



Council of the Great City Schools Summary of Recommendations | May 2019

Mission

The mission of the Special Education Department is to provide early intervention and appropriate pre-kindergarten thru 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

The vision of the Special Education Department is that ALL students with special needs will receive high quality instruction with the greatest number of inclusionary opportunities from the widest array of options.

Strategic Plan Development

The Special Education Strategic Plan was designed as a structured outline of the key service priorities that must be in place to ensure that all students with disabilities have the highest quality support, resources and access to district academic and behavioral programs in the least restrictive environment, placing emphasis on maximizing opportunities to learn with general education peers. The Strategic Plan was developed based on recommendations from the Council of the Great City Schools. The Council of the Great City Schools reviewed state and local data and interviewed representatives from all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, support staff, administrators, nurses, and district leaders.

Strategic Plan Drivers

1. *Multi-Tiered System of Supports*
2. *Demographic and Outcome Data*
3. *Instruction and Supports*
4. *Organizational Supports*
5. *Compliance and Accountability*

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)

- *Implement MTSS plan with urgency and fidelity*

System-Wide MTSS Framework

1. Expedite completion of district's draft of MTSS framework and supporting documents. Post finalized documents on district website.
2. Develop board policy on MTSS



District, Regional, and School Leadership Teams

1. Review MTSS leadership teams at the district, regional, and school levels, with respect to composition, purpose, and effectiveness.



Differentiated Professional Learning

1. Provide differentiated professional learning consistent with the MTSS framework, implementation plan and expectations, targeted on each critical audience (district leaders, site leaders, teachers, paraprofessionals, nurses and parents) to ensure common language and understanding of MTSS.

Implementation Plan

1. Conduct a review and possibly revise district-wide planning documents and each department's current documents to ensure their alignment with the MTSS framework and MTSS 5-year implementation plan.
2. Embed the following components into MTSS implementation:
 - ◆ Guidance that includes Universal Design for Learning, focus on literacy, scaffolding, tiered interventions, English Learner students, Health Sciences, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports
 - ◆ School walkthroughs to identify trends, strengths, and action items
 - ◆ Assistance to sites
 - ◆ Identification of exemplary implementation models
 - ◆ Interactive website to share MTSS implementation progress

Data Analysis and Reports

1. Work with Equity and Access staff to incorporate data collection reports with indicators that would be useful to determining schools use of MTSS practices and the relationship to student achievement.



Monitoring and Accountability

1. Develop common tools for assessing MTSS implementation at school sites (potentially Self-Assessment of MTSS implementation (SAM)) to include self-monitoring data checks, timely communication and feedback.

Demographic and Outcome Data

- *Improve consistency of eligibility decisions*
- *Address disproportionality in student achievement*

- *Address equity of educational settings and placements*

Data Review

1. Utilize a multi-disciplinary team to review and analyze special education disability rate data by region, by sites and by student sub groups.



Differentiated Professional Learning

1. In collaboration with other departments, plan and provide all relevant district stakeholders with the professional learning they need to strengthen their knowledge of appropriateness of referrals, assessments, and eligibility decisions in special education.

Implementation Plan

1. Based on multi-disciplinary team analysis, possibly modify the MTSS implementation plan to include activities designed to address disproportionality, cultural awareness and other identified issues.



Data Analysis and Reports

1. Develop user friendly summary reports incorporating relevant special education data for district leadership, and include in regular reporting cycles.

Achievement Data for Students with Disabilities

1. With a multi-disciplinary team, analyze the following special education achievement data with the intent of informing steps to improve inclusive, high quality instruction for students with disabilities:
 - ◆ Early childhood outcomes
 - ◆ Reading and math scores
 - ◆ Participation in statewide assessments
 - ◆ Chronic absences
 - ◆ Suspension/expulsion rates
 - ◆ Graduation/dropout rates
 - ◆ Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals/objectives progress

Written Expectations

1. For areas identified by multi-disciplinary team as problematic areas, review and revise district guidance on first instruction, interventions, and progress monitoring; and modify process for providing student assistance prior to special education referrals leading to assessments and eligibility.

Monitoring and Accountability

1. Review data with schools to increase awareness of referral, assessment and eligibility data so that sites are better prepared for follow-up action.

Educational Setting Demographics

1. With a multi-disciplinary team, analyze the following special educational setting data with the intent of informing steps to improve inclusive, high quality instruction for students with disabilities:
 - ◆ Young children 3 to 5 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 the state and national averages and state Strategy Program Planning targets.
 - ◆ Disproportionate enrollment of students with disabilities by region and schools; and placement of Special Day Classes (SDC) across the district and regions
 - ◆ Effectiveness of co-teaching

- Increase access to inclusive high quality instruction
- Support assistive technology and alternative communication
- Build upon secondary transition programs
- Improve parent support, communication and engagement

Inclusive Education Vision

1. Establish school board policy to state a bold inclusive mission, vision, values and definition for inclusive practices built around a MTSS framework.

Data Analysis and Reports

1. Work with Equity and Access to include Least Restrictive Environment site specific data on the District Data Dashboard.
2. Work with Equity and Access to identify disparities using risk ratios to better understand how different groups inclusionary options are affected by district practices.



Implementation Plan

1. Utilize a multi-disciplinary team to develop a multi-year action plan that includes expectations, professional learning, data analysis and accountability for inclusive education nested within MTSS.
2. In alignment with the district implementation plan, have school sites utilize existing MTSS teaming structures to do the following:
 - ◆ Conduct an Inclusive School Self-Assessment of current inclusionary practices at each site
 - ◆ Based on the assessment, develop a site-based inclusionary practices plan that includes both instructional (classroom) and non-instructional opportunities (recess, lunch, field trips, performances, etc.)
 - ◆ Conduct annual assessments for fidelity of implementation and opportunities for improvement

Differentiated Professional Learning and Parent Training

1. Develop professional learning using high quality professional learning (HQPL) guidelines for administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals in the area of MTSS and inclusive practices.
2. Expand courses of interest in the area of inclusive practices to parents of Students with Disabilities through Parent University structures.
3. Improve on collaborative work between Early Learning and Special Education in the area of inclusive preschools, early learning options for students with disabilities and special education services provided in the general education environment.
4. Utilize the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles as a foundational component of all lessons and within all learning environments.



Monitoring and Accountability

1. Expect all principals to be responsible for overseeing special education at their sites and expect that instructional superintendents will hold principals accountable for this responsibility.
 - ◆ Data checks
 - ◆ Walkthroughs
 - ◆ Timely communication and feedback



Written Expectations

1. Provide guidance to sites on the implementation of practices designed to promote student achievement and positive behavior.
- 2: Develop and articulate expectations for principals in promoting inclusive practices for:
 - ◆ Educating Students with Disabilities in general education classes with appropriate supports
 - ◆ Providing students in SDCs the majority of their day with supports needed to participate in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
 - ◆ Person first language (Emphasize person, not disability)
 - ◆ Hosting meetings with parents of students with disabilities at the site
 - ◆ Creating and implementing Ability Awareness programs at each school site to recognize and celebrate the individuality and strengths of all students
 - ◆ All non-academic and extracurricular activities being made available and are inclusive of all students with disabilities (award assemblies, sixth grade camp, Grad Night, etc.)
3. All master schedules give priority to student needs as documented on the individualized education program (IEP) to ensure access to core general education classes.
4. Include students with IEPs on general education classroom rosters, to the maximum extent possible.
5. Reverse inclusion of grade like peers addressed at specialty school sites.
6. Set expectations for general and special educators to collaboratively address teaching and learning of students with disabilities within the Accountable Community structures.
7. Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT) and Climate Culture Teams (CCT) will regularly address inclusionary practices at scheduled meetings.

District-Wide Assistive Technology and Augmentative and Alternative Communication

1. Annually evaluate the Assistive Technology (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. Based on the evaluation establish:
 - ◆ Annual goals
 - ◆ Need for additional staffing, equipment, and other resources
 - ◆ Need for professional learning/ training opportunities

Secondary Transition Activities and Service

1. Build upon the district's many secondary transition programs to improve supports for transition, planning activities, and broader awareness for students with disabilities.

District-Wide Parent Advisories

1. Review all district advisory groups that include parents (e.g., District Advisory Committee or Parent University Leadership Academy) and assess how well they include parents of students receiving special education and share the information with Community Advisory Committee.
 - ◆ Recruit parents of students with disabilities to participate in district advisory committees
 - ◆ Provide additional activities to support parent involvement

Community Advisory Committee Participation (CAC)

1. Increase Parent Awareness of CAC meetings and activities.
 - ◆ Use district communication to promote CAC
 - ◆ Ensure notices are posted at all school sites
 - ◆ Develop CAC brochure

Additional activities to support parent involvement

1. Ensure the following:
 - ◆ IEP Team meetings include parent voice
 - ◆ IEP and other documents translated in a timely manner
 - ◆ Parents are encouraged to participate in site parent/teacher organizations
 - ◆ Students with disabilities are included in all mentoring programs
 - ◆ Annually, update and distribute Parent Handbook to all parents of students with disabilities

Organizational Supports

- *Maximize interdepartmental collaboration*
- *Organize Special Education Department to support mission and vision*
- *Ensure sufficient special education staffing to support student needs*
- *Improve school based administration of special education*

Interdepartmental Decision Making

1. *Maximize interdepartmental collaboration in order to leverage collective communication.*

Interdepartmental Communication

1. *Leverage the expertise and knowledge of Special Education Department leaders to build capacity and maximize effectiveness inside and outside the department.*

Address Vacant Positions

1. *Have human resources and special education personnel review current and recurring staff vacancies particularly among para educators and speech/language pathologists and design strategies that can increase the applicant pool and quality of hires.*

Principal Leadership

1. *Communicate the expectation that every principal will lead and administer the operation of special education in their school, including providing oversight for para educator practices.*
2. *Survey principals to determine the professional learning needs. (e.g. eligibility, individual student needs, etc.)*
3. *Provide ongoing and differentiated professional learning based on survey data.*

Organizational Alignment and Coherence

1. *To the maximum extent possible, align all central office department personnel to groups of schools.*
 - ◆ Principals and Regional Instructional Managers (RIM) will meet regularly to address relevant data, trends, and Instructional Practice Guide (IPG) data.

Organizational Expectations

1. *Clearly outline department expectations in the following areas:*
 - ◆ Expertise
 - ◆ Defined roles
 - ◆ Program improvement
 - ◆ Addressing parent concerns
 - ◆ Feedback loops
 - ◆ Communication

Case Management

1. *Support case managers with respect to compliant and timely Individualized Education Programs by:*
 - ◆ Communicating the expectation for required participants
 - ◆ Requiring annual site IEP meeting calendars
 - ◆ Communicating the ability for sites to provide substitutes for teacher coverage
 - ◆ Communicating parameters for teachers in IEPs that go beyond the work day
 - ◆ Communicating that IEP decisions are based on data and documentation utilized in IEP meetings

Positions Reporting to the Assistant Superintendent

1. *Organize the following special education positions to better support the department's vision, mission, commitments and assistance to schools.*
 - ◆ Special Education Local Plan Area Director
 - ◆ Health Services Director
 - ◆ Six Program Managers
 - ◆ Principals of Special Schools
 - ◆ Regional Instructional Managers
 - ◆ School Psychologists

Student Personnel Ratios

1. *Based on student need and annual student projections, employ special education, health and related services personnel in sufficient numbers to carry out their expected responsibilities.*

Fill Para Educators Positions

1. *In coordination with human resources and California School Employees Association (CSEA) conduct a study of para educator vacancies, review the transfer and hiring process and potentially adjust rules and procedures.*
2. *To assist with retention of para educators, district will provide appropriate training that includes, behavior, cultural awareness along with curriculum and instruction.*

Excessive Caseloads

1. *Review caseloads of Teachers and Designated Instructional Services (DIS) staff on a monthly basis to determine any adjustments that should be made in order to maintain caseload guidelines.*

Compliance and Accountability

- *Improve compliance practices and enhance revenue*

- *Monitor data for substantial progress and results*

Develop a consistent and transparent system to address and monitor parent complaints, mediation, Individualized Education Program (IEP) compliance and outside evaluation with timely feedback

1. *Establish expectations and develop a process for responding to parents within 24-48 hours, electronically logging informal complaints, analyzing concerns, identifying common themes to develop more systemic strategies for resolution.*
2. *Develop a five-year master plan for transporting students with disabilities in order to address excessive delays to and from school to ensure transportation is not a barrier to participation in co-curricular activities.*
3. *Improve upon existing Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) protocol and procedures along with professional learning.*
4. *Improve special education webpage; enhance it with links to resources.*
5. *Develop a plan on IEP documentation and electronic storage.*



Increase Medi-Cal reimbursements and address current service tracking issues

1. *Research other vendors with Medi-Cal service tracking modules and conduct a cost-effective analysis*
2. *Provide more training on the district's current system to increase staff efficiency in meeting the reporting expectation*

Accountability-planning and improving processes

1. *Review and possibly revise the various special education reports available to all instructional superintendents, principals and ensure that reports are readily accessible.*



Monitoring and Accountability

1. *Review all district plans for improving teaching and learning and merge them into one comprehensive plan, annotating it with links to more specialized information as well as ensure all plans are aligned, use common language and promote a common understanding of related elements; additionally ensure all plans are sufficiently inclusive of students with disabilities.*
2. *Annually, review and revise Special Education Department goals based on data.*





On behalf of the Fresno Unified School District, I would like to extend our most sincere gratitude to all the representatives that participated in the Council of the Great City Schools visit. Your efforts have set the stage for our district to revitalize services and supports for all students with disabilities.

Brian Beck
-Assistant Superintendent

Council of the Great City Schools Review

A representative group composed of parents, teachers, support staff, administrators and district leaders provided information to the Council on recommendations to be considered for the Special Education Strategic Plan.

Parent/Community Members:

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