

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Special Education Strategic Planning

“Define the DISTRICT and SITE ROLES of special education support to ensure ownership for all Special Education students while providing the most effective and efficient program possible.”

The Strategic Planning process for Special Education in the Poway Unified School district outlines a bold new initiative designed to align special education with general education efforts to maintain solid performance on the State’s key performance indicators, adapt to the changing/complex needs of students with disabilities and to operate efficiently with limited resources. Our overarching goal is to build around Special Education a culture of ownership among students, parents, school staff, and special education department employees. This plan attempts to focus on alignment with District education literacy efforts, organizational and programmatic improvement, improved organizational expertise, and a focus on accelerating student learning.

Background to Strategic Planning ~ A Changing World

There are several factors that support the need for strategic planning in a large department like Special Education:

- When the District reaches a projected capacity enrollment of 37,000 we can anticipate an increase of approximately 1,200 more students requiring Special Education and related services. We need to make the necessary adjustments in organizational structure and program delivery to ensure that we continue to maintain our program/services within the federal and state guidelines.
- Dramatic changes in the nature and complexity of disabilities requiring intensive programming prompt a close look at programmatic structures to ensure that as a District we are providing the appropriate range of programs and services to meet the needs of students.
- Limited resources and increasing intensive student needs require careful planning and efficient use of resources.
- The high frequency of due process requests/costs sap energy and damage relations between stakeholders. A staff that is well trained to mediate differences and maintain strong relationships with parents is vital. We need service providers who possess skills in instructional delivery and special education law to inspire confidence in students and their parents. This requires staff training and development.

- The acceleration of learning for students with disabilities can happen through effective alignment with general education and active participation in all aspects of the District's literacy efforts.
- High stakes testing and No Child Left Behind legislation make the success of special education students have implications for the entire school system.

Parameters for Strategic Planning

The Strategic Planning process was built on a consensus model and based on data driven decisions. The Strategic Planning team's role was established as advisory, with Superintendent's Cabinet making the final recommendation to the School Board. While all decisions must maintain compliance with special education mandates and support the NCLB accountability requirements, the primary focus is on student achievement.

Strategic Planning Process

The Strategic Planning team was composed of general and special education teachers, specialist, administrators, parents, and 3 Board members. There were 36 members. Focus sessions were set up at various times throughout the District to gather staff input from a broader group of staff members. Participation was voluntary, with 71 people responding. The Strategic Planning team identified the specific strategies for the plan and action teams (34 members) developed the objectives necessary to achieve the goals. Next steps include a review and input from Learning Support Services, Principals. Cabinet, and other groups. Final recommendations to the School Board were made by Superintendent's Cabinet and presented to the Board on December 13, 2004. Once implementation begins, communication on all aspects of our work will be shared with all stakeholders on a consistent basis.

Special Education Strategies

The Strategic Planning Committee developed four strategies to improve Special Education services. These strategies broadly address four areas – a culture of ownership, the reduction and then elimination of adversarial IEP situations, improvements in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and staff development for all stakeholders in special education. The specific language of these strategies and their accompanying objectives are given below.

It is important to point out the relationship of these four strategies. The first strategy overarches the others and ties all together. In order to build a culture of collective ownership of all special education students, we must develop ways to eliminate adversarial IEP's. To do this, all District staff, especially special education staff, need to understand and to have access to the latest educational materials, strategies, and

training. This alone will not be enough without intensive staff development and training to meet the instructional needs of our students and developing strong collaborative relationships with parents built on trust and solid communication skills.

Special Education Strategic Planning

Strategy 1

We will create a district wide culture of ownership of all students by all staff members at all sites

- Implement a district philosophy for effective special education programs to ensure equitable services at all sites
- Establish agreed upon guiding principles for program organization and service delivery that provide ongoing leadership and support
- Implement a plan to make site/district leadership practices systemic. (the last part of this statement fits better with the next bullet so high school principals asked that it be moved below—it makes sense to me.
- Implement a plan that will make staff development for general education and special education aligned and systemic through ongoing participation with the new literacy councils, TLC and PPAP.
- Develop and implement a quality review process to ensure a continuum of General Education and Special Education services are in place.
- Implement a continuum of services that ensures equity for student progress
- Define roles and responsibilities for special education student success
- Develop strategies to reduce over representation of African American and Hispanic students in special education.

Strategy 2

We will implement strategies to reduce adversarial IEP situations and reduce the incidence of due process filings (HS principals felt that we would never eliminate it but that reduce was a more realistic goal)

- Develop strong collaborative relationships with parents supported by strong communication skills
- Improve teacher confidence to meet the needs of students and articulate the effective instructional strategies

- Develop an alternative dispute resolution model that includes an informal level offering early resolution
- Improve mediation skills among all parties in the dispute

Strategy 3

We will implement effective specialized instruction using research based curriculum and assessment to accelerate special education learning.

- Define district expectation that specialized instruction is:
 - ✓ Individualized differentiated instruction based on student needs and IEP goals
 - ✓ Explicit and sequential instruction will be provided by staff trained in research based curriculum and strategies
- Develop sequence of instructional strategies to integrate general education curriculum for special education students
- Use effective formal and informal assessments to drive instruction to meet unique needs of students
- Define curriculum that provides a continuum of skill development and integrates higher order thinking skills to support specialized instruction
- Provide coverage for absent instructional assistants to ensure consistent specialized instruction
- Provide options in career oriented, vocational or technological programs at all high schools

Strategy 4

We will provide appropriate effective district and site based trainings for both general and special education staff, administrators and parents to ensure the implementation of consistent and effective instructional strategies to meet the individual needs of all students.

- Provide timely, appropriate trainings to support the use of District adopted curriculum and strategies
- Provide training in the administration and interpretation of academic assessments so that both general and special education teachers can identify students' needs

- Provide training to general and special education teachers on writing IEP goals and selecting appropriate curriculum based on assessment results
- Ensure that all special educators will have a clear understanding of district standards through active participation in joint trainings and Literacy Councils
- Provide opportunities for special educators to meet in job alike groups to complete vertical planning and articulation for students
- Develop strong IEP meeting facilitation and leadership skills

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