

Feedback and Recommendations for the 2023-24 OUSD SELPA Annual Service Plan

Submitted to the OUSD SELPA Board by the OUSD Community Advisory Committee for Special Education
April 24, 2023

The level of service, as detailed in the Annual Service Plan, is not sufficient. While it meets the bare minimum of what needs to be provided to disabled students with IEPs, it does not account for the growing number of disabled students coming into OUSD. It must also account for the considerable backlog of initial IEP assessments and IEP reviews. Overdue assessments are specifically identified as an urgent issue mentioned later in this document.

The information used by the Oakland SELPA (OUSD) Board to cut paraprofessional and instructional support specialist positions was done at the district level rather than by school sites. This is another example of decisions that directly affect students and families being made dismissively to their needs without consultation. It is similar to determining classroom usage rates at a school site for the whole school while not having adequate coverage for individual classrooms. It gives the *appearance* that the number of students needing particular staff is in line with each other. The cuts create a lack of safety for our students, especially at the high school level, with 14-year-old students in multi-grade classrooms with 18-year-old students and a wide range/diversity of academic and social-emotional needs.

The cuts to paraprofessional and instructional support specialist positions, in turn, made possible the closure of Special Education programs/classrooms at particular school sites. While some classrooms are being "phased out," more are being moved. Students and parents are being robbed of school choice and essential stability.

We need a moratorium on the consolidation/closure of Special Educations programs/classrooms.

When you close a General Education classroom with 13 students, you keep them at the school site. When you close an SDC classroom, you signal students and parents that they are not part of the district. These closures have a negative impact on our teachers and staff retention, and there is counter-evidence to the claim that "staff will follow the classroom." With 800 pending/overdue initial assessments, these decisions also do not account for the space/staffing needs of the students that will qualify for services.

We also need the following to be urgent SELPA/district-wide initiatives:

- A focus on **reducing absenteeism for students with IEPs**. The near-full attendance of students with IEPs would fund the Special Education budget. Focused work in this area is needed, not cuts to resources and positions.
- We need focused work on **retaining teachers, instructional support specialists, and paraprofessionals** and hiring and retaining teachers with **Extensive Support Needs credentials**.

- The **assessment program also needs significant support**. To save money and avoid OCR and other complaints, get this into compliance. With school site staff being required to do initial assessments and not enough coverage for teachers on leaves and vacant positions, the Assessment Intervention team needs more assistance to do its work.
- While the **very high suspension rates for Black students with IEPs** can be understood as a school site issue, we also need programmatic and top-down intervention and decision-making to address this need.
- We need **ongoing and easily accessible information on staffing levels by positions, types of programs by school site**, and programs that serve the entire SELPA.
- We need **accountability and metrics for programs with a precise accounting of budget expenditures and students served**. This information should be viewable across multiple years so the CAC can identify and compare changes.

Next year the Special Education department will re-write the full Local Plan for Special Education, including related Board regulations. The CAC must be included in its rewriting from the start. The rewritten Local Plan must be fully integrated with the development of the 3-year LCAP and the budget process throughout the new school year.

Please review over the weekend and respond with any concerns or clarifying questions.

Thanks,
Alan Pursell, Vice-Chair