

Feedback for the *Learning Continuity & Attendance Plan* from the Community Advisory Committee for Special Education--8.27.20

A CAC meeting to review actions in support of Students with Dis/abilities and IEPs within the *Learning Continuity and Attendance Plan* was held on August 17, 2020. Relevant feedback from the June 22 meeting is also incorporated here.

The most urgent need raised is that students with severe dis/abilities need in-person support. This need is especially elevated in:

- families who cannot provide adequate adult supervision due to very challenging income and living situations;
- families who cannot communicate with providers in their native tongue and whose children face language and other barriers in distance-learning class settings;
- foster students who lack any consistent adult care or assistance, many of whom are being moved to group homes with even less supervision or support. (The CAC would also like to call out the advisory letter for FYAC and support its message and request.)

Committee and community members continue to worry about the physical, mental, and socio-emotional health of students disconnected from teachers and other providers, and that of the families who are not able to provide the support that their children need. If any process is underway to address the urgent need of these students for in-person support, information must be provided to all stakeholders about its progress and would be greatly appreciated.

The next most urgent need heard by the CAC, is the need for communication and a pipeline of information, most loudly raised by members of the District ELL Sub-Committee and participating ELL families, and echoed within the CAC. Families of students with IEPs, especially those who speak languages other than English, need phone lines that they can call to ask questions, where they can be directed to the appropriate staff people, and to get timely answers in their own language. Directory information is not available to these families who face additional challenges in supporting learning at home.

Furthering the need for clear communication is for families and caregivers to have access to programs that can assist them. For example, how will parents/providers find about programs such as the twice-weekly technology training led by Special Education staff, or know that they can access the recording afterwards? The siloing of Special Education needs to be broken. For example, why are there no links or even mention of Special Education on the [OUSD Family Central](#) site? Communication must go beyond posting a letter on a web site that families who have difficulty getting online will not see.

It has been difficult for CAC members and other Special Education stakeholders to provide specific feedback about needed investments for the LCP because the document does not include any details about new or revised investments. A line item indicating \$2.1million dollars being “set aside for special education needs” raises a concern in the CAC. We understand as the history of this item that the monies were offered to the Special Education Departments, and they were not able to come up with a plan on how to spend it, going back to LCP without their guidance. We wonder if the Special Education Department has the staffing levels and support necessary to run the basic programs, let alone the enhanced needs exhibited in distance-learning. This includes the time to spend funds on programs and to hire essential staff to run them.

It is also troubling to hear that Special Education staff will need to undertake their own fundraising efforts because the #OaklandUndivided initiative did not include technology and support for our Pre-K/ECE students to access distance learning materials, as well as computers for families and caregivers to stay in communication with their teachers. Early Childhood support in this time requires extensive modeling and collaboration between providers and families that must occur across a computer screen. Neither did the initiative include devices for the students in the Young Adult programs, who should also have access to engage in extended learning, community immersion experiences, and career programs (this includes the continuing education students and those in Community Day school).

If new staff hours, contracts, licenses, materials, stipends, etc. are part of a spending plan to address the unique needs of different groups of students with dis/abilities, those are not enumerated in the plan. Similarly, the plan does not clearly enumerate and describe changes to existing roles, nor does it address the impact of the MOU with OEA on the capacity of providers to fulfill the service minutes within student IEPs and to develop the Distance Learning Plans newly mandated by SB 98 in collaboration with parents, guardians, and education rights holders.

CAC members and other participants need to understand what the school day could look like when combining the support of General Education teachers, Special Education teachers, designated service providers, and paraprofessionals. This includes understanding how push-in services would work when General Education instruction is itself shifting to more small groups, and self-guided, instruction.

We have not even begun conversation on what IEP meetings will look like or require under new state guidelines and will expect that to be a major conversation in the future.

The CAC calls for spaces to be created within the LCP to provide for the following:

- increased in-person support for all special education students, from Pre-K to the Young Adult Program;
- the creation of a communications position that can partner with other departments to get information out during this crisis;
- increased language support from the Office of Equity, with a partnership in the hiring and training of interpreters;
- working with the Foster Youth Services to hire back case managers to give those students, and in particular foster students with dis/abilities, much needed support and stability.
- a comprehensive and transparent spending plan that accounts for all Special Education on-going and emergency expenditures. This will allow the CAC and other Special Education stakeholders to provide substantive feedback and identify gaps and opportunities in collaboration with other committees and stakeholder groups.

We look forward to a revised LCP that incorporates our feedback, details all on-going and supplementary investments, and that brings to the surface the great efforts of teachers, administrators, and other staff to address the compounding needs of students with dis/abilities and their families in this difficult time.

For questions about the CAC committee process and this feedback, please contact Alan Pursell, CAC Co-Chair, at ajpursell@gmail.com