

**Berkeley Unified School District**

**Special Education Study**

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**And**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Background**

Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) is a public school district located in Berkeley, California. Berkeley Unified operates an Early Childhood Program, eleven elementary schools (K-5), three middle schools, one high school and one alternative high school. Total enrollment in the district is approximately 9,109.

Recently the superintendent of Berkeley Unified School District initiated an effort to collect information on special education service delivery in all Berkeley schools. A special education study was conducted in May – June 2003 to assist in strategic planning for the district.

- Primary objectives of this effort:
- 1) Gather information from all school sites on current service delivery.
  - 2) Generate recommendations that could be utilized to strengthen internal organizational structures to support special education service delivery.
  - 3) Identify current areas of strength and areas for focused improvement.

### **Design of the Special Education Study**

Following the initiation of the special education study in Berkeley Unified School District, a six pronged approach was implemented to gather information. The six components were: 1) schools in Berkeley Unified were visited, observations were made, and all school site principals were interviewed; 2) special education teachers, specialists and parents were interviewed; 3) program specialists were interviewed; 4) the was interviewed; 5) special education student files were reviewed; and 6) there was a review of relevant documents.







- IV. - Greater inclusivity and the implementation of intensive, systematic instructional practices will require staff development at all levels. Leadership personnel and program supervisors will require opportunities for training, planning, and problem solving with each other (in zone teams) and with their staff. Special education teachers will require training in several areas listed in the report. General education teachers will require training in collaboration with special education teachers, differentiated instruction, and IEPs. Instructional assistants will require training in their new roles as "site and classroom-based" assistants, and in general instructional strategies, and collaboration.
- V. - Like all major initiatives, developing a more inclusive environment requires long-term and short-term planning. The necessary long-term planning will be accomplished through a strategic planning process.

## **Recommendation I: A Framework and Philosophy for District-wide Effective Supports in Inclusive Schools**

**Based on our review, the most important recommendation we can make toward the improvement of services for children and youth with disabilities is a serious shift in**

restrictive environment (Sailor, W. 2001).. In large part these struggles have stemmed from two primary problems: special education being thought of as a place, rather than a service and support; and, continuums of service being thought of as continuums of placements. This has resulted in student services being equated with “time” in special or general education rather than a clear description of specific supports and interventions which will remediate or compensate for learning challenges (see Halvorsen & Neary, 2000; Sailor et al, 2000 for review). While the intent of the law was to bring services and supports to children, in reality many children have had to leave general education classrooms for special education services.

**Providing comprehensive, effective special education services in the least restrictive environment is the goal of BUSD.** Special education as a field suffers from some adverse circumstances arising from an earlier period in its history when it was believed that separate service structures (from regular education) would produce the most positive educational outcomes for identified students. An artifact of that period has been that today many teachers, both general and special education, and even some families, perceive students with IEPs to be someone else’s responsibility other than the general education teacher’s. There is often a perception that many special education students should be served “elsewhere”. The traditional lexicon of special education tends to reinforce this perception, and works against systems change efforts to achieve educational integration for these students. As in many districts, this is a barrier in BUSD; but it is not insurmountable.

Currently, in BUSD, some students have been labeled "full inclusion" students, some students are "resource," and some are "special day class." These labels have confused service delivery and are indicative of an adult-driven system, instead of a child-centered or individualized model for services. **These labels, along with the lexicon of placement, must be thrown out** because they do not reflect effective services and only hold the district to an old structure.

We believe that the basic assumptions of the following framework reflect the best practices concerning education for students with disabilities. We are aware of no persuasive evidence, using scientific controls, for the efficacy of categorical placements in separate classes for students with disabilities. We are, however, aware of a preponderance of evidence from scientific investigations favoring highly integrated educational opportunities for students with disabilities (see Halvorsen & Sailor, 1990;



Hunt & Goetz, 1997; Hunt, et al. 1994; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Meyer, 2003; ---- for review). We are also aware of the large body of literature documenting effective instructional strategies, literacy interventions, math interventions, adaptations, modifications, positive behavioral support, and numerous other interventions, which can improve the educational and social outcomes for students with disabilities within inclusive settings. Some of these interventions require individual and small group instruction, some require whole-school change, some require instruction in settings other than the general classroom (see Rainforth & York, 1997; Snell & Brown, 2000; Sugai & Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2003; Wehmeyer, 2002 for review) .

We have chosen the phrase, \_\_\_\_\_, to capture the underlying assumptions of the approach we are recommending (see also Sailor, 2003). We recommend that the school district as a whole embrace and adopt the following framework.

**In an effective, inclusive school model the following assumptions exist**

- All children belong and all children are considered in every leadership, policy, and curricular decision. General education personnel are empowered to engage every student on an equal basis in their classrooms. Special education personnel are primarily focused on designing instructional interventions, teaching strategies, and supports instead of personally trying to arrange for mainstreaming or integration opportunities;
- All students are served at the schools they would attend if non-disabled (except in those situations where the low-incidence of their disability makes it difficult to have a qualified teacher at every possible site);
- All students are general education students although some may be additionally supported from IDEA (and/or other categorical) resources;
- As such, all students are members of a general education class;
- “Class” is a bigger concept than classroom. Students with IEPs may receive portions of their educational program in other integrated environments with some subset of their classmates when some of their educational objectives can be better met outside of the classroom;
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students, not just those with disabilities. Inclusion should be about how classrooms and schools can become more accommodating to all learners. Second, over time “inclusion” needs to transform into “school improvement,” because the recommended changes relate to improving general education classrooms, not just services to students with disabilities.

Time needs to be given to the definition and diagnosis of problems in order to create plans for action. It should be acknowledged that institutional values and organizational culture may, at times, converge in ways that contribute to inaccurate definitions of problems. By focusing on problems as unrealized organizational values, needs or opportunities, it may be possible to sort problems into categories which may be useful in problem solving situations as implementation begins.

### **A. Analysis of Current Service Delivery Structure and Organization**

**1. Central office organization.** As of this date there is a director of special education, and four program supervisors. The program supervisors have administrative duties that are divided by school sites, and in addition they carry district-wide responsibilities related to oversight of assessments, non-public school placements (NPSs), class assignments,

impact of this process is a much slower assessment timeline, and disconnected assessments. Because only certain RSP teachers are involved in the C.A.T., students are often assessed by special education teachers who are not located at their school site. Therefore, assessment is not always functional and not connected to the school site curriculum and services. Assessment reports begin to take on a "canned" script, as evidenced from our study of student files.

Many of the principals interviewed, expressed their desire to work closely with one psychologist and their teacher teams to ensure assessments that are timely and effective. While some psychologists and resource teachers support the current model, many of these professionals felt that the assessment process could be improved if it were site-based.

**Regardless of the structure, the current backlog of assessments is serious and out of compliance. It must be solved immediately** (see FICMAT Report – 3.21). By the end of the summer, the backlog should have been cleared and then new structures can be implemented.

**3. SST teams.** Some schools have made significant progress in their SST system over the past couple of years. Every principal discussed the SST process at their school. Some elementary schools are further along than others in terms of data collection, systematic evaluation of the supports, and ongoing problem solving. This is strongly connected with the need for data-based reading curriculum and overall accountability in the general education program. Principals and teachers identified the following needs to improve the SST process:

- an individual who is responsible for scheduling meetings, keeping data, etc. at each site;
- the need for more expertise on the SST team: specifically, at least one highly experienced and successful general education teacher should be on the team in addition to the student's current teacher who is struggling, the principal, the parent, and perhaps a resource teacher or psychologist.
- resources and ideas for how to share expertise within the building;
- how to provide supports when students don't qualify for special education;
- strategies for keeping data
- strategies for collaboration in the assessment process when a child is referred;
- ownership over the problems and the services.

**4. Location of service delivery and patterns of service delivery.** Currently, BUSD is divided into three school zones: north, central, and south. Families of regular education students have the opportunity to choose their child's elementary school within their zone

on whether the resource teacher is on site every day or has a paraprofessional who can provide the services. In many instances, when this approach has proven to be ineffective, the next step is to designate the student as "SDC" (Special Day Class). There are a few different reasons why this happens, but the predominant reason is usually behavior.

**Interviews with principals, special education and general education teachers, and parents, as well as folder reviews, evidenced that the most common reason a student gets shifted from resource support to a SDC placement was because of conduct.**

This can be avoided by training principals, teachers and staff in positive behavior support.

Another pattern that was surfaced for children with these labels, concerned children in 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grades. Files and interviews reflect that in these early grades concerns might be raised about a child being behind in reading and/or math. These concerns might come from a parent, a teacher, or family member. If the SST process proved ineffective at solving the problem, the student is then referred for an assessment. If the student does not qualify for special education, the school site, in many cases, has limited strategies for designing supports that could be different from those previously offered, to provide the intensive services the student needs to succeed. At this point, many parents conclude that they should seek outside evaluation and assessment in order to qualify their child for special services. Preventing this will take an active effort to bolster the SST process, working to surface substantive supports for students.

If the student does qualify for special education, it is typically under "specific learning disability," because of being significantly behind grade level in reading and/or math. The IEP team designates "resource support," often for two, three, or four times weekly for a certain number of minutes. The designation of RSP (resource student) seems to preclude the child from other literacy and math resources at some school sites but not others. At this point, the general education teachers assume that special education teaching staff are "handling" the problem. The student is typically pulled out of the classroom for several periods a week for "resource support." This "support" varies from school to school. If the resource support does not prove effective to bring the student's literacy or math up to grade level, sometimes IEP teams retain the student in the same grade for another year. Or, in some cases, at the next IEP the support time is just increased, designating more days or more minutes each day. The IEP does not reflect what changes in strategies will be used, or exactly what the student will be receiving in terms of special education support. After a couple of years of being behind in reading and/or math, often these children begin to show frustration and some begin to have conduct issues, which eventually become noted on the IEP. With a lack of resources in the district to problem

solve regarding support for these students, the IEP team begins to explore the possibility of designating the student as a "Non-SH SDC" student, or they may, in some cases, begin to seek the label of "emotionally disturbed," which brings further segregation. While this pattern is in itself disturbing, equally disturbing is the fact that the IEP teams seem to have no one to turn to in the district with more expertise, nor the direction to seek expertise from outside the district when BUSD faculty are not coming up with solutions. There is one individual from the Alameda County Office of Education that has provided support for challenging behavior, but no district or site level resource was identified. This can be remedied by harnessing expertise that can help problem solve tough cases.

**The majority of the students in the “non-SH SDC” classes are African-American males.**

Except for students in the communication disabilities SDC class at Cragmont, and the vision and hearing disabilities service programs, the majority of students placed in the "non-SH SDC classes" reflect the pattern described above. Some students have mild developmental disabilities, but there is no difference in how their instruction is provided. In fact, this population (students with mild cognitive/developmental disabilities) is rarely identified or discussed. A review of over 1,000 IEP goals and files completed by Anderson, E. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2003) showed several critical problems which the BUSD leadership should be aware of, including: 1) often language and literacy goals stayed the same year after year for these students; 2) goals were not changed even if they were not met; 3) the goals are primarily language and literacy based, suggesting that deficits in language are being used to identify students as SLD or mildly behaviorally disordered or mildly developmentally delayed. Our own review of files showed similar patterns.

Furthermore, when a student's team has followed the path just described, and there is no "non-SH SDC" class at the student's current school site, the student is transferred to another school where these classes are located, often times across zones. This pattern has created segregated classes of students with conduct disorders who are behind in reading and math located at Rosa Parks, Washington, and Malcolm X Elementary schools. This pattern continues through high school as evidenced in our file review.

Each of the three middle schools have "non-SH SDC" classes, and the high school has four teachers designated in this area. These students, along with many labeled "resource," receive tracked core content classes in English, history, science, biology, government, economics, politics and power, identity and ethnic studies, or social living. Some of



these students may be mainstreamed for one or two periods. The RSP and SDC teachers at the middle schools and high school are responsible for teaching the content standards for secondary coursework in several subject areas in which they may or may not have expertise. Classroom observations and a review of IEPs did not surface the delivery of an individualized instructional design for students in these classes.

The label of "emotionally disturbed" also makes it easier for the district to eventually recommend a non-public school placement (NPS) when the staff cannot find ways to support the student in the current system. From a fiscal standpoint, the use of NPS's is a huge financial drain (see Goldfinger, 2002). Avoiding these placements will require a change in philosophy and service delivery, as well as training and program development. While we acknowledge that there are some students with serious emotional disabilities, they are a low incidence. Creative, district-based supports and services can be developed for many students with mental health challenges.

Another pattern that has had a negative impact on the organization of services and the delivery of services in the least restrictive environment concerns students with more significant disabilities. Some students, but not all, have been labeled "full inclusion students" and, again, the definition of what that means varies. It seems that in BUSD "full inclusion students" are primarily students with moderate/severe disabilities. While BUSD has had some very strong teachers in the area of moderate/severe disabilities, the services are not consistent across elementary, middle, and high school. Historically, some students have been fortunate enough to have had a very strong teacher in the area of moderate/severe disabilities in elementary or middle school. These students have excellent IEPs and are supported to achieve their goals in general education classes and other environments on the school campus and in the community. Their services, however,

students that are "included" tend to be students whose parents have some access and power.

School site principals may or may not understand how to evaluate services for students with severe disabilities, and there are currently no program supervisors with expertise in moderate/severe or low-incidence disabilities (including autism). As a result, when a child with any of these disabilities presents challenges that the IEP team has difficulty solving (whether the child is "included" or not), there is no one identified within the current organizational structure to provide support and assistance. There are other special education teachers within the district, however, who could be utilized if the system was organized to facilitate this type of mentoring. There are also a number of experts in the Bay Area who could provide support, training, and consultation for students with severe

The current philosophy and service delivery structure separates caseloads for teachers by placement labels of "resource," "full inclusion," "non-SH SDC," and "SDC." Certain school sites have become magnets for certain types of services with segregated classes that have been created for particular categories. At most schools, teachers do not share students across categories and as a result some teachers go between two school sites to serve students in particular categories, making a full load, vs. serving a wider range of students at an individual site. Serving more than one school site is difficult unless there is full collaboration, training, and ownership on site for the delivery of services.

Special education teachers implementing "full inclusion" are not supported at each site by an overall district and school-site policy as evidenced by the varied categories of service delivery. This adds training and advocacy to their roles as teachers as they often have to help with systemic issues in order to provide the services designated on the IEP.

Teachers in SDC classes are quite isolated, as are their students. There is little support for these classrooms in terms of problem solving and strategies, despite the fact that the district has a high level of teacher expertise.

There is wide variation in terms of the ways in which special education teachers are included on teaching teams and other aspects of each school's curricular and instructional decision making. Just as all children in a school must be considered in all decision-making, all teachers, in their various roles, should be included. Teachers at Willard Middle School were taking important steps in the spring of 2003 to analyze their organizational structure and determine ways in which the special education staff could best serve the students. These types of efforts should be supported and evaluated.

Special education faculty at all levels, but especially at the middle, and high school levels are being asked to teach general education core content subjects that they may or may not be qualified to teach. Under the recent "No child Left Behind" federal legislation it is no longer legal to assign the teaching of core content courses to individuals not qualified to teach those exact courses. This is a serious problem, and in our view, a misuse of resources. It takes valuable time away from providing instructional supports,



education teachers, and D.I.S. staff that we spoke with, think this system must be changed. It is one of the issues that came up in every conversation, at every school site. Supervision of instructional assistants, evaluation, training, and assignment should be site-based with support from special education. Instructional assistants are not easily supervised. A serious problem exists in the ability to evaluate instructional assistants, and to terminate their contracts if their services are not satisfactory. In many instances instructional assistants have simply been moved from site to site vs. taking time to follow through and evaluate them and eventually terminate them if their work is unsatisfactory. **The needs of students are being compromised through this process.**

An additional problem has been created by differential pay related to individuals who help students with self-care and specialized health care. And, finally, the contracting of instructional assistants from outside agencies has created serious personnel issues. These individuals receive a different pay scale and are supervised by non-district personnel.

**One-to-one instructional assistants** Another artifact of the way in which "full inclusion" has been implemented, without school-wide support, is the over-assignment of one-to-one instructional assistants. BUSD has more one to one assistants than most districts in California. There are several reasons for this situation. Without school-wide training in inclusive schooling, students with moderate/severe disabilities (including multiple disabilities and autism) are often considered to be solely under the supervision of the special education support teacher and the assistants. Without general education and principal ownership of the special education service delivery for these students, the special education support teacher and, often the parents, feel dependent on a special education assistant to provide the support and instruction needed. When the student has a highly skilled special education teacher, the assistant is given specific instructional designs to follow and can often support more than one student and can assist in the general education classroom as well. However, in many instances students with moderate/severe disabilities are left with an instructional assistant who is the primary support person throughout the day. While parents may feel their child needs the one-to-one support, what they are often getting is less time from the special education teacher and less systematic instruction. Including students in general education should not preclude the student from getting systematic and direct instruction as needed, clear

2001). Often times one to one assistants prevent the development of peer relationships and the much-needed relationships with the general education staff. While some students with the most severe disabilities do need extra adult support on a regular basis, the adult support does not have to be provided by one single person who stays all day with the student. While individuals providing support need training and time to develop relationships with students, that can still happen in a school-based model. In addition, many supports can be provided by peers more creatively and inclusively.

Our perception is that many parents have requested one to one instructional assistants because they lack confidence in the special education teacher or the service delivery system, and fear that if they do not have that one to one person, their child may not

Special education early childhood services are offered 0-5 years. Infants and toddlers are served in various programs throughout the SELPA. Preschool children (age 2.9-5 years) are served either at Rosa Parks or Hopkins. At the Hopkins preschool there are five students served in "full inclusion" and nine students served in an SDC. At Rosa Parks there are five students in the "full inclusion" program within the general preschool classes, and seven students in the SDC class. It is unclear how some students are labeled "full inclusion" and others SDC. However, it is very clear that the students with the most significant disabilities are located at Rosa Parks in the SDC class, with a non-credentialed teacher.

Only one of the early childhood education special education teachers currently has a credential in special education. There are no goals or guiding frameworks for the early childhood education program. Currently, the person in charge of early childhood programs is not overseeing special education services. One of the program specialists has this role. The services in early childhood are somewhat disjointed, and not especially collaborative. There is no clearly stated vision of early childhood services, no parent training, and no clear plan for transition from preschool to kindergarten.

## **B. Recommended Service Delivery Structure and Organization**

### **New Service Delivery Structure and Organization**

Implementation of an inclusive philosophy of service delivery will require organizational shifts in service delivery practice. This section will present the organizational structure we recommend in keeping with the philosophical framework described in earlier in the report. This infrastructure will support the development of effective, inclusive schools. Bryk and Schneider (2002) in their book, *Trust in Schools*, provide the first evidence directly linking what they call "relational trust" to the long-term academic improvement of schools. They suggest that "relational trust" has four vital signs:

- **Respect**. How do we acknowledge each other in a courteous way? Do we talk and listen to each other? Bryk and Schneider found that respect was fundamental in building trust in schools.
- **Competence**. Can we believe in each other's ability to fulfill our responsibilities effectively? Bryk and Schneider point out that incompetence left unaddressed can corrode school wide trust.

- . Do we care about each other personally and professionally? Are we will to go beyond our formal roles to fulfill the job?
- . Is it possible to trust that we can put the interests of children first, especially when tough decisions have to be made? Do we keep our



Keeping students in the district would allow those monies to be reallocated to support students at school sites.

This process will require training and staff development.

- Rethinking traditional ways of conceptualizing funding for special education and regular education that usually frames each as separate: separate budgets, separate supplies, separate curriculum, separate rooms etc. In order to think more creatively around resources it will be necessary for school administrators to break out of that traditional paradigm.
- Reallocating resources has benefits to all students that can come from even the most mundane administrative decision.
- An awareness of unspoken messages that actions and decisions relative to resources can send.

School site principals have to take ownership of special education at their sites. The principal's ownership and participation in improving services will be, perhaps, the most critical factor in implementing successful inclusion.

**Focus on leadership.** Leadership is at the heart of successfully including all students in the life, culture and community of any of the schools in Berkeley Unified. Some of the attributes needed for effective leadership are:

- Driven by sound knowledge, principles and a belief system focused on inclusion
- Guided by a shared district vision
- Committed to empowering others through the management of human, material and fiscal resources
- Dedicated to leading by example

We cannot over emphasize the importance of working to harness expertise in the implementation of this plan. Individuals with particular areas of expertise need to be identified within and outside the district. Areas to consider in organizing such access to expertise would be positive behavioral support, learning disabilities and moderate/severe disabilities.

**d. Reading and literacy leadership team.** We recommend the development of a strong reading and literacy leadership team to work with the director of curriculum and instruction and the director of special education. Our recommendations are meant to **add** to the work already being done in the district, not duplicate it. There are already some excellent reading resources in the district and many schools have implemented concerted

efforts in reading and literacy. The purpose of this team is not to replace or create. The literacy team should include both general and special educators, and the purpose would be to make district-wide decisions which would develop and enhance the early literacy programs and the reading programs for children in the upper elementary grades, middle and high school, and create consistency and accountability. There are several highly trained individuals in the district who could serve on this leadership team.

Fostering a climate of open discussion around reading matters. The literacy team needs to “put reading on the table” as a topic for discussion and certain basic skills have to be central to instructional practice at all sites. These discussions will not be program driven, instead, a focus on what children need to know and what teachers need to know to teach

**e. Special education task force.** The current task force should continue, but with a structure, agendas, and clear roles for people involved. Consistent attendance will improve with more organized meetings. The task force should:

- Meet at least twice each semester
- In collaboration with the expert advisory council, oversee the quality management for special education
- Provide input to the director of special education
- Participate in planning parent training
- Assist in staff development planning

**f. Create an expert advisory council.**

challenging students, staff development ideas, and assistance with collaborative problem solving.

Suggested participants from within the district:

- Superintendent, director of special education, program specialists
- A teacher with moderate/severe disabilities training, a resource teacher, two principals, an occupational therapist, an adaptive physical education person, speech therapist, an instructional assistant

Suggestions for advisory group members from outside the district are included in Appendix B.

**g. Parent advisory group.** The parent advisory group would expand the current BSPED parent group to include a wider range of parents of children with special needs. We





**Student Study Teams.** The Student Study Team should be regarded as a process of regular education. Schools should establish clear methods of referring students to the team. The team should consist of an administrator, the classroom teacher, an experienced classroom teacher, a resource or special day class teacher, the child's parent and any other individuals who could help in generating ideas to assist in creating an intervention plan leading to student success.

Steps in the problem solving process need to be broken down: 1) a teacher, parent or any person expresses concern about a child's achievement or behavior; 2) information is gathered; 3) an SST meeting is held and problems are identified by the team; 4) intervention strategies are surfaced; 5) individuals who can assist in implementing the interventions are identified; 6) a specific plan of action is designed; and 7) progress is

assessments and gathering more information about children from their school sites. Assessments will become more functional and psychologists and resource teachers will be working closely with the same children they assess. School site administrators will have a closer working relationship with the psychologists. Some resource teachers may not have the skills to test children next year. In such cases, accommodations within the



- School site principals should return voice mail messages and e-mail the same day received. Clear procedures need to be set in place to hold individuals accountable.
- Schools should have clear procedures in place demonstrating how communications are sent to parents.
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While expertise exists in the district, data-based implementation varies from site to site. This is an area that all principals have been working on, and providing support and consistency across sites will only increase the effectiveness.

Special education teachers and general education teachers need the opportunity to receive training in strategies for that smaller group of children who still struggle to read despite the best efforts of an effective reading program. Allocating resource teacher and special education teacher time to provide intensive instruction for these students is critical. Staff development for resource teachers and special education teachers is recommended across age levels.

There are outside resources that could serve on the reading team to help with decision-making and suggestions for staff development.

**Elementary school special education service delivery.** Following the structural model above, best practices indicate that all students are assigned to the schools they would attend if they were non-disabled, within their zone. Similarly, as students are referred and identified for special education services, they stay at their current school site. The exceptions to this are students who need a linguistic community of sign language and/or

Children with specific learning disabilities, or mild cognitive disabilities who need extra support in reading, writing, and/or math should receive early and intensive individualized instruction that is data-based. Ongoing data should be reviewed regularly and if progress is not being made changes in instructional strategies should be problem solved. This individualized instruction can take place in the general education classroom, in small groups, or individually, but should occur during the student's regular reading time and should be closely coordinated with the general education classroom teacher's program. In combination with the literacy recommendations above, this will occur more easily when the school has a clear and definite structure for data-based reading.

Class wide and individual behavioral support plans should be implemented as described above and in Appendix B. Students should be supported by their special education teachers to develop successful strategies for learning with adaptations within the general education curriculum. They should be assisted to understand their learning strategies and assisted to understand their expectations within the curriculum if the outcomes have been modified. Teachers will need training in the determination of outcomes for students with cognitive disabilities. Teams have the following choices within the general curriculum. For each subject area:

- Some students will be expected to understand and accomplish the same expectations as all the other students;
- Some students will be expected to understand the content at the same level as the other students but need adaptations for \_\_\_\_\_ or adaptations for the way they \_\_\_\_\_ t the information;
- Some students may need the outcomes modified -- this means that the team has decided that the desired outcome for the student's cognitive understanding of the content is different than average grade level work and it must be specified on the IEP as well as clearly delineated for the student, parent, and teacher.
- Some students may be learning related goals within the general education curricular activities but not within the K-5 standards.
- Some students may need alternative integrated activities for certain periods of the day.

Children with developmental and/or multiple disabilities, including severe cognitive disabilities and autism, require teachers with training and expertise that is covered in the California moderate/severe disabilities credential. However, individual teachers may need additional training depending on the teacher preparation program they went through, the needs of individual children they serve, or when they received their credential. Because

new information is developed in the field every year, teachers need the opportunity to update their skills. There is a huge research data-base on the successful inclusion of students with severe disabilities in general education classes. Children with these labels should also be included in our general education classrooms. BUSD already successfully

In addition, at the middle school level, an understanding of how to design adaptations and modifications within the general education curriculum, which has become more content specific, is crucial. Teams need training and time to determine the most effective use of school time for students with disabilities. Special education staff need to be providing as much direct and intensive instruction as possible. Special education staff also need to specifically determine the outcome levels for core subjects other than reading and math, determine adaptations for input and output, and grading. Special education staff should not be teaching core subject areas that they are not prepared to teach. Instead their time should be spent remediating reading and math, and supporting students within the general education curriculum. Student schedules should be designed according to their needs for intensive instruction and the IEP team will need to problem solve the most effective schedule.

Students with moderate and severe disabilities need the same clear and definite instructional plans defined above. Depending on their family's input and the IEP team, their schedule might be adjusted to enroll in courses that are most useful to the success of IEP goals, not always following the typical middle school schedule.

**High school service delivery.** The high school special education program needs the most staff development, redesign and restructuring. The principal, in conjunction with the director of special education, outside consultants, and the superintendent need to work through the needed changes that will be system-wide.

First, an inclusive school philosophy and structure must be developed. Currently, the special education program runs like a school within a school. Students with disabilities at the high school and the special education staff need to be pulled back into the mainstream of all aspects of high school life. Decision making at all levels must include students with special needs. As the high school moves forward with other whole school reform efforts (for example, the "small schools" initiative), students with disabilities must be included. Whether it is textbook decisions, building and room decisions, or more substantive curricular decisions, students with disabilities must be included and considered.

In an effective, inclusive school model, all high school students with special needs have  
(Demchak & Greenfield, 2000; Holburn & Viest, 2002)

which engage the student and the family in determining desired outcomes for after high school. This is more than just diplomas or the "desire" to go to college; this planning is serious, intensive, and engaged with clear-cut goals and action plans for how they will be achieved.

Serious consideration should be given to the coursework at the high school. Many students labeled "resource" or "non-SH SDC" are receiving tracked off courses across all subject areas. **This practice of segregation has to cease. The separateness that students have experienced has been detrimental to their educational experience. Students with disabilities must be included in the same content courses as their nondisabled peers with adaptations and instructional supports designed by the special education teacher. This will require general education teachers to understand how to differentiate instruction and it will require new skills on the part of the special education teachers. Students who are behind in literacy and math should receive intensive direct instruction in reading, writing, and math as**



building.

It must be stated that the current status (June, 2003) of the services to students with severe disabilities at both Longfellow and the high school need immediate attention In

## **Recommendation IV: Staff Development**

In order to build capacity within the organization it is recommended that that effort be focused on staff development and training (see FICMAT Report – 3.22). A district staff development committee could be formed to help identify individuals working within the district with expertise that might be available to give training or provide help or resources in specific types of situations. School sites should also be encouraged to prioritize their training needs. Further, a strategic plan for staff development should be developed to guide training decisions over the next few years.

Staff development should be addressed at every level of organizational functioning. We want to discourage the district from taking the single workshop approach. Most of the training implied in the recommendations in this report would require a commitment of time, energy and resources.

While much training is needed, the investment will be cost effective for the district. Training could result in fewer non-public school placements, fewer law suits, less money spent on outside consultation, and less need for one to one instructional assistants. The staff development plan should be developed with clear outcomes and an action plan for implementation. School site administrators should be involved in developing the staff development plan along with district leaders as part of the strategic planning process. The training of special education staff needs to be planned and implemented in

**Goal #1: Develop a philosophy in the district for effective, inclusive service delivery, problem solving, responsive leadership, and accountable practice.**

Activities	Year 01	Year 02	Year 03	Year 04	Year 05
1. Provide training and problem solving sessions for the leadership cabinet, all school site leaders, and program specialists to understand and "buy in" to the new philosophy of service delivery.	X				
2. Create a leadership team to work with the superintendent and the director of special education to develop the strategic plan for restructuring and staff development	X				
3. Provide parent training on the redesign plan	X				
4. Monitor the strategic plan and its implementation over time		X	X	X	X
5. Send school site teams to training in June '04 on developing inclusive schools (CSU-Hayward), or provide the same training just for BUSD with a team from each site. (teams include principal, special ed teachers, a few general education teachers, parents, etc.)	X				

**Goal #2: Redesign structure of special education service delivery**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Year 01</b>	<b>Year 02</b>	<b>Year 03</b>	<b>Year 04</b>	<b>Year 05</b>
<b>1.Harness district and out of district expertise in specific areas</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>2. SSTs</b>					
- mandatory training and planning activities with all principals to agree on consistent practices across sites, resources, and implementation, data-based in place	X				
- ongoing implementation and data collection, regular review	X	X	X	X	X
<b>3. Site-based assessments</b>					
- plan for the move to site-based assessment	X				
- implement		X			
<b>4. Inclusive service delivery structure</b>					
- strategic planning for school sites to "take back" students within their zone, planning for re-allocation of human resources	X	X	X	X	X
- focused training for special education teachers as determined by program needs and school sites	X	X	X	X	X
- focused training for general education teachers as determined by program needs and school sites	X	X	X	X	X
- training and information for families	X	X	X	X	X
- implement new structure in 04/05		X	X	X	X



## **Epilogue**

A report can never capture all that is happening, and like any good story there is more to tell. The district is a dynamic organization and change has no doubt occurred during and following the interviews and observations we conducted in May and June of 2003.

Through conversations with district personnel and the influence such conversations can carry, change has begun in BUSD since we began this effort in April 2003. A Director of Special Education has been appointed. The district has begun conversations with Mental Health to secure more services at school sites to support students with behavioral challenges, and a staff development plan for special educators has been developed.

Although there is much to do, there are already signs of positive change as BUSD moves forward.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Articles on Individual and School-Wide Positive Behavioral Support**

