

Special Education Learning Council

End of Year Summary

August, 2006

Introduction

The Special Education Learning Council was formed in the fall of 2005 to provide input and direction into the implementation of the Special Education Strategic Plan. The Council is a joint effort of the Poway Federation of Teachers (PFT) and the Poway Unified School District to improve special education services in the district.

The Council met at least monthly during the 2005-2006 school year, with subcommittee meetings and work going on throughout the past year. This report is meant to summarize this work and provide direction for the special education department and the Special Education Learning Council during the 2006-2007 school year.

The Work

The Special Education Council has worked to complete the strategies outlined in the Strategic Plan. Included in the plan were four strategies. Listed below is the work completed under each strategy. Also included under each strategy are the recommendations of each subgroup and the next steps associated with that work.

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

The work of the council in this area focused on the following areas (1) gathering data on the needs and priorities of staff, (2) developing and disseminating the underlying philosophy of special education, (3) addressing ways to reduce the number of students who are referred to special education for testing who subsequently do not qualify. This saps time from special education staff when other, more appropriate interventions should be considered first. (4) Develop a Quality Review Process to oversee and support the implementation of council work.

In order to enhance this culture of ownership for special education students in Poway, this committee implemented the following to address this strategy:

- Created a philosophy statement for Special Education in the Poway Unified School District.
- Developed, executed and analyzed an electronic survey measuring quality standards (to see results, visit www.powayusd.com/projects/literacy/SSTTL/SpecialEd/PDF/CultOwnpdf.pdf)
- Drafted consistent standards of practice for the pre-referral process to be implemented across the district
- Develop quality indicators for the referral process for special education services
- Shared proposed recommendations around appropriate pre-referral processes and Quality Review Process to be implemented across the district at the June, 2006 K-12 principals meeting.
- Develop a proposed schedule and procedures for the first quality review visits to all schools in Spring, 2007.

Recommendations:

- Approval of proposed standards of practice for the pre-referral process and Quality Review Process to be implemented district-wide
- Allotment of \$3780.00 for the 2006-2007 school year in order to provide release time to a Special Education Quality Review Team that will begin a quality review process at each campus in spring of 2007.

Next Steps:

- Develop quality review team process that will monitor future quality indicators as they are developed.
- Develop quality indicators for curriculum implementation
- Develop quality indicators for student placement in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- Begin quality team visits that will focus on referral process for special education while considering pre-interventions before referral to special education.

How this relates to the Strategic Plan:

There are five main components identified in the culture of ownership strategy.

- All action steps for the first component have been addressed.
- Four of eight action steps in the second component have been addressed.
- Six of twelve action steps in the third component have been addressed.
- Four of ten action steps in the fifth component have been addressed.

2. *We will implement strategies to reduce adversarial IEP situations and reduce the incidence of due process filings.*

It should be noted that the number of outstanding due process cases outstanding has fallen dramatically. The goal of this committee for the 2006-2007 school year is to reduce the due process cases by two-thirds this year and to reduce litigation costs by at least fifty percent, saving the district over \$123,000.

A focus of this committee has been to research and develop Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) model for PUSD. Several districts throughout the state of California were contacted to gather information about existing ADR models. In addition, this group has examined staff development activities that would be helpful for all parts of the IEP team in terms of conflict resolution and working more effectively with parents and other stakeholders.

In order to maximize a culture of ownership for special education students in Poway, this committee implemented the following to address this strategy:

- Contact an experienced ADR expert before the 2006-07 school year begins to help formulate the structure for an effective conflict resolution model.
- Principals or site administrators are to attend contentious IEP's on their site and share responsibility with the special education department in contentious IEP's when requested by the directors of the special education department. The belief here is that site administrators could be very effective in helping parents during contentious IEP's and can bring additional resources and wisdom to the IEP that would be helpful in avoiding or reducing conflict.
- Finalized staffing plan with necessary reductions to cover the cost of ADR coordinator out of existing resources
- Finalized contract for Conflict Resolution Training with Nick Martin and scheduled dates: 9/11 & 12; 9/14&15; 9/18&19 @ OVMS
- Finalized contract with Haberfeld Mediation Group for Level II Mediation Training
- Finalized contract with Haberfeld Mediation Group for administrator training in mediation and negotiation to be scheduled in August
- Finalized and submitted Scope of Work to Exceptional Family Resource Center (EFRC) and SDSU for Alternative Dispute Resolution Coordinator
- Sent out summary sheet on three levels of ADR model to all stakeholders
- Consultant contracts approved by the School Board on 9/11/06
- Materials preparation for Conflict Resolution Training completed
- Scheduled presentation to Citizens' Advisory Council
- Finalize Scope of Work and contract between PUSD, SDSU and EFRC
- Begin materials prep for November mediation training
- Identify mediation teams for Level II training
- Finalize ADR Coordinator
- Develop draft of brochure for ADR

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

In order to understand the extent of the need for this strategy, this subgroup implemented an electronic survey.

- The Strategy 3 committee created a needs assessment survey to which 50% of special education teachers across all levels K-12 responded.
- Survey indicated that the most widely used educational program was teacher made materials (50%). This was particularly true among SDC teachers.
- Greatest program need indicated was language arts curriculum
- Staff development in programs was strongly expressed

A major catalyst for this committee's work has been the reauthorization of IDEA, which mandates that schools use instructional materials that have been proven to be effective through research. While reviewing the research on scientifically based curriculum, the committee examined educational programs designed to accelerate the academic achievement of special education students. Since special education students are often functioning several years below their chronological grade level, it is necessary for them to make more than a years academic growth in order to narrow the achievement gap that exists between them and their general education peers.

Recommendations:

- Pilot **STEP UP TO WRITING** Fall 2006 – all grade levels
- Submit for Board of Education adoption: **READ NATURALLY AND 6-MINUTE SOLUTION**
- Train all special educators on district-wide staff development day Fall 2006 in **REWARDS, READ NATURALLY, AND 6-MINUTE SOLUTION.**
- Implement **READ WELL** in all K-1 special day classes and elementary RSP programs Spring 2007
- Pilot **LANGUAGE!** Spring 2007 – all grade levels. K-12 teachers were identified for the pilot and received training on the implementation of the program. Members of the pilot group are participating in a TLC for the implementation. Pilot group will meet monthly to review data and effectiveness of the program.
- The committee further recommends the addition curriculum TOSAs (1 for the 2006-2007 school year and the addition of one for the 2007-2008 school year). Primary duty would be to assist classroom teachers in effectively implementing the adopted language arts curriculum and provide on-going staff development.

Next Steps:

- 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.

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, curriculum and assessment to accelerate special education learning.

All of the subcommittees have embedded this strategy in with their recommendations and next steps.

