



# SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION

Agenda Item 10.2

**Meeting Date:** May 15, 2018

**Subject:** Special Education Audit Update

- ☒ Information Item Only
- ☐ Approval on Consent Agenda
- ☐ Conference (for discussion only)
- ☐ Conference/First Reading (Action Anticipated: \_\_\_\_\_)
- ☐ Conference/Action
- ☐ Action
- ☐ Public Hearing

**Division:** Academic Office/Special Education Department

**Recommendation:** To provide an update on progress towards implementing the recommendations of the Council of Great City Schools' Special Education Audit from May, 2017.

**Background/Rationale:** The District engaged the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) to conduct an Audit of the Special Education services provided to students during the 2016-2017 school year. The CGCS presented its finding at a public Board Meeting in May, 2017. The report made ten broad recommendations for the district to consider for implementation. The purpose of this presentation is to provide a status report on the implementation activities that have taken place to date.

**Financial Considerations:** None

**LCAP Goal(s):** College and Career Readiness; Family and Community Empowerment

**Documents Attached:**

1. Executive Summary

**Estimated Time of Presentation:** 20 minutes

**Submitted by:** Iris Taylor, Chief Academic Officer

Becky Bryant, Director,

Special Education Department/SELPA

**Approved by:** Jorge A. Aguilar, Superintendent

# Board of Education Executive Summary

## Academic Office/Special Education Department:

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### I. Overview/History of Department or Program

The Sacramento City Unified School District provides a range of educational services for students with disabilities and is committed to serving students in a manner that is equitable, provides access to the general curriculum, meets students' unique needs, and eliminates opportunity gaps. Approximately 15% of the district's population are students with disabilities and within this group of students, 18% are White, 20% are African American, 41% are Hispanic, 8% list multiple ethnicities, 1% are Pacific Islander, 12% are Asian and less than 1% are Native American. Equally diverse is the range of disabilities served which includes the following educational classifications: Speech and Language Impaired, Specific Learning Disabilities, Other Health Impaired, Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, Emotional Disturbance, Visual Impairments, Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Orthopedic Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, Multiple Disability and Deaf-Blind.

The district provides a full continuum of services to serve students in the least restrictive environment. The services include programming for infants and toddlers, and services for students ages 3 - 21. The continuum of services includes speech and language therapy, push-in/pull-out or co-taught specialized academic instruction in the general education setting or a separate setting, special days classes, nonpublic schools or agencies, California Schools for the Deaf and Blind and related services (i.e., occupational therapy, adapted physical education, physical therapy, etc.).

To assess the special education services provided and to make improvements, the district engaged the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) to review its special education structure, staffing, practices and services. The report, released May 2, 2017, provided a comprehensive review and recommendations not only for the special education department specifically, but opportunities for improvement across the system. These recommendations were presented to the Board and staff presented an update in June 2017. This document outlines a further accounting of actions taken by the district during the 2017-2018 school year to improve the services provided to students with disabilities and their families.

### II. Driving Governance:

SCUSD's Equity, Access, and Social Justice Guiding Principle calls for all students to be given an equal opportunity to graduate with the greatest number of postsecondary choices from the widest array of options. Students with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable student groups when it comes to actualizing this guiding principle because of the diverse needs they have. To address these needs, a systemic approach is required that includes a supportive

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learning environment for students and families and well thought out instruction with accommodations for their unique learning needs.

Students eligible for special education services are protected by a comprehensive set of federal and state laws. These laws set the foundations for the provision of special education services by a Local Educational Agency (LEA). 34 CFR§ 300.101 states, "A free and appropriate public education must be available to all children residing in the State between the ages of 3 and 21, inclusive, including children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school." California is organized into Special Education Local Plan Areas to provide a full continuum of services to eligible students with special needs. SCUSD is a single district SELPA. In addition, SCUSD must actively and systematically seek out all students with special needs, from birth to 21 years of age (EC 56300 and EC 56301).

### III. Budget:

The budget that supports special education services is derived from multiple sources of federal, state and district funds. Realizing that the average cost to educate a student with an IEP is at least two times the cost of educating a student without special needs, the district contributes a significant amount of funds towards the delivery of services and transportation for the students. The 2017-2018 budget for special education is as follows:

2017-2018 Annual Budget Plan Revenue	
AB602 (State funds based on district's ADA)	\$ 22,092,007
IDEA (Federal Funds)	\$ 8,161,733
Special Education Transportation	\$ 3,265,457
Other grants, entitlements and general funds i.e., Educational Related Mental Health, Workability, Department of Rehabilitation (TPP), State and Federal Preschool, Alternative Dispute Resolution	\$ 72,486,412
Funds received to provide special education services	\$106,005,610

\*Note: students receiving special education services in special day classes generate ADA which is listed as part of the district's general fund contribution under LCFF

### IV. Goals, Objectives and Measures:

The goals of the special education department are to provide quality instructional and support services to students with special needs and their families so students graduate college, career, and life ready with an array of post-secondary options. To continuously improve upon the

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services provided, the department has developed indicators within the district's Performance and Targeted Action Index (PTAI) that will be used to assess and monitor progress. The progress and academic performance of students will be measured and monitored by analyzing annual indicators including performance on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) and the California Alternative Assessment (CAA).

Additional indicators to monitor progress on a more frequent basis have been developed. At the elementary, middle, and high school segments, five sub elements will be monitored specific to students receiving special education services. The elementary and middle school elements are: Grade Level On-Track Readiness, Grade Level Status Growth, IEP Goal Progress, Percent of Time in Least Restrictive Environment and ELL Red Zone Rate. At the high school segment, the sub elements are: Graduation Rate On-Track Status, Grade Level Status Growth, 5th Year Graduation Rate, A-G On-Track Status Grades 9-12, Percent of Time in Least Restrictive Environment.

These indicators, as well as additional related indicators will provide real time data for district and school site staff to monitor frequently and will inform instructional and organizational shifts needed to improve the outcomes for students with disabilities.

### V. Major Initiatives:

The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) review report includes ten key recommendations and provides related actions for the district to consider. Below we outline the recommendations and the actions that have been taken during the 2017-18 school year. The district has focused on some of the recommendations to a greater degree than others; however, some initial actions have been taken with each in this first year.

Recommendation 1: *Broad system-wide Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework and Plan for Implementation and Oversight Using information from CDEs website and other sources, develop and communicate a comprehensive written vision, framework, and action plan that supports MTSS*

Although highlighted in the district's Special Education Review, building a MTSS is a general education function and to be operational must be inclusive of every aspect of the district's work. Indeed, it becomes the way the district works. A critical first step in building an MTSS that is called for in the CGCS recommendations is developing and communicating a written vision that supports an MTSS. Under Superintendent Aguilar's leadership, SCUSD has begun aligning all of its work to a powerful vision of student achievement grounded in the Equity, Access, and Social Justice Guiding principle which calls for *All students to be given an equal opportunity to graduate with the greatest number of postsecondary choices from the widest array of options.*

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Accompanying this guiding principle is the district's Core Values statement which asserts that we understand that the system is inequitable by design and we vigilantly work to confront and interrupt inequities that exist to level the playing field and provide opportunities for everyone to learn, grow and reach their greatness. Building a common understanding of the SCUSD Equity, Access, and Social Justice Guiding Principle and Core Values statement has been a major component of the district's work to build a MTSS during the 2017-18 school year.

In 2016-17, the district assessed and mapped existing practices related to interventions and supports and data analysis practices (1c). The district's major work on MTSS in 2018-19 has centered around the CGCS report recommendation that as a component of the development of an MTSS, the district, *"establish an early warning system that highlights students on track for graduation. Ensure key performance indicators, across elementary, middle and high schools are established data collection systems, and analysis (e.g., custom reports) are designed to enable the superintendent, administrators, principals, teachers, and related-services personnel to review student growth, identify patterns, solve problems, and make informed decisions"* (1f).

The district has identified seven key performance indicators as follows:

- Elementary - Third Grade Readiness, English Learner Redesignation, and Middle School Readiness.
- Middle School - High School Readiness and English Learner Redesignation
- High School - Graduation, A-G requirements met, and English Learner Redesignation

The system also includes an early warning indicator which looks at a composite of information on suspension rates, chronic absenteeism, and academic performance. The data system is designed such that information on the performance of SWDs is easily available for each of these indicators including the degree of disproportionality amongst various demographic groups.

In addition, and as described previously staff have developed a set of indicators specifically for students with disabilities to better monitor key areas of performance for this student group. This includes a focus on monitoring time in the least restrictive environments, site-based special education referral rates, and progress towards IEP goals. This information will allow staff members to make programmatic and instructional decisions and to identify students in need of tiers of academic and social emotional supports.

The work of developing an MTSS has also focused on engaging site and central office leadership staff in professional learning focused on building their understanding and capacity to use a methodology of continuous improvement called Improvement Science (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015). The framework allows for site leaders to identify and address a problem of practice by first analyzing data, conducting a causal system analysis to determine the root cause of the problem, consulting with research and best practice to identify a change idea, and then engaging in rapid 60-90 cycles of implementation where data is again used to quickly assess if

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improvements are occurring. These cycles of improvement undergird a strong MTSS and professional learning and implementation will continue in 2018-19.

*Recommendation 2: Special Education Referral, Assessment and Eligibility - Improve consistency and appropriateness of referrals, assessments, and eligibility decisions.*

Based on feedback from interview participants during the audit, the CGCS recommended that the special education department's referral, assessment, and eligibility team's function be rethought. The department engaged with its labor partner and transitional activities were developed for the 2017-18 school year. This year all assessments for Emotional Disturbance (ED) remained a multi-disciplinary function but are now completed with the site School Psychologist instead of a dedicated team for ED. assessments. Data reveals that the district is qualifying the same percentage of students in this eligibility classification as it did with the teams, proving this was an effective move. It will be necessary to engage again in the same process to determine next steps for assessments for the eligibility for Autism to be implemented during the next school year. Currently staff are participating in professional learning on the best practices in autism assessment to ensure a highly qualified team is engaging in a standard set of assessment practices to assess eligibility.

To assess the effectiveness of these teams, the district will monitor the indicator developed for site-based special education referrals.

*Recommendation 3: Academic Achievement and Social Emotional Well Being for Students with IEPs - Review and address relevant data pertaining to Academic Achievement and Social/Emotional Well Being for Students with IEPs*

The development of indicators for academic achievement are outlined in detail in Recommendation 1. In addition, a related set of indicators for school culture and climate initiatives that support Inclusive Environments such as Social Emotional Learning, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports and Restorative Practice/Justice are being developed and will be discussed in a future Board meeting. These indicators will be used to assess the culture and climate of our schools as well as the progress of students who participate in schools where approaches to building school culture and climate are being implemented. The data will be used to both determine appropriate interventions and supports to students and to make programmatic adjustments to strengthen implementation.

*Recommendation 4: Interoffice Collaboration. With a representative group of principals, the AASs [Instructional Assistant Superintendents], the deputy superintendent, and the chief*

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*academic officer, discuss the optimum configuration for principals to communicate with each other and central office leadership. Follow up based on these discussions.*

The Department has implemented more specific meeting structures this year with central office staff in Curriculum and Instruction and Counseling Services in order to share important information and data. These meeting structures will be further formalized and expanded to include the regular analysis of the data related to referrals for special education assessment, rate of qualification, settings where services take place, yearly and benchmark achievement data, placement into more restrictive settings, suspensions and formal complaints/litigation.

Of note, there has been formal collaboration and work together between the Director of Counselors and the Special Education Department in order to address equity in designing master schedules for sites that provide for required class scheduling for students with IEPs early in the construction of the master schedule to ensure that adequate sections of classes are offered and teacher to student ratios are maintained.

Recommendation 5: Special Education and Support Services Organization. *Consider organization proposal to more effectively support students with disabilities as well as all students with respect to social/emotional learning and physical/mental health concerns.*

The district has reorganized its schools under the principal supervisors (now called Instructional Assistant Superintendents (IASs) into networks (largely based on feeder patterns) and they now report to the Chief Academic Officer. The special education department will be reorganized over the summer to align to the school assignments of the four IASs with four Special Education Supervisors and Special Education support staff aligned to them. This will continue to be housed under the Director. There has also been a greater amount of collaboration between Student Support Services and Special Education although the departments still report to two different people.

Recommendation 6: School-Based Special Education Personnel. *Ensure that personnel who support students with IEPs are employed in sufficient numbers and are available to meet student needs.*

This school year, classrooms serving students with IEPs were fully staffed at the beginning of the school year. This occurred by a concerted effort between the Human Resources Department, Teacher Development and Support and the Special Education Department to reinstate a dual credential internship partnership with CSUS, aggressive recruitment efforts and reaching out to teachers credentialed outside of the U.S. to staff our classrooms. As a result of a review of staffing ratios and tied to the new collective bargaining agreements, additional



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positions were added including 19.4 fte Language, Speech and Hearing Specialists, two fte School Psychologists, and one fte Program Specialist. were added this year.

Other additions specific to teachers serving students receiving special education services are class caps for all Special Day Classes, caseloads specific to Special Education Support Teachers, ratios for the compositions of general education classrooms so that there is not a disproportionate amount of students with IEPs assigned to any one class , and a caseload ratio for Language, Speech and Hearing Specialists that takes into account a maximum amount of school-age and preschool students on their caseload. To assess the effectiveness of our staffing practices, staff will develop a set of related indicators under the indicator focused on monitoring time in the least restrictive environment.

Recommendation 7: Compliance Support and Access to Information. *Consider actions to improve compliance and access to student special education records (e.g. procedure manual, SCUSD/SCTA Collective Bargaining Agreement, webpage, dispute resolution, special education records).*

The district is currently undergoing a Comprehensive Special Education Review by CDE. The district has received some preliminary findings within the last week and this week CDE completed its on-site implementation review at the sites. The Department looks forward to the written recommendations from CDE to use as a driver for its professional learning for teachers.

CDE was encouraged to learn that Appendix D in the Collective Bargaining Agreement was dissolved and it is now clear that the district requires teachers, including general education teachers, to attend IEP meetings as required by federal and state law.

In addition, the Policy and Procedures Manual for Special Education was reviewed. However, no material changes were made to the document pending the final recommendations of the CDE comprehensive review due to be received in June or July. Part of this recommendation was also to make enhancements to the district's webpage. Some enhancements were completed but further additions will be made during the summer that include more user-friendly resources for parents.

Finally, the Department has evaluated its procedure for accessing special education records and has provided additional training to staff that have responsibility for that function.

Recommendation 8: Fiscal Considerations. *Pursue activities to enhance revenue and shift more funds toward improving instruction at home schools, schools of choice, and SDCs. (Medicaid revenue, transportation, and long-term capacity building).*



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Data are being collected this year regarding the number of students being placed in more restrictive education settings and reasons why it is occurring. These data are needed in order to identify trends in what triggers a placement in another setting and identify the supports needed to prevent the trend in these placements which include Special Day Classes and Nonpublic Schools.

The district attempts to place classes in sites with multiple graded classes of the same type on the same site so that students do not have to move as frequently between grade levels, and to have the programs as close to the sites where students live as possible to reduce transportation. However, the recommendation for next school year is to open additional Special Day Classes to accommodate the new class limits in the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Analysis of site capacity is currently underway to determine where to place these classes.

To develop more inclusive settings, return students to their home schools, and thereby reduce transportation costs over time, the district will begin planning to shift some or all of the elementary Special Day Classes for student with learning disabilities to be included in a Learning Center model. This model allows students with disabilities to remain at their home school with more and additional support than resource support only. A year of planning will be needed to identify specific additional supports that will be needed at each site to accommodate the students' learning and social/emotional needs.

**Recommendation 9: Shared Accountability for Student Achievement.** *Consider actions that would strengthen the district's shared accountability for student achievement (e.g. state structure, Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA), Dashboard, Strategic Plan, Data, SCTA Collective Bargaining Agreement, Professional Learning, and Shared Accountability for Action)*

A key strategy for developing shared accountability has been the implementation of the new data system. Data on key indicators previously mentioned are now available in the district's new data system. Some indicators are updated at the end of each trimester (elementary) or quarter (high school). The system reports on the performance of students with disabilities on each indicator. Site administrators are able to analyze these data at the district and site level. Principals' meetings this year have been focused on engaging principals in analyses of their data to assess need, identify a problem, and analyze root causes of the problems which will result in the identification and implementation of change ideas to drive towards improvement in student outcomes. In the 2018-2019 school year, these indicators will be integrated into the planning process for the development of the site's Single Plan for Student Achievement or SPSA.

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Also fostering shared accountability and described in a previous recommendation is the current Collective Bargaining Agreement which dissolved the long-standing Appendix D provision. Language is now clear that teachers are required to attend IEP meetings as called for in federal and state law. Other additions to the Agreement are the caseload limits for each classroom serving students with IEPs and a class ratio for students with and without IEPs.

In addition, professional learning has been provided in a year-long series to all new teachers teaching special education. The professional learning focused on development of compliant IEPs, academic assessments, classroom management, writing goals and objectives and statewide testing. Continued professional learning will need to be delivered that accounts for the compliance issues that have been revealed as part of the CDE Comprehensive review. Professional learning is also being designed for teachers who are co-teaching on Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The new data system will allow the Department to support sites by designing professional learning for the sites that is specific to their needs and aligned to the areas of focus within the district.

Finally, in response to a need voiced from our sites, instructional materials specifically for students with moderate to severe needs was piloted and is expected to be adopted by the end of the year for full implementation in the 2017-2018 next school year.

**Recommendation 10:** *Internal Project Manager. Consider appointing an internal project manager reporting to the superintendent to support the execution of the district's plan and initiatives, including activities to follow up on the recommendations in this report. Have the project manager report on relevant data, the status of implementation, and barriers to execution that require interdepartmental collaboration, the superintendent's involvement, or the need for any adjustments to the plan.*

Superintendent Aguilar has repurposed a Cabinet level position to include a Chief of Improvement and Accountability (CIA). Although not specifically hired for the purposes outlined in the recommendation, there is great alignment of the job description and work of the office to the recommendation which makes bringing such a project under the portfolio of the CIA office a viable consideration.

## VI. Results:

Focusing on the Equity, Access and Social Justice Guiding Principle has provided for solid progress towards the development of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports and organizational and restructuring of certain positions in the central office as recommended in the CGCS' audit. In

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addition, the comprehensive reviews being completed by CDE are providing valuable information regarding disproportionality, IEP compliance, comprehensive assessments and delivering services in the least restrictive environment.

The district will continue to define indicators of success and will report these to the Board on an established cycle of updates that aligns with periods of data availability.

### VII. Lessons Learned/Next Steps:

The district will continue to draw on the recommendations in the CGCS report to make improvements to special education services as well as to other departments within the organization that impact these services. Lessons learned and next steps include:

- There is a need for greater communication and transparency about the initiatives and work under way to improve the system and their relationship to the CGCS recommendations
- There is a need for greater engagement of stakeholders, specifically families of students with disabilities, about the improvement initiatives that are underway
- Regular reporting on the progress and performance of students with disabilities is vital

#### Next Steps

- Continue to refine and develop local indicators that will allow stakeholders to know how well the district is serving students with disabilities
- Identify key points in the school year to report to the Board on the progress of students with disabilities on the key indicators that have been identified
- Develop indicators and a process for gathering data on stakeholder satisfaction with the services of the special education department
- Complete phase two of the department reorganization to include changes to the way staff are organized and deployed to serve students and families
- Construct a plan for the development and gradual implementation of Learning Support Centers to return students to their home schools
- Design a series of professional learning workshops for site leaders and principal supervisors and integrate into the district's professional learning offerings
- Collaborate on culture and climate initiatives on Social Emotional Learning, bullying prevention, and Restorative Practices.

#### Works Cited

Bryk, A., Gomez, L., Grunow, A., LeMahieu, P. (2015). Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.