



**Programs for Exceptional Children
Projects to Date
Executive Summary
April 13, 2016**

During the 2012-2013 school year, Programs for Exceptional Children (PEC) contracted with Dr. Marilyn K. Shepherd to study departmental strengths and areas of need. Dr. Shepard's report indicated, among other things, that PEC had a long history of inconsistent special education leadership, an absence of a clear organizational structure, poorly formulated budgets, expansive non-compliance, and lack of Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) oversight. Integral to this report was the recognition that the District's Special Education system was unsupported by evidence based pre-referral intervention programs.

As a result of the study and an underlying understanding that systemic transformation was required, Ms. Sheilagh Andujar, then Assistant Superintendent and now Deputy Chief of Programs for Exceptional Children, embarked on a process of organizational change. During 2013-2014, a series of community engagements were held to review Dr. Shepherd's report, compare and contrast her findings with qualitative and historical understanding of the department, and to memorialize a blueprint for action. That blueprint evolved into the current Programs for Exceptional Children Roadmap. PEC Roadmap work is highlighted throughout Superintendent Antwan Wilson's Workplan #3.

The Programs for Exceptional Children Roadmap focuses primarily on six elements:

1. Improved Student Performance
2. General Education Collaboration
3. Safe Learning Environments
4. Data Systems
5. Staffing and Resources
6. Improved Compliance

The PEC Roadmap first provides users with the language of PEC's shared vision and the mission statement moving the community toward that vision.

Vision:

All Oakland school communities and departments embrace students with disabilities and provide support and resources to ensure every student thrives!

Mission:

Programs for Exceptional Children supports District students, families, departments to ensure that each student with unique learning needs is provided a rigorous academic program, achieves at the highest level, and is recognized and respected. We believe that every student can graduate prepared for college, career and community.

1. Improved Student Performance

Students with disabilities in Oakland Unified School District are not meeting minimum academic standards set forth by the California Department of Education. From preschool to post-secondary programming, areas

of need are significant. OUSD's most recent Annual Performance Report (Feb. 2016) indicates that preschool students with disabilities missed developmental targets in both social-emotional/behavioral and skills and knowledge areas by 10%-20%. At the other end of the age and grade continuum, just 46% of OUSD students with disabilities obtained a high school diploma. This is nearly 23% short of the minimum target graduation rate of 69.25%.

A likely contributor to the poor performance indicator scores from California Department of Education (CDE) is Oakland's long-standing practice of educating students with disabilities in alternate settings such as self-contained special day classes and non-public schools. Thus, **Inclusion** has become an integral part of the PEC Roadmap and of Superintendent Wilson's Workplan #3. Widespread access to quality first instruction is a primary step toward building equitable access to Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for all students.

In order to comply with the LRE provision of IDEA, OUSD must increase the time its students with disabilities spend in general education settings by at least 10%. 2015-2016 has been set aside as a planning year to increase inclusive practices throughout the District. To assist in guidance with that work, a contract with Stetson and Associates was developed. Dr. Frances Stetson and her colleagues are recognized as national leaders in moving school-based teams toward inclusive practices. Stetson wrote, "The original IDEA regulations required that the general education classroom serve as the reference point for our planning for students with disabilities. Academic inclusion is supported by the reality that we will never close the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their typical peers without instruction in the general education classroom and within the general curriculum."

In studying Oakland's practices, 17 "Legacy Schools" were identified. These are OUSD sites that already embody tenets of inclusiveness and equity for students with special needs. As part of the planning to increase inclusion, ten additional schools were designated and made part of a three month Task Force. Dr. Stetson assisted teams from each of those sites in the process of individual student analysis and overall school analysis in order to guide a smooth transition into inclusive programming in 2016-2017. In collaboration with Community Schools Student Services (CSSS) an agreement has been put forth that any legacy or new inclusion sites will either continue with Culturally Relevant Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) practices or enter into this year's PBIS Cohort.

As a result of an internal study of Special Education programs throughout the regions within Oakland Unified School District's boundaries, inequities were identified. Certain areas of the District held an excessive number of special education classes and programs while other areas held few. Programs that started out in early grades in one region and then continued in other regions for higher grades demonstrated a particular disservice to students and families who were unable to become and remain a part of a single school community. Plans for remediation were drafted, revised, and put into place. This "**regionalization**" work affords all students and families equitable access to the continuum of Special Education services in schools close to their homes without the need to shift to another region during their tenure.

2. Collaboration with General Education

Consistent with California Task Force on Special Education's recommendations to the State Board of Education Oakland has put forth the tenet that in a comprehensive system of education, all children are general education students first.

Since 2011, OUSD has been identified as a “Significantly Disproportionate” school district. As a result of this inequity, 15% of all federal Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) funds are allocated to Coordinated Early Intervention Services (CEIS). CEIS dollars are intended to be used to provide pre-referral intervention services in the form of Multi Tiered Systems of Support to reduce overidentification of certain populations of students in any disability area.

Currently, Coordinated Early Intervention Services (CEIS) funds are maintained by OUSD’s Community Schools, Student Services (CSSS) Department. Oakland continues to identify as Significantly Disproportionate in the number of African American students it identifies as Emotionally Disabled. The District’s numbers improved by merely ½ of 1% in the 2014-2015 school year. In order to begin to provide a true remedy to this inequity, CSSS has contracted with an internationally known expert, Dr. Edward Fergus from New York University. As OUSD’s Technical Assistant (TA) Dr. Fergus is expected to guide the CEIS Leadership Team through the four phase process provided from CDE. Recent communication from the U.S. Department of Education indicates that a change to existing laws is expected. The rigor of calculating Significant Disproportionality is expected to increase, and the dollars are expected to be opened up to all students, including those who have disabilities.

3. Safe Learning Environments

To ensure safe learning environments for students with emotional disabilities, Programs for Exceptional Children reestablished contracts with Alameda County Behavioral Health (ACBH.) Counseling Enriched (CE) and Intensive Counseling Enriched (ICE) classes are embedded on public school campuses with the support of local mental health agencies and District provided Social Workers. Through the development of CE and ICE programming, Programs for Exceptional Children has been able to return more than 50 students from Non-Public Schools (NPS) in the past three years. Although a portion of students with emotional disabilities continue to be educated in NPSs, PEC has reduced NPS costs by \$2.5 million per year.

The transition from Peterson Bus Company to First Student was admittedly a difficult one. During the 2014-2015 school year, First Student was not able to fulfill many of its contractual obligations with the District. However, the 2015-2016 school year has been far more successful with every student routed and transported within a reasonable amount of time. PEC believes First Student to be a far safer and more effective transportation collaborator for its students.

4. Data Systems

During the 2012-2013 school year, Programs for Exceptional Children Leadership Team surmised that WebIEP, an Individual Education Program (IEP) system, had been retained past its usefulness. The system was cumbersome and ineffective; data submissions were often laden with errors. In order to improve accuracy of data, a contract was created with San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE). SJCOE oversees the Special Education Information System (SEIS) IEP system, the system used by 90% of school districts in California. PECs data is now provided on time and with greater accurateness. Most recently, PEC added the SEIS Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) software to serve its population of children with special needs from birth to age three. In collaboration with the Technology Department, integration between SEIS and Aeries, OUSD’s student information system, continues to increase. This is essential both for consistency of data and to prepare for CDE’s expected merger of the CaseMIS (Special Education data) and CalPADS (all student data) systems.

5. Staffing and Resources

Noting that the hiring and supervision of school site staff is enacted most appropriately at the local level, Ms. Andujar and her team spent much of the current school year preparing for **“Decentralization”** of staffing special education professionals and paraprofessionals. Details of Human Resources data and procedures have been moved out of Programs for Exceptional Children central office and into individual school sites. PEC management continues to work with school based administrators and staff in the process of acquiring and retaining qualified employees, but the final decisions to hire, evaluate and retain lie within the domain of the schools themselves.

2015-2016 brought forth a reorganization of PEC leadership with a reduction of three Coordinator positions and the addition of a Director of Schools position. The Coordinator of Teaching and Learning for PEC moved into the Teaching and Learning Department. Expected this year is another reorganization based on upcoming recommendations from the Council of Great City Schools and the California Department of Education.

California’s shortage of Special Education Professionals has had an effect on staffing this year. Ongoing recruitment events have helped school sites and central office maintain staffing throughout the District. PEC’s SELPA Director, together with the State SELPA organization, is working toward varied solutions toward the challenges of acquisition, retention, and attrition of Special Education Specialists.

6. Improved Compliance

Annual Performance Report Measures for Oakland Unified School District were provided in February, 2016. The Annual Performance Report identifies targets met and not met on federal performance indicators. Oakland continues to fall short of targets in the areas of Graduation Rates, Least Restrictive Environment, Preschool Development, Disproportionality by Disability, Timelines, Secondary Transitions, and Post-School outcomes. Alternately, the District met targets in the areas of Dropout Rates, Suspensions and Expulsions, Preschool LRE, Parent Involvement, and Overall Disproportionality. Particular gains were made in the area of on time completion of Annual and Triennial IEPs. Overdue documents were reduced from all time highs of 1,116 overdue Annual IEPs and 478 overdue Triennial IEPs to 74 overdue Annual IEPs and 23 overdue Triennial IEPs. Required monthly meetings with Focused Monitoring Technical Assistant (FMTA) Consultant are expected to be discontinued at the end of this school year.

In May 2015, CDE’s team of FMTAs worked with PEC on a four day Verification Review (VR). In response to the VR, training was provided to all Principals and Special Education Professionals in fall 2016. A full report is expected in upcoming months; the VR Report will contain both individual student and systematic corrective actions. Similarly, in early 2016, OUSD contracted with the Council of Great City Schools to study Programs for Exceptional Children. A full report is expected from the Council prior to the end of the 2015-2016 school year.

Recommendations from VR and Council of Great City Schools reports, together with the Education Resource Strategy report, will add to the list of essential items for improvement. A presumed outcome of these studies will be the recommendation that PEC function as part of a community of departments which provide academic and social emotional and behavioral supports to students. Thus, clearly defined Multi Tiered Systems of

Support will need to exist throughout the District as a continuum beginning with quality first instruction, continuing on to specific pre-referral interventions, and when needed, to specialized academic instruction.

Progress has been made in many areas of Special Education in Oakland and teams continue to work together on behalf of Students with Disabilities and their families. A great amount of systems work is still before us relative to access to general education, improved student achievement, equitable provision of service, compliance with federal and state laws and regulations, in-depth professional development, and improved fiscal responsibility.

The tenets under which we work are clear. Special education professionals in Oakland must assess each student suspected of having a disability using appropriate evaluation measures, provide each student with a disability free appropriate public education in his or her least restrictive environment, maintain current Individual Education Programs, ensure meaningful parent participation, and afford families their Procedural Safeguards under the United States Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act.