

"On behalf of all students, we commit to ensuring universal access to an inclusive and equitable education, thereby enriching our schools and communities." -Santa Clara County Office of Education Special Education Task Force

Santa Clara County Continuum of Services for Students with Disabilities Study

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Report on the State of Services to Improve Equity and Access



Background

The Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) conducted a study of the continuum of services for students with disabilities within Santa Clara County with a view towards improving equity and access. This year-long process sought input from a variety of stakeholders using metrics from the California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS) data, California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), California Dashboard data, survey data, and qualitative information from interviews and focus groups.

The study had four components:

- Establish a countywide Task Force consisting of a variety of stakeholders to analyze the data, research, and fiscal impact on best practices in inclusion.
- Use quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess the current landscape of services for students with disabilities from birth to age 22 in Santa Clara County.
- Identify high-quality inclusion programs in the county and state that can act as models for schools and districts.
- Identify research based best practices that can assist districts and programs to increase their capacity to use inclusive practices.

The study was informed by the SCCOE Special Education Task Force which consisted of stakeholders representing districts, charter schools, parents, students, community organizations, and agencies. The Task Force assisted in the development of the stakeholder survey and met to review the data on the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities, discussed the California Dashboard data, reviewed the survey and focus group results, and developed a vision for students with disabilities throughout Santa Clara County.

Continuum of Services for Students with Disabilities Study Summary

The Study of Special Education in Santa Clara County considered the feedback of hundreds of stakeholders, and included an analysis of data, a literature and study review, a review of best instructional practices, and an overview of local and state model programs for students with disabilities. The instructional practices review included the study of key frameworks, as well as instructional strategies such as Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning Framework, and the research from the High Leverage Practices in Special Education and High Leverage Practices for Inclusive Classrooms. The statewide context regarding funding of special education, the changing and expanding role of county offices of education with regard to the Statewide System of Support, and the role and structure of SELPA were considered.

Increasing costs and the lack of funding are straining district budgets. As districts and schools have more accountability for all students, the benefits of shifting the role of SCCOE special education personnel from direct classroom teacher and program provider to quality consultative service provider was considered. This shift could be essential in increasing the capacity of local school districts. A consultative/collaboration model designed to support districts could leverage the expertise of SCCOE teachers to support district classroom

teachers. In a consultative/collaboration model, services could include case management, behavior management, assistive technology, consultation on instructional strategies, teacher training, and service coordination. Increased availability of specialized programs and services at schools and districts would likely cost less than SCCOE provided programs and could lead to reduced transportation costs.

The SCCOE Special Education Task Force identified three countywide priority areas for focus that serve as foundational framing for the overall recommendations of the study: (1) creating a culture of inclusion; (2) providing for quality instruction; and (3) expanding the availability of social and emotional supports.

Recommendations:

1. Advocate at the state and federal level for policy, legislation, and adequate funding that supports students with disabilities.
2. Adopt resolutions establishing support for inclusive practices and a culture of inclusion.
3. Implement strategies to recruit and retain qualified professionals in special education.
4. Expand professional development and coaching in Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning, Co-teaching, and High

- Leverage Practices for Inclusive Classrooms to support quality instruction for all students preschool through post-secondary.
5. Expand the availability of integrated social emotional learning (SEL) instruction, services, and programs.
 6. Expand the availability of programs and services currently offered by the SCCOE in local school districts.
 7. Increase the availability of mental health supports in schools.
 8. Conduct a study of the SELPA Administrative Unit (AU) structure and determine the impacts of having two AUs and options to maximize economy of scales while maintaining a high level of support and services to districts.
 9. Conduct an analysis of available IEP software systems and consider the process and benefits of, and barriers to, adopting one system for use countywide.

"A one coherent system of education has all children at the center and acknowledges that all students are general education students and some students will need additional and specialized instructional services, supports, and programs."

-Dr. Mary Ann Dewan, Santa Clara County Superintendent of Schools

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Summary of the Major Findings of the Survey and Student Surveys, and Major Themes from the Focus Group Input Sessions:

Inclusive Practices in Place

- Most Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) foster a welcoming and collaborative environment between general education and special education.
- Students felt academically supported in both general education settings and special education settings.
- Students felt neutral about safety in the general education setting and socially and emotionally safer in special education classrooms.
- The majority of students have access to the core curriculum in their general education and content area special education classes.
- Goals and objectives are based upon the core curriculum.
- Access to the information on the California Dashboard allows better understanding of the total system of support and accountability for all students.
- Students felt they were learning the general education curriculum in the general education settings and were supported by their special education classes.
- Students reported that their accommodations and modifications were appropriate.
- Most parents feel welcomed on campus and feel they are a valued member of a team.
- Co-teaching is occurring across the county; co-teaching occurs at some school sites but did not appear to be implemented district wide.

Expanding on Inclusive Practices

- Most LEAs provide basic fundamental organizational structures for inclusion but continue to have limited opportunities for inclusion in general education and limited collaboration between general and special education teachers.
- Some teachers and service providers reported the large size of caseloads has affected their ability to provide support to students with disabilities in general education classes.
- A large number of districts are in the process and/or the beginning stages of implementing a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS).
- Professional development trainings and access varies across districts with the most frequent trainings being positive behavior intervention strategies (PBIS) and behavior management.
- Most districts have some collaboration between general education and special education teachers but it is not formally structured with defined roles.
- Some group members felt that professional development was adequate while others felt the need for more training or different training. There was a consensus that the majority of training required more systematic follow-up and coaching on-site implementation.
- The use of benchmark assessments varies across districts. There is partial implementation across most districts for using benchmark data to enter and exit interventions for students with disabilities.
- Special education inclusionary practices are inconsistent across districts.
 - It is difficult to form co-teaching partnerships.
 - Minimal collaboration time is made available for co-teachers to plan.

Building a Culture of Inclusion

- Systemic barriers (e.g., inconsistent collaboration time, master schedules) either promote or hinder placing students with disabilities into general education classes.
- The term “inclusion” represents a broad perspective and is understood to be many different things.
- Leaders of influence need to understand the “why” and believe in inclusion in order to promote inclusionary practices.
- The mindset/culture and approaches to inclusion vary across districts.
- There is an overall sense that Special Education is a place, not a service, and “they are your kids, not my kids.”
- A turn-over of administrators could result in starting over in building inclusionary cultures.
- When leaders don’t know the evidence and research basis supporting inclusive practices, they are less effective in ensuring inclusive programs and services are provided.
- Student survey responses indicated that there was some variability in the students’ feelings about their instruction in general education and special education settings.
- Expectations for inclusion are different for Resource Specialist Programs (RSP) and Special Day Class (SDC) programs.
- There was great appreciation expressed for the Inclusion Collaborative.

Opportunities to Build Capacity

- Some districts reported inconsistent implementation of professional development trainings.
- There are shortages of qualified special education teachers and paraeducators, substitutes, and related service providers which impacts the ability to promote and support the work of inclusion.
- Intervention opportunities and resources vary from school to school and district to district.
- There is a shortage of preschool settings that offer inclusion for children with disabilities. Preschools and Head Start programs are not geographically close to or available at all districts.
- Availability of behavior supports in general education makes a difference for inclusion.
- Some districts reported the need for additional resources to support site administrators in providing students with moderate to severe disabilities the following: modified/adapted core curriculum materials; research/evidenced -based instructional strategies; and alternate assessment practices.
- Teachers would like to have designated time to plan, consult, and collaborate with their colleagues.
- Parents would like more training in the IEP process, inclusive practices, and alternate dispute resolution (ADR).
- District department meetings are typically held as grade level or content area meetings.
- With the exception of a few model sites, SCCOE-operated special education programs on school site campuses have limited opportunities for inclusion with typical peers.
- Parents desire more communication about their children's program and services.
- Parents have an interest in learning about resources and trainings (IEP, ADR, behavior), through districts and groups such as Parents Helping Parents (PHP) and the Inclusion Collaborative.

