needs, but the plan includes no models for accomplishing this.

**Assistive Technology**

- **Focus Group Participants.** Concerns included: (a) the small team devoted to assistive technology has difficulty keeping up with all requests for assistance and has attended only one conference in eight years; (b) a lengthy and cumbersome process for purchasing AT/AAC; (c) outdated lending-library equipment; (d) more appropriate and plentiful AT/AAC apps for iPads are not approved because of preference for other tablets; (e) appropriate text-to-speech technology is not always available for students needing this AT; (f) complete AAC assessment kits are not available for speech/language pathologists; (g) supports needed to train jointly teachers, parents and students; (h) the picture exchange communication system is not consistently implemented as designed; and (i) teachers are not consistently trained to use SMART boards to facilitate communications for students needing AAC.

**Postsecondary Transition Activities and Services**

- **Concerns.** District personnel recognize that despite its many programs, the following areas could be improved: (a) supports for transition; (b) program planning; and (c) awareness of opportunities and services. Focus group concerns included: (a) counselors do not participate in IEP team meetings when transition services are addressed; (b) the need for additional professional learning to encourage students with IEPs to attend college or other postsecondary educational programs; (c) attention to students with disabilities who are homeless or foster youth; and (d) additional opportunities to support credit recovery.

**Professional Learning**

- **EL Master Plan.** The extent to which the EL Master Plan specifies PL related to teaching and learning for English learners with IEPs is not clear. Instructional strategies for educating EL students have many elements in common to the education of students with disabilities. Many students with IEPs (and students without IEPs) are native English speakers who also need instruction in English language development. The instructional strategies that have been developed for EL students are beneficial for these students as well. When professional learning is focused on EL students, instructional strategies that have broader application are not fully appreciated and accessed by teachers and administrators who do not have this focus.
Focus Group Participants. Concerns included: (a) the need across the district for PL on teaching and learning for students with disabilities; (b) the absence of interdisciplinary PL for universal design for learning; (c) PL for all special educators on implementing SpringBoard with fidelity; (d) insufficient use of feedback loops to identify PL needs; and (e) insufficient options for paraeducators to receive PL.

Parent Support and Engagement

Districtwide Parent Advisories. It is not clear whether any parents having students with disabilities participate in the District Advisory Council (DAC) or Parent University’s Parent Leadership Academy (PLA). It is also unclear the extent to which information about these opportunities have been shared with the CAC.

Focus Group Participants. Concerns included: (a) parents were not sufficiently aware of the CAC and its activities because of inadequate communication; (b) schools were not consistently posting CAC meeting notices within the required time frame and at locations that parents frequent; (c) notices were not consistently provided in parents’ native language; (d) there was a need to expand parent university courses for parents of students with IEPs; (e) there was insufficient facilitation of parent participation in IEP meetings; and (f) there was insufficient supports for parents with limited English proficiency to understand information discussed at IEP meetings and a lack of awareness of cultural differences that might hinder communications. Issues included in other areas of this report involve access to and timely responses from special education personnel in resolving concerns; principal support and leadership; student achievement; and participation of knowledgeable vice principals in IEP team meetings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Educational Setting Demographics. With a multi-disciplinary team of instructional leaders, including staff from English learner services, prevention/intervention, African American student achievement, and principals, review exhibits 4a through 4n and monitor these data as the district implements the Council’s recommendations. Develop hypotheses about the patterns in the data in the following areas –

- Young children three to five years of age who are educated in regular preschool classes;
- School aged children who are disproportionately educated at higher rates in more restrictive settings, compared to state and nation averages and state SPP targets; and how these rates change by grade, disability, gender, race/ethnicity, English learner status (including long-term ELs) and combinations thereof.
- Disproportionate enrollment of students with disabilities by region and schools; and placement of SDCs across the district and regions.

These hypotheses and potential corrective actions should guide implementation of Recommendation 5.
5. **Increase Access to Inclusive Education and Provision of High Quality Education.** As part of the district’s movement toward an MTSS framework, embed increasing designs/supports for and activities to promote more inclusive educational settings and high-quality instruction for students with disabilities. Incorporate first teaching principles, including UDL, to ensure that the district’s instructional and behavioral strategies apply to a broader group of students than just those with disabilities. To aid this process, the district might hire a consultant who has successful helped districts become more inclusive and produce higher academic achievement and stronger social/emotional wellbeing for students with disabilities.

a. **Inclusive Education Vision.** Establish a school board policy to state a bold and inclusive vision for FUSD that is built around a UDL and MTSS framework, built on a framework of UDL and MTSS, and it incorporates supports for accelerating achievement and social/emotional well-being for all students, including students with disabilities. Use the district’s draft definition to begin this work around inclusive education and high-quality instruction in the core curriculum and interventions and supports for all students. Inclusive schools have a collaborative and respectful school culture where students with disabilities are presumed to be competent, can develop positive social relationships with peers, and are fully participating members of the school community.

Emphasize the importance of providing students educated in general education classes with the differentiated and scaffolded instruction they need, and state that a student’s disability label should not drive the type or location of services. Reinforce district expectations that students will receive rigorous core instruction that is linguistically appropriate and culturally relevant, and that students will demonstrate accelerated achievement. These expectations should be easier to attain as teachers become more familiar with and base their instruction on the principles of UDL. Also, express high expectations that students can move to education in less restrictive environments with the supports to be successful. Attend to students previously incarcerated, and those who are economically disadvantaged and/or are in foster care.

b. **Implementation Plan.** With a multi-disciplinary team, develop a multi-year action plan that includes expectations, professional learning schedules, data analytics, and accountability. Have the team provide broad supervisory reach and expertise, along with representation from instructional superintendents, principals, special education, curriculum/instruction, English learners, prevention/intervention, African American achievement personnel. In addition, include representatives from the Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE) team along with parents. Have the team conduct the data review proposed in Recommendations 3 and 4 and charge them with revising the district’s

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71 See, for example, Evanston/Skokie (IL) School District 65’s inclusion policy and related documents, retrieved from [https://www.district65.net/Page/812](https://www.district65.net/Page/812). The policy states: “Inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every student and his/her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for students with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential.” Also, language from the Common Core State Standards website may be helpful for this purpose. Retrieved from [http://www.corestandards.org/assets/application-to-students-with-disabilities.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/application-to-students-with-disabilities.pdf).
inclusive education vision. On completion of the plan, establish a uniform way for school-based teams to implement activities into their regular school-based planning process.

Use a phase-in process over three to four years in all district schools. Identify general and special education personnel that schools can contact to support their service delivery needs.\

When developing the implementation plan, consider the following—

- **Preschool.** Models to significantly increase the number of children educated inclusively in regular preschool classes. This action will require a partnership between instructional superintendents, early childhood, special education, and other instructional and facilities personnel. On request, the Council team will provide Fresno Unified with names of other school districts that have done this effectively. When more children are successful in inclusive classrooms, there will be higher expectations that these opportunities can continue in kindergarten and spur high-quality education for students with disabilities.

- **Focus Group Participant Feedback.** Also, consider focus group issues: (a) transitions for infants/toddlers to school-based instruction; (b) opportunities for students in SDCs to participate in general education classrooms; (c) teachers with caseloads that are excessively large; (d) SDC age span for young children that is too wide to address developmental differences; and (e) implementation fidelity of the STAR curriculum.

- **School-Age Models of Inclusivity.** Develop models for educating more students using flexible service delivery models, along with supports necessary for them to be successful in general education, e.g., co-teaching, collaborative consultation, flexible intervention groups, etc. Revisit the district’s traditional use of resource-service providers and their relationship to student outcomes. Draft parameters for these models and obtain stakeholder feedback so they are visionary but doable with available resources and support. Establish guidance for specialty schools like International Baccalaureate to increase access and support for students with disabilities. Include scheduled time for teachers working with the same students to share information and plan. Also, develop models for English learners with disabilities, and embed information in all relevant documents.

- **School Sites.** Increase the number of schools over the next three to four years that receive supports for and technical assistance to plan and implement flexible and inclusive service designs. Ensure that individuals providing training have the experience and knowledge needed for this purpose.

- **Instruction.** Embed the special education department’s draft Curriculum Alignment document in the district’s MTSS Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment document and ensure the two documents are aligned. Also, incorporate relevant information in the

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72 See, for example, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Inclusive Vision Project: A Roadmap for Implementing Inclusive Best Practices in Our Schools PowerPoint.

Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

Instructional planning guides for literacy and math. Address the following areas of concern—

- **Adaptation of Curriculum Materials.** Adapt Wonders, Corrective Reading, SpringBoard, GoMath, and other materials to students struggling with them.

- **Reading Far Below Standards.** Help general and special educators to support instruction aligned with the core curriculum when students are reading far below grade level text.

- **Interventions.** Ensure all students with literacy challenges receive the appropriate evidence-based interventions they need to progress. When reviewing benefits of the WonderWorks pilot, take into account the adequacy of training and the implementation time frame.

- **Reading Instruction Past 6th Grade.** Give middle and high school students who are struggling to access grade level text the interventions they need to address their deficit skills. Seriously consider purchasing reading program(s) of different intensities that are based on Orton-Gillingham methods.

- **Credit Recovery.** Increase opportunities for students with disabilities to earn credits for graduation.

- **Instructional needs of Special Populations.** Address instructional needs of specific populations of students, and consider—
  - **Unique Learning System.** Supplement Unique materials with materials to better understand each student’s engagement interests and utilize information to encourage learning. This activity is applicable to all students.
  
  - **Low Incidence Services.** Ensure that a sufficient number of special educators and necessary materials, supplies, and assistance (e.g., sign language interpreters) are available students with orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, deafness, and hearing impairments, etc.

- **Supports for Challenging Student Behavior.** Refer to data like those shown in exhibits 4o through 4r, which present suspensions of students with IEPs by various parameters. Also refer to data showing schools from which students have moved to attend Phoenix Alternative School or other schools because of behavioral issues. Develop hypotheses about patterns in the data to inform additional supports. Use a triage approach, relying on school personnel (e.g., psychologists and social workers) to support schools and teachers with students displaying significant behavioral challenges. Supplement these resources with interdepartmental and regional teams with individuals having high levels of expertise, including support for students experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Include supports such as coaching and modeling instruction and establish expectations for follow-up activities in the schools.

- **SDC Master Planning.** Review the current configuration of SDCs and modify them to better meet the needs of students. For example, consider the various service configurations used by Council member districts who participated in a recent meeting.
to discuss special education issues. As part of this process, use a recognized expert in providing instruction to students with autism spectrum disorder, including in general education. Also, review the locations of SDC programs, including those in mobile units, and consider how they (or newly reconfigured SDCs) could be reorganized by region to promote better equity/access, have a better distribution of students with disabilities, and have standardized equipment and materials. Once this is accomplished—

- **Program Parameters.** Have clear parameters for each SDC program but allow flexibility to promote more inclusivity.

- **Placement Protocols.** Develop, implement, and monitor placement protocols, including transitions and support for students moving between schools, placement types, and to less restrictive environments. Include processes for rapid problem-solving and resolution of placements that appear to be inappropriate (including students in special schools or students with delayed placements because of “unavailable space.”) Enforce placement timelines that are reasonably short.

- **More Restrictive Placement Protocol.** Develop electronic worksheet protocols with guidance that must be completed prior to considering a student’s movement to a more restrictive environment. Establish criteria for such moves. Have psychologists review this information and share results with the associated RIM. For students with questionable data, have a regional team with expertise in each student’s needs meet with the psychologist and RIM to offer feedback. The IEP team, upon review of all information, is responsible for making the placement determination.

- **2-Year Grade Span.** If feasible economically, expand the pilot to all schools and limit SDCs to a two-year grade span, especially for younger children.

- **Articulation Protocol.** Review and reinforce processes for supporting students transitioning from one grade level school to another, including appropriate notice of incoming students.

*Feedback.* Have the team collect feedback on the draft plan from stakeholders at varying grade levels, including special/general education administrators, principals, general/special education teachers, related-service providers, teacher assistants, CAC, other parent-based and community-based organizations, and union representatives. Continue this feedback loop as the plan is implemented to address concerns.

*b. Written Expectations.* Develop and provide guidance on the implementation of practices designed to promote student achievement and positive behavior. Address relevant areas in the district’s implementation plan that would require written expectations and guidance--as well as the following:

- **Principal Leadership.** Articulate expectations for principal leadership in promoting inclusive practices for: educating students with disabilities in general education classes with sufficient support and assistance; providing students educated in SDCs

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74 These configurations were provided previously to the special education assistant superintendent.
with the supports they need to attend general education classes to the maximum extent appropriate; and modeling respectful interactions with parents about their concerns and for students with disabilities.

- **Differentiated Instruction.** Articulate expectations for the provision of linguistically appropriate and culturally competent instruction aligned with core standards and that is differentiated for students with reading and math outcomes significantly below classroom peers.

- **Instructional Materials.** Ensure that students receiving instruction aligned with the core curriculum and their special education teachers have copies of all materials used by their nondisabled peers.

- **IEP Decision Making.** Provide guidance to IEP teams on decision-making about students’ education in general education classes and supports needed for instruction based on the core curriculum and evidence-based interventions.

- **Planned Collaboration.** Require collaboration between general and special educators, paraeducators, and related-services personnel on instruction and interventions for students they have in common.

c. **Differentiated Professional Learning and Parent Training.** Embed in the professional learning curriculum ( Recommendation 1c) the content needed to carry out the activities mentioned in and stemming from Recommendation 5. In addition, consider –

- **Learners.** The creation of an all-inclusive matrix of staffing groups, including paraeducators, who need professional learning to implement these recommendations, and areas of professional development needed.

- **Multi-Disciplinary Approach.** How training will be provided through a multidisciplinary approach, so that professional learning to promote inclusive education is not viewed incorrectly as a “special education” initiative;

- **Access.** How and when personnel will be provided access to training in each critical area;

- **Delivery.** How key information will be communicated effectively, including use of on-line training for compliance issues that are more rote and routine in nature;

- **Follow-Up.** How information will be used;

- Inclusive Group of Leaners. How the needs of all stakeholder groups will be addressed, including the needs of paraeducators and parents;

- **Supports.** What additional modeling, coaching, and supports may be needed;

- **Certificate of Expertise.** Modeling professional learning after the EL Master Plan for Success model, which includes a certificate of expertise.

- **Cross Discipline Learning.** To the extent possible, embed information from this section in other professional learning sessions.

- **Parent University.** Review Parent University activities with CAC/other stakeholders; and expand it to incorporate additional courses of interest to parents of students with
disabilities. Consider other avenues for training, including with the CAC and community-based organizations.

- **Student Engagement.** Develop fellowships opportunities that allow teachers, administration, parents and youth to attend professional learning opportunities together to encourage teamwork and increased knowledge in areas of interest and engagement.

- **Data Analysis and Reports.** In addition to the data analysis and reporting described in Recommendation 1d, include in all school performance and planning documents --
  - **Data Reporting.** The types of data used in this report and other data to better target patterns and areas of concern.
  - **Risk Ratios.** Disparities using risk ratios to better understand how different groups are affected by district practices.

- **Monitoring and Accountability.** Expect all principals to be responsible for overseeing special education in their buildings and expect that instructional superintendents will hold principals accountable for this responsibility. Embed these activities into the monitoring and accountability systems described in Recommendation 1e. Have instructional learning teams include individuals knowledgeable of the indicators described and ensure that the multi-disciplinary teams observe classes attended solely by students with disabilities, e.g., SDCs and special schools.

- **Data Checks.** Include data such as that used in this report during discussions on follow-up actions and to track outcomes.

- **Fidelity Assessments and Walkthroughs.** Embed indicators relevant to these recommendations to assess effective inclusion instruction, along with education in resource classes, SDCs, and special schools to see how students are being taught. Initiate technical assistance, professional development, coaching, and mentoring to improve practices.

- **Timely Communication and Feedback.** Establish a process for timely feedback to the district’s MTSS leadership team on barriers to inclusive education.

6. **Assistive Technology, and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AT/AAC).** Consider the following to support assistive technology, and augmentative and alternative communications.

- **AT Team.** Evaluate the AT team’s composition and size, given the requests it receives and services it provided to determine whether current resources are sufficient to meet needs.

- **Resources.** Conduct an analysis of current AT/AAC services for: (a) students receiving instruction based on a modified curriculum; (b) students with orthopedic impairments; (c) students with a text-to-speech technology need; and (d) speech/language pathologists who need a complete AAC assessment kit. In addition, consider budget needs to keep up with IEP-required AT/AAC devices and materials. Based on these results, have high level meetings with fiscal and purchasing personnel to address budget adequacy and a streamlined purchasing process.
c. **Lending Library.** Review current equipment and supplies in the district’s lending library and gaps with current needs.

d. **Apps.** With staff from the instructional and technology offices, discuss the extent to which evidence-based apps are available for iPads vs. other tablets, and take follow-up steps based on these results. As part of this process, involve special education and related services personnel familiar with this issue, e.g., speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists, special educators, etc.

e. **Training.** Address the following training issues:
   - Teachers use of SMART boards to ease communications for students needing AAC.
   - Models for combining AT/AAC training for students, his/her parents, and teachers rather than scheduling separate sessions for each.
   - More effective use of the picture-exchange communication (PEC) system.
   - Access to conferences showcasing current AT/AAC devices for the AT/AAC team.

7. **Secondary Transition Activities and Services.** Build upon the district’s many secondary transition programs to improve supports for transitions, planning activities, and broader awareness to parents and students of transition opportunities and services. Also, consider the following actions

   a. **Counselors.** Have counselors participate in IEP team meetings when transition services are addressed;

   b. **Professional Learning.** Include in the professional learning curriculum (Recommendation 1c and 5c) PL that would encourage students with IEPs to attend college or other postsecondary educational programs. Include this student population in all activities the district initiates to promote college or other postsecondary education attendance.

   c. **Special Populations.** Specifically address the needs of students with disabilities who are homeless, in foster care, and/or economically disadvantaged in the district’s planning documents.

8. **Parent Support and Engagement.** Improve parent support, communications, and engagement with the following activities.

   a. **Districtwide Parent Advisories.** Review all district advisory groups that include parents, e.g., District Advisory Council (DAC) or Parent University’s Parent Leadership Academy (PLA) and assess the extent to which they include parents of students receiving special education and share information with the Community Advisory Committee (CAC). If this information shows that such parents are not participating, develop/implement strategies for including them in these groups.

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75 See Recommendation 7 for reference to actions designed to increase credit recovery options for students with disabilities.
b. **Community Advisory Committee Participation.** Increase parental awareness of the CAC and its activities by notifying principals of their responsibility to have CAC meeting notices prominently posted in school locations parents visit. Ensure that they are posted within required time frames. Also, ensure notices are provided to schools in common native languages read by parents. Use instructional visits held during this timeframe to monitor the posting of notices as expected. Moreover, to the extent not fully executed, use the parent messaging service to communicate information about CAC meetings. Collaborate with the CAC to identify additional steps the district can take to enable parents to be aware of the CAC and its activities. Include family and community services personnel for this purpose.

c. **Additional Activities.** In addition, consider the following activities to support parent involvement in IEP meetings and their child’s education

- **Facilitating Parent Involvement in IEP Team Meetings.** Identify a person on the IEP team to actively involve parents in meeting discussions, and ensure they have an opportunity to ask questions that are answered, etc.

- **Translation.** Review the district’s system for translating IEPs and other special education documents to ensure that they are completed in a timely manner. Explore the availability of IEP systems that include a translation component for this purpose.

- **PTOs.** Encourage parent teacher organizations to reach out to parents of students with disabilities, and to parents of other student subgroups, to be sure their interests are included.

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76 Recommendations related to many issues raised by parents are addressed elsewhere, e.g., access to and timely response from special education personnel, student achievement, understanding the special education organization and who to contact for assistance, etc.
V. Support for Teaching and Learning for Students with Disabilities

This section summarizes FUSD’s teaching and learning supports for students with disabilities. The section attends to issues of collaboration and support at the central office level, within the special education department, and at the school level. This focus addresses interdepartmental collaboration, special education department organization, and school-based personnel; compliance, data, and fiscal matters; and FUSD’s system of accountability for students with disabilities.

**Interdepartmental Collaboration**

Given concerns about student achievement and social/emotional wellness generally, and students with disabilities particularly, along with the high costs and legal implications of special education, it is essential that the central office, network staff, and school leadership collaborate effectively. Driving this work are FUSD’s four district goals, core beliefs, and commitments, which reinforce values of inclusivity.

**Goals (2014-19)**
- All students will excel in reading, writing, and math
- All students will engage in arts, activities, and athletics
- All students will demonstrate the character and competencies for workplace success
- All students will stay in school on target to graduate

**Core Beliefs.** Fresno is a place where—
- Diversity is valued
- Educational excellence and equity are expected
- Individual responsibility and participation by all is required
- Collaborative adult relationships are essential
- Parents, students and the community are vital partners

**Commitments**
- We will establish collaborative relationships with staff, parents, students, and the community
- We strongly encourage and welcome the valuable contributions of our families
- We expect and depend upon individual responsibility.

To realize these goals, beliefs, and commitments for all students, including those with disabilities, it is necessary for FUSD to have practices and organizational structures in place to support these aspirations. There is a clear desire for the district to develop and strengthen a culture of collaboration and connectivity that is shared by central office and schools. While the development and implementation of a common pedagogy, collaborative learning groups, and accountable community work is taking place, there is an acknowledgement that these activities have not always included special education in the past. It is a misperception that special education – the department and its personnel at all levels – should be capable of teaching and supporting
students with disabilities on its own. Only a collective sense of responsibility and the infrastructure to support it at the central, regional, and school levels, working together with common purpose, will result in a force strong enough to accelerate progress.

**Structured Communication**

Generally, communication between departments and schools is facilitated through:

- **Cabinet.** Weekly superintendent cabinet meetings.
- **ILTs.** Weekly instructional leadership team (ILT) meetings, which includes department heads.
- **Lead Teams.** Bi-weekly lead team meetings, which are led alternatively by the special education assistant superintendent and prevention/intervention executive director.
- **ILT/Lead Teams.** Bi-weekly ILT and lead team meetings, which include the chief academic officer (CAO) and lead instructional superintendent, along with special education, English learner support, and prevention/intervention leadership.
- **Instructional Divisions.** Quarterly instructional division meetings, which include about 75 individuals representing multiple areas under the CAO. During these meetings, participants discuss instructional practices and problems, data, school issues, etc.
- **Instructional Superintendents.** Instructional superintendents meet with principals every three to six weeks, and instructional practice walks are conducted throughout the year. Special education personnel are involved inconsistently. Absent a protocol with indicators to guide what to look for in terms of instruction for students with disabilities, the walks typically do not produce sufficient information about this group of students.
- **All Principals.** Quarterly meetings with all principals. Reportedly, agendas do not include special education matters on a consistent basis.
- **Accountable Communities.** Accountable communities at various levels use a multidisciplinary team approach to review data and develop follow up action.
- **Systems Planning.** Systems planning team meetings with cross-departmental personnel occur on an as needed basis. These participants include human resources, fiscal, instructional departments, etc.

Focus group participants reported a high degree of collaboration between special education and prevention/intervention, transportation, career technical education (CTE), workability, and English learner support departments. For example, special education representatives participate on the EL advisory committee (ELAC). There is a perception, however, that special education was an afterthought in planning at all levels. To some degree, this may be due to insufficient communications about collaboration that does take place.

At the same time, collaboration between special education and curriculum/instruction (C/I) is insufficient. A RIM was promoted to Program Manager who maintained the responsibility that they had been under the regional instructional manager for C/I. However, there was a need for more intentional collaboration between C/I and special education personnel, particularly with
special education managers and regional instructional managers (RIMs). 77 Absent such interaction, decisions are sometimes made with unintended consequences. For example:

- **Handwriting without Tears** was purchased without the input of occupational therapists to explain that the material is not appropriate for some students and, as a result, it is not being universally used.
- **SpringBoard** was not fully adaptable for students reading significantly below grade level.

### Alignment of Instructional Superintendents and Special Education Personnel

With different organizational structures for instructional superintendents and special education personnel assigned to schools, it is difficult for these groups to collaborate, plan, and address special education issues in schools they support. This organizational disconnect may also apply to other instructional areas that the Council team did not review, e.g., C/I, English learners, prevention/intervention, etc.

Principals report to one of four instructional superintendents. Two superintendents oversee elementary schools, and two oversee secondary schools. The instructional superintendents report directly to the Chief Academic Officer who reports to the superintendent. However, the district is organized by areas associated with each of seven high school regions along with middle and elementary schools feeding into each high school. Generally, two middle schools feed into each high school. One high school is aligned with 6 elementary schools, and the other 6 high schools have 8 to 10 elementary schools. The special education department provides support to schools through four managers. 78 Together, the managers supervise 14 RIMs. Generally, two RIMs each support one high school area. 79 Exhibit 5a graphically shows these disparate organizational structures.

### Exhibit 5a. Organization: Instructional Superintendents and Special Education Managers/RIMs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Superintendents</th>
<th>Regions (High Schools and Feeder Schools)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wall Russell</td>
<td>Sunnyside HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her Gomes</td>
<td>8 ES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sp Ed Manager</td>
<td>Sp Ed Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 RIMs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

77 The role of regional instructional managers is addressed more fully in the section below that pertains to the special education department’s organization.

78 As described in more detail below, each of the special education managers supervise three to five special education programmatic areas, e.g., extended school year.

79 One manager directs two RIMS who support one area and alternative education schools. This information is based on the organizational chart that the district’s representative provided to the Council team during its February 2018 visit to FUSD.

80 One middle school and one elementary school are “choice” schools.

81 Also support alternative education schools.
Because the instructional superintendents are organized horizontally, and the special education managers and RIMS are assigned vertically by high school region, sharing information on common schools is difficult. Except for one special education manager who has schools aligned with two superintendents, the other three are aligned with four superintendents. RIMS each have schools aligned with two to three different superintendents. Conflicting priorities and uncoordinated schedules make it difficult for RIMS to participate in school walkthroughs. This inherent structural incongruence is difficult to overcome and retrofit to support activities, such as: reviewing data, problem-solving, addressing compliance issues, identifying and organizing necessary professional development in common schools, etc.

Furthermore, there is no structure for the SELPA director to interact regularly with the instructional superintendents, which may contribute to the perception that problems stay within special education. There are those who believe special education issues are not addressed proactively, and that personnel are after-thoughts, e.g., last to receive class rosters.

School districts with which the Council team is familiar have the same organizational structure for principal supervisors and special education and other supports. This design has many advantages, including the ability to develop stronger administrative relationships based on common work; meet regularly with common principals; review data and develop strategies for schools with similar needs; set up professional development across schools; etc. In addition, this relationship allows principal supervisors to work with special education liaisons to better support principals, address complex and difficult issues more effectively, and enable principal supervisors to resolve issues faster.

**Special Education Department Organization and Support to Schools**

District representatives provided the Council team with FUSD’s special education departments mission, vision, and commitments. This information is not visible on the special education webpage.

- **Mission:** FUSD Special Education department is committed to provide early intervention and appropriate pre-kindergarten through adult instruction that prepare students for a seamless transition to adult life with the expectation that all students will learn and become productive citizens.

- **Vision:** ALL FUSD students with disabilities will receive high quality instruction with the greatest number of inclusionary opportunities from the widest array of options.

- **Commitments**
  - We stand for students being at the heart of all behaviors, actions, and decisions
  - We will work with all stakeholders in meeting the SMART goals of the district and Special Education Department
  - We will make data driven decisions to improve student outcomes
  - We will be positive, contributing members of collaborative teams
  - We stand for inclusive opportunities for all students
We will implement evidence-based practices in a continuous cycle of improvement that have a positive effect size on student achievement.

We stand for providing our schools with leadership, stability, and direction daily to keep student achievement as our primary focus.

While the department’s mission, vision, and commitments are all positive statements, they are apparent in practice only when FUSD leadership at all levels provides direction and practices to support these ideals. In the section above, the Council team assessed the structural interaction of instructional superintendents and special education department personnel to support common school communities. Below is our review of the special education department’s organization, which was put into place this school year, to determine the extent to which personnel are organized to support teaching and learning.

**Overall Special Education Department Structure**

In addition to a classified employee and an analyst II, the assistant superintendent supervises two directors. One director oversees health services, and the second oversees the district’s special education local plan areas (SELPA).

**SELPA Structure**

The major work of the department is carried out under the auspices of the SELPA director, and some 26 individuals working in this large unit. These personnel are primarily responsible for carrying out the work of the SELPA. The SELPA director supervises four program managers, psychologists, the Lori Ann infant program, and information systems. Three program managers are assigned to two high school regions, and four RIMs report to each of these managers. One program manager is assigned to one region and alternative education schools, and two RIMs report to this manager. In addition, to supervising RIMs, the program managers carry out all the special education department’s programmatic activities. Exhibit 5b shows this organizational structure, including the various areas of responsibilities under each manager and the SELPA director. (See exhibit 5b.)

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82 California uses SELPAs to carry out the state’s master plan for special education. School districts, such as FUSD, that are sufficiently large carry out all SELPA responsibilities themselves. Smaller districts, typically in the same geographical region, join together to provide the full continuum of services for children and youth residing within their jurisdictions.
Exhibit 5b. Current Special Education Department Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SELPA DIRECTOR</th>
<th>Program Managers</th>
<th>SELPA Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SELPA DIRECTOR</strong></td>
<td><strong>Program Managers</strong></td>
<td><strong>SELPA Director</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunnyside/Edison Manager</td>
<td>Ballard/Hoover Manager</td>
<td>McLane/Roosevelt Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ED Programs</td>
<td>• Autism Program</td>
<td>• Adult Ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ed Related MH Services (ERMHS)</td>
<td>• Alternative Learning Pathways (ALPs)</td>
<td>• Designated Instructional Services (DIS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extended School Year</td>
<td>• Speech/Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC)</td>
<td>• Workability/Rehab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Curriculum/Instruction (C/I)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Center Based Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Adult Transition Mgr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nonpublic School/Nonpublic Agencies (NPS/NPA)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 Principals, specialized schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Principal, specialized school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 RIMs</td>
<td>4 RIMs</td>
<td>4 RIMs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Important programmatic areas that deserve attention are not listed as part of the program managers’ responsibilities, including inclusive instruction; literacy; mathematics; alternative curriculum for students taking alternate assessments; deaf/hearing impaired; blind/vision impaired; and early childhood. In many of these and other areas, support cannot be provided in isolation but must be conducted with dotted lines to and in close collaboration with respective general education partners.

**Regional Instructional Managers (RIMs)**

Prior to this year, RIMs reported directly to the SELPA director. By reporting to the program managers this year, the RIMs focus group reported that they helped with the manager’s programmatic responsibilities in addition to their school-based responsibilities. However, administration reported that the RIMS should not have programmatic responsibilities and in fact, the Program Managers should help with regional responsibilities. The team’s perspective is that there is considerable confusion with these roles and responsibilities in the field and within central office.

The group of 14 RIMs serve as liaisons between school site teams and the special education management team. The primary goal of the RIMs is to improve instruction in all special education settings. They are to ensure IEPs are being implemented appropriately, monitor IEP compliance, problem solve issues as they arise, and provide guidance when students need a more restrictive placement to meet the students individualized needs. According to information the district provided, RIMs have the following responsibilities –

- Meet with each assigned site administrator at the beginning of each year to review expectations and special education goals;
• Partner with the site administrator to address compliance issues, conduct collaborative instructional practice walks, conduct observations, and discuss feedback;
• Attend any change of placement or difficult IEP meetings;
• Support teachers with instruction, classroom management, and alignment of IEP goals/objectives;
• Visit each of their school sites weekly; and
• Weekly email site administrators data on IEP compliance and suspension data.

Missing from these responsibilities were activities related to the special education department’s mission, vision, and commitments. These included strategizing and problem-solving with site administrators with the use of school-based data on student outcomes; inclusive educational opportunities; high quality instruction; evidence-based practices, etc.

Specialized School Principals’ Supervision

According to the special education organization chart, one specialized school principal reports to the Sunnyside/Edison manager, and two principals report to the McLane/Roosevelt manager. In other school districts visited by the Council team, specialized school principals report to the same supervisory position as the principals of typical schools. This reporting structure enables principals to receive the same information other principals receive. Special education department personnel provide assistance and bring principals together around issues of common special education concerns.

Focus Group Participant Feedback

The following trends were presented by focus group participants on the special education department organization and its support to schools.

Communication

Communication issues included the following –

• Department and Schools. School personnel do not have a consistent and clear understanding of special education management team decisions, and there was a desire for more transparency.
• RIMs. The RIM role could be better defined and communicated.
• Contact Information. The special education homepage does not show the organization of the department and people to contact for assistance by area of need.
• Responding to Parents. Parents do not consistently receive timely answers to their questions and they may be sent from person to person for answers.

Program Managers

Program managers are overburdened with the scope and complexity of their respective programmatic responsibilities. As a result, special education management interacts with school site teams to varying degrees. Consistently, support was not available to school teams to address
students having serious behavioral, health, and educational challenges. Some perceived that directives were handed down without follow up and responsiveness when related problems arose. When RIMs were involved, there was a sense that prior decisions sometimes overrode IEP team decision-making.

**RIMs**

RIMs have varying levels of experience, and some are new this school year with no prior experience. There was a perception among interviewees that all RIMS do not possess the knowledge and skills to be effective in their positions. Additional training would help bridge this gap. There was inconsistent regard for RIMs themselves, with some viewed as being responsive and others who were not. Although there was a desire for RIMs to focus more on teaching and learning, a great deal of their time was spent on program management and compliance, including attending contentious IEP meetings. Their (or others’) support was needed especially among new special educators, to provide coaching like that provided to new general educators.

**Designated Instructional Services**

The largest groups of DIS personnel were registered nurses, LVNs, and health and medical assistants (140, 59, and 29, respectively), speech/language pathologists (75.5 FTE), and psychologists (65.7 FTE). Focus group participants provided concerns about the supervision, support, and school assignments for several of these personnel areas.

- **Supervision.** A director supervises health services. RIMs report they supervise SLPs, OTs, and, at the beginning of this school year, psychologists.
  - **Psychologists.** RIMs conduct psychologists’ performance evaluations to decrease the unrealistic number of evaluations that program managers were required to conduct. When making this decision about who makes what evaluation, leadership did not consider that RIMs and psychologists were at the same management level (E25). This action created a backlash, which was exacerbated by the fact that principals were notified of this supervisory decision before the psychologists were notified. Given this concern, the decision was made that RIMs would not supervise psychologist. Psychologists expressed a need for formal supervision by a director level position staffed with an individual with knowledge of the work of school psychologists. With the increased number of psychologists budgeted for 2018-19, some assert that the director position could be absorbed within the expanded budget allocation.
  - **SLPs and OTs.** RIMs report that they supervise SLPs and OTs. Reportedly, RIMs lack the time needed to support, collaborate with, and respond to questions posed by OTs. Furthermore, RIMs appear to lack an understanding of OT needs and concerns.
- **Lead Positions.** Various DIS personnel have lead personnel who have small caseloads. The lead personnel are on the same pay scale as their peers but work nine additional days. They are

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83 Clarification was provided to the team that RIMs supervise SLPs and do not supervise OTs or psychologists.

84 Administration advised the team that RIMs are not to be supervising OTs, but that information was contrary to other information provided by RIMS during the focus group process.
not part of the management team and do not participate in their discussions and decision-making processes. Furthermore, leads lack authority to independently influence the role of their personnel area and the systemic delivery of services. They have no job description, and their positions are not intended to conduct performance evaluations.

- **Psychologist Leads.** Two psychologists serve as leads for the group, but one spends half of his time supporting crisis activities. Both leads are widely respected and are highly qualified.

- **SLP Leads.** By contrast, SLPs have seven leads with one for each region.

- **Assignment to Schools.** Even though SLPs and psychologists have about the same number of FTEs, SLPs are assigned to schools within a single region and many psychologists are randomly assigned to schools across the city. Psychologists have slowly been assigned to schools within high school regions, but this has not occurred systematically. Each region has distinct challenges that could be more specifically addressed by psychologists who work together as a team within regions to share resources, troubleshoot, support, mentor and bring stability and consistency to the delivery of services, including crisis intervention. It is the team’s understanding that assignments have begun to move in the recommended regional direction. The creation of high school regional community teams would provide a cohesive approach to each set of schools and would benefit students and staff.

**Special Education Regional Centers**

According to the special education webpage, regional centers with full-time special education office assistants are located throughout the district to assist parents, special education field staff, and school staff members with information, contacts, transportation, routing requests, intakes, and other special education-related services. 85 Centers are available at three high schools and a middle school. In addition, there was a center at the Lori Ann Infant Center and the Fresno Adult Center. According to the webpage—

The purpose of the SPED Regional Centers is to improve services by increasing the availability and level of support at the school sites. The Regional Centers also create strong, positive ties to students, staff, and community, help close communication gaps, provide parent support closer to home, decrease response time, decrease travel time, and increase the amount of time support staff are available to assist students, teachers, support staff, parents, and site administrators.

**School-based Special Education and Related Services Support to Schools**

Principal leadership and oversight for special education at his/her school is essential to the improvement of teaching and learning for students with disabilities, and the promotion of inclusive and effective education. To play this leadership role, principals must be provided with the human and material resources necessary that are often outside their control. As in most school districts,

85 Retrieved from
https://www.fresnounified.org/dept/specialeducation/Pages/Special%20Education%20Regional%20Centers.aspx#.Wq7Jl8gh3OQ.
FUSD principals inconsistently “own” special education. In some cases, this is due to insufficient training, irregular supports, and vague expectations.

This subsection presents discusses the operation of special education at the school level and personnel in schools who provide instruction and services to students with disabilities. In addition, it presents data on staff-to-student ratios in special education, i.e., intervention specialists, paraprofessionals, speech/language pathologists, psychologists, nurses, occupational therapists (OTs), and physical therapists (PTs). FUSD’s ratios were compared to other urban school districts on which we have data. (All districts did not report data in each area.) These data are based on full time equivalent (FTE) staff members and not the number of positions per se. Also, the Council team presumed that FTE data included vacant positions but could not always be sure.

The data do not provide precise comparisons, so results need to be used with caution. District data are not consistently reported (e.g., some districts included contractual personnel and others excluded them from their data submission). Also, data are affected by the extent to which districts rely on out-of-district placements. Service providers for these students are not always included in the data submissions. Still, these data are the best available and are useful as a rough guide to staffing ratios. Appendix A has detailed data on each school district on which we have data.

Overall FUSD Students to Personnel Ratios Compared to Other Districts

Exhibit 5c shows the number of districts having smaller student-to-staff ratios, i.e., fewer students with IEPs per staff member in each area, compared with FUSD and other districts on which we have data. Except for the areas of paraeducators and psychology, the district had much larger student-to-staff ratios compared to most other districts.

- **Special Educators.** Fifty-three of 79 districts (67.0 percent) had smaller ratios than FUSD.
- **Paraprofessionals.** Thirty-six of 79 districts (45.5 percent) had smaller ratios than FUSD.
- **Speech/Language Pathologists.** Forty-nine of 79 districts (62.0 percent) had smaller ratios than FUSD.
- **Psychologists.** Twenty-nine of 74 districts (39.1 percent) had smaller ratios than FUSD.
- **Social Workers.** Thirty-seven of 51 districts (72.5 percent) had smaller ratios than FUSD.
- **Nurses.** Forty of 60 districts (66.7 percent) had smaller ratios than FUSD.
- **OTs.** Seventy of 76 districts (92.1 percent) had smaller ratios than FUSD.

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86 Much of the data were provided by the school districts that responded to a survey conducted by the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative; Council of the Great City Schools team or members of the team collected the remaining data during district reviews.

87 Forty percent of the FTE paraeducation positions are vacant.

88 The FTE number for occupational therapists includes two certified OT assistants (COTA).
Exhibit 5c. Number of Districts with Ratios Smaller than FUSD and Number of District Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sped Teacher</th>
<th>Paraprofessionals</th>
<th>SPLs</th>
<th>Psychologists</th>
<th>Social Work</th>
<th>Nurses</th>
<th>OTs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Districts with Survey Data</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special Education Teachers and Paraeducators

This section provides student-to-staff ratios for special educators and paraeducators, along with information about how they were allocated. The section also includes feedback from focus group participants about caseloads and their job function.

Special Educators and Paraeducator Ratios

Exhibit 5d shows FUSD’s students-to-staff ratios for special educators and for paraeducators compared to 79 other urban school districts.

- **Special Educators.** The district has 509.6 full-time-equivalent (FTE) special educators, including 10.6 vacancies (2 percent of the FTE total). FUSD has an average of 16.4 students with IEPs (including those with speech/language only impairments) for every special educator. This ratio is higher than the 14.1 student-special educator average of all districts on which we have data. In other words, this means that FUSD has fewer special educators for its students with IEPs than other districts. The ratio ranks FUSD as 54th among the 79 reporting districts.

- **Paraeducators.** FUSD’s 603.1 FTE paraeducators includes those filling positions in one of the following areas: social emotional intervention; autism; speech; deaf/hard of hearing (signing); deaf/hard of hearing (oral); community-based; moderate/severe; early childhood mild/moderate; mild moderate/visually impaired; CPR certificate, first aid, and defensive driving class certification. Each area is classified separately with an associated salary schedule and required experience and licensures. The Council team is not aware of any other district with this degree of specialization for paraeducators. The specialization has an impact on FUSD’s ability to fully staff positions in this area. Currently, the district has 87 paraeducator vacancies (14 percent of the FTE total). This issue is discussed further below.

The district has an average of 13.8 students with IEPs for every paraprofessional. This ratio is lower than the 15.4 student-paraprofessional average of all districts on which we have data.

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89 “Paraeducator” is used as a generic term. As explained further, there are numerous categories of paraeducators.
80 Data include students receiving speech/language services only from a speech/language pathologist.
other words, this means that FUSD has more paraprofessionals for its students with IEPs than other districts. It ranks FUSD as 37th among the 79 reporting districts.

**Exhibit 5d. Average Number Students for Each Special Educator**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Comparison</th>
<th>Special Educators</th>
<th>Paraprofessional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of FUSD Staff FTE</td>
<td>509.6</td>
<td>603.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUSD Student w/IEP-to-Staff Ratios</td>
<td>16.4:1</td>
<td>13.8:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All District Average Ratios</td>
<td>14.1:1</td>
<td>15.4:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of All District Ratios</td>
<td>5–37:1</td>
<td>4.3–56:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUSD Ranking Among Districts</td>
<td>54th of 79 districts</td>
<td>37th of 79 districts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Allocation of Special Educators and Paraeducators to Schools**

FUSD allocates resource teachers at a ratio of 1 to 28 students—as state code requires. Also, a paraeducator is assigned to students. Schools with a low number of students or with students who require minimal services are allocated an itinerant teacher, i.e., individual small group instructor (ISGI). Special day class teachers (including specialty programs) are allocated based on enrollment projections and adjusted during a leveling process after the start of the school year. Exhibit 5e shows the students-to-staff ratios used to staff each of the listed specialized programs.

**Exhibit 5e. Student to Special Educator and Paraeducator Ratios**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Paraprofessional Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally Disturbance</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Inclusion</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Intensive Behavioral</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Learning Pathways (MS)</td>
<td>10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf/Hearing Impaired</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Impairment</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedic Impairment</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center-based Medically Fragile</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Specialized Circumstances Instructional Assistance (SCIA)**

Guidelines pertain to a school site’s determination of a student’s need for SCIA. The guidelines specify that SCIA is not a person, but it is assistance. Various tools are used to identify the specific activities and times in which additional assistance or supervision is required.

- Teachers complete a document that describes the need and use of existing support

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91 Ranking begins with districts having a low average number of students to one staff person.
• The RIM and psychologist, with principal input, reviews the teacher’s document, gathers specified information about the student’s schedule; staffing; curriculum/instruction; behavioral supports; and other supports being used. Suggestions and next steps are identified, along with dates these steps are implemented.

• The site team completes an analysis of the classroom.

Based on this information, the RIM meets with the appropriate special education manager, and if necessary information is presented at the SCIA weekly meeting with special education management.

Paraeducator Vacant Positions

The district’s current 87 paraeducator vacancies constitutes 14 percent of all FUSD paraeducator FTE positions. Recently, 21-member districts provided FTE paraprofessional personnel vacancy data to the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) to prepare for a two-day meeting that focused on special education. Seven of the 21 districts had no paraeducator vacancies. The remaining 14 reported vacancy rates ranging from 2 percent to FUSD’s 14 percent, which was the highest across all the cities reporting. The data in exhibit 5f shows the vacancy rates for the 14 districts in ascending order.

| CGCS Member District Paraeducator Vacancy Rates |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 2% | 2% | 3% | 3% | 4% | 4% | 5% | 6% | 7% | 7% | 8% | 8% | 11% | 14% |

Negotiated Process for Filling Paraeducator Positions

FUSD has a complicated process for filling paraeducator positions that has been in place for many years and is based in provisions negotiated with the California School Employees Association (CSEA), Chapter 125. Relevant provisions are summarized below.

• **Transfer Pool.** Individuals within the FUSD transfer pool are interviewed first. These are employees who filed a request for transfer and meet minimum qualifications for a vacant position that is in the same class and salary level.

• **First Interview.** Names of approved transfers are sent to hiring managers who organize and schedule interviews.

• **Within District Advertising.** If individuals from the transfer pool are interviewed and found to be unacceptable, the position is advertised within FUSD. Human resources (HR) personnel develop job advertisements and send them to all district sites and departments to be posted for five days. All employees may apply, even though they may not meet minimum qualifications or be in probationary or substitute status. They will be interviewed only if no other fully qualified applicants apply and/or interviewed applicants were not acceptable. These positions are screened for minimum qualifications.
• **Interview and Selection.** HR personnel provide appropriate supervisors with lists of applicants to be interviewed. Sites are responsible for contacting applicants with an interview date and time. Interviews are conducted in the following order:\(^{92}\)

• **First Interviews.** Applies to permanent employees with minimum qualifications. The supervisor notifies HR if no applicant is acceptable and provides a detailed justification for not selecting the applicant.

• **Second Interviews.** Applies to probationary employees with minimum qualifications. Detailed justifications for all rejected first interview applicants are deemed to be reasonable.

• **Third Interviews.** Applies to substitute employees meeting minimum qualifications. Detailed justifications for all rejected second interview applicants are deemed to be reasonable.

• **Advertisements Outside of the District.** Only after the rejection of all third interviews may vacant positions be advertised to the public.

With 87 paraeducator vacancies and this complicated process for interviewing current employees, it is very difficult for FUSD to expand the paraeducator applicant pool with individuals from outside of the district. This expansion is necessary to fill vacancies in a proactive manner rather than rotate current paraeducators between positions. Focus group comments on this process are summarized further below.

**Focus Group Participant Feedback**

Focus group members provided feedback that included major issues on principal leadership, special educators, designated instructional service teachers, and paraeducators.

**Principals.** Principals were not consistently respectful of and engaged with parents and their students with disabilities. Various examples were given to support this concern.

**Special Educators and DIS Teachers**

• **Case Management.** In addition to their teaching responsibilities, special education and designated instructional services teachers act as case managers by setting up and facilitating IEP meetings, and ensuring they are implemented. As case managers, however, these personnel do not have authority over others for providing IEP-required services. Furthermore, they do not have authority over personnel required to attend IEP meetings, including vice principals. In some cases, teachers must “beg” required participants to attend the meetings. Participation is especially difficult when there may be as many as three IEP meetings in an afternoon. When required individuals fail to participate in IEP meetings, they must then be rescheduled to another day. Further, IEP meetings may be held after school during the district’s 8\(^{th}\) hour, but when they last longer teachers are not compensated.

• **Large Caseloads.** Some special educators have caseloads that exceed established limits. Concerns applied to caseloads for teachers of students for whom instruction to learn braille writing was appropriate. Furthermore, when teachers and orientation and mobility teachers

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\(^{92}\) Source: USD Division of Human Resources HR 2405, Vacancies – Classified.
must travel to instruct students at multiple schools, travel time affected delivery and caseload needs. Too often, service minutes required by students do not align with caseload numbers.

- **Qualified Personnel and Vacancies.** FUSD has a 96 percent retention rate for special education teachers, and a relatively small vacancy rate. Because life-time benefits were grandfathered for teachers prior to July 1, 2005, there is a focus on retaining personnel hired after that date. Yet, vacancies that do exist affect instruction, especially for students who are deaf or hearing impaired. It is believed that the human resources department needs to be staffed in a way that would allow personnel to step up recruitment of teachers, especially those teaching students with low incidence disabilities, when the need was clearly expected and could mitigate caseload numbers. This action might reduce the employment of teachers working under a waiver while they take years to complete basic credentialing requirements.

- **Expanding Applicant Pool.** FUSD has various programs to grow special educators, such as the Pathway System that enables individuals with a bachelors’ degree to receive a grant to become special education certified. The district also has a teacher quality program. Concerns that the Grow to Teach program will not remain from year to year makes participants anxious. Having program facilitators support participants would be helpful in addressing operational issues, e.g., maintaining receipts for reimbursement and providing coaching/mentoring.

- **Fresno Teachers Association (FTA).** Through negotiations leading to a new Collective Bargaining Agreement, the district agreed to establish a committee with teachers and union and administrator representatives to address special education concerns. The group has a $2 million budget.

**Paraeducators**

- **Vacancies.** A consistent theme from focus group participants concerned the negative impact of paraeducator vacancies on student learning and behavior, and on teachers’ working conditions.

- **HR Capacity.** The multi-stepped process involved in filling paraeducator positions when qualified personnel were not found initially is HR resource intensive, especially given the large numbers of applications that require screening. The two individuals working on this issue in HR does not appear to be sufficient to handle the workload in an expedited manner.

- **Temporary Support Aides.** FUSD will authorize temporary paraeducators but they can only work for 30 days pursuant to union negotiations. Rotating personnel across the many students with the most intensive needs, is disconcerting.

- **Salary Schedule.** With difficult jobs, it is not unusual for paraeducators to have additional employment outside of the school environment to cover their expenses.

- **Licensing Requirements.** Paraeducator positions require applicants to have certifications in first aid and CPR, and some in defensive driving. The district does not provide these courses, and several paraeducators stated that driving was not part of their position requirements.

- **Induction and Training.** Currently, new autism paraeducators receive a 13-week course that is provided after the school day once each week. FUSD is considering developing a general induction process for paraeducators modeled after the one in place for teachers. Such coursework and induction support would be useful in retaining paraeducators over time.
• **Accountability.** Schools inconsistently conduct oversight on paraeducators to ensure their time and attendance is appropriate, and that they carry out their roles and responsibilities as expected. Variations from expectations affect teaching and learning, and student safety and wellness.

**Designated Instructional Services (DIS) Personnel**

This section provides staffing ratios for DIS (e.g., related services) personnel, and feedback from focus group participants on their roles and practices. Generally, FUSD assigns personnel to schools based on the following factors: service minutes, program types, travel time, and case management responsibilities.

**Staffing Ratios**

Staffing ratios and other data for DIS personnel are summarized below and detailed in exhibit 5g.

- **Speech/Language Pathologist (SLP).** FUSD has 75.5 FTE speech/language pathologists (SLPs), including 15.1 vacancies (20 percent of all FTEs.) There is one SLP for every 111 students with IEPs in FUSD, which is the same as the urban district average. FUSD ranked 50th of 79 reporting districts in its number of SLPs.

- **Psychologists.** With 65.7 FTE psychologists, there is one psychologist for every 127 students with IEPs in FUSD, compared to the urban district average of 163 students. There are no vacant positions. FUSD ranked 30th of the 74 reporting districts in its number of psychologists. Seven psychologists were added last school year and an additional nine positions are budgeted for 2018-19.

- **Social Workers.** With 33.5 FTE social workers, there is one social worker for every 250 students with IEPs in FUSD, compared to the urban district average of 163 students. FUSD ranked 38th of the 51 reporting districts in its number of social workers.

- **Nurses.** With 53.1 FTE nurses, including 1.2 vacancies, there is one nurse for every 158 students with IEPs in FUSD, compared with the urban district average of 138 students. FUSD ranked 41st of 60 reporting districts in its number of nurses.

- **Occupational Therapists.** With 8 FTE occupational therapists (OTs) and certified OT assistants (COTAs) there is one OT for every 1,046 students with IEPs in FUSD, compared with the urban district average of 354 students. FUSD ranked 71st of reporting districts in its number of OTs. However, it should be noted that 375 students have OT services on their IEPs provided by the 8 FTEs.

- **Physical Therapists.** FUSD reported that it contracts for physical therapy services, but it did not provide this FTE number.

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93 Some schools have purchased additional psychologist time through the site's Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA).
Exhibit 5g. Average Number Students for Each Speech/Language Pathologist and Psychologist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related-Services Areas</th>
<th>Speech/Language Pathologists</th>
<th>Psychologists</th>
<th>Social Workers</th>
<th>Nurses</th>
<th>Occupational Therapy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of FUSD Staff FTE</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUSD Students w/IEPs-to-Staff</td>
<td>111:1</td>
<td>127:1</td>
<td>250:1</td>
<td>158:1</td>
<td>1046:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All District Average Ratio</td>
<td>110:1</td>
<td>163:1</td>
<td>163:1</td>
<td>138:1</td>
<td>354:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of All District Ratios</td>
<td>37–596:1</td>
<td>31–422:1</td>
<td>40–1924</td>
<td>58-834:1</td>
<td>75-2757:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUSD Ranking</td>
<td>50th of 79</td>
<td>30th of 74</td>
<td>38th of 51</td>
<td>41st of 60</td>
<td>71st of 76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus Group Feedback

Focus group participants provided feedback on several issues involving psychologists, speech/language pathologists, nurses, and occupational therapists.

**Psychologists**

Focus group participants provided thoughtful and comprehensive feedback on issues relating to psychologists. Comments focused on the structure of management, supervision and evaluation, the psychologist’s role in schools, and access to training.

- **Role.** Many interviewees indicated that they believed that the skills of school psychologists were underutilized in FUSD. They also indicated that because sufficient interventions and progress monitoring was not in place that the psychologists instead need to conduct formalized assessments of students even though they are mostly trained to design academic and behavioral interventions and systems at all three levels of support. They could also help address parent concerns and address issues. The hiring of more psychologists next school year will help facilitate their involvement in these areas. However, there was a need for FUSD to recognize their value and expanded role.

- **Performance Evaluations.** Reportedly, the content of psychologists’ evaluations, which follows the administrator framework, does not align with the role of psychologists or with consistent expectations and quality standards in the field of school psychology.

- **Professional Learning.** Psychologists hold monthly half-day meetings and rely on their expertise to expand professional knowledge for peers. The local California Association of School Psychologists has helped fund presenters.

**Speech/Language Pathologists**

Focus groups provided the following feedback on SLP services, caseloads and organization.

- **Vacancies.** There were 15.1 SLP vacancies, which constituted some 20 percent of all FTEs. The district was contracting to provide virtual speech/language services. This service model, if implemented appropriately, has been authorized by the American Speech and Hearing association (ASHA).
• **Caseloads.** With 75.5 FTE speech/language pathologists (SLPs), district staff reported that their average caseload was 55 students, and a ratio of 1 to 40 among students from birth to 5 years of age. However, some SLPs reported having caseloads of as many as 80 students.

**Nurses**

Focus group participants provided the following feedback about nursing and health services.

• **Increase in Nursing.** With the large number of students needing nursing/health services, FUSD has 53 nurses, 48 LVNs, and 29 medical and health assistants. The district had a total of 140 health personnel, including 1.2 nurse vacancies. Last year’s lower number of school nurses was substantially helped with the hiring of 17 nurses this school year.

• **Assignment of Nurses.** Full time nurses are assigned at each high school. Middle school nurses have two schools each, and elementary school nurses have two-three schools each depending on the number of students receiving special education services; the number of total students; the number of scheduled medical procedures and known medical conditions; and specialty services and programs.

**Occupational Therapists**

Focus group participants provided the following feedback occupational therapists.

• **High Caseloads.** With the lowest staffing ratios of all reporting school districts, there is concern in FUSD that OTs were not able to carry out their responsibilities by providing IEP-required services. In addition to direct services and consultations, they must contact physicians to understand their prescriptions.

• **Follow-up.** The district need to recognize that the accommodations and/or modifications and techniques OTs use with students must be followed throughout the day and week to be effective. Isolated services by OTs will not have the intended benefits.

• **Purchasing.** A bureaucratic process governs the purchasing of OT materials. Information and justifications must be documented on two different forms, which is then brought to a committee (with no OTs) to review and approve.

**Compliance Support**

The section below addresses the district’s IDEA determination, SPP and CDE monitoring activities, special education webpage, and IEP development and operations.

**IDEA Determination from CDE, SPP Review, and Monitoring Activities**

The California Department of Education gave the district a “needs assistance” determination under IDEA for the 2016-17 school year. In addition to reviewing Fresno Unified’s SPP indicator outcomes against state targets (see exhibit 5h), CDE used the results of monitoring activities on disproportionality and significant disproportionality to determine the district’s IDEA determination. Additional detailed information about the SPP indicator results appear in other parts of this report.


Exhibit 5h. SPP Indicators and Outcomes Against Targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Meets Target?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Graduation Four Year Rate</td>
<td>No (9.79 pts &lt; minimum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dropout Four Year Rate</td>
<td>No (3.58 pts &lt; minimum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Statewide Assessments: Participation</td>
<td>No (.95 pts &lt; minimum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a. ELA Achievement</td>
<td>No (9.51 pts &lt; minimum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b. Math Achievement</td>
<td>No (7.78 pts &lt; minimum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a. Discipline: Disproportionate Compared to Statewide Rates</td>
<td>Yes (1.18 pts &lt; maximum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b: Discipline: Disproportionate based on Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>No (African American 3.67 pts &gt; max)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a. LRE: Inclusive (At Least 80 percent in General Education)</td>
<td>Yes (4.74 pts &gt; minimum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b. LRE: SDC (Less than 40 Percent in General Education)</td>
<td>No (5.95 pts &gt; minimum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5c. LRE: Separate (Center) Schools</td>
<td>Yes (1.7 pts &lt; maximum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a. Preschool: Most Special Education Services in Regular Class</td>
<td>Yes (17.39 pts &lt; minimum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b. Preschool: Educated in Separate Class or School</td>
<td>Yes (8.15 pts &lt; minimum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Disproportionality: All Disability Categories</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Disproportionality: Six Disability Areas</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Timely Initial Evaluations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Timely Transition from Infant/Toddler to Preschool</td>
<td>No (18.83 &lt; minimum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Postsecondary transition (IEP appropriate)</td>
<td>Yes (100 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Post-school Outcomes</td>
<td>Yes (3 indicators)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)</td>
<td>No (0.16 to 0.39 pts &lt; minimum)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Monitoring Activities**

CDE has required the district to develop and implement performance indicator review (PIR) plans, address corrective actions from monitoring, and conduct a critical incidence review.

- **Performance Indicator Reviews.** Improvement plans must be developed and implemented based on SPP indicator outcomes in the following areas: graduation rates, statewide assessments, and least restrictive environment (LRE). Both the best practice inclusive education (BPIE) focus group and supporting inclusive practices (SIP) grant activities will address the LRE improvement plan.

- **Comprehensive Review.** CDE worked with FUSD to review 70 IEPs on several specific areas, e.g., IEP implementation, education benefit, and compliance. IEP team meetings must be held to correct identified student IEPs. The review also generated district-level corrective actions, which were mostly require training on specific items.

- **Critical Incidence Review.** This review focuses on 50 records of students with moderate/severe disabilities, including IEPs, that determine educational benefit, compliance, and accuracy of
data reported to the CDE. The review also included a review of local policies, procedures, and the Special Education Local Plan for IDEA compliance. Interviews and follow-up discussions were held with parents/guardians, general and special education teachers, and district administrators. Also, monitoring included visits to 17 moderate/severe SDCs located within the Bullard, Fresno, Hoover, McLane and Roosevelt regions.

Dispute Resolution and Complaints

Information on district resolution of due process hearing requests and complaints are addressed below.

Due Process

Fresno Unified has had a long-term relationship with its special education attorney, who works with the district on a contractual basis. The district has resolved parents’ due process hearing requests for the last three years. (See exhibit 5i). The number of requests has been relatively small for the size of the district.

Exhibit 5i. Number of Due Process Hearing Requests and Resolution by School Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Requests</th>
<th>Settled/Pending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7 settled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11 settled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3 settled, 2 pending</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Complaints Filed with the California Department of Education and Office for Civil Rights

Since about 2012, one complaint filed with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights resulted in a Section 504 resolution agreement involving student discipline. Complaints filed with CDE are typically resolved upon notice to the district. Issues generally relate to students with autism and related speech or behavioral issues, amount of services, and placement.

Focus Group Participant Feedback

- **Training.** Additional training from the district’s special education attorney would be helpful for administrators and school personnel to be better informed about the legal rights of students with disabilities.

- **Independent Educational Evaluations (IEEs).** There was a perception among interviewees that IEEs are quickly and casually offered or approved without first clarifying the basis of parental concerns. IEEs are typically not an appropriate option when parents disagree with IEP services or placements rather than with the results of an evaluation. Also, parent requests for IEEs are always granted without adequate review of the basis for the request. It can take up to a year to complete the entire IEE process, which puts student services on hold. Better communication/guidance to school teams, including RIMs, is needed to (a) consider IEE results; (b) address the poor quality of some IEEs; and (c) develop legally defensible offers of appropriate education after IEEs are completed. During the 2016-17 school year, 35 IEEs were
approved. IEE costs can reach $6,000 each, but most are around $2,000, and there are no costs when conducted by the CA Diagnostic Center in Fresno.

- **Assessment Plans.** When developed during mediation, discussions about assessment plans do not consistently involve assessors, such as psychologists. In some cases, the plan is not provided to the assessor in a timely manner. Such issues are preventable with upfront communication.

- **Cultural Barriers.** For some, especially parents with limited English proficiency, there are cultural differences that make it more difficult for them to communicate during IEP meetings and share concerns about their child’s education, including issues pertaining to compliance.

**Special Education Webpage**

Webpages offer a good opportunity for school districts to share information with stakeholders about special education policy and procedures, as well as evidence-based practices that support teaching and learning of students with disabilities.

**Policy and Procedures Manual**

The special education department’s webpage includes a link to the special education policy and procedures manual. The manual contains excellent and relevant information, using a pdf format. Special education policies and procedures are complex and difficult to internalize and operationalize. Presenting this information in a webpage format allows for key information to be briefly explained with links to more detailed explanations based on the user’s need. This format also supports the use of links to publicly available articles and videos of desired practices, e.g., facilitation of IEP meetings, as well as district-prepared information. Text and resources can be updated quickly along with notices about current information and new resources.

**Other Webpage Contents**

In addition to the special education manual, the webpage includes information about health services, the SELPA local plan, IEP team members, a 2014 transition correction action document, special education timelines, explanations of parent rights, extended school year information, physical education, and WorkAbility. However, no information is provided on special education department personnel or a directory of contacts for assistance; how to address special education concerns; information about the CAC, or links to other valuable resources.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP) Development and Operations**

The district has an electronic system to support the development of students’ IEPs. Focus group participants provided the following feedback on the system, and development and storage of IEPs.

- **IEP Quality.** Numerous concerns were shared about IEPs that do not provide sufficient information to follow up with the student. There was a desire to have an academic and social/emotional profile of each child and a summary of instructional approaches.

- **Standards-based IEP Goals.** Teachers were having difficulty developing standards based IEP goals that addressed students’ deficit skills.
• **IEP Storage.** Despite having all IEPs included in the district’s electronic system, school personnel must convert the IEP to a pdf and send paper copies of the IEP and related documents to the central office where all special education records are filed centrally. This process unnecessarily requires a significant amount of time to process and store/retrieve these documents. Other districts, such as Los Angeles Unified School District and the Chicago Public Schools do not centralize records except for students placed in out-of-district schools.

**Transportation Issues**

Two systems provide transportation services to district students. One system is for general education that includes students with IEPs if they can access regular route busses. Another vender provides transportation for 1,300 students with IEPs. Two schedulers route 130 routes for these students and work almost daily with two RIMs for this purpose. Typically, one to three days is needed to schedule transportation for students with disabilities, with 15 days permitted by contract. One-way routes average 45 minutes to one hour.

**Focus Group Participant Feedback**

Focus group participants shared numerous concerns about the transportation process.

• **Starting/Changing Routes.** Most participants reported excessive delays in executing transportation routes, especially at the beginning of the school year. Although the district will reimburse parents for transporting their children, this option is not consistently available for parents, and reimbursement is not available for taxi, Uber or Lyft travel. There was a perception among interviewees that the special education transportation provider is not receptive to student needs.

• **Changes.** Transportation changes are initiated by schools to special education personnel and then to transportation personnel. Other districts have transportation personnel who manage these issues directly, and special education personnel become involved only when necessary to intervene and address persistent issues. Also, transportation is delayed when parents move during the summer and do not communicate changes to appropriate personnel.

District personnel indicated that they are using systems planning to address these issues. One goal was to have a regional framework for SDC classes, which would help decrease travel time and the number of routes, and better facilitate communication.

**Medi-Cal**

Generally, there has been good management of the special education budget in compliance with state and federal requirements. Several issues were raised about the operation of Medi-Cal, California’s Medicaid program.

• **Documenting Services.** The district’s process for documenting Medi-Cal services is not user friendly for all service areas, e.g., occupational therapy. The interface is not as intuitive as other claiming systems.

• **Occupational and Physical Therapy.** Some OT and PT services are not being reimbursed because they lack physician prescriptions.
• **Documenting Non-Eligible Services.** All related services and itinerant staff must document progress notes even though services are not Medi-Cal eligible. These areas include service providers for students with orthopedic impairments, vision impairments, blindness, deafness, and hearing impairments, and students receiving adapted physical education. Although it might make sense to have progress recording, it is perceived that the elements required for Medi-Cal billing are more onerous than necessary for this group of personnel.

**Accountability**

In the fall of 2011, the Council of the Great City Schools published its report *Pieces of the Puzzle: Factors in the Improvement of Urban School Districts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.* The report summarized research the Council conducted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) on characteristics of urban school districts that had made the greatest academic improvements and had the highest overall performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The first characteristic involved a district’s clear statement of goals and districtwide accountability for results. This feature helps create a culture of shared responsibility for student achievement. Other research found similar results and articulated barriers to effective teaching and learning. School districts that effectively support school leadership often demonstrate a capacity to facilitate learning and development, address barriers to learning and teaching, and govern and manage the district in ways that prioritize good instruction. In pursuing these goals, districts showing improvement have mechanisms for systemic planning, program implementation, evaluation, and accountability.

Fresno Unified has various tools and data reporting in place to support implementation of its 2014-19 goals. These mechanisms, including those used by the special education department, are addressed below.

**Planning and Improvement Processes**

The district uses the following planning tools to support improved achievement for all students, including those with disabilities. Some of these have been discussed previously in this report, but they are gathered below to discuss their alignment with each other and their collective support for students with disabilities.

• **Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP).** Since July 1, 2014, all California school districts must adopt an LCAP using a statewide template. The LCAP describes key FUSD goals for students as well as specific actions (with expenditures) the district will take to achieve the goals and metrics used to assess progress. A review of the district’s LCAP shows that students with disabilities have data in relevant areas and are included in budgeted activities. FUSD’s plan is aligned with the following four districtwide goals.

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All students will –

- Excel in reading, writing, and math (yes sped);
- Engage in arts, activities, and athletics;
- Demonstrate the character and competencies for workplace success; and
- Stay in school on target to graduate.

• Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) and State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP).
  California requires schools to develop an SPSA to create a cycle of continuous improvement of student performance, and to ensure that all students succeed in reaching academic standards. This plan focuses on students who are economically disadvantaged, English learners, or foster youth. Recognizing that a sizable large portion of these students have IEPs, CDE developed its SSIP, which is a 17th SPP indicator and aligned with and a key component of the state’s single plan approach to education. In this respect, Fresno Unified’s students who are economically disadvantaged, English learners, or foster youth include the following percentages of students with IEPs: 8.4 percent, 16.4 percent, and 22.2 percent, respectively. The SSIP focuses on the same three student groups as the SPSA, drawing attention to students with disabilities in each of the three student groups. The SSIP targets the following three areas
  - Student Engagement (supported by increased time in class through reduced absences)
  - Student Discipline (decrease suspensions and expulsions)
  - Access To/Instruction in State Standards, including students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum and education with their same-aged peers. CDE will support guidance and resources on effective instructional strategies and structures, such as UDL and MTSS.

• School Quality Improvement System (SQIS). With seven other partners, Fresno Unified is a member of California’s CORE districts, which have established multiple measures and are working together to eliminate student disparity and disproportionality. Through this partnership, districts, and school sites are now accountable for academic performance, academic growth, retention and completion, social-emotional indicators, and culture and climate measures.

• Master Plan for English Learner Success. The Master Plan articulates the district’s direction and guidance for programs and services addressing the academic needs of ELs and expectations the district holds for each school and classroom in which English learners are served. The Master Plan addresses the instructional shifts teachers and leaders must make to understand and foster rigorous learning environments for English learner students in all classrooms throughout the district. It also includes several references to education of English learners with IEPs or receiving special education.

• Accelerating Achievement for African American Students in FUSD. Milestones and focus areas address four major issues: entering school ready to learn and reading at grade level by third grade; graduating from high school ready for college and career and completing post-secondary education or training; successfully entering the workplace; and being safe from violence and providing second chances.
• **State Performance Indicators and Special Education Improvement Plan.** As discussed elsewhere in this report, California has federally required state performance plan (SPP) indicators that measure performance and compliance outcomes, which resulted in a 2016-17 “needs improvement” designation on the district. Fresno Unified’s special education improvement plan has goals and measurable benchmarks aligned with the SPP indicators. Special education department personnel conduct data reviews to monitor progress toward department goals and develop actionable steps to support improvement in the data. As provided in greater detail in Appendix B, the plan’s six goals are –

1: Increase Graduation Rate -  
2: Decrease Disproportionality of African American and English Learners  
3: Increase Time in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)  
4: Improve student achievement on state-wide assessments  
5: Improve IEP Compliance  
6: Improve Classroom Instruction

Goal 6 measures the percentage of special education classrooms that score 3 or 4 in Tenets 1, 2A, and 2B, as measured by the instructional practice guide observation tool. This tool, which is based on the location of students’ programs, seems to consider special education as a “place” rather than a “service” to students. Also, it is not inclusive of students with disabilities who are educated in general education classrooms nor does it include the importance of general education teachers who provide instruction to these students.

• **Accountable Communities (AC).** Facilitated by lead teachers⁹⁶ who are compensated for their time, ACs are the mechanism by which groups of central office and site-based personnel examine student achievement data and align teaching practices. The work of ACs include developing common formative assessments, sharing teaching strategies, planning with common core state standards, and utilizing the four guiding questions for improving student achievement: What do we want our students to learn? How will we know they learned it? How will we respond when they didn't learn it? How will we respond when they already know it?

**Data and Reports**

Various data and reports are available to support the achievement and social/emotional wellbeing of students with disabilities. These include reports available through the assessment and accountability and special education departments.

**Assessment and Accountability**

The assessment/accountability webpage⁹⁷ shows the data sources and resources below to support the district’s school quality improvement system. The index and reports included are designed to help school communities identify strengths and challenges that need addressing.

• District Data Dashboard

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⁹⁶ Lead teachers attend 9 hours of district training to develop skills in evaluating data, understanding curriculum, working as a team, and creating collective commitments.

⁹⁷ Retrieved from [https://www.fresnounified.org/Pages/Assessment-and-Accountability.aspx](https://www.fresnounified.org/Pages/Assessment-and-Accountability.aspx).
• California School Dashboard
• Smarter Balanced Assessment
• CORE SQII Report Cards
• National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)
• School Accountability Report Card (SARC)
• Fresno Unified Data Dashboard
• District Data Dashboard-Board Presentation
• Data Dashboard Fact Sheet

Special Education Data and Reports

A variety of reports are available to share on students with disabilities. These include-

• **ATLAS Reports.** Includes grades, enrollment, attendance, positive interactions, state assessment results, interim assessment reports, and suspension/expulsions.

• **IPR.** Instructional practice guide reports to assess instruction.

• **IEP Enrollment Status.** Daily email to special education staff and RIMs for enrolled students with IEPs.

• **IEP Status.** Weekly email to special education and school site administrators, and case managers.

• **Special Education Information Summary.** Weekly email to special education assistant superintendent and SELPA director.

• **Special Education Goals.** Monthly report to RIMs.

• **IEP Suspensions.** Weekly email to special education and DPI management, and psychologists for weekly suspensions, and daily email to school administrators, psychologists, RIMs, and case managers on suspensions for the day.

These reports communicate valuable information. However, they are reliant on email communications. Other school districts have numerous reports with requirements that individuals responsible for reviewing the information do so. Other districts also have tracking systems that show the reports were reviewed as intended. There is a need for individuals at different levels to have access to information on a real-time basis to track various special education procedures and support educational decision-making. A few examples of such reports currently in use include-

• **Service Tracking.** Shows percentages of IEP services required and provided by discipline, e.g. speech therapy, by site, region, and overall for administrators, site administrators, and service providers.

• **Services Uploaded.** Tracks service on a weekly basis with reports showing personnel who did not comply by site, region, and district.

• **Caseload.** Reports number of caseloads exceeding guidance by program, site, region, and district.
Focus group participants indicated that requests for ad hoc reports were not responded to in a timely manner. Also, it takes a long time to respond to requests to add students to or to transfer students from schools. It is important that all personnel have timely access to the reports they need to inform follow-up activities. Otherwise, administrators are functioning blindly, and accountability suffers.

Overall Comments

It is critical that activities under each of the district’s improvement plans are aligned with each other to the maximum extent possible and in a way that is easily understood by school personnel and other stakeholders. It is also important for instructional administrators to understand how they must leverage their departments’ collective resources to this end, and for accountable communities to understand how various data sources on related purposes can be used to inform their study and actions. This report provides many examples of challenges to accelerating achievement and social/emotional wellness for students with disabilities, including their receipt of high quality instruction in inclusive settings. Unless activities to address these challenges are embedded within aligned plans, efforts will be fragmented, approaches will be less effective, and expected outcomes will not be realized.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

The following were areas of strength in the district’s teaching and learning supports for students with disabilities, particularly with respect to collaboration at the central office and school levels.

Interdepartmental Collaboration

- **Communication.** Regular and structured communication occurs at various FUSD leadership levels, including at the principal level.
- **Leadership.** The four assistant superintendents each provide leadership to their principals for curriculum and instruction.
- **Cross Department Collaboration.** Systems planning and accountable communities use a cross departmental and multi-disciplinary approach to carry out their respective tasks. Also, the special education assistant superintendent and prevention/intervention executive director alternatively lead bi-weekly meetings with their respective staff. Furthermore, the special education department has a strong collaboration with transportation, CTE, workability, and EL support departments.

Special Education Department Organization and Support to Schools

- **Mission, Vision and Commitments.** The Department has established written mission, vision, and commitment statements on special education that are positive and align with district statements.
- **Alignment of RIMs and Speech/Language Pathologists with Regions.** Both RIMs and speech/language pathologists are assigned to schools consistent with the high school regional structure.
- **Health Management.** A director oversees nurses, LVNs, and medical and health assistants.
- **Psychological Support.** The psychology force has been increased in numbers, and additional personnel have been budgeted for 2018-19. This increase should enable psychologists to better support MTSS-related activities and expand their role to better utilize their knowledge and skills.
- **Speech/Language Pathologists.** SPLs are organized by high school regions and their associated feeder patterns. Seven lead SPLs each support the pathologists assigned within each group of schools.
- **Special Education Regional Centers.** Throughout the district, regional centers with office assistants can assist stakeholders with various special education issues.
- **Class Size Ratio Guidelines.** Class-size ratio guidelines with special educators and paraeducators have smaller student-to-adult ratios compared to many school districts with whom the Council team is familiar.
- **Teacher Retention.** The district has a 96 percent retention rate for special education teachers, which is due partly to the grandfathering of benefits in place prior to July 1, 2005.
- **Paraeducator Support.** New autism paraeducators receive a 13-week course that is provided after the school day once each week. Consideration is being given to providing an induction program for all new paraeducators.
- **Psychologist Support.** The hiring of more psychologists next school year will help improve the ability of psychologists to support teaching and learning activities. Furthermore, they organize monthly professional learning activities to further their expertise and knowledge.

**Compliance Support**

- **Due Process Requests and Complaints.** The district has had a long-term relationship with its special education attorney who works on a contractual basis. Due process hearing requests are not excessive for the size of the district and they are resolved with parents. Complaints filed with CDE are typically resolved in a timely manner.
- **Special Education Webpage.** The webpage includes the department’s policy and procedures manual, which contains relevant information on special education processes.

**Accountability**

- **Planning and Improvement Processes.** Fresno Unified has various processes it uses or CDE uses to support improved achievement of all students, including those with disabilities: Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP); Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) and State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP); School Quality Improvement System (SQIS); Master Plan for English Learner Success; State Performance Indicators; and District Special Education Improvement Plan. Accountable Communities (ACs) form around common work to address four guiding questions: What do we want our students to learn? How will we know they learned it? How will we respond when they didn't learn it? How will we respond when they already know it?
• **Data Reports.** The assessment/accountability webpage has a robust set of data sources and resources to support the district’s school quality improvement system. The indices and reports listed are designed to help school communities identify strengths that can be leveraged and challenges that need addressing. The special education department also has a myriad of data reports to share on students with disabilities.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The following areas present opportunities for improvement.

*Interdepartmental Collaboration*

• **Inclusivity.** The district’s practices for carrying out its goals, beliefs, and commitments are not sufficiently inclusive in special education. There is a strong perception that special education is an afterthought at all levels. To some degree, this may be due to insufficient communication about the collaboration that does take place.

• **Alignment of Instructional Leadership and Special Education Support.** The four instructional superintendents and four special education managers and their RIMs have different organizational structures and do not have common groups of schools they support. This lack of alignment makes it more difficult than necessary for these groups to establish relationships, meet the needs of their schools, and to consistently include special education personnel in school walkthroughs and accountable communities.

• **C/I and Special Education.** More communications between C/I and special education is needed to avoid unintended consequences, particularly at the manager and RIM levels.

*Special Education Department Organization and Support*

The department’s organizational structure should be improved to better support its vision, mission, and commitments, and its assistance to schools.

• **Leadership.** On paper the organizational structure shows only two directors, a classified employee, and analyst II reporting to the assistant superintendent. The SELPA director has direct oversight of early intervention, psychologists, information systems, and four program managers. Fourteen RIMs report to the managers. Although this reporting structure allows the assistant superintendent to engage in districtwide activities, at least on paper, the SELPA director’s responsibilities appear to be comparatively large. The SELPA director, however, has no structured opportunity to interact regularly with instructional superintendents.

• **Specialized Principal Reporting Structure.** Three specialized school principals report to special education managers rather than to an instructional superintendent who oversees schools in the principals’ feeder groups.

• **Communication to Schools.** School personnel do not have a clear understanding of special education management team decisions, and there is a desire for more transparency. Furthermore, the RIM role could be better defined and communicated.

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98 It is important to note there is confusion with what is delineated on paper and what is actual for roles and responsibilities. It was reported to the team that many program managers work closely with the assistant superintendent for direction and support.
• **Program Managers.** Program managers are overburdened with the scope and complexity of their respective responsibilities and supervision of RIMs. There is a sense among staff that directives are handed down without follow up engagement or responsiveness when problems arise.

• **RIMs.** All RIMs do not have the knowledge and experience needed to be effective in their positions. They spend considerable time supporting the programmatic components of their respective managers and handling compliance issues. Little time remains to work with schools and their principals/staff. This makes it difficult for RIMs to proactively address instructional issues, support new special educators, and consistently participate in school walkthroughs. Furthermore, when RIMs are involved there is a sense that prior decisions sometimes override IEP team decision-making.

• **DIS Supervision.** Although a director supervises health personnel, RIMs supervise speech/language pathologists and OTs, and were supposed to supervise psychologists until that relationship was put on hold. Currently, the SELPA director supervises psychologists. Compared to the seven SLP leads, psychologists have 1.5 leads. This managerial structure does not meet the needs of DIS personnel and does not facilitate their involvement in the special education department’s upper management team deliberations.

• **DIS Assignment to Schools.** SLPs are assigned to schools by region and psychologists are as well to varying degrees.

• **Special Education Department Organization.** The special education homepage does not show the organization of the department and people to contact for assistance by area of need. Parents do not get timely answers to their questions and may be sent from person to person for answers.

**School-based Services**

• **Principals.** According to numerous interviewees, FUSD principals inconsistently “own” special education and they are not consistently respectful of and engage with parents and their students with disabilities. In addition, consistent processes for overseeing paraeducators is necessary to ensure they meet performance expectations.

• **Case Management.** Special educators and DIS teachers do not have the authority over required IEP team members to participate in meetings. Too often, meetings must be postponed because there are several meetings scheduled on the same day or people are not available. Also, personnel are not compensated for their time at IEP meetings that extend beyond the eighth hour of school.

• **Large Caseloads.** Some special educators and SPLs have caseloads that exceed expectations. Concerns apply to students learning braille and needing orientation and mobility training.

• **Special Educator Preparation Program.** From year to year there are concerns that the Grow to Teach program may be discontinued. Facilitators to support participants would be helpful.

• **Paraeducator and SLP Vacancies.** The areas of paraeducators and SLPs are plagued by vacancies (87 and 15.1, respectively). While the number of special educator vacancies is smaller, they disproportionately affect students with significant needs. There does not appear

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99 Administration reports that OTs are in fact supervised by Program Managers.
to be sufficient human resource personnel to proactively address these issues. The number of classified positions for paraeducators is not typical for school districts with which the Council team has experience and may exacerbate the district’s ability to fill vacancies. With relatively low salaries, paraeducators must obtain licenses for first aid and CPR to be qualified for their positions. Some must have a license in defensive driving even though their driving is not required for their job. These pre-employment requirements may make it more difficult to expand the district’s paraeducator applicant pool. Furthermore, the three-step interview process based on current employment status that must be satisfied before posting positions outside of the district appears to be contributing to the district’s extensive shortages in this area. The use of temporary support aides is not a remedy for present vacancies. Structured training for paraeducators, such as that available for those supporting students with autism, might help retain more paraeducators.

- **Psychologists.** If better understood, the knowledge and skills of psychologists could be used more fully to support MTSS activities. Insufficient interventions and progress monitoring data compel psychologists to conduct formal assessments, which underutilizes their usefulness to school personnel and parents. The performance evaluation of psychologists focuses on managerial functions rather than on their role, expectations, and the quality standards of their field.

- **OTs.** The Council was told that the district had three OTs. Additionally, the district has four OTs and one COTA under contract for a total of eight providers.

- **PTs.** No data were reported on PT personnel and the area was not represented in focus group meetings. There was a need for PT personnel, which the district has more recently informed the team will be contracted.

**Compliance Support**

- **IDEA Determination for 2016-17.** Fresno Unified has a “needs assistance” determination under IDEA based on monitoring results related to the disproportionate suspension of African American students with IEPs. The district met 10 of 19 SPP indicators (including subparts) that CDE measured against outcome targets. CDE is initiating three monitoring activities for the district. The first involves three performance indicators (graduation rates, statewide assessments, and restrictive educational placements); corrective action stemming from a review of 70 IEPs; and a critical incidence review focusing on 50 records of students with moderate/severe disabilities, interviews with stakeholders, and visits to 17 SDCs in five regions. (Bullard, Fresno, Hoover, McLane, Roosevelt)

- **Focus Group Participants.** Concerns included: (a) additional training from the district’s special education attorney; (b) sufficient attention to approving independent educational evaluations only when warranted; (c) negotiated assessment plans do not consistently include relevant personnel, which then results in plans that require change; and (d) cultural barriers sometimes interfere with parent’s ability to be involved in their child’s IEPs.

- **Special Education Webpage.** The webpage includes the district’s policies and procedures manual, which is posted using a pdf format. This format makes complex and difficult information less user-friendly. The webpage could provide links to additional resources of value to stakeholders.
• **IEP Development and Operations.** Focus group concerns included: (a) the need to send IEPs in a pdf format to central office where records are filed centrally, even though the records are available electronically; (b) IEPs with insufficient information about student’s instructional needs; and (c) standards-based IEPs are not written in a manner that addresses critical deficit skills.

**Additional Issues**

• **Transportation.** Two special education RIMs talk with transportation personnel almost daily. Focus group concerns included: (a) some delays in executing transportation routes, especially at the beginning of the school year; (b) although parents may be reimbursed, not all are able to drive their children to and from school; and (c) multiple steps are required to communicate transportation changes. The administration reports that schools communicate with the special education department program managers to make changes with transportation. However, there is a lot of confusion about a process that involves RIMs, IEP teams, and schools with central office.

• **Medi-Cal.** Concerns included: (a) the process for documenting Medi-Cal services is not user friendly for all service providers and it is not as intuitive as it could be; (b) some eligible occupational and physical therapy services are not reimbursed because a prescription is not available; and (c) service providers who are not authorized to bill under Medi-Cal must nevertheless use the same complex service-tracking process as authorized providers do.

**Accountability**

• **Data Reports.** Responses to requests for data assistance are not always made in a timely way, e.g. ad hoc reports, requests to add or transfer students, etc. Also, school-based personnel do have real-time user-friendly access to a menu of the special education reports they need. Also, personnel are not held accountable for accessing real time school reports when they are available. Instead special education department personnel email reports on a scheduled basis.

• **Alignment of Plans.** Activities under the seven plans that the district operates could be better aligned so they are more easily understood by school personnel and other stakeholders. Better alignment might allow instructional division personnel to better understand how to leverage their resources in common areas of work. This report provides many examples of challenges to the accelerating achievement and social/emotional wellness units and how they work with students with disabilities, including their receipt of high quality instruction in inclusive settings. Unless activities are better aligned, district efforts may be less effective and expected outcomes may be harder to attain.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to improve supports for teaching and learning for students with disabilities.

9. **Organization and Collaboration of Central Office Personnel.** Maximize interdepartmental collaboration between instructional division leaders and their respective staffs in order to leverage their collective resources.

   a. **Inclusive Decision-making and Communication.** Establish protocols for communicating issues affecting students with disabilities (and other student groups). These issues should include new policies, new programs, curriculum/instruction, etc., to avoid unintended consequences and misunderstandings. Ensure that communications is seamless from the central office to schools to improve transparency and stakeholder involvement. Check the effectiveness of this process through various means, e.g., focus groups, surveys, walkthrough discussions, etc.

   - **Inclusive C/I Considerations.** Establish structured and planned communications between curriculum/instruction and special education (and other relevant departments), including multiple personnel groups. Ensure information is shared with personnel working directly with and in schools, including special education and EL services. Ensure that feedback is collected and considered thoughtfully. Follow this process prior to purchasing materials to minimize unanticipated consequences and to ensure materials meet their intended purposes.

   b. **Organizational Alignment and Coherence.** Consider aligning instructional superintendents and special education oversight structures so that both groups are organized by high school regions. To the maximum extent possible, align all central office department personnel to groups of schools in the same manner. Supplement the expertise of instructional superintendents with experience in only a single grade level with other staff with expertise in other grades.

   - **Collaboration for Common School Groups.** Expect that each instructional superintendent and RIM (and other FUSD personnel groups) responsible for the same schools will meet regularly to address: relevant data, issue trends, challenges to teaching and learning, etc. Based on special education’s regional center model, establish one per region to serve as the base for each instructional superintendent and support personnel, and as a clearinghouse for parents and stakeholders. Involve personnel from special education and EL services.

   - **Cross-functional Work.** Establish a matrix of personnel expertise and supports across departments to better coordinate cross-functional work. For example, to support the positive behavior of students, personnel from various departments with the appropriate expertise could be tapped to lead professional learning activities and support schools. Other examples of common work involve supporting inclusive educational structures for students who require differentiated first teaching and increasingly intensive interventions; explicit instruction for students requiring English language development regardless of their native language; expanding social engagement among students; etc. These activities need to be coordinated to reduce redundancy, establish universal
language and messages, and determine how they support schools together. In addition, have these personnel review their budgets together to determine how they collectively support common work.

10. Special Education Organization. Post the department’s vision, mission, and commitments prominently on the special education webpage. Frequently refer to this information as a way of focusing activities, benchmarking progress, and staying on-task. Organize the special education department to better support its vision, mission, commitments, and assistance to schools.

a. Positions Reporting to the Assistant Superintendent. Have the following positions report to the assistant superintendent—

- **SELPA Director.** SELPA director responsibilities would include supervision of RIMs.
  
  - **Support for RIMs.** Have the SELPA director establish coherence, a common set of expectations, and coordinated support. When a RIM requires support beyond the SELPA director’s expertise, establish direct communication lines between RIMs and program managers to provide assistance. Periodically, have the assistant superintendent ensure that the SELPA director has sufficient time to support RIMs in addition to the director’s other responsibilities.

  - **RIM Support for All Special Education Services in Respective Schools.** Have each RIM be responsible for all school-based special education, including SDCs, in their respectively assigned schools.

  - **RIM Coordination with Respective Instructional Superintendents.** Expect that each instructional superintendent will meet regularly with his/her RIMs and share information about their common schools, support strategic planning for teaching/learning improvement, and plan professional development.

  - **Coordination Across the District.** Have managers use feedback from RIMs to communicate common issues and trends with assistant superintendents and program managers.

- **Health Services Director.** Retain the director’s current supervisory and programmatic responsibilities, including the structure currently in place to support health service personnel.

- **Six Program Managers.** Assign responsibilities to program managers in an equitable manner and assign to each manager a set of related programmatic areas. Have each manager be an expert (or quickly develop expertise) in each area under their control; keep up with evidence-based research and best practices; develop high quality indicators (see further below); observe classes as requested; provide consultations; develop and be involved in professional learning activities; and support RIM activities. Ensure that at least one manager has a high level of expertise in literacy and math instruction and intervention, and in positive behavioral supports.

  - **Psychologists Program Director.** Have one program manager supervise school psychologists according to high school regions. As with SLPs, have seven leads
support the psychologists, one per region. Use psychologists to a greater degree to support principals and school personnel with such activities as MTSS implementation; crisis intervention; problem-solving on student challenges and disputes with parents; and supporting IEP team discussions and placement decisions, including the reassignment of students to more restrictive settings. Create conditions through MTSS that will enable psychologists to spend less time conducting formal assessments of students and more time supporting MTSS activities, progress monitoring, and the like.

- **Principals of Special Schools.** Have principals of each special school report to their respective instructional superintendent. As appropriate, have the assistant superintendent include principals in meetings with special education administrators and RIMs to discuss and address information relevant to their schools.

b. **Interdepartmental Coordination.** Have the assistant superintendent take steps to ensure that the SELPA director, program directors, and RIMs leverage their resources and expertise across their areas of responsibilities; and coordinate the instructional superintendents and other FUSD department personnel for maximum effectiveness.

c. **Organizational Expectations**

- **Expertise.** Ensure all personnel have the expertise they need to address the programmatic areas for which they are responsible. Enable them to access professional learning on evidence-based instruction. Identify individuals with specific expertise and ensure that others are responsible for keeping up with evidence-based research. Establish structures for information sharing across staff members. Provide intensive professional development during summer months to fill gaps in knowledge.

- **Defined Roles.** Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each position and communicate them with others.

- **Sufficient Resources to Carry Out Work.** Survey program managers to determine if they can manage responsibilities without relying on RIMs to do so. To the extent necessary, consider increasing clerical or other types of assistance to secure this outcome.

- **Program Improvement.** Have directors/managers develop quality indicators for their respective areas of responsibility after taking into account feedback from the field. Apply the indicators to practice and review results to continually improve instruction.

- **Addressing Parent Concerns.** Establish a process by which parents can raise concerns first at the school level and then with RIMs, if issues are not resolved in a timely manner. Establish a protocol and electronic data collection process to capture concerns, resolutions, and to identify trends.

- **Feedback Loops.** Use feedback loops across the special education department’s staff, colleagues in other departments, and school-based personnel. Use this information

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100 Given the additional support provided by program managers), with input from SLPs and psychologists, determine the appropriate structure for leads, whether they should have a role in performance evaluations, have no or reduced caseloads, and have job descriptions.
from these loops to identify trends, problem-solve and address issues, and celebrate successes.

- **Communication of New Organization.** When the special education department’s organization is approved, distribute information about the new organization and any new personnel positions established with an explanation of their functions. Once individuals are in place, establish a functional directory to communicate who to contact for various purposes. Post this information on the district’s special education webpage and provide a link to the webpage on the district’s website. Distribute the information directly to school personnel, parent and advocacy organizations, parents, and community-based organizations in languages most frequently used by students’ parents and families.

11. **Student-Personnel Ratios.** Ensure that personnel who support students with disabilities are employed in sufficient numbers to meet student needs. Review the staffing ratios summarized in this report (see Appendix A) on a regular basis with special education staff, instructional superintendents, and finance. NOTE: Relatively low or high student-to-personnel ratios do not necessarily mean that any given area is staffed inappropriately. However, the ratios should prompt further review. Ensure that adequate numbers of special education and related-services personnel are at each school to carry out their expected responsibilities. Based on a full review, consider changes needed short and long term.

a. **Address Vacant Positions.** Have human resources and special education personnel immediately review current and recurring staff vacancies, particularly among paraeducators and speech/language pathologists, and design strategies that could be used to increase the applicant pool and quality of hires.

- **RFP.** Consider issuing a request for proposals (RFP) to identify vendors with a successful track record of recruiting qualified personnel who might work with the district.

- **Paraeducators**
  - **HR Resources.** Ensure there are sufficient human resources personnel to manage the complex process necessary to abide by union procedures and have a screened applicant pool ready for interviewing, particularly among paraeducators. Track vacancies by region and school, and report the status biweekly to the superintendent, instructional superintendents, and special education assistant superintendent.

  - **CPR and First Aid.** Provide new paraeducators with free CPR and first aid training immediately after they are hired, rather than as a condition of employment.

  - **Defensive Driving.** For paraeducators who do not have driving as an essential part of their jobs, eliminate this requirement. (The Council team was told that the district has now eliminated defensive driving certification as an employment qualification.)

b. **Fill Paraeducator Positions.** Conduct a study of paraeducator vacancies that would include the following components:
• Number of paraeducator vacancies by category and in total at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year; the number of vacant positions filled; the number of vacant positions that became vacant again; and the number currently vacant.

• For each of the three interviews required prior to posting outside of FUSD, the average number of days (and ranges) necessary to post, to set up interviews, interview, respond with a hire or to justify no hire, and to review the justification.

• The number of vacant positions posted outside of the district, and number filled.

• An analysis of the process to fill paraeducator positions, including any significant variances by paraeducator category.

If necessary, use a consultant for this purpose. Share the results with CESA and initiate negotiations to review the transfer and hiring process. Change the rules and procedures based on the data.

12. School-based Administration of Special Education

\textit{a. Principal Leadership.} Expect that every principal will lead and administer the operation of special education in his/her school, including providing oversight for paraeducator practices. Articulate activities necessary to carry out this function, and survey principals to determine the professional learning needs to conduct it. Use this information to develop a curriculum for principals and provide differentiated and intensive training to them over the summer and next school year. Reinforce this knowledge with continuing learning opportunities and repeat the process for new principals.

\textit{b. Case Management.} Take the following steps to support case managers with respect to compliant and timely IEP meetings.

- \textit{Required Participants.} Set expectations for the participation of required personnel at IEP meetings and establish accountability standards consistent with this expectation.

- \textit{Scheduling.} Support IEP member participation by addressing how scheduling of IEP meetings is done and by avoiding conflicting priorities.

- \textit{Substitutes.} Consider freeing up or allocating funds to hire substitutes when needed to enable teachers to attend meetings.

- \textit{Past 8\textsuperscript{th} Hour.} Establish parameters for the continuation of IEP meetings past the 8\textsuperscript{th} hour of school and consider any relevant compensation issues.

- \textit{IEP Team Data to Support Decision-Making.} Establish a protocol for ensuring that IEP decisions are based on data and documentation of items discussed at IEP meetings.

\textit{c. Excessive Caseloads.} Establish a process for identifying caseloads that exceed FUSD parameters and addressing these situations. Determine how students who need to learn braille, receive orientation and mobility training, and require sign language interpreter services receive the IEP-services they are entitled to. As part of this activity, review caseloads of OTs in association with IEP-required OT services. Address gaps in service by hiring additional OTs and certified occupational therapy assistants (COTAs) as
appropriate. Also, consider needs for physical therapy and service providers available to meet this need.

13. Compliance Support and Fiscal Issues. Consider the following actions to improve compliant practices and enhance revenue.

a. Compliance Support and Dispute Resolution. Special education personnel—alone—cannot improve special education compliance. Develop consistent, transparent systems to address and monitor parent complaints, mediation, and the handling of independent educational evaluations (IEEs) with continuous feedback.

   • Informal Complaints and Early Resolution. It is important to listen patiently for and resolve problems proactively in their early stages. Establish expectations for the following –
     - Timely Replies. Return all phone calls to parents within 24 hours.
     - Recitation of Facts. After a parent explains his or her concerns fully, do not expect the parent to repeat them if transferred to another person with more authority.
     - Calls to Ombudsperson. Red flag parent complaints related to special education for the ombudsperson in the district’s constituent services department to expedite replies.
     - Listening Times. Several times each year, organize listening sessions to hear from parents by region about their concerns. Have personnel present who can talk with parents individually, so they do not have to work up layers of the bureaucracy.
     - Complaint Analysis. Have a process for electronically logging informal complaints, analyzing where concerns are occurring, and identifying common themes to develop more systemic strategies for resolution.
     - Transportation. Address concerns about excessive delays in executing transportation routes, especially at the beginning of the school year. Resolve how to get students to school when parents are unable to transport them, and a bus route has not yet been established. As part of this process, reduce reliance on special education personnel as liaisons between schools and the transportation department. Instead, have parents and schools contact transportation personnel directly to streamline processes.

   • IEEs. Better communicate with and provide guidance to school teams, including RIMs, on reviewing IEE requests; talking with parents; analyzing the appropriateness of requests; analyzing IEE results; addressing the poor quality of some IEEs; and developing legally defensible offers of appropriate education after completed IEEs.

   • Negotiated Assessment Plans. Involve appropriate personnel in discussions about negotiated assessment plans, so they are properly done and do not require subsequent changes.

   • IDEA Determination. Review the district’s 2016-17 IDEA determination rating. Also, review the SPP data that the district received for FFY 2016 and compare it to SPP data reviewed in this report to determine outcome improvements and slippage.
Include in the implementation plan for recommendation 5b actions that would be necessary to boost the district’s performance and compliance results. Finally, review CDE monitoring activities underway or scheduled and consider how resources could be leveraged to support schools and special education personnel to obtain successful outcomes.

- **Special Education Attorney.** Conduct a cost-effectiveness analysis on bringing the services of a special education attorney in-house and using this expertise to expand training, daily consultations, and advice.

- **Special Education Webpage and Policies/Procedures Manual.** With parents and other stakeholders, review the district’s special education webpage and enhance it with links to resources and information of interest. Also, improve the usability of the special education policy and procedures manual by using a web-based platform. This format allows for key information to be briefly explained with links to more detailed explanations based on the user’s need. Also, this format supports the use of links to publicly available articles and videos of desired practices, e.g., facilitation of IEP meetings. Texts and resources can be updated more quickly along with notices about current information and new resources. For example, see the Seattle Public Schools’ special education webpage, which includes web-based special education procedures.\(^{101}\)

- **Compliant and Useful IEPs.** Embed in professional learning activities information about the development of IEP goals that align to standards and address skill deficit areas. Answer the following questions: What skills must this student learn to become proficient on grade-level standards? What skills related to the grade-level standard(s) must this student learn? What are the component skills and are they “equal”?\(^{102}\) Have RIMs facilitate discussions with school personnel who frequently attend IEP meetings to determine whether several recently developed IEPs are sufficiently informative. Use these discussions to improve future IEP development for schools and the district.

- **Centralization of IEPs.** Develop a plan to stop sending IEPs and other documents to the central office and maintain them at each school. Establish a process for uploading signature pages and other documents to the IEP system and store these documents electronically. This or a similar process is used in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

**b. Medi-Cal.** Increase Medi-Cal reimbursements and address current service tracking issues by doing the following-

- **RFQ.** Issue a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to identify vendors with Medicaid service tracking modules that are more intuitive and easier to use than the one FUSD currently uses.

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102 Decision Making to Support Standards-Based IEPs, by John Payne South Carolina Department of Education and Jim Shriner University of Illinois, retrieved from https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/AAMAStransition/PayneShriner.ppt.
Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

- **Training.** Provide more training on the district’s current system to increase staff efficiency in meeting this reporting expectation.

- **Prescriptions.** Increase use of a physician to write prescriptions for occupational and physical therapy services when they are supported by OT and PT evaluations.

- **Unnecessarily Medi-Cal Service Tracking.** For service providers giving services not eligible for reimbursement under Medi-Cal’s state plan, inform them as soon as possible that they no longer need to use the detailed Medi-Cal service tracking system. Instead, enable them to track services and document progress using a streamlined version.

14. **Accountability.** In addition to previous recommendations on data analysis and reports (Recommendations 1d, 2e, and 5d) and monitoring and accountability (Recommendations 1e, 2f, and 5e), consider the following actions.

   a. **Data Reports**

   - **Menu of Reports.** Review the various standard special education reports available to instructional superintendents, principals, and special education administrators and supplement them with other analysis used by the Council team or deemed to be useful. Enable these reports to be accessed through a menu and expect school-based personnel to access them on a regular basis. Track this usage periodically to ensure that information is being reviewed.

   - **Ad Hoc Reports.** Enable ad hoc reports to be available in a timely manner so that administrative personnel can use data to focus their activities.

   - **Accountable Communities.** Support accountable communities in understanding how various data sources can be used to inform their study and actions.

   - **ATLAS.** Ensure that special education administrators have access to ATLAS.

   b. **Monitoring and Accountability.** This report provides many examples of challenges to accelerating achievement and social/emotional wellness for students with disabilities, including their receipt of high quality instruction in inclusive settings. Unless activities to address these challenges are embedded in and aligned with district plans, then efforts will be fragmented, less effective, and expected outcomes will not be realized.

   - **Alignment of District Plans.** Review all district plans for improving teaching and learning and merge them into one comprehensive plan, annotating it with links to more specialized information. At a minimum, ensure all plans are aligned, use common language, and promote a common understanding of related elements. Also, ensure all plans are sufficiently inclusive of students with disabilities.

   - **Special Education Improvement Plan.** Revise goal 6 of the district’s special education improvement plan, which targets the percentage of special education classrooms that score 3 or 4 in Tenets 1, 2A, and 2B on the instructional practice guide

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103 Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP); Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) and State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP); School Quality Improvement System (SQIS); Master Plan for English Learner Success; State Performance Indicators; and District Special Education Improvement Plan.
observation tool. Modify the goal to measure the percentage of students with disabilities, rather than special education classrooms. As written, the measure does not include students receiving special education services in general education classes. Further, the focus on special education classrooms reinforces the notion that special education is a “place”\textsuperscript{104} rather than a “set of services” based on student needs.

CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the recommendations made in Chapter 3 in two ways. The first way lists the recommendations and the functional categories into which each proposal falls. The categories include accountability, planning, criteria/process, training, data/reports, and cross-references. The second way simply lists all the recommendations, so the reader can see them in one place.

Recommendation Matrix

The exhibit below lists the recommendations from the previous chapter in table form, corresponding to their functional categories.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Standards/Procedures</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Data/Reports</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Multi-tiered System of Supports</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Systemwide MTSS Framework, Implementation Plan, and Oversight.</strong> Expedite completion of the district’s draft MTSS framework and supporting documents to ensure they are available for feedback and use in professional learning over the summer of 2018. This work needs to reflect a sense of urgency among stakeholders in order to improve educational outcomes for all students. Support this effort with a board policy on MTSS, reinforcing its importance, purpose, etc., and how instructional strategies and activities fit within the overall framework.</td>
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<td>a. <strong>District, Network and School Leadership Teams.</strong> Review leadership teams at the district, regional, and school levels that support MTSS planning and implementation with consideration of district, regional and school-based teams. Include Tier 3 problem-solving groups.</td>
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<td>b. <strong>Implementation Plan.</strong> To the greatest extent possible, have the MTSS leadership team provide guidance in the following planning documents to promote broad application of universal language, e.g., LCAP, SPSA, SQIS, Accelerating Achievement for African American Students in FUSD, Core MTSS Elements, etc. Draft MTSS framework guidance and MTSS Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment documents to include: UDL, literacy focus, scaffolding, tiered interventions, EL students, PBIS activities. Have each department review current documents to ensure their alignment with the MTSS framework and its components. Post when finalized along with relevant links to district information and public resources.</td>
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<td>c. <strong>Differentiated Professional Learning.</strong> Incorporate into the district’s professional learning program specific information targeted on each critical audience, e.g., central office personnel, principals, vice principals, general and special educators, teachers of English learner students, related-services personnel, paraprofessionals, and parents. Ensure that professional development is consistent with the MTSS framework, implementation plan, and expectations. To the extent possible, provide at least four to five days each year of training for school-based leadership teams over the next two years. Base training on the district’s High Quality Professional Learning Guidelines. Consider how training will be budgeted, e.g., through stipends, funds for substitute coverage, incentives for after-school and Saturday training, summer training, etc. Consider having a summer boot camp for this purpose. (See Recommendation 1b) Address: cross-functional teams, high-quality trainers, stakeholders’</td>
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differentiated learning, multiple formats, technical assistance to schools, school walk-throughs, exemplary implementation models, post on district website.

e. **Data Analysis and Reports.** Review current data collection, analyses, and reports and supplement them with indicators or metrics that would be useful to determining schools’ use of MTSS practices and the relationship to student achievement, e.g., growth based on appropriate instruction and intensive interventions.

f. **Monitoring and Accountability.** Evaluate the implementation, effectiveness, and results of MTSS, and include: self-monitoring, data checks, timely communication & feedback.

## Recommendations

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<th>Demographic &amp; Outcome Data</th>
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### 2. **Special Education Eligibility.** Improve consistency and appropriateness of eligibility determinations across district.

a. **Data Review.** With a multi-disciplinary team of instructional division leaders, principals, and others like the executive director for accelerating achievement for African American students, review data like that displayed in exhibits 2a, 2b, and 2d through 2j (along with CDE’s latest SPP report and other relevant data) and develop hypotheses about the pattern of results. Focus attention on variant disability rates; grades leading up to those with highest disability rates; disproportionate identification by race/ethnicity; conditions leading to the high proportion of males by race/ethnicity with disability; and English learner students and those who are long term. To the extent possible, sort data by regions, schools, and other variables to help identify and focus on areas of concern. Identify other data that might help further target areas for action and specific schools needing more assistance.

b. **Implementation Plan.** Based on these data and hypotheses about why the patterns look like they do, modify the MTSS implementation plan to include activities designed to address these issues. (Coordinate this activity with Recommendation 1b.) Consider reviewing health plans at annual reviews of Section 504 criteria to determine whether students with such plans may qualify under Section 504. As part of this process, address whether a student’s health constitutes a physical or mental impairment, and whether the results suggest that the impairment substantially limits a major life activity.

c. **Written Expectations.** For areas the multi-disciplinary team identifies as problematic, review/revise district guidance on first instruction, interventions, and progress monitoring; and modify processes for special education referrals, assessments, and eligibility.

d. **Differentiated Professional Learning.** Plan for and provide all relevant district stakeholders with the professional learning they need to implement the recommendations in this section. As part of this process, have personnel from special education, English learner, and acceleration of African American students’ achievement departments, etc., collaborate on the referral and assessment needs of EL and African American students. (Coordinate this activity with Recommendation 1c.)

e. **Data Analysis and Reports.** Develop and provide user-friendly summary reports to district leadership showing data like exhibits 2a, 2b, and 2d through 2j. Share data by region and by school. Consider how these data should be handled and reviewed by district leadership on a regular basis.

f. **Monitoring and Accountability.** Develop a process for the ongoing monitoring of referrals, evaluations, and eligibility practices. Rather than using a traditional record-review compliance model, review data with schools so that school-based personnel are aware of problems, so they are better prepared for follow-up action. Enable staff to observe best practices and receive
coaching that will improve their knowledge and skills. (Coordinate this activity with Recommendation 1d.) Consider folding relevant outcomes into school accountability measures.

### Recommendations

#### 3. Achievement Data for Students with Disabilities.

With a multi-disciplinary team of instructional division leaders, including principals to the extent feasible, review exhibits 3a through 3l, benchmark them against future data as the district implements the Council team’s recommendations, and develop hypotheses/follow up actions about the patterns relating to: early childhood outcomes based on SPP indicators/other indicators; TUDA/NAEP reading/math scores; statewide assessment participation; chronic absences; suspension expulsion rates; graduation/ dropout rates (reconciling district/state data); and graduation criteria for students taking alternate assessments.

#### 4. Educational Setting Demographics.

With a multi-disciplinary team of instructional leaders, including staff from English learner services, prevention/intervention, African American student achievement, and principals, review exhibits 4a-4n and monitor these data as the district implements the Council’s recommendations. Develop hypotheses about the patterns in the data for young children with IEPs in regular preschool; disproportionate restrictive placements; disproportionate enrollment of students with IEPs and SDC placement across the district and regions. Use hypothesis to guide implementation of Recommendation 5.

#### 5. Increase Access to Inclusive Education and Provision of High Quality Education.

As part of the district’s movement toward an MTSS framework, embed increasing designs/supports for and activities to promote more inclusive educational settings and high-quality instruction for students with disabilities. Incorporate first teaching principles, including UDL, to ensure that the district’s instructional and behavioral strategies apply to a broader group of students than just those with disabilities. To aid this process, the district might hire a consultant who has successful helped districts become more inclusive and produce higher academic achievement and stronger social/emotional wellbeing for students with disabilities.

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<td>g. Timely Evaluation and Annual Review Work Group. Convene a group of multi-disciplinary personnel, including representatives from PEC, principals and other school staff members, technology, and finance to identify and learn about the most common impediments to the completion of timely and compliant activities, including those shared in this report, and to recommend activities to accelerate improvements. Have the Academic Leadership Team (ALT) review this information and forward findings and recommended actions to the cabinet for action.</td>
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<td>3. Achievement Data for Students with Disabilities. With a multi-disciplinary team of instructional division leaders, including principals to the extent feasible, review exhibits 3a through 3l, benchmark them against future data as the district implements the Council team’s recommendations, and develop hypotheses/follow up actions about the patterns relating to: early childhood outcomes based on SPP indicators/other indicators; TUDA/NAEP reading/math scores; statewide assessment participation; chronic absences; suspension expulsion rates; graduation/ dropout rates (reconciling district/state data); and graduation criteria for students taking alternate assessments.</td>
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<td>4. Educational Setting Demographics. With a multi-disciplinary team of instructional leaders, including staff from English learner services, prevention/intervention, African American student achievement, and principals, review exhibits 4a-4n and monitor these data as the district implements the Council’s recommendations. Develop hypotheses about the patterns in the data for young children with IEPs in regular preschool; disproportionate restrictive placements; disproportionate enrollment of students with IEPs and SDC placement across the district and regions. Use hypothesis to guide implementation of Recommendation 5.</td>
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from https://www.district65.net/Page/812. The policy states: “Inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every student and his/her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for students with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential.” Also, language from the Common Core State Standards website may be helpful for this purpose. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/assets/application-to-students-with-disabilities.pdf.
Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

The district’s draft definition to begin this work around inclusive education and high-quality instruction in the core curriculum and interventions and supports for all students. Inclusive schools have a collaborative and respectful school culture where students with disabilities are presumed to be competent, can develop positive social relationships with peers, and are fully participating members of the school community. Emphasize the importance of providing students educated in general education classes with the differentiated and scaffolded instruction they need, and state that a student’s disability label should not drive the type or location of services. Reinforce district expectations that students will receive rigorous core instruction that is linguistically appropriate and culturally relevant, and that students will demonstrate accelerated achievement. These expectations should be easier to attain as teachers become more familiar with and base their instruction on the principles of UDL. Also, express high expectations that students can move to education in less restrictive environments with the supports to be successful. Attend to students previously incarcerated, and those who are economically disadvantaged and/or are in foster care.

Recommendations

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<td>b. School-based Leadership Teams. Have school-based MTSS leadership teams oversee activities related to instruction/supports (academic/behavior) for students with disabilities – based on the districtwide plan referenced in Recommendation 3a – including the monitoring of implementation. Establish a template for school-based planning that will take into consideration the unique characteristics and needs of each school’s students, including special education demographic disparities, student achievement, and configuration of special education services. Embed these plans in the school-based improvement planning process.</td>
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| c. Implementation Plan. With a multi-disciplinary team, develop a multi-year action plan that includes expectations, professional learning, data analytics, and accountability. Have the team provide broad supervisory reach and expertise, along with representation from instructional superintendents, principals, special education, curriculum/instruction, English learners, prevention/intervention, African American achievement personnel. In addition, include representatives from the Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE) team along with parents. Have the team conduct the data review proposed in Recommendations 3 and 4 and charge them with revising the district’s inclusive education vision. On completion of the plan, establish a uniform way for school-based teams to implement activities into their regular school-based planning process. Use a phase-in process over three to four years in all district schools. Identify general and special education personnel that schools can contact to support their service delivery needs.  

106 When developing the implementation plan, consider:

- **Instruction:** preschool models; focus group feedback; increase school sites for support with knowledgeable personnel; and embed the special education department’s draft Curriculum Alignment document in the district’s MTSS Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment document and ensure the two documents are aligned. Also, incorporate relevant information in the instructional planning guides for literacy and math. Address: adaption of curriculum materials; students reading far below standards; interventions; reading instruction past 6th grade; credit recovery.
- **Instructional Needs of Special Populations:** Address Unique Learning System and low incidence services;
- **Support for Challenging Student Behavior:** Refer to data like those shown in exhibits 4o through 4r, which present suspensions of students with IEPs by various parameters. Also | X | | | |

106 See, for example, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Inclusive Vision Project: A Roadmap for Implementing Inclusive Best Practices in Our Schools PowerPoint.
Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

refer to data showing schools from which students have moved to attend Phoenix Alternative School or other schools because of behavioral issues. Develop hypotheses about patterns in the data to inform additional supports. Use a triage approach, relying on school personnel (e.g., psychologists and social workers) to support schools and teachers with students displaying significant behavioral challenges. Supplement these resources with interdepartmental and regional teams with individuals having high levels of expertise, including support for students experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Include supports such as coaching and modeling instruction and establish expectations for follow-up activities in the schools.

- **SDC Master Planning.** Review the current configuration of SDCs and modify them to better meet the needs of students. For example, consider the various service configurations used by Council member districts who participated in a recent meeting to discuss special education issues.\(^\text{107}\) As part of this process, use a recognized expert in providing instruction to students with autism spectrum disorder, including in general education. Also, review the locations of SDC programs, including those in mobile units, and consider how they (or newly reconfigured SDCs) could be reorganized by region to promote better equity/access, have a better distribution of students with disabilities, and have standardized equipment and materials. When accomplished, address program parameters for SDCs; placement protocols for more restrictive placements and articulation; try to expand 2-year grade span pilot; and establish stakeholder feedback loops as implementation continues.

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<td><strong>d. Written Expectations.</strong> Develop and provide guidance on the implementation of practices designed to promote student achievement and positive behavior. Address relevant areas in the district’s implementation plan that would require written expectations and guidance— and for principal leadership; differentiated instruction; instructional materials; IEP decision making; and planned collaboration time.</td>
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<td><strong>e. Differentiated Professional Learning and Parent Training.</strong> Embed in the professional learning curriculum (Recommendation 1c) the content needed to carry out the activities mentioned in and stemming from Recommendation 5. Consider: all personnel groups; multi-disciplinary approach; training access; delivery of training and follow-up, including modeling, coaching, etc.; certificates of expertise; parent university; and student engagement.</td>
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<td><strong>f. Data Analysis and Reports.</strong> In addition to the data analysis and reporting described in Recommendation 1d, include in all school performance and planning documents -- <strong>Data Reporting.</strong> The types of data used in this report and other data to better target patterns and areas of concern. <strong>Risk Ratios.</strong> Disparities using risk ratios to better understand how different groups are affected by district practices.</td>
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<td><strong>g. Monitoring and Accountability.</strong> Expect all principals to be responsible for overseeing special education in their buildings and expect that instructional superintendents will hold principals accountable for this responsibility. Embed these activities into the monitoring and accountability systems described in Recommendation 1e. Have instructional learning teams include individuals knowledgeable of the indicators described and ensure that the multi-disciplinary teams observe classes attended solely by students with disabilities, e.g., SDCs</td>
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\(^\text{107}\) These configurations were provided previously to the special education assistant superintendent.
and special schools. Address data checks; fidelity assessments/walkthroughs; timely communication/feedback.

### Recommendations

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#### 6. Assistive Technology, and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AT/AAC)

Consider the following to support assistive technology, and augmentative and alternative communications.

- **AT Team.** Evaluate the AT team’s composition and size, given the requests it receives and services it provided to determine whether current resources are sufficient to meet needs. X

- **Resources.** Conduct an analysis of current AT/AAC services for: (a) students receiving instruction based on a modified curriculum; (b) students with orthopedic impairments; (c) students with a text-to-speech technology need; and (d) speech/language pathologists who need a complete AAC assessment kit. In addition, consider budget needs to keep up with IEP-required AT/AAC devices and materials. Based on these results, have high level meetings with fiscal and purchasing personnel to address budget adequacy and a streamlined purchasing process. X  X

- **Lending Library.** Review current equipment and supplies in the district’s lending library and gaps with current needs. X

- **Apps.** With staff from the instructional and technology offices, discuss the extent to which evidence-based apps are available for iPads vs. other tablets, and take follow-up steps based on these results. As part of this process, involve special education and related services personnel familiar with this issue, e.g., speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists, special educators, etc. X  X

- **Training.** Address the following training issues: use of SMART boards; models for combining AT/AAC training for students, and parents; better use of the picture-exchange communication (PEC) system; and access to conferences showcasing AT/AAC devices. X

#### 7. Secondary Transition Activities and Services

Build upon the district’s many secondary transition programs to improve supports for transitions, planning activities, and broader awareness to parents and students of transition opportunities and services.

- **Counselors.** Have counselors participate in IEP team meetings when transition services are addressed. X  X

- **Professional Learning.** Include in the professional learning curriculum (Recommendation 1c and 5c) PL that would encourage students with IEPs to attend college or other postsecondary educational programs. Include this student population in all activities the district initiates to promote college or other postsecondary education attendance. X

- **Special Populations.** Specifically address the needs of students with disabilities who are homeless, in foster care, and/or economically disadvantaged in the district’s planning documents. X  X

#### 8. Parent Support and Engagement

Improve parent support, communications, and engagement with the following activities.

- **Districtwide Parent Advisories.** Review all district advisory groups that include parents, e.g., District Advisory Council (DAC) or Parent University’s Parent Leadership Academy (PLA) and assess the extent to which they include parents of students receiving special education and share information with the Community Advisory Committee (CAC). If this information shows that such parents are not participating, develop/implement strategies for including them in these groups. X

- **Community Advisory Committee Participation.** Increase parental awareness of the CAC and its activities by notifying principals of their responsibility to have CAC meeting notices prominently posted in school locations parents visit. Ensure that they are posted within X  X  X
required time frames. Also, ensure notices are provided to schools in common native languages read by parents. Use instructional visits held during this timeframe to monitor the posting of notices as expected. Moreover, to the extent not fully executed, use the parent messaging service to communicate information about CAC meetings. Collaborate with the CAC to identify additional steps the district can take to enable parents to be aware of the CAC and its activities. Include family and community services personnel for this purpose.

### Recommendations

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### c. Additional Activities

In addition, consider the following activities to support parent involvement in IEP meetings and their child’s education:

- **Facilitating Parent Involvement in IEP Team Meetings.** Identify a person on the IEP team to actively involve parents in meeting discussions, and ensure they have an opportunity to ask questions that are answered, etc.

- **Translation.** Review the district’s system for translating IEPs and other special education documents to ensure that they are completed in a timely manner. Explore the availability of IEP systems that include a translation component for this purpose.

- **PTOs.** Encourage parent teacher organizations to reach out to parents of students with disabilities, and to parents of other student subgroups, to be sure their interests are included.

### Organizational Support


Maximize interdepartmental collaboration between instructional division leaders and their respective staffs in order to leverage their collective resources.

- **a. Inclusive Decision-making and Communication.** Establish protocols for communicating issues affecting students with disabilities (and other student groups). These issues should include new policies, new programs, curriculum/instruction, etc., to avoid unintended consequences and misunderstandings. Ensure that communications are seamless from the central office to schools to improve transparency and stakeholder involvement. Check the effectiveness of this process through various means, e.g., focus groups, surveys, walkthrough discussions, etc.

  - **Inclusive C/I Considerations.** Establish structured and planned communications between curriculum/instruction and special education (and other relevant departments), including multiple personnel groups. Ensure information is shared with personnel working directly with and in schools, including special education and EL services. Ensure that feedback is collected and considered thoughtfully. Follow this process prior to purchasing materials to minimize unanticipated consequences and to ensure materials meet their intended purposes.

- **b. Organizational Alignment and Coherence.** Consider aligning instructional superintendents and special education oversight structures so that both groups are organized by high school regions. To the maximum extent possible, align all central office department personnel to groups of schools in the same manner. Supplement the expertise of instructional superintendents with experience in only a single grade level with other staff with expertise in other grades.

108 Recommendations related to many issues raised by parents are addressed elsewhere, e.g., access to and timely response from special education personnel, student achievement, understanding the special education organization and who to contact for assistance, etc.
• **Collaboration for Common School Groups.** Expect that each instructional superintendent and RIM (and other FUSD personnel groups) responsible for the same schools will meet regularly to address: relevant data, issue trends, challenges to teaching and learning, etc. Based on special education’s regional center model, establish one per region to serve as the base for each instructional superintendent and support personnel, and as a clearinghouse for parents and stakeholders. Involve personnel from special education and EL services.

• **Cross-functional Work.** Establish a matrix of personnel expertise and supports across departments to better coordinate cross-functional work. For example, to support the positive behavior of students, personnel from various departments with the appropriate expertise could be tapped to lead professional learning activities and support schools. Other examples of common work involve supporting inclusive educational structures for students who require differentiated first teaching and increasingly intensive interventions; explicit instruction for students requiring English language development regardless of their native language; expanding social engagement among students; etc. These activities need to be coordinated to reduce redundancy, establish universal language and messages, and determine how they support schools together. In addition, have these personnel review their budgets together to determine how they collectively support common work.

### Recommendations

10. **Special Education Organization.** Post the department’s vision, mission, and commitments prominently on the special education webpage. Frequently refer to this information as a way of focusing activities, benchmarking progress, and staying on-task. Organize the special education department to better support its vision, mission, commitments, and assistance to schools.

a. **Positions Reporting to the Assistant Superintendent.** Have the following positions report to the assistant superintendent—

   • **SELPA Director.** SELPA director responsibilities would include supervision of RIMs.
     - Support for RIMs
     - RIM Support for All Special Education Services in Respective Schools
     - RIM Coordination with Respective Instructional Superintendents
     - Coordination Across the District

   • **Health Services Director.** Retain the director’s current supervisory and programmatic responsibilities, including the structure currently in place to support health service personnel.

   • **Six Program Managers.** Assign responsibilities to program managers in an equitable manner and assign to each manager a set of related programmatic areas.
     - Psychologists Program Director. Have one program manager supervise school psychologists according to high school regions. As with SLPs, have seven leads support the psychologists, one per region.

   • **Principals of Special Schools.** Have principals of each special school report to their respective instructional superintendent. As appropriate, have the assistant superintendent include principals in meetings with special education administrators and RIMs to discuss and address information relevant to their schools.

b. **Interdepartmental Coordination.** Have the assistant superintendent take steps to ensure that the SELPA director, program directors, and RIMs leverage their resources and expertise across their areas of responsibilities; and coordinate the instructional superintendents and other FUSD department personnel for maximum effectiveness.
c. Organizational Expectations

- **Expertise.** Ensure all personnel have the expertise they need to address the programmatic areas for which they are responsible. Enable them to access professional learning on evidence-based instruction. Identify individuals with specific expertise and ensure that others are responsible for keeping up with evidence-based research. Establish structures for information sharing across staff members. Provide intensive professional development during summer months to fill gaps in knowledge.

- **Defined Roles.** Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each position and communicate them with others.

- **Sufficient Resources to Carry Out Work.** Survey program managers to determine if they can manage responsibilities without relying on RIMs to do so. To the extent necessary, consider increasing clerical or other types of assistance to secure this outcome.

- **Program Improvement.** Have directors/managers develop quality indicators for their respective areas of responsibility after taking into account feedback from the field. Apply the indicators to practice and review results to continually improve instruction.

- **Addressing Parent Concerns.** Establish a process by which parents can raise concerns first at the school level and then with RIMs if issues are not resolved in a timely manner. Establish a protocol and electronic data collection process to capture concerns, resolutions, and to identify trends.

- **Feedback Loops.** Use feedback loops across the special education department’s staff, colleagues in other departments, and school-based personnel. Use this information from these loops to identify trends, problem-solve and address issues, and celebrate successes.

- **Communication of New Organization.** When the special education department’s organization is approved, distribute information about the new organization and any new personnel positions established with an explanation of their functions. Once individuals are in place, establish a functional directory to communicate who to contact for various purposes. Post this information on the district’s special education webpage and provide a link to the webpage on the district’s website. Distribute the information directly to school personnel, parent and advocacy organizations, parents, and community-based organizations in languages most frequently used by students’ parents and families.

d. Student-Staff Ratios and Personnel Allocation

Have the districtwide MTSS leadership team, which includes special education department representation, review staffing ratios summarized in this report (see Appendix A). **NOTE:** Relatively low or high student-to-personnel ratios do not necessarily mean that any given area is staffed inappropriately; however, the ratios should prompt further review. Ensure that adequate numbers of special education and related-services personnel are at each school to carry out their expected responsibilities. Based on a full review, consider needed changes for the short and long term.

### 11. Student-Personnel Ratios

Ensure that personnel who support students with disabilities are employed in sufficient numbers to meet student needs. Review the staffing ratios summarized in this report (see Appendix A) on a regular basis with special education staff, instructional superintendents, and finance. **NOTE:** Relatively low or high student-to-personnel ratios do not necessarily mean that any given area is staffed inappropriately. However, the ratios should prompt further review. Ensure that adequate numbers of special education and related-services personnel are at each school to carry out their expected responsibilities. Based on a full review, consider changes needed short and long term.
Recommendations

### a. Address Vacant Positions.
Have human resources and special education personnel immediately review current and recurring staff vacancies, particularly among paraeducators and speech/language pathologists, and design strategies that could be used to increase the applicant pool and quality of hires.

- **RFP.** Consider issuing a request for proposals (RFP) to identify vendors with a successful track record of recruiting qualified personnel who might work with the district.
- **Paraeducators**
  - **HR Resources.** Ensure there are sufficient human resources personnel to manage the complex process necessary to abide by union procedures and have a screened applicant pool ready for interviewing, particularly among paraeducators. Track vacancies by region and school, and report the status biweekly to the superintendent, instructional superintendents, and special education assistant superintendent.
  - **CPR and First Aid.** Provide new paraeducators with free CPR and first aid training immediately after they are hired, rather than as a condition of employment.
  - **Defensive Driving.** For paraeducators who do not have driving as an essential part of their jobs, eliminate this requirement. (The Council team was told that the district has now eliminated defensive driving certification as an employment qualification.)

### b. Fill Paraeducator Positions.
Conduct a study of paraeducator vacancies that would include the following components; If necessary, use a consultant for this purpose. Share the results with CESA and initiate negotiations to review the transfer and hiring process. Change the rules and procedures based on the data.

- Number of paraeducator vacancies by category and in total at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year; the number of vacant positions filled; the number of vacant positions that became vacant again; and the number currently vacant.
- For each of the three interviews required prior to posting outside of FUSD, the average number of days (and ranges) necessary to post, to set up interviews, interview, respond with a hire or to justify no hire, and to review the justification.
- The number of vacant positions posted outside of the district, and number filled.
- Analysis fill paraeducator positions, including variances by paraeducator category.

### 12. School-based Administration of Special Education

#### a. Principal Leadership.
Expect that every principal will lead and administer the operation of special education in his/her school, including providing oversight for paraeducator practices. Articulate activities necessary to carry out this function, and survey principals to determine the professional learning needs to conduct it. Use this information to develop a curriculum for principals and provide differentiated and intensive training to them over the summer and next school year. Reinforce this knowledge with continuing learning opportunities and repeat the process for new principals.

#### b. Case Management.
Take the following steps to support case managers with respect to compliant and timely IEP meetings.

- **Required Participants.** Set expectations for the participation of required personnel at IEP meetings and establish accountability standards consistent with this expectation.
- **Scheduling.** Support IEP member participation by addressing how scheduling of IEP meetings is done and by avoiding conflicting priorities.
- **Substitutes.** Consider freeing up or allocating funds to hire substitutes when needed to enable teachers to attend meetings.
• **Past 8th Hour.** Establish parameters for the continuation of IEP meetings past the 8th hour of school and consider any relevant compensation issues.

• **IEP Team Data to Support Decision-Making.** Establish a protocol for ensuring that IEP decisions are based on data and documentation of items discussed at IEP meetings.

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**Recommendations**

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**c. Excessive Caseloads.** Establish a process for identifying caseloads that exceed FUSD parameters and addressing these situations. Determine how students who need to learn braille, receive orientation and mobility training, and require sign language interpreter services receive the IEP-services they are entitled to. As part of this activity, review caseloads of OTs in association with IEP-required OT services. Address gaps in service by hiring additional OTs and certified occupational therapy assistants (COTAs) as appropriate. Also, consider needs for physical therapy and service providers available to meet this need.

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**Compliance Support, Fiscal Issues & Accountability**

13. **Compliance Support and Fiscal Issues.** Consider the following actions to improve compliant practices and enhance revenue.

a. **Compliance Support and Dispute Resolution.** Develop consistent, transparent systems to address and monitor parent complaints, mediation, and the handling of independent educational evaluations (IEEs) with continuous feedback.

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• **Informal Complaints and Early Resolution.** It is important to listen patiently for and resolve problems proactively in their early stages. Establish expectations for the following
  - **Timely Replies.** Return all phone calls to parents within 24 hours.
  - Recitation of Facts. After a parent explains his or her concerns fully, do not expect the parent to repeat them if transferred to another person with more authority.
  - **Calls to Ombudsperson.** Red flag parent complaints related to special education for the ombudsperson in the district’s constituent services department to expedite replies.
  - **Listening Times.** Several times each year, organize listening sessions to hear from parents by region about their concerns. Have personnel present who can talk with parents individually, so they do not have to work up layers of the bureaucracy.
  - **Complaint Analysis.** Have a process for electronically logging informal complaints, analyzing where concerns are occurring, and identifying common themes to develop more systemic strategies for resolution.
  - **Transportation.** Address concerns about excessive delays in executing transportation routes, especially at the beginning of the school year. Resolve how to get students to school when parents are unable to transport them, and a bus route has not yet been established. As part of this process, reduce reliance on special education personnel as liaisons between schools and the transportation department. Instead, have parents and schools contact transportation personnel directly to streamline processes.

• **IEEs.** Better communicate with and provide guidance to school teams, including RIMs, on reviewing IEE requests; talking with parents; analyzing the appropriateness of requests; analyzing IEE results; addressing the poor quality of some IEEs; and developing legally defensible offers of appropriate education after completed IEEs.

• **Negotiated Assessment Plans.** Involve appropriate personnel in discussions about negotiated assessment plans, so they are properly done and do not require subsequent changes.
• **IDEA Determination.** Review the district’s 2016-17 IDEA determination rating. Also, review the SPP data that the district received for FFY 2016 and compare it to SPP data reviewed in this report to determine outcome improvements and slippage. Include in the implementation plan for recommendation 5b actions that would be necessary to boost the district’s performance and compliance results. Finally, review CDE monitoring activities underway or scheduled and consider how resources could be leveraged to support schools and special education personnel to obtain successful outcomes.

• **Special Education Attorney.** Conduct a cost-effectiveness analysis on bringing the services of a special education attorney in-house and using this expertise to expand training, daily consultations, and advice.

• **Special Education Webpage and Policies/Procedures Manual.** With parents and other stakeholders, review the district’s special education webpage and enhance it with links to resources and information of interest. Also, improve the usability of the special education policy and procedures manual by using a web-based platform. This format allows for key information to be briefly explained with links to more detailed explanations based on the user’s need. Also, this format supports the use of links to publicly available articles and videos of desired practices, e.g., facilitation of IEP meetings. Texts and resources can be updated more quickly along with notices about current information and new resources. For example, see the Seattle Public Schools’ special education webpage, which includes web-based special education procedures.109

• **Compliant and Useful IEPs.** Embed in professional learning activities information about the development of IEP goals that align to standards and address skill deficit areas. Answer the following questions: What skills must this student learn to become proficient on grade-level standards? What skills related to the grade-level standard(s) must this student learn? What are the component skills and are they “equal”?110 Have RIMs facilitate discussions with school personnel who frequently attend IEP meetings to determine whether several recently developed IEPs are sufficiently informative. Use these discussions to improve future IEP development for schools and the district.

• **Centralization of IEPs.** Develop a plan to stop sending IEPs and other documents to the central office and maintain them at each school. Establish a process for uploading signature pages and other documents to the IEP system and store these documents electronically. This or a similar process is used in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

### Recommendations

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<tr>
<td><strong>b. Compliance Support and Dispute Resolution.</strong> Develop consistent, transparent systems to address and monitor parent complaints, mediation, and the handling of independent educational evaluations (IEEs) with continuous feedback.</td>
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<td><strong>c. Medi-Cal.</strong> Increase Medi-Cal reimbursements and address current service tracking issues by doing the following-</td>
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<td>• <strong>RFQ.</strong> Issue an RFQ to identify vendors with Medicaid service tracking modules that are more intuitive and easier to use than the one FUSD currently uses.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Training.</strong> Provide more training on the district’s current system to increase staff efficiency</td>
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110 Decision Making to Support Standards-Based IEPs, by John Payne South Carolina Department of Education and Jim Shriner University of Illinois, retrieved from https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/AAMASTransition/PayneShriner.ppt.
in meeting this reporting expectation.

- **Prescriptions.** Increase use of a physician to write prescriptions for occupational and physical therapy services when they are supported by OT and PT evaluations.
- **Unnecessarily Medi-Cal Service Tracking.** For service providers giving services not eligible for reimbursement under Medi-Cal’s state plan, inform them as soon as possible that they no longer need to use the detailed Medi-Cal service tracking system. Instead, enable them to track services and document progress using a streamlined version.

## Recommendations

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### 14. Accountability

In addition to previous recommendations on data analysis and reports (Recommendations 1d, 2e, and 5d) and monitoring and accountability (Recommendations 1e, 2f, and 5e), consider the following actions.

#### a. Data Reports

- **Menu of Reports.** Review various standard special education reports available to instructional superintendents, principals, and special education administrators and supplement them with other analysis used by the Council team or deemed to be useful. Enable reports to be accessed through a menu and expect school-based personnel to access them regularly. Track this usage periodically to ensure that information is being reviewed.

- **Ad Hoc Reports.** Enable ad hoc reports to be available in a timely manner so that administrative personnel can use data to focus their activities.

- **Accountable Communities.** Support accountable communities in understanding how various data sources can be used to inform their study and actions.

- **ATLAS.** Ensure that special education administrators have access to ATLAS.

#### b. Monitoring and Accountability

This report provides many examples of challenges to accelerating achievement and social/emotional wellness for students with disabilities, including their receipt of high quality instruction in inclusive settings. Unless activities to address these challenges are embedded in and aligned with district plans, then efforts will be fragmented, less effective, and expected outcomes will not be realized.

- **Alignment of District Plans.** Review all district plans for improving teaching/learning and merge them into one comprehensive plan, annotating with links to more specialized information. Ensure plans are aligned, use common language, promote a common understanding of related elements, and are sufficiently inclusive of students with IEPs.

- **Special Education Improvement Plan.** Revise goal 6 of the district’s special education improvement plan, which targets the percentage of special education classrooms that score 3 or 4 in Tenets 1, 2A, and 2B on the instructional practice guide observation tool. Modify the goal to measure the percentage of students with disabilities, rather than special education classrooms. As written, the measure does not include students receiving special education services in general education classes. Further, the focus on special education classrooms reinforces the notion that special education is a “place” rather than a “set of services” based on student needs.

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Recommendations

The following is a comprehensive list of all recommendations prepared by the Strategic Support Team of the Council of the Great City Schools for the Fresno Unified School District. Detailed recommendations are found in the body of the report.

1. **Systemwide MTSS Framework, Implementation Plan, and Oversight.** Expedite completion of the district’s draft MTSS framework and supporting documents to ensure they are available for feedback and use in professional learning over the summer of 2018. This work needs to reflect a sense of urgency among stakeholders to improve educational outcomes for all students. Support this effort with a board policy on MTSS, reinforcing its importance, purpose, etc., and how instructional strategies and activities fit within the overall framework.

   a. **District, Network and School Leadership Teams.** Review leadership teams at the district, regional, and school levels that support MTSS planning and implementation with consideration of the following –

   - **District MTSS Leadership Team.** Have the chief academic officer become the face and voice for MTSS, with support from all instructional division leaders and principals, including their staff members, and other stakeholders.

   - **Regional MTSS Leadership Teams.** Have each network establish an MTSS leadership team with principals and a diverse group of school personnel responsible for implementation.

   - **School-Based Leadership Teams.** Establish one school-based leadership team (SBLT). Have the SBLT be a multi-disciplinary team of professionals who create and support school-based decision making; establish and monitor schoolwide learning and development goals; coordinate the delivery of services to all students (academic, behavior, student engagement); allocate resources needed to fully implement plans with fidelity; and monitor the effectiveness of core (Tier 1) and supplemental (Tier 2) instruction and intervention. SBLT subgroups should address and report back on such focused work as literacy, positive behavior supports, school resources, etc.

   SBLT responsibilities include –

   - Ensuring critical MTSS elements are understood by school staff, including curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices.

   - Actively engaging staff in ongoing professional learning and coaching to support MTSS implementation.

   - Actively facilitating implementation of MTSS as part of the school improvement planning process.

   Have Tier 3 Problem Solving Groups meet based on SBLT Tier 2 outcomes, to develop and revise individual problem-solving plans for individual students. Include specific and individualized data and other information, and grounds upon which to refer a student for a special education evaluation. Incorporate specific information on English learners to appropriately address language acquisition needs. Include this information.
in all relevant documents, e.g., MTSS, special education policies and procedures, and English Learner Master Plan.

b. **Implementation Plan.** To the greatest extent possible, have the MTSS leadership team provide guidance in the following planning documents to promote broad application of universal language, e.g., LCAP, SPSA, SQIS, Accelerating Achievement for African American Students in FUSD, Core MTSS Elements, etc.

- **Draft MTSS Framework Guidance and MTSS Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment Document.** Address the following areas in one or both documents, as appropriate –
  - **Universal Design for Learning (UDL).** Actively incorporate UDL principles in the MTSS framework and incorporate them into all guidance documents to support its implementation. Include the technology chief and executive directors in this effort.
  - **Focus on literacy.** With city agencies and community-based organizations, establish a citywide initiative to support early reading and standards attainment by third grade. Include activities designed to promote talking with infants and toddlers, such as used in the Thirty Million Words project.\(^{112}\)
  - **Scaffolding.** Include scaffolding and other strategies, which are included in the English Learner Master Plan, that are useful in supporting close reading and complex texts for all students. Include accommodations when needed.
  - **Tiered Interventions.** Emphasize increasingly intensive interventions but clarify that they should be used to supplement–not replace–first teaching instruction aligned with the core curriculum. Also--
    - Include reference to multisensory reading program(s) based in Orton Gillingham’s methodology, which is beneficial for students who are not progressing using other reading approaches.
    - Obtain feedback from schools on additional evidence-based programs that are necessary to meet student needs. Ensure that all instructional divisions are involved in reviewing materials and guiding purchasing decisions.
  - **English Learner Students.** Embed guidance on MTSS into the English Learner Master Plan, and, as appropriate, embed new guidance into the Master Plan.
  - **Under PBIS** embed descriptions of restorative practices and social/emotional learning rather than simply listing these as three separate and unrelated initiatives.\(^ {113}\)

- **Document Alignment.** Require each department to review their current documents to

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\(^{112}\) Retrieved from [http://tmwcenter.uchicago.edu/](http://tmwcenter.uchicago.edu/).

ensure their alignment with the MTSS framework and its components.

- **Posting.** When finalized, prominently post the MTSS implementation plan on the district’s website, along with relevant links to district information and publicly available resources.

c. **Differentiated Professional Learning.** Incorporate into the district’s professional learning program specific information targeted on each critical audience, e.g., central office personnel, principals, vice principals, general and special educators, teachers of English learner students, related-services personnel, paraprofessionals, and parents. Ensure that professional development is consistent with the MTSS framework, implementation plan, and expectations. To the extent possible, provide at least four to five days each year of training for school-based leadership teams over the next two years. Base training on the district’s High Quality Professional Learning Guidelines. Consider how training will be budgeted, e.g., through stipends, funds for substitute coverage, incentives for after-school and Saturday training, summer training, etc. Consider having a summer boot camp for this purpose.

Embed the following components into the district’s MTSS implementation plan (See Recommendation 1b) —

- **Cross-Functional Teams.** Cross-train individuals from multiple departments to ensure common language and understanding of MTSS. This will help align and support schools as they work on implementation.

- **High-Quality Trainers.** Identify staff members at all levels who are knowledgeable about and are experienced in various MTSS components and deploy them as professional developers. As necessary, supplement these staff members with experts outside the school district.

- **Access to Differentiated Learning.** Ensure that professional learning is engaging and differentiated based on individual skills, experience, and need. Have professional learning and technical assistance continue for new personnel and those needing additional support.

- **Multiple Formats.** Use multiple formats (e.g., videos, webinars, and narrative text) and presentation approaches (e.g., school-based, small groups) to provide professional development on MTSS.

- **Assistance.** Develop a plan for providing technical assistance to principals and school-based leadership teams along with mentoring, modeling, and coaching to teachers and other staff members to reinforce training and materials.

- **School Walkthroughs.** Establish or embed into current walkthrough protocols core MTSS provisions. Make the observations with a diverse team that includes the instructional superintendent, principal, and instructional division representatives like special education, English learners, prevention/intervention, etc. Consider including an employee who liaisons with parents. Analyze results of the walk-throughs to

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114 The term “walkthrough” is used generically and applies to all school observation models and protocols used by the district.
identify trends, strengths, and action items. Use electronic tablets to the extent possible.

- **Exemplary Implementation Models.** Provide regional forums where schools can highlight and share best practices, lessons learned, victories, and challenges in implementing MTSS for all students (e.g., gifted, English learners, students with IEPs, and students who are twice exceptional). Identify exemplary schools by region and enable staff from other schools to visit.

- **District Website.** Develop a highly visible, well-informed, and interactive web page highlighting the district’s MTSS framework. Include links to other local and national sites. Highlight schools within the district that are showing results with the approach and share stories and data on the impact of MTSS on student outcomes.

d. **Data Analysis and Reports.** Review current data collection, analyses, and reports and supplement them with indicators or metrics that would be useful to determining schools’ use of MTSS practices and the relationship to student achievement, e.g., growth based on appropriate instruction and intensive interventions.

e. **Monitoring and Accountability.** Evaluate the implementation, effectiveness, and results of MTSS, and include the following as part of the assessment –

- **Self-Monitoring.** Include benchmark and other regular districtwide and school-based progress monitoring tools into the evaluation of MTSS implementation. Consider using the Self-Assessment of MTSS Implementation (SAM) guide for this purpose. Incorporate these elements into instructional leadership team visits and other instructional walk throughs.

- **Baseline Data and Fidelity Assessments.** Use/adapt the Self-Assessment of MTSS (SAM)\(^{115}\) to help schools self-assess their MTSS practices. Have regional and districtwide leadership teams periodically review these self-assessments for validity. Incorporate SAM results into school observations to assess fidelity to the framework.

- **Data Checks.** Using data and reports proposed in Recommendation 1d, have the CAO host regular data conversations with departments, network leaders, and principals to discuss results, anomalies, needed supports, follow-up activities, and outcomes.

- **Timely Communication and Feedback.** Assign responsibility for communicating the MTSS work to stakeholders through a variety of channels, e.g., website, television, radio, social media, etc. Design feedback loops involving the central office, school personnel, parents, and the community to assess problems and successes. Use this feedback to provide regular and timely feedback to the district’s MTSS leadership team about barriers or where schools require additional assistance.

\(^{115}\) Retrieved from
2. **Disability, Demographics, Referral and Identification of Disability.** Strengthen the consistency and appropriateness of referrals, assessments, and eligibility decisions in special education.

   **a. Data Review.** With a multi-disciplinary team of instructional division leaders, principals, and others like the executive director for accelerating achievement for African American students, review data like that displayed in exhibits 2a, 2b, and 2d through 2j (along with CDE’s latest SPP report and other relevant data) and develop hypotheses about the pattern of results. Focus attention on variant disability rates; grades leading up to those with highest disability rates; disproportionate identification by race/ethnicity; conditions leading to the high proportion of males by race/ethnicity with disability; and English learner students and those who are long term. To the extent possible, sort data by regions, schools, and other variables to help identify and focus on areas of concern. Identify other data that might help further target areas for action and specific schools needing more assistance.

   **b. Implementation Plan.** Based on these data and hypotheses about why the patterns look like they do, modify the MTSS implementation plan to include activities designed to address these issues. (Coordinate this activity with Recommendation 1b.) Consider reviewing health plans at annual reviews of Section 504 criteria to determine whether students with such plans may qualify under Section 504. As part of this process, address whether a student’s health constitutes a physical or mental impairment, and whether the results suggest that the impairment substantially limits a major life activity.

   **c. Written Expectations.** For areas the multi-disciplinary team identifies as problematic, review/revise district guidance on first instruction, interventions, and progress monitoring; and modify processes for special education referrals, assessments, and eligibility.

   **d. Differentiated Professional Learning.** Plan for and provide all relevant district stakeholders with the professional learning they need to implement the recommendations in this section. As part of this process, have personnel from special education, English learner, and acceleration of African American students’ achievement departments, etc., collaborate on the referral and assessment needs of EL and African American students. (Coordinate this activity with Recommendation 1c.)

   **e. Data Analysis and Reports.** Develop and provide user-friendly summary reports to district leadership showing data like exhibits 2a, 2b, and 2d through 2j. Share data by region and by school. Consider how these data should be handled and reviewed by district leadership on a regular basis.

   **f. Monitoring and Accountability.** Develop a process for the ongoing monitoring of referrals, evaluations, and eligibility practices. Rather than using a traditional record-review compliance model, review data with schools so that school-based personnel are aware of problems, so they are better prepared for follow-up action. Enable staff to observe best practices and receive coaching that will improve their knowledge and skills. (Coordinate this activity with Recommendation 1d.) Consider folding relevant outcomes into school accountability measures.
3. **Achievement Data for Students with Disabilities.** With a multi-disciplinary team of instructional division leaders, including principals to the extent feasible, review exhibits 3a through 3l, benchmark them against future data as the district implements the Council team’s recommendations, and develop hypotheses about the patterns relating to the following areas –

- Early childhood outcomes based on SPP indicators and other relevant district indicators;
- TUDA/NAEP reading and math scores;
- Participation in statewide assessments by disability area and economically disadvantaged and foster youth. Reconcile district data with discrepant state-posted SPP data;
- Chronic absences;
- Suspension/expulsion rates based on number of days suspended, grades in school, and risk ratios by disability status and race/ethnicity. Calculate risk ratios for African American males by disability area and other groups of concern; and
- Graduation and dropout rates. Reconcile FUSD data with discrepant state posted SPP data.

These hypotheses and steps to address them should guide implementation of Recommendation 5 and the provision of inclusive, high-quality instruction for students with disabilities.

**Criteria for Graduation for Students Taking Alternate Assessments.** Under the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, states may establish criteria for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who can participate in alternate assessments to earn an alternate diploma.\(^{116}\) The criteria must be based on standards aligned with state requirements for the regular high school diploma. Indiana’s House of Representatives, for example, has approved such a diploma and the bill has moved to the Senate where it is expected to pass.\(^{117}\) Consider having CORE districts and others study this issue and lobby for such an approach in California.

4. **Educational Setting Demographics.** With a multi-disciplinary team of instructional leaders, including staff from English learner services, prevention/intervention, African American student achievement, and principals, review exhibits 4a through 4n and monitor these data as the district implements the Council’s recommendations. Develop hypotheses about the patterns in the data in the following areas –

- Young children three to five years of age who are educated in regular preschool classes;
- School aged children who are disproportionately educated at higher rates in more restrictive settings, compared to state and nation averages and state SPP targets; and how these rates change by grade, disability, gender, race/ethnicity, English learner status (including long-term ELs) and combinations thereof.
- Disproportionate enrollment of students with disabilities by region and schools; and placement of SDCs across the district and regions.

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These hypotheses and potential corrective actions should guide implementation of Recommendation 5.

5. **Increase Access to Inclusive Education and Provision of High Quality Education.** As part of the district’s movement toward an MTSS framework, embed increasing designs/supports for and activities to promote more inclusive educational settings and high-quality instruction for students with disabilities. Incorporate first teaching principles, including UDL, to ensure that the district’s instructional and behavioral strategies apply to a broader group of students than just those with disabilities. To aid this process, the district might hire a consultant who has successful helped districts become more inclusive and produce higher academic achievement and stronger social/emotional wellbeing for students with disabilities.

a. **Inclusive Education Vision.** Establish a school board policy to state a bold and inclusive vision for FUSD that is built around a UDL and MTSS framework, built on a framework of UDL and MTSS, and it incorporates supports for accelerating achievement and social/emotional well-being for all students, including students with disabilities. Use the district’s draft definition to begin this work around inclusive education and high-quality instruction in the core curriculum and interventions and supports for all students. Inclusive schools have a collaborative and respectful school culture where students with disabilities are presumed to be competent, can develop positive social relationships with peers, and are fully participating members of the school community.

   Emphasize the importance of providing students educated in general education classes with the differentiated and scaffolded instruction they need, and state that a student’s disability label should not drive the type or location of services. Reinforce district expectations that students will receive rigorous core instruction that is linguistically appropriate and culturally relevant, and that students will demonstrate accelerated achievement. These expectations should be easier to attain as teachers become more familiar with and base their instruction on the principles of UDL. Also, express high expectations that students can move to education in less restrictive environments with the supports to be successful. Attend to students previously incarcerated, and those who are economically disadvantaged and/or are in foster care.

b. **Implementation Plan.** With a multi-disciplinary team, develop a multi-year action plan that includes expectations, professional learning schedules, data analytics, and accountability. Have the team provide broad supervisory reach and expertise, along with representation from instructional superintendents, principals, special education, curriculum/instruction, English learners, prevention/intervention, African American achievement personnel. In addition, include representatives from the Best Practices for

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118 See, for example, Evanston/Skokie (IL) School District 65’s inclusion policy and related documents, retrieved from [https://www.district65.net/Page/812](https://www.district65.net/Page/812). The policy states: “Inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every student and his/her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for students with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential.” Also, language from the Common Core State Standards website may be helpful for this purpose. Retrieved from [http://www.corestandards.org/assets/application-to-students-with-disabilities.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/application-to-students-with-disabilities.pdf).
Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

Inclusive Education (BPIE) team along with parents. Have the team conduct the data review proposed in Recommendations 3 and 4 and charge them with revising the district’s inclusive education vision. On completion of the plan, establish a uniform way for school-based teams to implement activities into their regular school-based planning process.

Use a phase-in process over three to four years in all district schools. Identify general and special education personnel that schools can contact to support their service delivery needs.¹¹⁹

When developing the implementation plan, consider the following—

- **Preschool.** Models to significantly increase the number of children educated inclusively in regular preschool classes. This action will require a partnership between instructional superintendents, early childhood, special education, and other instructional and facilities personnel. On request, the Council team will provide Fresno Unified with names of other school districts that have done this effectively. When more children are successful in inclusive classrooms, there will be higher expectations that these opportunities can continue in kindergarten and spur high-quality education for students with disabilities.

- **Focus Group Participant Feedback.** Also, consider focus group issues: (a) transitions for infants/toddlers to school-based instruction; (b) opportunities for students in SDCs to participate in general education classrooms; (c) teachers with caseloads that are excessively large; (d) SDC age span for young children that is too wide to address developmental differences; and (e) implementation fidelity of the STAR curriculum.

- **School-Age Models of Inclusivity.** Develop models for educating more students using flexible service delivery models, along with supports necessary for them to be successful in general education, e.g., co-teaching, collaborative consultation, flexible intervention groups, etc. Revisit the district’s traditional use of resource-service providers and their relationship to student outcomes. Draft parameters for these models and obtain stakeholder feedback so they are visionary but doable with available resources and support. Establish guidance for specialty schools like International Baccalaureate to increase access and support for students with disabilities. Include scheduled time for teachers working with the same students to share information and plan. Also, develop models for English learners with disabilities, and embed information in all relevant documents.¹²⁰

- **School Sites.** Increase the number of schools over the next three to four years that receive supports for and technical assistance to plan and implement flexible and inclusive service designs. Ensure that individuals providing training have the experience and knowledge needed for this purpose.

- **Instruction.** Embed the special education department’s draft Curriculum Alignment

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¹¹⁹ See, for example, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Inclusive Vision Project: A Roadmap for Implementing Inclusive Best Practices in Our Schools PowerPoint.

document in the district’s MTSS Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment document and ensure the two documents are aligned. Also, incorporate relevant information in the instructional planning guides for literacy and math. Address the following areas of concern—

- **Adaptation of Curriculum Materials.** Adapt Wonders, Corrective Reading, SpringBoard, GoMath, and other materials to students struggling with them.

- **Reading Far Below Standards.** Help general and special educators to support instruction aligned with the core curriculum when students are reading far below grade level text.

- **Interventions.** Ensure all students with literacy challenges receive the appropriate evidence-based interventions they need to progress. When reviewing benefits of the WonderWorks pilot, take into account the adequacy of training and the implementation time frame.

- **Reading Instruction Past 6th Grade.** Give middle and high school students who are struggling to access grade level text the interventions they need to address their deficit skills. Seriously consider purchasing reading program(s) of different intensities that are based on Orton-Gillingham methods.

- **Credit Recovery.** Increase opportunities for students with disabilities to earn credits for graduation.

- **Instructional needs of Special Populations.** Address instructional needs of specific populations of students, and consider—

  - **Unique Learning System.** Supplement Unique materials with materials to better understand each student’s engagement interests and utilize information to encourage learning. This activity is applicable to all students.

  - **Low Incidence Services.** Ensure that a sufficient number of special educators and necessary materials, supplies, and assistance (e.g., sign language interpreters) are available students with orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, deafness, and hearing impairments, etc.

- **Supports for Challenging Student Behavior.** Refer to data like those shown in exhibits 4o through 4r, which present suspensions of students with IEPs by various parameters. Also refer to data showing schools from which students have moved to attend Phoenix Alternative School or other schools because of behavioral issues. Develop hypotheses about patterns in the data to inform additional supports. Use a triage approach, relying on school personnel (e.g., psychologists and social workers) to support schools and teachers with students displaying significant behavioral challenges. Supplement these resources with interdepartmental and regional teams with individuals having high levels of expertise, including support for students experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Include supports such as coaching and modeling instruction and establish expectations for follow-up activities in the schools.

- **SDC Master Planning.** Review the current configuration of SDCs and modify them
to better meet the needs of students. For example, consider the various service configurations used by Council member districts who participated in a recent meeting to discuss special education issues. As part of this process, use a recognized expert in providing instruction to students with autism spectrum disorder, including in general education. Also, review the locations of SDC programs, including those in mobile units, and consider how they (or newly reconfigured SDCs) could be reorganized by region to promote better equity/access, have a better distribution of students with disabilities, and have standardized equipment and materials. Once this is accomplished—

- **Program Parameters.** Have clear parameters for each SDC program but allow flexibility to promote more inclusivity.

- **Placement Protocols.** Develop, implement, and monitor placement protocols, including transitions and support for students moving between schools, placement types, and to less restrictive environments. Include processes for rapid problem-solving and resolution of placements that appear to be inappropriate (including students in special schools or students with delayed placements because of “unavailable space.” Enforce placement timelines that are reasonably short.

- **More Restrictive Placement Protocol.** Develop electronic worksheet protocols with guidance that must be completed prior to considering a student’s movement to a more restrictive environment. Establish criteria for such moves. Have psychologists review this information and share results with the associated RIM. For students with questionable data, have a regional team with expertise in each student’s needs meet with the psychologist and RIM to offer feedback. The IEP team, upon review of all information, is responsible for making the placement determination.

- **2-Year Grade Span.** If feasible economically, expand the pilot to all schools and limit SDCs to a two-year grade span, especially for younger children.

- **Articulation Protocol.** Review and reinforce processes for supporting students transitioning from one grade level school to another, including appropriate notice of incoming students.

**Feedback.** Have the team collect feedback on the draft plan from stakeholders at varying grade levels, including special/general education administrators, principals, general/special education teachers, related-service providers, teacher assistants, CAC, other parent-based and community-based organizations, and union representatives. Continue this feedback loop as the plan is implemented to address concerns.

**b. Written Expectations.** Develop and provide guidance on the implementation of practices designed to promote student achievement and positive behavior. Address relevant areas in the district’s implementation plan that would require written expectations and guidance—as well as the following:

- **Principal Leadership.** Articulate expectations for principal leadership in promoting

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121 These configurations were provided previously to the special education assistant superintendent.
inclusive practices for: educating students with disabilities in general education classes with sufficient support and assistance; providing students educated in SDCs with the supports they need to attend general education classes to the maximum extent appropriate; and modeling respectful interactions with parents about their concerns and for students with disabilities.

- **Differentiated Instruction.** Articulate expectations for the provision of linguistically appropriate and culturally competent instruction aligned with core standards and that is differentiated for students with reading and math outcomes significantly below classroom peers.

- **Instructional Materials.** Ensure that students receiving instruction aligned with the core curriculum and their special education teachers have copies of all materials used by their nondisabled peers.

- **IEP Decision Making.** Provide guidance to IEP teams on decision-making about students’ education in general education classes and supports needed for instruction based on the core curriculum and evidence-based interventions.

- **Planned Collaboration.** Require collaboration between general and special educators, paraeducators, and related-services personnel on instruction and interventions for students they have in common.

c. **Differentiated Professional Learning and Parent Training.** Embed in the professional learning curriculum (Recommendation 1c) the content needed to carry out the activities mentioned in and stemming from Recommendation 5. In addition, consider –

- **Learners.** The creation of an all-inclusive matrix of staffing groups, including paraeducators, who need professional learning to implement these recommendations, and areas of professional development needed.

- **Multi-Disciplinary Approach.** How training will be provided through a multidisciplinary approach, so that professional learning to promote inclusive education is not viewed incorrectly as a “special education” initiative;

- **Access.** How and when personnel will be provided access to training in each critical area;

- **Delivery.** How key information will be communicated effectively, including use of on-line training for compliance issues that are more rote and routine in nature;

- **Follow-Up.** How information will be used;

- Inclusive Group of Leaners. How the needs of all stakeholder groups will be addressed, including the needs of paraeducators and parents;

- **Supports.** What additional modeling, coaching, and supports may be needed;

- **Certificate of Expertise.** Modeling professional learning after the EL Master Plan for Success model, which includes a certificate of expertise.

- **Cross Discipline Learning.** To the extent possible, embed information from this section in other professional learning sessions.
• **Parent University.** Review Parent University activities with CAC/other stakeholders; and expand it to incorporate additional courses of interest to parents of students with disabilities. Consider other avenues for training, including with the CAC and community-based organizations.

• **Student Engagement.** Develop fellowships opportunities that allow teachers, administration, parents and youth to attend professional learning opportunities together to encourage teamwork and increased knowledge in areas of interest and engagement.

d. **Data Analysis and Reports.** In addition to the data analysis and reporting described in Recommendation 1d, include in all school performance and planning documents --

- **Data Reporting.** The types of data used in this report and other data to better target patterns and areas of concern.

- **Risk Ratios.** Disparities using risk ratios to better understand how different groups are affected by district practices.

e. **Monitoring and Accountability.** Expect all principals to be responsible for overseeing special education in their buildings and expect that instructional superintendents will hold principals accountable for this responsibility. Embed these activities into the monitoring and accountability systems described in Recommendation 1e. Have instructional learning teams include individuals knowledgeable of the indicators described and ensure that the multi-disciplinary teams observe classes attended solely by students with disabilities, e.g., SDCs and special schools.

- **Data Checks.** Include data such as that used in this report during discussions on follow-up actions and to track outcomes.

- **Fidelity Assessments and Walkthroughs.** Embed indicators relevant to these recommendations to assess effective inclusion instruction, along with education in resource classes, SDCs, and special schools to see how students are being taught. Initiate technical assistance, professional development, coaching, and mentoring to improve practices.

- **Timely Communication and Feedback.** Establish a process for timely feedback to the district’s MTSS leadership team on barriers to inclusive education.

6. **Assistive Technology, and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AT/AAC).** Consider the following to support assistive technology, and augmentative and alternative communications.

- **AT Team.** Evaluate the AT team’s composition and size, given the requests it receives and services it provided to determine whether current resources are sufficient to meet needs.

- **Resources.** Conduct an analysis of current AT/AAC services for: (a) students receiving instruction based on a modified curriculum; (b) students with orthopedic impairments; (c) students with a text-to-speech technology need; and (d) speech/language pathologists who need a complete AAC assessment kit. In addition, consider budget needs to keep up with IEP-required AT/AAC devices and materials. Based on these results, have high level
meetings with fiscal and purchasing personnel to address budget adequacy and a streamlined purchasing process.

- **Lending Library.** Review current equipment and supplies in the district’s lending library and gaps with current needs.

- **Apps.** With staff from the instructional and technology offices, discuss the extent to which evidence-based apps are available for iPads vs. other tablets, and take follow-up steps based on these results. As part of this process, involve special education and related services personnel familiar with this issue, e.g., speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists, special educators, etc.

- **Training.** Address the following training issues:
  - Teachers use of SMART boards to ease communications for students needing AAC.
  - Models for combining AT/AAC training for students, his/her parents, and teachers rather than scheduling separate sessions for each.
  - More effective use of the picture-exchange communication (PEC) system.
  - Access to conferences showcasing current AT/AAC devices for the AT/AAC team.

7. **Secondary Transition Activities and Services.** Build upon the district’s many secondary transition programs to improve supports for transitions, planning activities, and broader awareness to parents and students of transition opportunities and services. Also, consider the following actions\(^\text{122}\):

- **Counselors.** Have counselors participate in IEP team meetings when transition services are addressed;

- **Professional Learning.** Include in the professional learning curriculum (Recommendation 1c and 5c) PL that would encourage students with IEPs to attend college or other postsecondary educational programs. Include this student population in all activities the district initiates to promote college or other postsecondary education attendance.

- **Special Populations.** Specifically address the needs of students with disabilities who are homeless, in foster care, and/or economically disadvantaged in the district’s planning documents.

8. **Parent Support and Engagement.** Improve parent support, communications, and engagement with the following activities.

  a. **Districtwide Parent Advisories.** Review all district advisory groups that include parents, e.g., District Advisory Council (DAC) or Parent University's Parent Leadership Academy (PLA) and assess the extent to which they include parents of students receiving special education and share information with the Community Advisory Committee (CAC). If this

\(^{122}\) See Recommendation 7 for reference to actions designed to increase credit recovery options for students with disabilities.
information shows that such parents are not participating, develop/implement strategies for including them in these groups.

b. **Community Advisory Committee Participation.** Increase parental awareness of the CAC and its activities by notifying principals of their responsibility to have CAC meeting notices prominently posted in school locations parents visit. Ensure that they are posted within required time frames. Also, ensure notices are provided to schools in common native languages read by parents. Use instructional visits held during this timeframe to monitor the posting of notices as expected. Moreover, to the extent not fully executed, use the parent messaging service to communicate information about CAC meetings. Collaborate with the CAC to identify additional steps the district can take to enable parents to be aware of the CAC and its activities. Include family and community services personnel for this purpose.

c. **Additional Activities.** In addition, consider the following activities to support parent involvement in IEP meetings and their child’s education:

- **Facilitating Parent Involvement in IEP Team Meetings.** Identify a person on the IEP team to actively involve parents in meeting discussions, and ensure they have an opportunity to ask questions that are answered, etc.

- **Translation.** Review the district’s system for translating IEPs and other special education documents to ensure that they are completed in a timely manner. Explore the availability of IEP systems that include a translation component for this purpose.

- **PTOs.** Encourage parent teacher organizations to reach out to parents of students with disabilities, and to parents of other student subgroups, to be sure their interests are included.

9. **Organization and Collaboration of Central Office Personnel.** Maximize interdepartmental collaboration between instructional division leaders and their respective staffs in order to leverage their collective resources.

a. **Inclusive Decision-making and Communication.** Establish protocols for communicating issues affecting students with disabilities (and other student groups). These issues should include new policies, new programs, curriculum/instruction, etc., to avoid unintended consequences and misunderstandings. Ensure that communications is seamless from the central office to schools to improve transparency and stakeholder involvement. Check the effectiveness of this process through various means, e.g., focus groups, surveys, walkthrough discussions, etc.

- **Inclusive C/I Considerations.** Establish structured and planned communications between curriculum/instruction and special education (and other relevant departments), including multiple personnel groups. Ensure information is shared with personnel working directly with and in schools, including special education and EL services. Ensure that feedback is collected and considered thoughtfully. Follow this process prior to purchasing materials to minimize unanticipated consequences and to ensure

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123 Recommendations related to many issues raised by parents are addressed elsewhere, e.g., access to and timely response from special education personnel, student achievement, understanding the special education organization and who to contact for assistance, etc.
materials meet their intended purposes.

b. **Organizational Alignment and Coherence.** Consider aligning instructional superintendents and special education oversight structures so that both groups are organized by high school regions. To the maximum extent possible, align all central office department personnel to groups of schools in the same manner. Supplement the expertise of instructional superintendents with experience in only a single grade level with other staff with expertise in other grades.

- **Collaboration for Common School Groups.** Expect that each instructional superintendent and RIM (and other FUSD personnel groups) responsible for the same schools will meet regularly to address: relevant data, issue trends, challenges to teaching and learning, etc. Based on special education’s regional center model, establish one per region to serve as the base for each instructional superintendent and support personnel, and as a clearinghouse for parents and stakeholders. Involve personnel from special education and EL services.

- **Cross-functional Work.** Establish a matrix of personnel expertise and supports across departments to better coordinate cross-functional work. For example, to support the positive behavior of students, personnel from various departments with the appropriate expertise could be tapped to lead professional learning activities and support schools. Other examples of common work involve supporting inclusive educational structures for students who require differentiated first teaching and increasingly intensive interventions; explicit instruction for students requiring English language development regardless of their native language; expanding social engagement among students; etc. These activities need to be coordinated to reduce redundancy, establish universal language and messages, and determine how they support schools together. In addition, have these personnel review their budgets together to determine how they collectively support common work.

10. **Special Education Organization.** Post the department’s vision, mission, and commitments prominently on the special education webpage. Frequently refer to this information as a way of focusing activities, benchmarking progress, and staying on-task. Organize the special education department to better support its vision, mission, commitments, and assistance to schools.

a. **Positions Reporting to the Assistant Superintendent.** Have the following positions report to the assistant superintendent—

- **SELPA Director.** SELPA director responsibilities would include supervision of RIMs.
  - **Support for RIMs.** Have the SELPA director establish coherence, a common set of expectations, and coordinated support. When a RIM requires support beyond the SELPA director’s expertise, establish direct communication lines between RIMS and program managers to provide assistance. Periodically, have the assistant superintendent ensure that the SELPA director has sufficient time to support RIMs in addition to the director’s other responsibilities.
- **RIM Support for All Special Education Services in Respective Schools.** Have each RIM be responsible for all school-based special education, including SDCs, in their respectively assigned schools.

- **RIM Coordination with Respective Instructional Superintendents.** Expect that each instructional superintendent will meet regularly with his/her RIMs and share information about their common schools, support strategic planning for teaching/learning improvement, and plan professional development.

- **Coordination Across the District.** Have managers use feedback from RIMs to communicate common issues and trends with assistant superintendents and program managers.

  - **Health Services Director.** Retain the director’s current supervisory and programmatic responsibilities, including the structure currently in place to support health service personnel.

  - **Six Program Managers.** Assign responsibilities to program managers in an equitable manner and assign to each manager a set of related programmatic areas. Have each manager be an expert (or quickly develop expertise) in each area under their control; keep up with evidence-based research and best practices; develop high quality indicators (see further below); observe classes as requested; provide consultations; develop and be involved in professional learning activities; and support RIM activities. Ensure that at least one manager has a high level of expertise in literacy and math instruction and intervention, and in positive behavioral supports.

  - **Psychologists Program Director.** Have one program manager supervise school psychologists according to high school regions. As with SLPs, have seven leads support the psychologists, one per region.\(^{124}\) Use psychologists to a greater degree to support principals and school personnel with such activities as MTSS implementation; crisis intervention; problem-solving on student challenges and disputes with parents; and supporting IEP team discussions and placement decisions, including the reassignment of students to more restrictive settings. Create conditions through MTSS that will enable psychologists to spend less time conducting formal assessments of students and more time supporting MTSS activities, progress monitoring, and the like.

  - **Principals of Special Schools.** Have principals of each special school report to their respective instructional superintendent. As appropriate, have the assistant superintendent include principals in meetings with special education administrators and RIMs to discuss and address information relevant to their schools.

**b. Interdepartmental Coordination.** Have the assistant superintendent take steps to ensure that the SELPA director, program directors, and RIMs leverage their resources and

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\(^{124}\) Given the additional support provided by program managers), with input from SLPs and psychologists, determine the appropriate structure for leads, whether they should have a role in performance evaluations, have no or reduced caseloads, and have job descriptions.
expertise across their areas of responsibilities; and coordinate the instructional superintendents and other FUSD department personnel for maximum effectiveness.

c. Organizational Expectations

- **Expertise.** Ensure all personnel have the expertise they need to address the programmatic areas for which they are responsible. Enable them to access professional learning on evidence-based instruction. Identify individuals with specific expertise and ensure that others are responsible for keeping up with evidence-based research. Establish structures for information sharing across staff members. Provide intensive professional development during summer months to fill gaps in knowledge.

- **Defined Roles.** Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each position and communicate them with others.

- **Sufficient Resources to Carry Out Work.** Survey program managers to determine if they can manage responsibilities without relying on RIMs to do so. To the extent necessary, consider increasing clerical or other types of assistance to secure this outcome.

- **Program Improvement.** Have directors/managers develop quality indicators for their respective areas of responsibility after taking into account feedback from the field. Apply the indicators to practice and review results to continually improve instruction.

- **Addressing Parent Concerns.** Establish a process by which parents can raise concerns first at the school level and then with RIMs, if issues are not resolved in a timely manner. Establish a protocol and electronic data collection process to capture concerns, resolutions, and to identify trends.

- **Feedback Loops.** Use feedback loops across the special education department’s staff, colleagues in other departments, and school-based personnel. Use this information from these loops to identify trends, problem-solve and address issues, and celebrate successes.

- **Communication of New Organization.** When the special education department’s organization is approved, distribute information about the new organization and any new personnel positions established with an explanation of their functions. Once individuals are in place, establish a functional directory to communicate who to contact for various purposes. Post this information on the district’s special education webpage and provide a link to the webpage on the district’s website. Distribute the information directly to school personnel, parent and advocacy organizations, parents, and community-based organizations in languages most frequently used by students’ parents and families.
11. **Student-Personnel Ratios.** Ensure that personnel who support students with disabilities are employed in sufficient numbers to meet student needs. Review the staffing ratios summarized in this report (see Appendix A) on a regular basis with special education staff, instructional superintendents, and finance. NOTE: Relatively low or high student-to-personnel ratios do not necessarily mean that any given area is staffed inappropriately. However, the ratios should prompt further review. Ensure that adequate numbers of special education and related-services personnel are at each school to carry out their expected responsibilities. Based on a full review, consider changes needed short and long term.

**a. Address Vacant Positions.** Have human resources and special education personnel immediately review current and recurring staff vacancies, particularly among paraeducators and speech/language pathologists, and design strategies that could be used to increase the applicant pool and quality of hires.

- **RFP.** Consider issuing a request for proposals (RFP) to identify vendors with a successful track record of recruiting qualified personnel who might work with the district.

- **Paraeducators**
  - **HR Resources.** Ensure there are sufficient human resources personnel to manage the complex process necessary to abide by union procedures and have a screened applicant pool ready for interviewing, particularly among paraeducators. Track vacancies by region and school, and report the status biweekly to the superintendent, instructional superintendents, and special education assistant superintendent.
  - **CPR and First Aid.** Provide new paraeducators with free CPR and first aid training immediately after they are hired, rather than as a condition of employment.
  - **Defensive Driving.** For paraeducators who do not have driving as an essential part of their jobs, eliminate this requirement. (The Council team was told that the district has now eliminated defensive driving certification as an employment qualification.)

**b. Fill Paraeducator Positions.** Conduct a study of paraeducator vacancies that would include the following components:

- Number of paraeducator vacancies by category and in total at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year; the number of vacant positions filled; the number of vacant positions that became vacant again; and the number currently vacant.

- For each of the three interviews required prior to posting outside of FUSD, the average number of days (and ranges) necessary to post, to set up interviews, interview, respond with a hire or to justify no hire, and to review the justification.

- The number of vacant positions posted outside of the district, and number filled.

- An analysis of the process to fill paraeducator positions, including any significant variances by paraeducator category.

If necessary, use a consultant for this purpose. Share the results with CESA and initiate negotiations to review the transfer and hiring process. Change the rules and procedures
based on the data.

12. School-based Administration of Special Education

a. **Principal Leadership.** Expect that every principal will lead and administer the operation of special education in his/her school, including providing oversight for paraeducator practices. Articulate activities necessary to carry out this function, and survey principals to determine the professional learning needs to conduct it. Use this information to develop a curriculum for principals and provide differentiated and intensive training to them over the summer and next school year. Reinforce this knowledge with continuing learning opportunities and repeat the process for new principals.

b. **Case Management.** Take the following steps to support case managers with respect to compliant and timely IEP meetings.

   - **Required Participants.** Set expectations for the participation of required personnel at IEP meetings and establish accountability standards consistent with this expectation.
   - **Scheduling.** Support IEP member participation by addressing how scheduling of IEP meetings is done and by avoiding conflicting priorities.
   - **Substitutes.** Consider freeing up or allocating funds to hire substitutes when needed to enable teachers to attend meetings.
   - **Past 8th Hour.** Establish parameters for the continuation of IEP meetings past the 8th hour of school and consider any relevant compensation issues.
   - **IEP Team Data to Support Decision-Making.** Establish a protocol for ensuring that IEP decisions are based on data and documentation of items discussed at IEP meetings.

c. **Excessive Caseloads.** Establish a process for identifying caseloads that exceed FUSD parameters and addressing these situations. Determine how students who need to learn braille, receive orientation and mobility training, and require sign language interpreter services receive the IEP-services they are entitled to. As part of this activity, review caseloads of OTs in association with IEP-required OT services. Address gaps in service by hiring additional OTs and certified occupational therapy assistants (COTAs) as appropriate. Also, consider needs for physical therapy and service providers available to meet this need.

13. **Compliance Support and Fiscal Issues.** Consider the following actions to improve compliant practices and enhance revenue.

a. **Compliance Support and Dispute Resolution.** Special education personnel—alone—cannot improve special education compliance. Develop consistent, transparent systems to address and monitor parent complaints, mediation, and the handling of independent educational evaluations (IEEs) with continuous feedback.

   - **Informal Complaints and Early Resolution.** It is important to listen patiently for and resolve problems proactively in their early stages. Establish expectations for the following –
     - **Timely Replies.** Return all phone calls to parents within 24 hours.
- **Recitation of Facts.** After a parent explains his or her concerns fully, do not expect the parent to repeat them if transferred to another person with more authority.

- **Calls to Ombudsperson.** Red flag parent complaints related to special education for the ombudsperson in the district’s constituent services department to expedite replies.

- **Listening Times.** Several times each year, organize listening sessions to hear from parents by region about their concerns. Have personnel present who can talk with parents individually, so they do not have to work up layers of the bureaucracy.

- **Complaint Analysis.** Have a process for electronically logging informal complaints, analyzing where concerns are occurring, and identifying common themes to develop more systemic strategies for resolution.

- **Transportation.** Address concerns about excessive delays in executing transportation routes, especially at the beginning of the school year. Resolve how to get students to school when parents are unable to transport them, and a bus route has not yet been established. As part of this process, reduce reliance on special education personnel as liaisons between schools and the transportation department. Instead, have parents and schools contact transportation personnel directly to streamline processes.

  - **IEEs.** Better communicate with and provide guidance to school teams, including RIMs, on reviewing IEE requests; talking with parents; analyzing the appropriateness of requests; analyzing IEE results; addressing the poor quality of some IEEs; and developing legally defensible offers of appropriate education after completed IEEs.

  - **Negotiated Assessment Plans.** Involve appropriate personnel in discussions about negotiated assessment plans, so they are properly done and do not require subsequent changes.

  - **IDEA Determination.** Review the district’s 2016-17 IDEA determination rating. Also, review the SPP data that the district received for FFY 2016 and compare it to SPP data reviewed in this report to determine outcome improvements and slippage. Include in the implementation plan for recommendation 5b actions that would be necessary to boost the district’s performance and compliance results. Finally, review CDE monitoring activities underway or scheduled and consider how resources could be leveraged to support schools and special education personnel to obtain successful outcomes.

  - **Special Education Attorney.** Conduct a cost-effectiveness analysis on bringing the services of a special education attorney in-house and using this expertise to expand training, daily consultations, and advice.

  - **Special Education Webpage and Policies/Procedures Manual.** With parents and other stakeholders, review the district’s special education webpage and enhance it with links to resources and information of interest. Also, improve the usability of the special education policy and procedures manual by using a web-based platform. This format allows for key information to be briefly explained with links to more detailed
explanations based on the user’s need. Also, this format supports the use of links to publicly available articles and videos of desired practices, e.g., facilitation of IEP meetings. Texts and resources can be updated more quickly along with notices about current information and new resources. For example, see the Seattle Public Schools’ special education webpage, which includes web-based special education procedures.125

- **Compliant and Useful IEPs.** Embed in professional learning activities information about the development of IEP goals that align to standards and address skill deficit areas. Answer the following questions: What skills must this student learn to become proficient on grade-level standards? What skills related to the grade-level standard(s) must this student learn? What are the component skills and are they “equal”?126 Have RIMs facilitate discussions with school personnel who frequently attend IEP meetings to determine whether several recently developed IEPs are sufficiently informative. Use these discussions to improve future IEP development for schools and the district.

- **Centralization of IEPs.** Develop a plan to stop sending IEPs and other documents to the central office and maintain them at each school. Establish a process for uploading signature pages and other documents to the IEP system and store these documents electronically. This or a similar process is used in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

b. **Medi-Cal.** Increase Medi-Cal reimbursements and address current service tracking issues by doing the following-

- **RFQ.** Issue a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to identify vendors with Medicaid service tracking modules that are more intuitive and easier to use than the one FUSD currently uses.

- **Training.** Provide more training on the district’s current system to increase staff efficiency in meeting this reporting expectation.

- **Prescriptions.** Increase use of a physician to write prescriptions for occupational and physical therapy services when they are supported by OT and PT evaluations.

- **Unnecessarily Medi-Cal Service Tracking.** For service providers giving services not eligible for reimbursement under Medi-Cal’s state plan, inform them as soon as possible that they no longer need to use the detailed Medi-Cal service tracking system. Instead, enable them to track services and document progress using a streamlined version.

14. **Accountability.** In addition to previous recommendations on data analysis and reports (Recommendations 1d, 2e, and 5d) and monitoring and accountability (Recommendations 1e, 2f, and 5e), consider the following actions.

a. **Data Reports**

- **Menu of Reports.** Review the various standard special education reports available to

126 Decision Making to Support Standards-Based IEPs, by John Payne South Carolina Department of Education and Jim Shriner University of Illinois, retrieved from https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/AAMATransition/PayneShriner.ppt.
instructional superintendents, principals, and special education administrators and supplement them with other analysis used by the Council team or deemed to be useful. Enable these reports to be accessed through a menu and expect school-based personnel to access them on a regular basis. Track this usage periodically to ensure that information is being reviewed.

- **Ad Hoc Reports.** Enable ad hoc reports to be available in a timely manner so that administrative personnel can use data to focus their activities.

- **Accountable Communities.** Support accountable communities in understanding how various data sources can be used to inform their study and actions.

- **ATLAS.** Ensure that special education administrators have access to ATLAS.

**b. Monitoring and Accountability.** This report provides many examples of challenges to accelerating achievement and social/emotional wellness for students with disabilities, including their receipt of high quality instruction in inclusive settings. Unless activities to address these challenges are embedded in and aligned with district plans, then efforts will be fragmented, less effective, and expected outcomes will not be realized.

- **Alignment of District Plans.** Review all district plans for improving teaching and learning and merge them into one comprehensive plan, annotating it with links to more specialized information. At a minimum, ensure all plans are aligned, use common language, and promote a common understanding of related elements. Also, ensure all plans are sufficiently inclusive of students with disabilities.

- **Special Education Improvement Plan.** Revise goal 6 of the district’s special education improvement plan, which targets the percentage of special education classrooms that score 3 or 4 in Tenets 1, 2A, and 2B on the instructional practice guide observation tool. Modify the goal to measure the percentage of students with disabilities, rather than special education classrooms. As written, the measure does not include students receiving special education services in general education classes. Further, the focus on special education classrooms reinforces the notion that special education is a “place” rather than a “set of services” based on student needs.

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127 Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP); Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) and State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP); School Quality Improvement System (SQIS); Master Plan for English Learner Success; State Performance Indicators; and District Special Education Improvement Plan.

APPENDICES
Appendix A. Incidence Rate and Staffing Survey Results

The Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative and the Council of the Great City Schools, including its team members who conducted school district special education reviews, collected the data reported in these tables. The data do not give precise comparisons, so the results need to be used with caution. District data are not consistently reported (e.g., some districts include contract personnel and others may exclude them) and are sometimes affected by varying placement types used by a school district. The data may count all students with IEPs, including those placed in charters, agencies, and nonpublic schools. Still, these data are the best available and are useful as a rough guide to staffing ratios.

Incidence of Students with IEPs and Personnel Staffing Ratios (November 2017)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># IEPs</th>
<th>% IEPs</th>
<th># IEPs</th>
<th>% IEPs</th>
<th># IEPs</th>
<th>% IEPs</th>
<th># IEPs</th>
<th>% IEPs</th>
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<td>666</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>431</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>224</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>76</td>
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<td>18%</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>358.5*</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>94</td>
<td>98</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>263</td>
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<td>450</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>85</td>
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<td>16.4</td>
<td>603.1</td>
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<td>75.5</td>
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<td>376</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>106</td>
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<td>448</td>
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<td>5.0</td>
<td>3,158</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>160</td>
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<td>89</td>
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<td>119</td>
<td>110*</td>
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<td>79</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>318</td>
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<td>95</td>
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<td>155.1</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>241.5</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>127.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Does not include itinerant teachers
* Does not include diagnosticians
* Includes diagnosticians

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Council of the Great City Schools  Page 175
### Incidence of Students with IEPs and Personnel Staffing Ratios (November 2017)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% IEPs of All Students</th>
<th>Sp Ed Teachers</th>
<th>Paraeducators</th>
<th>Speech/Lang Pathologists</th>
<th>Psychologist</th>
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<tbody>
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<td># IEPs</td>
<td>% IEPs</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Ratio</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
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<td>Kyrene School District</td>
<td>1,544</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Lakota Local</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Los Angeles Unified SD</td>
<td>71,969</td>
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<td>4909.9</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
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<td>14.0%</td>
<td>347</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Marlborough Pub Sch</td>
<td>1,198</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memphis City</td>
<td>16,637</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami-Dade</td>
<td>40,012</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>16,406</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>1281</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montgomery Cty Sch</td>
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<td>1,588</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nashville</td>
<td>10,141</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
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<td>14.9</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>20%</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>462</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>3,894</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<td>23</td>
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</table>

| Averages | 13.4% | 14.1 | 15.4 | 110 | 151 |

* The Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative and the Council of the Great City Schools, including its team members who conduct school district special education reviews, collected the data reported in these tables. *The data do not give precise comparisons, so the results need to be used with caution.* District data are not consistently reported (e.g., some districts include contractual personnel and others may exclude them) and are sometimes affected by varying placement types used by a school district. The data may count all students with IEPs, including those placed in charters, agencies, and nonpublic schools. Still, these data are the best available and are useful as a rough guide to staffing ratios.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratios for Social Workers, Nurses, OTs &amp; PTs</th>
<th># IEPs</th>
<th>Social Workers</th>
<th>Nurses (School/RN)</th>
<th>Occupational Therapy</th>
<th>Physical Therapy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Ratio</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Ratio</td>
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Notes: Ratios are calculated as the number of social workers, nurses, OTs, and PTs per 1000 students.
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# Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

| Percent Students with IEPs of Total Enrollment & Students with IEPs to Staff Ratio in Ascending Order |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rank | % IEPs | Special Ed Teachers | Speech/Language Pathologists | Psychologists | Social Workers | Nurses | Occupational Therapists |
| 1 | 7.3% | 5 | 4.3 | 37 | 31 | 40 | 58 | 75 |
| 2 | 8% | 7 | 5 | 44 | 55 | 56 | 60 | 103 |
| 3 | 8% | 8.1 | 7 | 44 | 77.7 | 61.4 | 67 | 112 |
| 4 | 9% | 8.6 | 7 | 47 | 79 | 61.5 | 68 | 140 |
| 5 | 9% | 9 | 7 | 50 | 85.5 | 66 | 68 | 141 |
| 6 | 9% | 9 | 7 | 58 | 87 | 69 | 75 | 142 |
| 7 | 9.1% | 9.5 | 8 | 59 | 90 | 73 | 82 | 147 |
| 8 | 10% | 9.8 | 8 | 59 | 94 | 73 | 82 | 154 |
| 9 | 10% | 9.8 | 8.3 | 60 | 100 | 75 | 83 | 154 |
| 10 | 10% | 9.8 | 8.5 | 63 | 100 | 78 | 85 | 163 |
| 11 | 10.3% | 10 | 8.6 | 68 | 102 | 86 | 89 | 165 |
| 12 | 10.9% | 10.3 | 8.8 | 71 | 102 | 88 | 89 | 170.5 |
| 13 | 11% | 10.9 | 9.5 | 72 | 104 | 89 | 89 | 174 |
| 14 | 11% | 11 | 9.7 | 73 | 110 | 95 | 93 | 175 |
| 15 | 11% | 11 | 9.8 | 73 | 111 | 96 | 93 | 180 |
| 16 | 11.1% | 11 | 10 | 74 | 111 | 105 | 94 | 186 |
| 17 | 11.2% | 11.8 | 10 | 74 | 112 | 110 | 94 | 187 |
| 18 | 11.2% | 11.8 | 10.4 | 76 | 112.5 | 110 | 96 | 187.4 |
| 19 | 11.3% | 11.8 | 11 | 76.8 | 115 | 115 | 98 | 199 |
| 20 | 11.3% | 12 | 11 | 77 | 117 | 116 | 98.6 | 205 |
| 21 | 11.4% | 12 | 11.1 | 77 | 121 | 117 | 100 | 210 |
| 22 | 11.7% | 12 | 12 | 79 | 121 | 124 | 104 | 210 |
| 23 | 11.7% | 12 | 12 | 79 | 121 | 127 | 110 | 216 |
| 24 | 12% | 12 | 12 | 80 | 122.8 | 134 | 111 | 219 |
| 25 | 12% | 12.5 | 12.6 | 80 | 123 | 134 | 113 | 225 |
| 26 | 12% | 13 | 12.8 | 81 | 125 | 135 | 114 | 226 |
| 27 | 12% | 13 | 13 | 83 | 125 | 136 | 115 | 231 |
| 28 | 12% | 13 | 13 | 84 | 125 | 158 | 119 | 240 |
| 29 | 12.3% | 13 | 13 | 85 | 126 | 160 | 120 | 242 |
| 30 | 12.5% | 13 | 13 | 89 | 127 | 165 | 121 | 256 |
| 31 | 12.7% | 13 | 13 | 89 | 127.3 | 172 | 122 | 263 |
| 32 | 12.8% | 13.3 | 13 | 92 | 129 | 188 | 124 | 276 |
| 33 | 13.0% | 13.4 | 13 | 93 | 130 | 197 | 126 | 300 |
| 34 | 13.0% | 13.7 | 13.3 | 95 | 134 | 199 | 127 | 309 |
| 35 | 13.1% | 13.7 | 13.5 | 96 | 140 | 201 | 127 | 325 |
| 36 | 13.1% | 13.7 | 13.7 | 96.5 | 144 | 221 | 129 | 332 |
| 37 | 13.1% | 13.8 | 13.6 | 98 | 150 | 249 | 133 | 332 |
| 38 | 13.9% | 14 | 14 | 98 | 151 | 250 | 146 | 335 |
| 39 | 13.9% | 14 | 14 | 98 | 155 | 270 | 148 | 344 |
| 40 | 14.0% | 14 | 15 | 98 | 155 | 284 | 153 | 355 |
| 41 | 14.0% | 14.2 | 15 | 100 | 159 | 288 | 158 | 366 |
| 42 | 14.0% | 14.7 | 15 | 103 | 165 | 300 | 162 | 367 |
| 43 | 14.0% | 14.9 | 15.5 | 103 | 166 | 303 | 175 | 374 |
| 44 | 14.0% | 15 | 16 | 104 | 169 | 312 | 178 | 379 |
| 45 | 14% | 15 | 16 | 105 | 173 | 334 | 184 | 384 |
| 46 | 14% | 15 | 16 | 105 | 178 | 364 | 186 | 388 |
| 47 | 14% | 15 | 16.4 | 105 | 178 | 487 | 195 | 407 |
| 48 | 14.1% | 15 | 17 | 107 | 179 | 495 | 217 | 408 |
| 49 | 14.1% | 15.2 | 17 | 108 | 187 | 512 | 220 | 413 |
| 50 | 14.3% | 15.7 | 17.1 | 111 | 192 | 525 | 226 | 417 |
| 51 | 14.5% | 16 | 17.2 | 111 | 195 | 1924 | 230 | 431 |
| 52 | 14.7% | 16 | 17.3 | 112 | 196 | 241 | 450 |
| 53 | 15.0% | 16.3 | 17.6 | 112 | 199 | 245 | 457 |
| 54 | 15.0% | 16.4 | 18 | 112 | 210 | 245 | 470 |
| 55 | 15.3% | 16.7 | 18 | 115 | 213 | 248 | 474 |
| 56 | 15.8% | 17 | 19 | 116 | 218 | 258 | 478 |
### Percent Students with IEPs of Total Enrollment & Students with IEPs to Staff Ratio in Ascending Order

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<th>Speech/Language Pathologists</th>
<th>Psychologists</th>
<th>Social Workers</th>
<th>Nurses</th>
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<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>13.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>14.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>110</strong></td>
<td><strong>163</strong></td>
<td><strong>138</strong></td>
<td><strong>354</strong></td>
<td><strong>928</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B. Special Education Improvement Plan

Goal 1: Increase Graduation Rate - By June 2018, the graduation rate for students with disabilities will increase from 60.7% to 66.7% (APR target) as measured by annual performance review.

Goal 2: Decrease Disproportionality of African American and English Learners
- By June 2018, the percentage of African American students identified for Special Education services will decrease from 14% (current) to 10% (overall identification rate), as measured by annual performance review.
- By June 2018, the percentage of English Learner students identified for Special Education services will decrease from 31% (current) to 10% (overall identification rate), as measured by annual performance review.
- By June 2018, the percentage of African American students with disabilities who are suspended or expelled for more than 10 days will decrease from 3.67% (current) to 2.43% (APR statewide rate), as measured by annual performance review.

Goal 3: Increase Time in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- By June 2018, the percentage of students with disabilities in general education environments less than 40% of the day will decrease from 30.55% (current) to 24.66% (APR target), as measured by annual performance review.
- By June 2018, the percentage of students with disabilities in general education environments more than 80% of the day will increase from 53.94% (current) to 55% or greater, as measured by annual performance review.

Goal 4: Improve student achievement on state-wide assessments
- By June 2018, the percentage of students with disabilities participating in statewide assessments will increase from 94.09% (current ELA) and 93.42% (current math) to 95% (APR target), as measured by annual performance review.
- By June 2018, the percentage of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding standards in ELA will increase from 4.39% (current) to 13.9% (APR target), as measured by annual performance review.
- By June 2018, the percentage of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding standards in Math will increase from 4.22% (current) to 12% (APR target), as measured by annual performance review.
- By June 2018, 85% of students using Unique curriculum will improve on the 3rd Unique Benchmark, as measured by the Unique Learning System.

Goal 5: Improve IEP Compliance
- By June 2018, all initial, annual and triennial IEPs will be 100% compliant, as measured by SEIS data reporting system.
- By June 2018, 20% of all special education will meet 100% of their goals, as measured by annual performance review, as measured by SEIS data reporting system.
- By quarterly reporting periods, 100% of progress reports will be affirmed and attested, as measured by SEIS data reporting system.
Appendix C. Data and Documents Reviewed

- Graduation Rates 2011-12 through 2015-16 for all students
- Graduation Rates 2011-12 through 2015-16 for special education students
- Dropout Rates 2011-12 through 2015-16 for all students
- Dropout Rates 2011-12 through 2015-16 for special education students
- FUSD Enrolled Students Infant -12th grade
- FUSD Enrolled Special Education Students Infant -12 grade
- Exit Special Education Services by disability 2013-2018 (partial pull 2017-18)
- Aged out Special Education Services by disability 2013-2018 (partial pull 2017-18)
- FUSD Student Information numbers for 504 and Health Plans
- FUSD Students Enrolled by Race and Gender
- FUSD Special Education Students Enrolled by Race and Gender
- FUSD Enrolled ELs Infant-12th grade
- FUSD Enrolled Long Term ELs-12th grade
- FUSD Enrolled Special Education ELs Infant-12th grade (by disability)
- FUSD Enrolled Special Education Long Term ELs-12th grade (by disability)
- Referrals for Initial Evaluations, Numbers Evaluated and
  - Numbers Determined to Need IEP (by disability)
- Data for FUSD Assessment System (SBAC 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 Meeting/Exceeding for Math and Reading and Alternate Assessments)
- Educational Setting Data by Grade, Disability, Race and EL ages 6-21
- Educational Setting Data for ages 3-5
- Special Education Configuration by School
- Out of School Suspension Data by grade for Race, El and Disability
- Number of FTE Staff by Position
- Instructional Practice Guide for Literacy and Math
- Curriculum Alignment Document with the specific Core and Supplemental Curriculum by each program.
- Alternative Learning Pathways (ALPs) Preschool-Adult Programs
- New High School Courses for ALPs 18-19 school year
- Numerous Emails from Review Process to Team from Interested Parties/Stakeholders
Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

- Information regarding:
  - Multi-tiered System of Supports
  - Preschool and inclusive instruction
  - Curriculum alignment
  - Approved 2017-18 LCAP
  - CEIS Plan
  - EL Master Plan
  - AT Guidebook
  - Instructional calendar
  - District organization chart
  - Special education organization chart
  - Paraprofessionals
  - Section 504
  - Special education policy and procedures
  - Data report examples
  - Collective bargaining agreements
  - Transition programs and planning
  - Site based accountability
  - College and career readiness, including credit recovery
  - Parent engagement
## Appendix D. Agenda and Focus Group Participants

**Council of the Great City Schools Site Visit DRAFT Agenda – Special Education**

**Fresno Unified School District**

**January 13-15, 2018**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Monday, February 12, 2018 Elbow Room 731 W San Jose Fresno, CA 93704</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>6:00-8:30 Dinner with Superintendent <strong>Bob Nelson</strong>, Superintendent <strong>Brian Beck</strong>, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Health Services</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Tuesday, February 13, 2018 FUSD Center for Professional Learning 1833 E Street, Room 210 Fresno, CA 93706</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 8:00-9:00 **8:00-8:30 Brian Beck**, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Health Services  
**8:30-9:00 Adrian Varanini**, Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) Director |  |
| 9:00-10:00 **Kim Mecum**, Chief Academic Officer |  |
| 10:00-11:00 Instructional Leadership Team **Melissa Dutra**, Instructional Superintendent (Curriculum and Instruction)  
**Ed Gomes**, Instructional Superintendent (Elementary Schools)  
**Misty Her**, Instructional Superintendent (Elementary Schools)  
**Katie Russell**, Instructional Superintendent (Secondary Schools)  
**Brian Wall**, Instructional Superintendent (Secondary Schools) |  |
| 11:00-12:00 Instructional Division Lead Team **Ambra Dorsey**, Executive Director, Department of Prevention and Intervention  
**Sally Fowler**, Executive Director, Career Technical Education  
**Maria Maldonado**, Assistant Superintendent, English Learner Services  
**Deanna Mathies**, Executive Director, Early Learning |  |
| 12:00-12:30 LUNCH – Assistant Superintendent Follow Up  
**Brian Beck**, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Health Services |  |
| 12:30-1:15 Human Resources **Paul Idsvoog**, Chief of Human Resources  
**Kim Collins**, Human Resources Administrator |  |
| 1:15-2:00 Fiscal Services and Transportation **Ruthie Quinto**, Chief Financial Officer/Deputy Superintendent  
**Karim Temple**, Chief Operations Officer  
**Alex Belanger**, Assistant Superintendent, Facilities  
**Kim Kelstrom**, Executive Director, Fiscal Services  
**Santino Danisi**, Executive Director, Categorical Programs  
**Reggie Ruben**, Director of Transportation |  |
| 2:00-2:45 Special Education Program Managers **Jeanne Butler**, Program Manager III  
**Mike Fletcher**, Program Manager III  
**Susan Kalpakoff**, Program Manager III  
**Julie Wheelock**, Program Manager III |  |
| 2:45-3:00 BREAK |  |
| 3:00-4:00 Special Education Regional Instructional Managers **Kelli Flake** (Bullard Region)  
**Janet Trosper** (Bullard Region)  
**Roy Exum** (Edison Region)  
**Angela Dryden** (Edison Region)  
**Christie Gunter** (Fresno HS Region)  
**Kim Kuphaldt** (Fresno HS Region)  
**Sarah Scheidt** (Hoover Region)  
**Nicole Evangelinos** (Hoover Region)  
**Phil McIlhargy** (McLane Region)  
**Deanna Hoffman** (McLane Region)  
**Claudina Espudo** (Roosevelt Region)  
**Cheryl Rudell** (Roosevelt Region)  
**Robyn** |  |

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132 Draft agenda. Changes made on site during review.
### Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

**Wednesday, February 14, 2018**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>4:00-5:00</td>
<td>Special Education Teachers&lt;br&gt;See attached list of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00-6:00</td>
<td>Parents/Community Members&lt;br&gt;See attached list of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30-8:30</td>
<td>DINENR&lt;br&gt;2 Board Members&lt;br&gt;Cosmopolitan 625 O Street Fresno, CA 93721</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Wednesday, February 14, 2018 FUSD Center for Professional Learning 1833 E Street, Room 210 Fresno, CA 93706**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00-9:00</td>
<td>Related Services Providers&lt;br&gt;See attached list of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:45</td>
<td>Psychologists&lt;br&gt;See attached list of participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:45-10:30</td>
<td>Special Education Office Staff&lt;br&gt;See attached list of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30-11:00</td>
<td>Legal Compliance Adrian Varanini, SELPA Director Jeanne Butler, Program Manager III Diandra Netto, Legal Counsel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00-12:00</td>
<td>Paraeducators&lt;br&gt;See attached list of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-12:30</td>
<td>LUNCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30-1:00</td>
<td>SELPA Director Follow Up&lt;br&gt;Adrian Varanini, SELPA Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00-2:00</td>
<td>Labor Partners&lt;br&gt;Fresno Teachers Association (FTA) California School Employees Association (CSEA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00-2:45</td>
<td>Center-Based School Principals Katrina Pleshe, Addicott Principal Gina Boni, Rata Principal Grace Settle, Fulton Principal Heidi Barbis, Lori Ann Infant Program Derrick Flake, Adult Transition Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45-3:00</td>
<td>BREAK</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:00-4:00</td>
<td>General Education Teachers&lt;br&gt;See attached list of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00-5:00</td>
<td>Elementary Site Principals&lt;br&gt;See attached list of participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:00-6:00</td>
<td>Secondary Site Principals&lt;br&gt;See attached list of participants</td>
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**Thursday, February 15, 2018**

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<tr>
<td>1:30-3:00</td>
<td>Debriefing with Superintendent Bob Nelson, Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00-3:45</td>
<td>Board Members&lt;br&gt;1 Board Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:45-4:30</td>
<td>Board Members&lt;br&gt;1 Board Member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Improve Special Education Services in the FUSD

Tuesday, February 13, 2018

Fresno Unified School District Administration
Brian Beck, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Health Services
Adrian Varanini, Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) Director

Kim Mecum, Chief Academic Officer

Instructional Leadership Team
Melissa Dutra, Instructional Superintendent (Curriculum and Instruction)
Ed Gomes, Instructional Superintendent (Elementary Schools)
Misty Her, Instructional Superintendent (Elementary Schools)
Katie Russell, Instructional Superintendent (Secondary Schools)
Brian Wall, Instructional Superintendent (Secondary Schools)

Instructional Division Lead Team
Ambra Dorsey, Executive Director, Department of Prevention and Intervention
Sally Fowler, Executive Director, Career Technical Education
Maria Maldonado, Assistant Superintendent, English Learner Services
Deanna Mathies, Executive Director, Early Learning

Human Resources
Paul Idsvoog, Chief of Human Resources
Kim Collins, Human Resources Administrator

Fiscal Services
Karin Temple, Chief Operations Officer
Alex Belanger, Assistant Superintendent, Facilities
Kim Kelstrom, Executive Director, Fiscal Services
Santino Danisi, Executive Director, Categorical Programs
Reggie Ruben, Director of Transportation

Special Education Program Managers
Susan Kalpakoff, Program Manager III
Jeanne Butler, Program Manager III
Julie Wheelock, Program Manager III
Michael Fletcher, Program Manager III

Hospitality Team
Kimberley Rodrigues, Administrative Secretary II. Brian Beck, Assistant Superintendent
Marilyn Wood, Human Resources Employment Specialist, Special Education

Special Education Regional Instructional Managers
Kelli Flake (Bullard Region)
Janet Trosper (Bullard Region)
Improving Special Education Services in the FUSD

Roy Exum (Edison Region)
Angela Dryden (Edison Region)
Christie Gunter (Fresno HS Region)
Kim Kuphaldt (Fresno HS Region)
Sarah Scheidt (Hoover Region)
Nicole Evengelinos (Hoover Region)
Phil McIlhargey (McLane Region)
Deanna Hoffman (McLane Region)
Claudina Espudo (Roosevelt Region)
Cheryl Rudell (Roosevelt Region)
Robyn Scroggins (Sunnyside Region)
Lori Rolff (Sunnyside Region)

Special Education Teachers
Deidre Wyrick, Autism Teacher, Kirk Elementary
Dianna Ortega, Moderate/Severe Teacher, Adult Transition Program
Donna Hoffman, Individual Small Group Instruction, McLane High School
Julie Wong, Moderate/Severe Teacher, Fresno High School
Kerrie Matoba, Mild/Moderate Teacher, Ericson Elementary
Lauren Grippenstraw, Autism Teacher, Starr Elementary
Michelle Dau, Resource Specialist Teacher Centennial Elementary
Michelle Diebert, Resource Specialist Teacher, Phoenix Elementary
Patrick Morrison, Mild/Moderate Teacher, Bullard High School
Philip Krumpe, Mild/Moderate Teacher, Edison High School
Rhonda Runmerfield, Mild/Moderate Teacher, Anthony Elementary
Veronique Sigala, Mild/Moderate Teacher, Fort Miller School
Lark Atkin, Orthopedic Impaired Teacher, Special Education D
Molly Knuffke, Autism Teacher, Kirk Elementary

Parents/Community Members
Amada Karabian, Parent
Anne Levesque, Parent
Betty Caster, CAC Board Member & Parent
Cara Ford, Parent
Chrissy Kelly, Parent
Christina Torres, Parent
Devon Gass, CAC Board Member & Parent
Gina Fernandez, Central Valley Regional Center (CVRC)
Heather Flores, Central Valley Regional Center (CVRC)
Joe Barron, CAC Board Member & Parent
Kim Waldron, Parent
Michelle Smith, Parent
Sherry Bess, Parent
Simara Vonthongdy, Parent

Wednesday, February 14, 2018
Related Services Providers
Amanda Koole, Speech Language Pathologist
Cristen Hubell, Assistive Technology
Jennifer Silva, Deaf, Heard-of-Hearing Teacher
Job Melton, Therapist, Social Emotional Manager
Lark Atkin, Orthopedic Impaired Teacher
Natalie Turner, Occupational Therapist
Patricia Camarillo, Visually Impaired Teacher
Jessica Barrett, Nurse
Cynthia Garza, Nurse

Psychologists
Alissa Vasquez, School Psychologist
Ashley Trippel, School Psychologist
Deeds Gill, School Psychologist
Jay Wiebe, School Psychologist
Joe Zavala, School Psychologist
Julia Picher, School Psychologist
Kerry Hawkins, School Psychologist
Kong Vang, School Psychologist
Michelle DeLaTorre, School Psychologist
Nancy Lee, School Psychologist
Russell Raypon, School Psychologist
Sarah Belt, School Psychologist
Susan Wittrup, School Psychologist
Tim Conway, School Psychologist
Wayne Jones, School Psychologist

Special Education Staff
Alberto Landeros, Teacher on Special Assignment
Christine Mott, Medi-Cal Clerk
Dora Terrazas, Department Office Manager
Elizabeth Gutierrez Toledo, Special Education Office Assistant
Gail Williams, Director, Health Services
Katie DiViccaro, Analyst II
Kristen Miller, Department Office Manager
Mike Stegall, Specialist, Information Systems
Ryan Ruschhaupt, Teacher on Special Assignment
Shoushan Krikorian, Special Education Office Assistant
Teresita Villasenor, Translator (Spanish)
Valerie Simpson, Teacher on Special Assignment
Marissa Saldate, Autism Manager

Legal Compliance Team
Adrian Varanini, Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) Director
Jeanne Butler, Program Manager III
Diandra Netto, Legal Counsel

Paraeducators and Paraprofessionals
Dawn Riddlesprigger, Mild/Moderate Paraprofessional
Deandre Hill, Moderate/Severe Paraprofessional
Ioannis Vasilarios, Social Emotional Paraeducator
Kimberly Conley, Autism Paraeducator
Mark Cantor, Community Based Paraeducator
Patricia Carr, Community Based Paraeducator
Sally Echols, Mild/Moderate Paraprofessional
Shannon Lucio, Social Emotional Paraeducator
Sylvia Cruz, Moderate/Severe Paraprofessional
Tahira Edward, Community Based Paraeducator
Beverly Eastman, Autism Paraeducator
Chad Dinsmore, Autism Paraeducator

Labor Partners
Cyndy Caskey, Autism Teacher
Carl D’Souza, Speech Language Pathologist
Rhonda Garner, Resource Specialist Teacher
Teri Reichert, Nurse
Tamara Smith, Mild/Moderate Teacher
Xena Wickliffe, Speech Language Pathologist
Mattie Thomas, Retiree, CSEA Labor Partner
Lonzella Mason, Student Records Technician

Center-Based School Principals
Katrina Pleshe, Addicott Principal
Gina Boni, RATA Principal
Grace Settle, Fulton Principal

General Education Teachers
Amanda Peterson, Sunnyside High School
Blanca Ledesma, Lincoln Elementary
Brenda McLain, McCardle Elementary
Hortencia Munoz, Greenberg Elementary
Kristen Norton, Hoover High School
Sandra Espinoza, Wishon Elementary

Elementary Site Principals
Adele Stewart, Principal, Holland Elementary
Annarita Howell, Principal, Wishon Elementary
Antonio Sanchez, Principal, Gibson Elementary
Beth Buettner, Principal, Eaton Elementary
Bonifacio Sanchez, Principal, Williams Elementary
Joy Nunes, Principal, Anthony Elementary  
Laura Gemetti, Principal, Heaton Elementary  
Lynn Rocha-Salazar, Principal, Ayer Elementary  
Pam Taylor, Principal, Easterby Elementary  
Sandra Aguayo, Principal, Winchell Elementary  
Steve Zoller, Principal, Figarden Elementary  
Carla Manning, Principal, Kirk Elementary  
Jack Kelly, Phoenix Elementary  

Secondary Site Principals  
Carlos Castillo, Principal, Bullard High School  
Kimberly Villeschez, Principal Wawona Middle School  
Rebecca Wheeler, Principal, Hoover High School  
Jose Guzman, Principal, Ahwahnee Middle School  
Felicia Quarles-Treadwell, Principal, Gaston Middle School  
Nichole Horn, Principal, Yosemite Middle School  
Matt Ward, Principal, Sequoia Middle School  
Michael Allen, Principal, Roosevelt High School  
Mike Jones, Principal, Fort Miller Middle School  
Mark McAleenan, Principal, Phoenix Secondary
Appendix E. Strategic Support Team

The following were members of the Council’s Strategic Support Team on special education who conducted this project for the Sacramento Unified School District.

**Sue Gamm, Esq.**

Sue Gamm, Esq., is a special educator and attorney who has spent more than 40 years specializing in the study and understanding of evidence-based practices, policies, and procedures that support a systemic and effective education of students with disabilities and those with academic and social/emotional challenges. Ms. Gamm has blended her unique legal and special education programmatic expertise with her experiences as the chief specialized services officer for the Chicago Public Schools, attorney and division director for the Office for Civil Rights (US Department of Education) and special educator to become a highly regarded national expert as an author, consultant, presenter, and evaluator. Since her retirement from the Chicago Public Schools in 2003, has been engaged in 30 states and the District of Columbia with more than 50 school districts and five state educational agencies working to improve the instruction and support provided to students with disabilities. Twenty-one of these reviews were conducted through the auspices of the Council of the Great City Schools. Ms. Gamm has written standard operating procedure manuals for special education practices and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) for more than 10 school districts, and has shared her knowledge of the IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act and related issues at more than 70 national, state and local conferences. Ms. Gamm has authored/co-authored numerous periodicals and publications, including those focused on MTSS, disproportionality for special education, responding to OCR investigations, and assessment. She also testified before Congressional and Illinois legislative committees. Ms. Gamm has served as a consulting attorney on several of the Council’s *amicus* briefs focusing on special education that were submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court. Further, she consults with the Public Consulting Group and numerous school districts and state educational agencies and provides training at national, state, and local conferences on special education matters, particularly in special education disproportionality. Ms. Gamm has also been recognized for her legal expertise in special education through her engagement as an expert witness or consultant involving nine special education federal class action or systemic cases. She is admitted to practice before the Illinois Bar, the Federal Bar, and the U.S. Supreme Court Bar.

**Julie Wright Halbert, Esq.**

Julie Halbert has been legislative counsel for the Council of the Great City Schools for over 22 years. In that capacity, she has served as a national education legal and policy specialist, with emphasis on special education. She worked extensively on the reauthorizations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 and 2004. Ms. Halbert is responsible for drafting numerous technical provisions to the IDEA and providing technical assistance to Congress and the U. S. Department of Education. In 1997 and again in 2005, she testified before the U.S. Department of Education on its proposed regulations on IDEA 2004. Ms. Halbert has directed each of the Council’s special education strategic review teams, including special education reviews in the Anchorage, Austin, Boston, Chicago, Charleston, Cincinnati, Des Moines, District of Columbia, Guilford County (NC), Memphis, New York City, Richmond, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Providence and St. Louis. Working with national experts Sue Gamm and Judy Elliott, she has
published a Council national white paper on the implementation and development of MTSS, Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports for our nation’s urban school districts. Ms. Halbert most recently, January 2017, took the lead working with our cities in the development of the Council’s amicus brief to the Supreme Court of the United States in *Endrews v. Douglas County School District*, on determining the educational benefit standard due by our districts to students with disabilities when implementing their IEPS. This case is certain to be one of the most important cases since *Rowley* decided over thirty years ago. She was also the counsel of record for the Council of the Great City Schools’ *amicus* briefs in the Supreme Court of the United States in (a) Board of Education of the City School District of the City of New York v. Tom F., On Behalf of Gilbert F., A Minor Child (2007); (b) Jacob Winkelman, a Minor By and Through His Parents and Legal Guardians, Jeff and Sander Winkelman, et al., v. Parma City School District (2007); (c) Brian Schaffer v. Jerry Weast, Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools, et al., (2005); (d) Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District, and Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education (2007) and Forest Grove School District v. T.A, (2009). Ms. Halbert graduated with honors from the University of Maryland and the University of Miami School of Law. She is admitted to practice in the Federal Bar, the U.S. Supreme Court Bar, and the Florida and Pennsylvania Bars. Additionally, for the past year, together with Husch Blackwell partner John Borkowski, Ms. Halbert is assisting to develop and implement national legal webinars for urban district’s counsel and key staff on emerging legal issues for the Council’s districts. They include, Civil Rights Priorities at the End of One Administration and Beginning of Another, Hate Speech, Micro-aggressions and Student First Amendment Rights.

**Sowmya Kumar**

Sowmya Kumar was the assistant superintendent for special education in the Houston Independent School District from July 2010 to March 2017. Through comprehensive, and systemic planning based on data, Ms. Kumar focused on the district’s efforts on balancing compliance with improving outcomes for students with disabilities. She was an education specialist at Region 4 Education Service Center in Houston for 13 years before her tenure in Houston ISD. Prior to moving to Houston, she served as director of special services in New Jersey. Ms. Kumar has over 36 years of experience in special education. She has a BA in chemistry from Queens College, NY, and an MA in special education/supervision and administration from Columbia University, NY.

**Marco Tolj**

Marco Tolj currently serves as the Director of Strategic Planning and Data Management with the Division of Special Education, in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Throughout his 18-year career working for the second largest school district in the nation, he has held a variety of roles. He started his career in LAUSD as a campus aide and later worked as a special education teacher, Special Education Coordinator, Special Education Program Specialist and Assistant Principal, while simultaneously serving in a variety of adjunct roles working with students, staff and the community. Mr. Tolj has developed a strong understanding of how to provide leadership and direction in the form of school and district reform, particularly in the areas of instruction, student achievement, behavior and student discipline, attendance, promoting a positive school climate and the integration of students with disabilities. He has firsthand experience in successfully implementing new instructional initiatives, coordinating various programs, capably resolving
student discipline and safety issues, and effectively collaborating with outside agencies and other District offices.

As Administrative Coordinator, Local District Central, he had the privilege of leading a diverse group of exceptional individuals who support almost 12,000 students with disabilities (SWD). One of his main goals was to ensure that schools, students and families receive the most efficient, effective collaborative support possible. LAUSD’s Local District Central made great strides in accomplishing this task because he grounded his work around Fullan’s Right Drivers (Group Quality, Focus on Instruction, Systemness and Building Capacity) and Simon Sinek’s Golden Circle. He prides himself in adhering to his personal “Why”, which is “Connecting to Fulfill Dreams”. Marco Tolj has represented LAUSD at both the Special Education Local Plan Area Administrators (SELPA) of California and at the Greater Los Angeles Area SELPA (GLASS) meetings and has served as a Liaison with the LAUSD Office of Government Relations. Marco co-founded the ONE Conference in collaboration with California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA), the Charter College of Education (CCOE). The goal of this conference is to create an opportunity for schools to learn strategies, attain resources, and build a network of support to make the vision and outcome of integrating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment a reality. In 2016, Mr. Tolj was awarded the ACSA Region 16 Special Education Administrator of the Year award.
Appendix F. About the Council and History of Strategic Support Teams

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 70 of the nation’s largest urban public-school systems. The organization’s Board of Directors is composed of the superintendent, CEO, or chancellor of schools and one school board member from each member city. An executive committee of 24 individuals, equally divided in number between superintendents and school board members, provides regular oversight of the 501(c)(3) organization. The composition of the organization makes it the only independent national group representing the governing and administrative leadership of urban education and the only association whose sole purpose revolves around urban schooling.

The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public education and to assist its members in to improve and reform. The Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The group also convenes two major conferences each year; conducts studies of urban school conditions and trends; and operates ongoing networks of senior school district managers with responsibilities for areas such as federal programs, operations, finance, personnel, communications, instruction, research, and technology. Finally, the organization informs the nation’s policymakers, the media, and the public of the successes and challenges of schools in the nation’s Great Cities. Urban school leaders from across the country use the organization as a source of information and an umbrella for their joint activities and concerns.

The Council was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961 and has its headquarters in Washington, DC. Since the organization’s founding, geographic, ethnic, language, and cultural diversity has typified the Council’s membership and staff.

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133 Albuquerque, Anchorage, Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, Birmingham, Boston, Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), Buffalo, Caddo Parish (Shreveport), Charleston County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Buffalo, Clark County (Las Vegas), Cleveland, Columbus, Dallas, Dayton, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Duval County (Jacksonville), East Baton Rouge, Fort Worth, Fresno, Guilford County (Greensboro, N.C.), Hillsborough County (Tampa), Houston, Indianapolis, Jackson, Jefferson County (Louisville), Kansas City, Little Rock School District, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Memphis, Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Nashville, Newark, New Orleans, New York City, Norfolk, Sacramento, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Orange County (Orlando), Palm Beach County, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Portland, Providence, Richmond, Rochester, Sacramento, Salt Lake City, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, St. Louis, St. Paul, Toledo, Washington, D.C., and Wichita
# History of Strategic Support Teams of the Council of the Great City Schools

The following is a history of the Strategic Support Teams provided by the Council of the Great City Schools to its member urban school districts over the last 18 years.

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