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Fresno Unified School District

Special Education Review

January 19, 2007

FISCAL CRISIS
& MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM



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Kern County
Superintendent of Schools

Chief Executive Officer
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January 19, 2007

Michael E. Hanson, Superintendent
Fresno Unified School District
2309 Tulare Street
Fresno, California 93721-2287

Dear Superintendent Hanson:

In August 2006, the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) entered into an agreement for a special education review with the Fresno Unified School District. The request specified that FCMAT would:

1. Review efficiency and effectiveness of the district's special education fiscal and program delivery system.
2. Review the referral processes and determine effectiveness of student study teams.
3. Review the district process on determining the hiring of one-on-one paraprofessionals and make recommendations for improvement.
4. Review special education staffing ratios and the allocation of FTE teachers to student class size.
5. Review the relationship of roles and responsibilities between the Fresno USD SELPA and district programs.
6. Review the district process of involving parents. Examine the role and functions of the district's and/or SELPA special education citizens' advisory committee.
7. Review the computerized program the district is attempting to implement regarding IEPs. Make recommendations on effectiveness, time line for implementation, and cost effectiveness compared to other options that may be available.
8. Review the district processes for Medi-Cal billing and reimbursements for the Special Education and Health Services divisions.

FCMAT visited the district to conduct fieldwork, interview staff and review reports. This report is the result of that effort.

We appreciate the opportunity to serve you, and we extend our thanks to all the staff of the Fresno Unified School District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel D. Montero".

Joel D. Montero
Chief Executive Officer

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Executive Summary 3

Findings and Recommendations

Fiscal Delivery Systems 7

Program Delivery Systems..... 17

Referral Processes and Student Study Teams.....31

One-to-One (1:1) Paraprofessionals.....35

Class Sizes.....37

SELPA and District Roles and Responsibilities.....45

Parental and Committee Involvement.....49

IEP Information System.....53

Appendices 57



Introduction

As the fourth largest school district in the state, serving nearly 80,000 students, the Fresno Unified School District oversees a sizeable special education program, with an \$83.5 million budget this fiscal year. The district is a single-district Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA). The instructional philosophy for the Special Education Department is the same as that for the district overall: "... to provide a learning environment that inspires in all students and families the passion and the power to make positive life choices by becoming architects of their futures."

In May 2006, the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) received a request from the Fresno Unified School District for a management review of its purchasing and warehouse, technology, and special education services. This report covers the special education component of the study agreement between FCMAT and the district. The scope and objectives of the special education review are to:

1. Review the efficiency and effectiveness of the district's special education fiscal and program delivery system.
2. Review the referral processes and determine the effectiveness of student study teams.
3. Review the district process on determining the hiring of one-on-one paraprofessionals and make recommendations for improvement.
4. Review special education staffing ratios and the allocation of FTE teachers to student class size.
5. Review the relationship of roles and responsibilities between the Fresno Unified School District SELPA and district programs. Review the SELPA allocation funding formula.
6. Review the district process of involving parents. Examine the role and functions of the district's and/or SELPA special education citizens' advisory committee.
7. Review the computerized program the district is attempting to implement regarding IEPs. Make recommendations on effectiveness, time line for implementation, and cost effectiveness compared to other options that may be available.
8. Review the district processes for MediCal billing and reimbursements for the special education and health services divisions.

Study Team

The FCMAT study team was composed of the following members:

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Bakersfield, California

Study Guidelines

FCMAT consultants visited the district in September and October 2006 to conduct interviews, collect data and review documentation. This report is the result of those activities. Findings and recommendations are presented in the following sections:

- Executive Summary
- Fiscal Delivery Systems
- Program Delivery Systems
- One-to-One (1:1) Paraprofessionals
- Class Sizes
- SELPA and District Roles and Responsibilities
- Parental and Committee Involvement
- Appendices

Executive Summary

The district superintendent communicated his vision of a district that was fully committed to educating all its students in a supportive educational community that embraces the fullest participation of all students and their parents.” The Superintendent’s vision is actively supported by the Special Education Department staff.

There appears to an insufficient level of collaboration among the district’s special education program administrative staff, the district’s fiscal staff, and the district’s human resources staff. This is exacerbated by a low level of involvement of the program administrative staff in the development of the budget and their ability to effectively monitor it. There is also an overreliance on one individual to be the interface between the program and the fiscal and human resource divisions.

To address these concerns, the district should consider forming a budget and/or operations oversight committee composed of fiscal and program staff to fully analyze the budget and develop the 2007-08 budget considering prior expenditures, current activities, and projected needs. The group should meet regularly throughout the year to review budget expenditures and revenue and to ensure that the budget reflects program operations. Human Resources should periodically be involved to ensure that personnel standards are addressed.

The district should also undertake efforts to assist the program administrative staff in acquiring greater understanding of the budget monitoring process through internal training by fiscal services staff and attendance at relevant workshops and other training opportunities.

Resource specialists are all fully charged in the budget to a special education goal/activity code. Yet a number of resource specialists, particularly at the elementary level, are assigned in a manner that facilitates their ability to work with students before they are identified as eligible for special education services. Since the district also provides local support (encroachment), this practice gives the impression to parents and the community that special education resources are used to serve students not eligible for special education. It also tends to increase the maintenance of effort required of the district as a condition of receiving federal special education resources. If the time spent working with students without disabilities was coded as a non-special education activity/cost, the level of local support (encroachment) would be reduced, as would the maintenance of effort requirement.

MediCal billing revenues should be expended in a manner that ensures they are used to supplement existing services. A committee composed of administration and providers should be established to determine how these revenues are expended.

Some school site administrators do not take ownership or responsibility for special education programs on their campus and rely on special education administrative staff to resolve problems and issues. The district should promote the consistent view throughout the dis-

trict that “all kids are district kids” and are therefore the responsibility of site administration, as are all other students on that site.

Site administrators or their designees do not consistently participate in the IEP process. This is a serious shortcoming because the administrative representative in the IEP meeting must have knowledge of and the ability to commit district resources. The district should not treat this responsibility lightly. This legal requirement has been recently reinforced again in the new federal special education reauthorization. The district should take steps to ensure that the importance of the role of the administrator, or designee, is understood by site administrators.

A district-wide process has not been established to address the transition of students with disabilities from the 8th grade into high school. This frequently creates problems for students, parents, and the high school staff when there is a breakdown in communication. This can be avoided by developing a district-wide plan for student transitions from one educational level to the next.

FCMAT found numerous examples of older technology still being used in special education classrooms, and some classrooms are isolated at some school sites. Since classrooms for all students must have high quality equipment and technology that is up-to-date, the district should take steps to address this issue. Specialized materials and equipment should be the responsibility of the Special Education Department, but other classroom materials and equipment should be the responsibility of each school site.

Currently there is only one FTE Special Education Technology Specialist for the entire school district, with more than 8,000 special education students. The district needs to consider additional staffing for this highly specialized area and consider opening a Technology Center.

The district does not currently provide appropriate curriculum to students with mild to severe disabilities. Some special day class teachers do not demonstrate good teaching practices, which is unacceptable to parents and other staff. Research indicates that all students can be successful learners when presented with instruction that is based on their individual learning style. The SELPA Director and the Curriculum and Instruction Department have undertaken the development of such curricula and curricular alignments.

Special day classes need to look like general education classes, with meaningful student work and age-appropriate group projects. Student progress depends on appropriate instruction that results from teacher training. Finding and retaining qualified staff is a problem facing special education throughout the state and nation. This heightens the importance of quality staff development, which has not been a strong element of the district’s special education program.

There are many students who, if provided an appropriate public education, will not need specially designed instruction throughout their educational career. Many SELPAs in California have developed exit criteria that reduce the numbers of students served to only those who currently qualify. The district should consider implementing this strategy.

The Fresno USD is a single-district SELPA. In single district SELPAs, staff members often have both regionalized service and direct instructional program responsibilities. Thus, the separation between SELPA activities and program activities is blurred. Such is the case with Fresno USD. The organizational chart could be modified so that it clearly delineates the SELPA responsibilities and program responsibilities for each Program Manager.

The CAC Executive Committee is dedicated to improving the district's culture and environment for children with disabilities, but has expressed numerous concerns about the special education delivery system. The committee has made numerous recommendations, with, they reported, few results. The district should work closely with the CAC Executive Committee and the CAC, as a whole, in implementing recommendations from this report.

The district entered into an agreement with a software vendor to customize its Web-based Individualized Education Program (IEP) and management information system to meet the specified needs of the district. It was understood by the parents that it would also provide a "parent portal" that would enable the parents to access information regarding their child and monitor the delivery of specified services. Implementation has not gone smoothly. The vendor did not meet its time lines for initial testing in June of 2005, and following the testing in November of that year, the provider found it necessary to replace its entire project team.

No district staff were assigned to oversee this project. Although the project was to begin its pilot implementation this year, requested budget augmentations necessary to prepare for this process were rejected by the district administration, leaving the district unprepared, inadequately staffed, and insufficiently trained. The costs of staffing, hardware, technical support, and training have not been fully considered or planned for. The vendor also expressed concerns that the configuration team kept changing items throughout the process, particularly with regard to the customized forms.

In October 2006, the product was delivered for final validation and is now ready for installation. The vendor does not, however, feel that the district is adequately staffed and trained for this installation. The vendor also indicated that the parent portal is still about two years away. The district is not confident that the vendor can deliver a fully functional and dependable product.

Even though the district has already put \$1.5 million into the customization of the product, it may not be advisable to continue, as completion would require as much as another \$1 million, plus additional staffing, training, hardware, and support to successfully implement the product. Also, as the parent portal is not likely to be forthcoming for at least a year, it may be more practical for the district to adopt a currently available program for data reporting and CASEMIS, such as the SEIS developed by the San Joaquin County Office of Education, and plan to develop its own system within the technical support system when it is in place.

Fiscal Delivery Systems

Interdepartmental Collaboration

Cost-efficient program delivery requires continual and meaningful collaboration among program, fiscal, and human resources administrators. Each must understand the roles of special education staff to ensure that the program is effectively staffed and funded. The program staff must understand the budgets with which they operate to ensure they can effectively monitor the revenue-expense balance throughout the year. The fiscal staff must have a clearer understanding of program delivery factors so that the budget more accurately reflects program operations. The human resources staff needs to clearly understand the skills, knowledge, experience, training and credentials or licensing that various positions require, and should monitor position descriptions so the descriptions and classifications match the expectations of each position.

While staffing issues are addressed elsewhere in this report, the team was not able to effectively utilize the position control system to identify staffing ratios, relationships, or the appropriate fiscal support. There should be effective administrative and fiscal linkages within the position control system to ensure adequate controls for the supervision of staffing for special education and related programs.

As is commonly found in other educational agencies, program administrators stated they do not sufficiently understand the budgetary aspects of the program. They seem to have limited knowledge regarding revenue streams and how they are to be used. They also reported that:

1. The budget seems to be primarily developed based on prior years' budgets.
2. They have minimal input into the development of program budgets and are only permitted to address the 4000-6000 object codes. These factors can easily result in the assignment of special education and support staff in a manner not reflected in the budget.
3. They believe that they have very little input or ability to effect budget revisions throughout the year.
4. There appears to be no systematic review of the operating budgets for special education and related programs following the P-1 apportionment certification in late February.
5. Federal grants mostly are expended through a journal adjustment process at year's end, and proposed budgets are not always developed for the grants.

The presence of a fiscal analyst in the special education program office may lead program administrators to believe that they do not need to understand the budget in depth. The fiscal analyst should serve as the link between the program administration staff and the fiscal and human resources departments, and should not compensate for a more complete understanding of the budget by program management.

Correct Use of SACS Codes

It is important for program administrative staff to recognize the ability of the SACS system to fully outline where the funding comes from (resource code or agency code), the purpose for each expenditure (goal code or activity code), the specific focus of the activity (function code) and the nature of the expenditure (object code). Specific codes have been established for the key areas of special education operations. For example:

Specific Focus	Purpose	Source of Funds	Nature
Function Code	Goal/Activity Code	Resource/Agency	Object
1100	1190	5770	3310
Special Ed - Other Specialized Instruction	Services to Non-Severely Disabled	Federal Part B Funds	Certificated Salary

This indicates that a salary is paid from IDEA Part B federal funds to a teacher providing specialized instruction other than in a special class or the resource specialist program for a student with a non-severe disability.

While SACS contains specific codes, they sometimes lack clarity or are insufficient for the purposes desired by local administration. For example, function code 1130 is to be used for “supplemental aids and services in a regular classroom.” However, the Fresno USD budget shows expenditures for this purpose in the infant and preschool programs. It is unlikely that regular classes serve these populations; therefore, the use of function code 1130 is probably incorrect. It would likely be more appropriate to use function code 1190, “other specialized instructional services.” Better collaboration between fiscal administration and program administration could prevent such miscoding.

Similarly, expenditures for regionalized services were not reported using goal/ activity code 5050. Before the current year, the use of goal/activity code 5050 was optional. The state indicates “optional” by putting the code in italics. Because funding for regionalized services is restricted for uses specified in the Education Code, the state made the use of goal/activity code 5050 mandatory this year, essentially by de-italicizing the code. This illustrates the importance of continually reviewing the state’s code structure and instructions to determine if changes have been made.

While the SACS codes have broad application, sometimes they are too broad and don’t facilitate the close monitoring of specific programs. Many districts have created subcodes to enable more specific tracking. For example, while the state has recognized the restricted nature of regionalized funds and made the appropriate goal/activity code mandatory, it has not yet done so for funds intended solely to provide supplies and equipment for students with low-incidence disabilities such as blindness, deafness, or severe orthopedic impairments. These expenditures are incorporated under goal/activity code 5750, “services for students with severe or low incidence disabilities.” Some local educational agencies use

code range 5760 through 5769 to monitor such expenditures. While the information will roll up to 5750 for the state's purposes, it remains easily identified and locally tracked. Other specific funding sources, though not restricted, might also be locally tracked. Some educational agencies have established subcodes to function codes 3110 (counseling) and 3120 (psychological services) to track expenditures for pre-referral activities with students being considered for Department of Mental Health services. Others have subcodes for function code 3120 to differentiate between assessment and counseling or to identify when the agency is paying the local mental health agency for services. Fresno USD has already implemented a subcode (5775) for intersession services for students with non-severe disabilities.

Program administrative staff expressed interest in being able to monitor expenditure growth for specific populations more closely, such as services to students with autism. Currently, it would require analysis of each expenditure charged to goal/activity code 5750 to identify those associated with autism. If a subcode for 5750 were employed (for example, 5755), then the autism program could easily be monitored and analyzed from year to year.

Staff Assignment for Budget Integrity and Maintenance of Effort

While this topic is discussed in greater depth in other sections of this report, it should be noted that problems can result directly from how staff salaries and benefits are charged in the budget. At the elementary level, resource specialists have been assigned based on the total school population and not the current or potential caseload the school might genuinely yield. These resource specialists are overassigned to schools to enable them to engage in pre-referral interventions that might prevent some students from requiring special education services.

There are clearly positive elements to this assignment scheme. It enables intervention strategies at the earliest possible opportunity. It precludes the identification of some students as requiring special education so that the school's resource specialist time is not reduced or lost. There is also a belief that these non-disabled students do not count toward the case-loading limits for the resource specialist program.

There are, however, some very costly negatives to the practice of charging staff full time to special education resources when a significant amount of their time is spent providing services to the general education population.

First, while non-disabled students may receive incidental benefit from special education resources, both federal and state law prohibit the use of special education resources to fund other activities:

Code of Federal Regulations 34 § 300.202 Use of amounts.

- (a) *General.* Amounts provided to the LEA under Part B of the Act—
- (1) Must be expended in accordance with the applicable provisions of this part;
 - (2) Must be used only to pay the excess costs of providing special education and related services to children with disabilities, consistent with paragraph (b) of this section; and
 - (3) Must be used to supplement State, local, and other Federal funds and not to supplant those funds.

California Education Code

56836.04. (a) The superintendent shall continuously monitor and review all special education programs approved under this part to assure that all funds appropriated to special education local plan areas under this part are expended for the purposes intended.

(b) Funds apportioned to special education local plan areas pursuant to this chapter shall be expended exclusively for programs operated under this part.

56841. (a) Federal funds available through Part B of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400 et seq.) and appropriated through the annual Budget Act shall only be used as follows:

- (1) For the excess costs of providing special education and related services to individuals with exceptional needs.
 - (2) To supplement state, local, and other federal funds and not to supplant those funds.
- (b) Except as provided in subdivisions (c) and (d), the funds shall not be used to reduce the level of expenditures for the education of individuals with exceptional needs made by the local educational agency from local funds below the level of those expenditures for the preceding fiscal year.

Clearly, assigning staff fully funded by special education resources to general education responsibilities may be a potential misuse of such resources.

56362. (a) The resource specialist program shall provide, but not be limited to, all of the following:

- (1) Provision for a resource specialist or specialists who shall provide instruction and services for those pupils whose needs have been identified in an individualized education program developed by the individualized education program team and who are assigned to regular classroom teachers for a majority of a school day.
- (2) Provision of information and assistance to individuals with exceptional needs and their parents.
- (3) Provision of consultation, resource information, and material regarding individuals with exceptional needs to their parents and to regular staff members.
- (4) Coordination of special education services with the regular school programs for each individual with exceptional needs enrolled in the resource specialist program.

- (5) Monitoring of pupil progress on a regular basis, participation in the review and revision of individualized education programs, as appropriate, and referral of pupils who do not demonstrate appropriate progress to the individualized education program team.
- (6) Emphasis at the secondary school level on academic achievement, career and vocational development, and preparation for adult life.
- (b) The resource specialist program shall be under the direction of a resource specialist who is a credentialed special education teacher, or who has a clinical services credential with a special class authorization, who has had three or more years of teaching experience, including both regular and special education teaching experience, as defined by rules and regulations of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing and who has demonstrated the competencies for a resource specialist, as established by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing.
- (c) Caseloads for resource specialists shall be stated in the local policies developed pursuant to Section 56195.8 and in accordance with regulations established by the board. No resource specialist shall have a caseload which exceeds 28 pupils.
- (d) Resource specialists shall not simultaneously be assigned to serve as resource specialists and to teach regular classes.
- (e) Resource specialists shall not enroll a pupil for a majority of a school day without prior approval by the superintendent.
- (f) At least 80 percent of the resource specialists within a local plan shall be provided with an instructional aide.

56362.1. For the purposes of Section 56362, “caseload” shall include, but not be limited to, all pupils for whom the resource specialist performs any of the services described in subdivision (a) of Section 56362.

If the resource specialist is charged to the budget as a full-time special education program staff member, then they should not be simultaneously assigned to teach regular classes. An assignment to work with non-disabled children is, more than likely, an assignment to teach regular classes.

FCMAT was informed that this practice resulted in the resource specialists serving more students than the statutory limit permits. The language in EC Sections 56362(d) and 56362.1 uses the term “pupil,” not “individual with exceptional needs,” “student with a disability,” or “disabled student.” In those cases where a resource specialist is providing any of the described services to a student without a disability, it is most likely that the student should be counted in the caseload.

These problems could be avoided by assigning staff to function code 1120 and a special education resource/agency code and goal/activity code only to the extent they actually serve students with disabilities. The remainder of the FTE could be charged to general education (resource/agency code 0000) and to goal/activity and function codes that don’t suggest they provide spe-

cial education services. The maximum caseload requirement would decrease proportionately to reflect the actual special education FTE. For example, a .5 FTE specialist would have a maximum caseload of 14, not 28. If he/she was also a .5 FTE reading teacher or school improvement teacher, that would not be charged to special education.

Some psychologists may be excessively charged to special education resources. In both the resource specialist and pupil personnel services programs (and in other similar situations) it is probably advisable to conduct periodic work-time analyses to determine the appropriate FTEs to charge to special education.

Excessive activities charged to special education resources also generate two significant problems for the district. First, parents and the community continually hear how much special education costs the district, yet they are fully aware that special education teachers work in general education with non-special education students. They have expressed concern that special education funds are not being spent only for special education and that regular education is benefiting from assistance that should go to students with disabilities. While this may not be accurate, the perception creates problems within the school community.

Secondly, since Fresno USD, like nearly every district in the state, spends more on special education than it receives from state and local sources, support for these programs also comes from the district's general funds. This is often referred to as encroachment; however, the funding models of both the federal and state programs are intended to supplement the local support:

“We found in our field visits that in many LEAs there is conflict between general and special education concerning the responsibility for providing services for pupils with disabilities. Some LEA administrators believe that students with disabilities are the sole responsibility of the state and federal governments and resent using any local revenue limit funding for special needs pupils. This viewpoint ignores the fact that the state provides a revenue limit for every pupil and works counter to providing a seamless educational system for all pupils.

“A principle of our proposal is that federal, state, and local education agencies will continue to share responsibility for funding special education. State and federal funding is intended to support a portion of LEA costs for providing special education for children with identified needs. There will continue to be a local funding share in providing education to these children.”

New Funding Model for Special Education: Final Report
Legislative Analyst's Office, Department of Education, Department of Finance
November 1995

As noted above, federal funds are to be “used to supplement State, local, and other Federal funds and not to supplant those funds.” The maintenance of effort requirement specifies that the district must spend at least as much of its local funds or its combined state and

local funds for special education as it did the prior year. Thus, every dollar the district spends for special education in a given year must continue to be expended in succeeding years.

Inappropriately charging staff to special education resources or purposes inflates the district's maintenance of effort level. Alternatively, directly charging non-special education activities to the general fund would reduce local support (encroachment) for special education and minimize the required maintenance of effort level. Of the \$83.5 million that the district has budgeted for special education this year, \$19 million is projected to come from the general fund. If that proves accurate, then next year the district must again budget that amount, or more, to be eligible for federal Part B funds. However, an unknown yet sizeable amount of that budgetary item will fund non-special education activities.

The district should review expenditures and staff assignments for 2004-05 and 2005-06 to determine the appropriate adjustment to the maintenance of effort requirement. Clearly, if general funds were used for non-special education activities, the district should not be required to expend that level to demonstrate maintenance of effort.

Other Budgeting Issues

As noted above, budgets are not always initially developed for federal grants and special state funding sources, and expenditures are made through journal adjustments at year's end by transferring appropriate expenditures from other resource/agency codes to the grant in question. This process is not unusual, but an initial budget is usually developed to address the purposes of the grant. For example, the staff development grant should be earmarked for specific activities to ensure that adequate staff development activities are conducted and the grant is appropriately used.

Textbook and lottery funds are not reflected in the special education budget, yet special education average daily attendance generates a portion of those funds. Including those funds would address the concerns of parents and others that special education students do not receive the resources to which they are entitled.

No evidence was found that a district committee exists to oversee the funds generated by MediCal billing. These funds are to be used to supplement existing services, not supplant them, and are to be based on the decisions and recommendations of a committee of service providers.

The district may initiate a program for 18- to 22-year-olds at its Adult Education School. It is concerned, however, that it may lose the revenue limit apportionment these students generate. The district could consider establishing a special education center at that location with its own school code, which should enable the average daily attendance to be reported as a special class or center and not as part of the adult school.

Other Fiscal Concerns

Fresno is the fourth largest single-district Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) in the state. For comparison, FCMAT identified the 17 largest single-district SELPAs, eliminating San Francisco because it is a district/county office SELPA.

As shown in the appendix, Fresno's per-ADA funding rate of \$581.0581 is ninth among the 17 SELPAs. Recent legislative actions have resulted in a cost of living adjustment (COLA) for special education that is significantly below that received by general education. For Fresno USD, the effective special education COLA is only 4.1%, almost 2% below that received by general education. Unless the Legislature addresses this problem, Fresno USD will need to plan for proportionately less revenue for special education than it has been receiving.

Fresno USD is also experiencing declining enrollment. The district lost 2,800 ADA last year, and the effects of that loss will be felt by a projected \$239,000 reduction in state funds this year.

Based on 2004-05 expenditures, Fresno USD ranked ninth among the 17 SELPAs in total expenditures per special education student, at \$10,719. However, it ranked fourth in expending local support from its general fund per special education student, at \$3,056. If staffing and coding changes are made as described above, both figures could drop considerably. Information was not available for all 17 SELPAs.

As shown in the appendix, Fresno USD does not inordinately identify students with disabilities overall (10.63% vs. the state average of 11.62%); nor does it overidentify any specific disability.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Form a budget committee of fiscal and program staff to fully analyze the budget and develop the 2007-08 budget considering prior expenditures, current activities, and projected needs.
2. Undertake efforts to assist the program administrative staff in acquiring greater understanding of the budget monitoring process through internal training by fiscal services staff and attendance at relevant workshops and other training opportunities.
3. Form an operations oversight committee of both fiscal and program staff to conduct regularly scheduled meetings to review budget expenditures and revenue and ensure that the budget reflects program operations.

4. Reflect the assignment of special education personnel to non-special education activities by charging their salaries to 5000 goals only when it is appropriate to do so. If possible, review the charges made to the 5000 goals in 2004-05 and 2005-06 and adjust the 2005-06 actuals to show maintenance of effort for 2006-07 at an appropriate level.
5. Consider implementing subcodes for the SACS goal, function, and object codes as other districts have done for federal special education, low incidence, and regionalized service/program specialist grants.
6. Consider interprogram revenue transfers to more accurately depict the source, destination and usage of funds and to make the budget more understandable to staff, parents, and the community.
7. Develop a MediCal billing committee to oversee these funds and ensure they are used to supplement, not supplant, other funded activities and their use is based on priority of need.
8. Place greater attention on MediCal eligible services to maximize this funding stream. Conduct considerable planning regarding when activities are undertaken to maximize MAA funds.
9. Use textbook funds generated by students in special day classes to purchase state approved or waived texts for use in special education classrooms.
10. Use Lottery funds generated by students in special day classes to purchase necessary instructional materials for use in those classes.
11. Develop a plan for the use of certain federal and state grants that can be anticipated (staff development, low incidence, out of home care, pre-mental health referral, etc.) and reflect the plan in the budget at the outset.
12. Utilize specific account codes for staff development provided directly by the district and for external staff development activities that the district supports.

Program Delivery Systems

Leadership Team

The Superintendent communicated to FCMAT his vision of a district that is fully committed to educating all its students in a supportive educational community that embraces the fullest participation of all students and their parents. The Superintendent's vision is actively supported by the Special Education Department staff.

In FCMAT's meetings with the Special Education Department leaders, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education, SELPA Administrator and district coordinators, there was a sense of collaboration and communication in efforts to enhance the delivery of special education services to district students. The leadership's comments in support of the Superintendent's vision suggest that they are interested in improving the organization and delivery of special education services in the district.

To improve the district's special education delivery model, collaborative teams might be organized to:

- Identify areas of study
- Identify each team member's responsibility
- Set the frequency of meetings
- Select a team leader to regularly report on team activities to the Assistant Superintendent
- Develop action plans and be accountable for them at all times

The teams need to clearly identify the purpose, function, funding and who is responsible for each of the following areas:

- Student Study Teams (SSTs)
- 504 Plans
- Baseline Teachers
- Response to Intervention (RTI)
- School Psychologists' Role

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Identify collaborative teams and outline their responsibilities.

Staffing Allocation

Site level resource specialists, baseline teachers and aide FTE allocations at the elementary level are determined by elementary general education school enrollment, not by caseload or based on special education student needs.

The district has implemented a baseline teacher program for special education at the elementary level that sees identified special education students and other students who are claimed on a Resource Specialist caseload. The program provides intervention strategies and instruction to students in pullout programs, and classroom interventions. It is funded with special education dollars, but doesn't appear to follow the legal requirements of a Resource Specialist program. The Resource Specialist programs in Education Code 56362 require students to be identified as having a handicapping condition. Their teachers are to be certified as Resource Specialists, and shall not be assigned to simultaneously teach regular classes. The district program conflicts with appropriate special education program funding. This will increase the district's support of special education funding and may affect its maintenance of effort. The intent of the program is to expand services to students needing intervention, but it should not be funded or operated under the special education umbrella. Some sites consider the program model to be a good option prior to referring students to special education; however, the funding source is one of the major issues.

All teams (student study teams and RTI) need to consider the following:

- The rationale for the program
- The funding model
- Supervision of the program
- Instruction and services the program offers
- Staffing
- Alternatives to the program
- Number of students served
- Other options
- How students are identified
- Parent involvement

The district's special education system seems highly decentralized. The school sites determine specialized program and service needs. These models are not consistent throughout the district and could lead to noncompliant delivery of special education services. Some principals and staffs have their own interpretation of special education policies, which also leads to a highly fragmented organization.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Review the baseline teacher programs through one of the newly recommended teams in the district, such as RTI.
2. Carefully review the funding of the program to ensure that special education dollars are not expended for a model that is not part of the state's special education structure and may affect district support and maintenance of effort. This would include other current special education supports to the program such as psychological time, etc.
3. Discontinue the baseline program as a special education program.

Site Administrators' Role in Special Education

Some school site administrators do not take ownership or responsibility for special education programs on their campus. Although some principals consider every student on their campus their responsibility, others leave the responsibility for the special education program to the special education staff.

Some principals expressed concern regarding the delivery of special education in that the programs and services need to be reviewed to better meet the students' needs. A district-wide process has not been established for students when they move from the 8th grade into high school. This creates problems for students, parents, and the high school staff when there is a breakdown in communication.

A needs assessment conducted at an administrators' meeting could identify professional development needs for the district administrators, which should include principals, vice principals, and other administrative personnel from other departments. Professional development programs could be provided by peers, the Special Education Department, the Diagnostic School – Fresno, attorneys and consultants.

Site administrators or their designees do not consistently participate in the IEP process. This is a serious shortcoming because the administrative representative in the IEP meeting must have knowledge of and the ability to commit district resources. This legal requirement has been reinforced again in the new federal special education reauthorization.

A district policy needs to be adopted so students can benefit from their educational program on the first day of high school. The policy could include some of the following options:

- A representative from the high school could attend the final IEP at the middle school.
- The meeting could be held at the high school that the student will attend.
- A parents' night could be held at the high school in the fall to discuss programs and services offered at the high school.
- A field trip could be planned for the students to visit the high school in the fall.
- Eighth-grade students could be monitored for dropout prevention.
- A high school peer mentoring program could be developed.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Develop a district-wide plan for each school administrator to take responsibility for all educational programs at the school, including special education.
2. Include an assessment in all administrator evaluations of how well the administrator assumes responsibility for special education programs at their site.
3. Develop a policy for successfully transitioning 8th grade special education students to high school. Communicate the student's current IEP, programs and services well in advance to ensure a smooth transition.

Access to Equipment and Technology

There are numerous examples of older technology still being used in special education classrooms, and some classrooms are isolated at some school sites.

To avoid discrimination issues, each school site must carefully review the location of special education classrooms on campus. These programs and classrooms must not be separated so that students do not have the opportunity to participate with nondisabled peers. Both federal and state laws are clear about the needs for students with disabilities to be included in regular education programs.

Classrooms for all students should have high quality equipment and technology that is up-to-date. Specialized materials and equipment should be the responsibility of the special education department, but other classroom materials and equipment should be the responsibility of each school site.

Currently there is only one FTE Special Education Technology Specialist for the entire school district, with more than 8,000 special education students. The district might consider additional staffing for this specialized area and consider opening a Technology Center. Students could be brought to the center for assessments, with specialized materials and equipment available to determine the appropriate equipment for each student referred.

The center might handle speech and language services, psychological services, occupational therapy, and total assessments. This concept could extend to the Diagnostic School – Fresno, California State University, Fresno, and Children’s Hospital Central California. A Technology Center would support the Superintendent’s vision of a regional support system and would include a variety of other agencies working together on behalf of students with special needs.

Concern was expressed by parents that special education students were using older equipment. Technology can enhance the learning opportunities for students in special education. A special education program located in a portable behind the main building that contains outdated equipment and materials can send a very negative message to the parent. There should be comparable materials and equipment for regular education and special education classrooms.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Conduct an inventory needs assessment of materials and equipment on each school site, including the number, age, and location of computers.
2. Require the principal at each site to review the inventory needs assessment and, with the special education staff, develop an action plan for the removal of old equipment and purchase of new equipment.
3. Develop a low-incidence budget for the purchase of equipment for students who qualify under the low-incidence funding per Education Code 56026.5. Form a committee to develop a handbook identifying how the funds can be spent and the appropriate forms and procedures for securing such equipment.
4. Consider opening a Technology Center, as described above.

Curriculum

The district has not adopted a curriculum for mild to moderate special education students. The SELPA Director and the Curriculum and Instruction department have undertaken the development of such curricula and curricular alignments. There was sporadic implementation of the SEACO curriculum, but no district-wide implementation or professional development.

Parents, teachers, and administrators expressed concern regarding the curriculum and instruction being delivered in special education programs throughout the school district. The district does not currently provide appropriate curriculum to students with mild to severe disabilities. Some special day class teachers observed did not demonstrate good teaching

practices. Research indicates that all students can be successful learners when presented with instruction that is based on their individual learning style. The pace and volume of learning may be different for each student, but the quality of instruction is the key to success. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the world's leader in the development of standards for special education teachers. Utilizing these standards can help teachers to maintain the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of their students. The article, "TEACHING Exceptional Children-July/August 2003" discusses the standards that can be used as a self evaluation of teaching skills. This evaluation tool is very helpful for beginning teachers who work with mild to moderate students and can be a means for special education teachers to request and receive professional development.

Special day classes should look like general education classes, with meaningful student work and age-appropriate group projects. Student progress depends on appropriate instruction that results from teacher training. There has been little special education teacher training in the district for a significant period of time.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Utilize the Special Education Administrators of County Offices (SEACO) curriculum for students with moderate to severe needs.
2. Utilize other curriculums such as TEACCH, Handwriting without Tears, the Handbook of Goals and Objectives from ACSA and numerous other published curricula.
3. Use assessment data to drive instructional programs, including special education. Conduct ongoing assessments in all classrooms to give each instructor feedback concerning learning in their classroom and the impetus to change curriculum when necessary to ensure that all students benefit from specialized instruction. Provide teachers with good data so they may demonstrate student success.
4. Ensure that students are grouped according to their abilities, age and needs. Provide teachers with professional development in teaching strategies based on ongoing data collection, assessment, and curriculums, and train them in how to provide support to students with behavioral needs.
5. Provide job-alike sessions after school for teachers to share curricula and successful instructional strategies for students.

6. Conduct a staff development needs assessment for all special education staff and parents. (Staff development will be reviewed in another section of this report.)
7. Ensure that teachers are evaluated as required. Focus on the same evaluation areas for special education teachers and general education teachers. Consider using the standards set forth in California Standards for the Teaching Profession. Require site administrators to conduct evaluations; however, if an administrator experiences difficulty with an evaluation, seek consultation from the Special Education Department for the teacher and administrator.
8. Consider providing special education teachers with training similar to a beginning teacher program for ongoing teacher support, coaching and professional development.
9. Develop and maintain IEPs based on current assessment information. Ensure that weekly student assessments take place, as assessments drive instruction, and that parents are kept informed.
10. Develop a partnership with the Special Education Department, the Curriculum Department and local universities regarding teaching special education students with diverse needs and diverse backgrounds.
11. Ensure that the Special Education and Human Resources departments meet to review or develop all job descriptions for special education personnel. Place the job descriptions into a handbook and distribute it to all district administrators for use in evaluations and for information regarding special education.
12. Adopt curricular alternatives that align with the core curriculum for district-wide use with students who have mild to moderate disabilities.
13. Adopt a district-wide curriculum for use with students who have moderate to severe disabilities. During the adoption process, develop regional support systems to provide professional development and assistance in implementing the adopted curricula and alternatives throughout the district. Include both special educators and general educators in the support systems.
14. Consider forming one or more diagnostic teams to assess students in-depth and develop educational interventions to facilitate student success in core curricular areas. Place the teams at centrally located sites to facilitate the evaluation of proposed interventions with these students in regular classrooms. The following teams are suggested:

- Autism
 - Preschool
 - Middle School/High School
 - Blind and Visually Impaired
 - Deaf and Hard of Hearing
 - Orthopedically Handicapped
15. Review the role and responsibility of the following positions to ensure all the critical elements of special education program design and implementation are in place:
- Certificated Occupational Therapy Assistants (COTA)
 - Behavioral Specialists
 - Program Specialists in accordance with Education Code 56368

Collaboration/Communication

Collaboration and communication between the Special Education Department and other departments such as fiscal, curriculum, health services and human resources is limited. For example, the Health Services Department changed a form that is used for special education students, but the Special Education Department was not aware of the change.

An advisory committee for special education could help facilitate communications. The Assistant Superintendent of Special Services could serve as committee chair, with the SELPA Administrator, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Associate Superintendent/CFO, Director of Nursing Services, and Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources as key members. The committee chair would report on committee activities to the district Superintendent, and each member would convey the information to their staff. Agendas and minutes would be included in this process. Topics could include professional development, technology, curricula, and budgets.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Consider developing a Special Education Advisory Committee that would meet monthly to share information, discuss program concerns, review fiscal information, personnel, curriculum, etc.

Individualized Educational Plans

Less than 4% of IEP reviews are overdue and less than 2% of triennial evaluations have not been completed. However, any overdue IEP is a potential liability to a school district. At the time of FCMAT's fieldwork, there were approximately 323 overdue IEPs and 162 triennial evaluations not completed, with a special education pupil count of 8,078. The

district's current IEP forms do not meet all the legal requirements; for example, the team could not locate the district's Offer of Free Appropriate Public Education. The forms do not have sufficient space for writing and/or typing.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Provide alternative dispute resolution training and facilitated IEP professional development for staff who attend IEP meetings.
2. Discuss exit criteria for students at every IEP meeting and provide more space on the IEP forms for notes of the discussion.
3. Send out CASEMIS lists of all students to all staff at the beginning of every school year as to when IEP meetings need to be held and triennial evaluations must be completed.
4. Temporarily reassign staff, if necessary, to complete assessments.
5. Ensure that site administrators or their designees are involved in and take responsibility for the IEP process at their school sites. Send monthly notices from the Special Education Department to all site administrators regarding overdue IEPs.
6. Identify a department administrator to be responsible for due process and compliance.

Matriculation and Exit Criteria

The district has no clear plan for providing services to fifth-year and older seniors. Some students attend programs operated by the County Office of Education, some continue to be served in high schools, some go to adult education, and some cease to receive services.

The district's Local Plan contains a section that discusses transition, and there are IEP forms for transition services. The signature page of the IEP contains a section titled Proficiency Standards, with four options for the team to identify. These range from "the student will meet board-adopted standards" to "the team anticipates the student will not be a candidate for a diploma, but instead will be a candidate for a Certificate of Educational Achievement/Completion or a Letter of Recommendation upon completion of required coursework." The student's educational track to a diploma or a certificate appears to be established at a very early age and is sometimes decided by the type of disability. Many 18-year-old students with severe disabilities move to the Fresno County Office of Education's program. Other 18-year-old students with severe needs receive a Certificate of Completion or transition to adult school.

The California Department of Education 2004-2005 Special Education Data Report indicated the following for Fresno Unified School District:

	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Diploma	62.7%	43.4%	44.0%
Certificate/Other	16.5%	20.8%	16.3%
Dropout	1.4%	2.0%	1.1%
Move-Unknown	2.0%	1.2%	1.9%

To help reduce the number of students with disabilities that drop out of school, the IEP teams must work closely with each student and the student's family to discuss the future and what will motivate the student to complete his or her education. There are many reasons why students drop out of school, including lack of motivation, grades, peer pressure, lack of success, poor instruction, etc. The IEP team is responsible to constantly monitor students' difficulties and successes in school. Timing is crucial in making the necessary changes that a student needs to succeed.

Transition planning in the IEP process guides the student toward a diploma or a certificate of completion. The original purpose of transition planning was to enable special education students to take the appropriate coursework to receive a diploma and to help guide them in vocational areas of interest to become independent young adults. The first IEP transition meeting is when the team, including the student, makes decisions regarding the student's high school career, curriculum, diploma/certificate, and eventual vocation.

The district should consider forming a committee that includes parents and district and high school administrators to review existing forms and information and set criteria to guide the IEP teams in their efforts to transition each student. The committee could set the age at which the team should recommend a track for the student to follow and determine the reasons why special education students drop out of school. The Certificate of Education Achievement and Certificate of Completion forms should be reviewed, and appropriate changes recommended. The committee could develop a Transition Handbook for parents, students and teachers.

In addition, the committee could review local special education policies on promotion, retention, and grading of students with special needs, as well as the Algebra 1 graduation requirement and how it pertains to special education students. (There are State Department policies on these topics.) Programs for fifth year and older seniors need to be identified and made available for review at IEP meetings. Many community colleges provide services to disabled students, so it would be appropriate to include the college in the discussion of options and services for older students.

The committee could meet with the Fresno County Office of Education regarding its programs and services and who should operate the programs. The same discussion could occur with the adult school.

Information and recommendations from this committee would be reviewed by Administrative Special Education Advisory Committee and the Community Advisory Committee (CAC).

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Review the transition IEP forms to determine the legal requirements.
2. Consider forming a Transition Committee to review documents, develop materials, and collaborate with other committees and entities to ensure appropriate transition planning for special education students.

Transportation

Over 1,344 special education students are provided door-to-door transportation in the district. Currently 14,000 students are transported to school daily through a contract arrangement with a private bus company. There is no parent handbook regarding transportation and parents are not informed of policies and procedures. Frequently parents are not home when students need to be dropped off. However, the district has adopted a new procedure when parents are not home that will help decrease the number of incidences per day.

The Transportation Department has a significant driver retention issue, which is common throughout the state. Some students require an aide or a nurse. Some students are placed in a special education program close to their home rather than one that is appropriate for the student.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Design a transportation handbook for parents that is printed in English and Spanish.
2. Provide a transportation fact sheet to parents at the beginning of the year reminding them of their responsibilities and duties with regard to transportation, such as making sure their student is on time.
3. Ensure that IEP teams continue to seek out appropriate programs and services for all students regardless of where they live.

Exit Criteria

There are many students who, if provided an appropriate public education, will not need specially designed instruction throughout their educational career. The purpose of special education is to design an individualized program to meet the educational needs of the student and promote educational success. Placing students with disabilities in this manner should enable each disabled student to meet high expectations in the future.

Placement decisions must be individually determined based on each student's abilities and needs and not solely on factors such as category or significance of the disability, availability of special education services, the service delivery system, space or convenience. Rather, each student's IEP forms the basis for the placement decision and the exit criteria. Some district students, particularly at the high school level, currently have an IEP, but do not regularly receive services. Some students received speech and language services in kindergarten for an articulation disorder and are now in 9th grade with the same articulation issue and still receiving services. Many SELPAs in California have developed exit criteria that reduce the numbers of students served to only those who currently qualify. The Sonoma County SELPA has good information in this regard.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Identify through the California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS) those students who receive the least amount of services, and discuss this issue with site administrators.
2. Develop exit criteria and discuss the criteria with the CAC, with special education teachers at all levels, and at every IEP meeting.
3. Provide exit data to the Administrative Special Education Advisory Committee.
4. Provide teachers with professional development on exit criteria.

Staffing

There is a national shortage of special education personnel throughout this country as fewer individuals go into the profession. Some fields within special education have significant numbers of graduates, such as speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists and teachers of the emotionally disturbed. Other issues include salaries and a lack of new teacher support. Some colleges and universities have a strong special education department and others provide a basic program. Nearly 36% of school-age students in the United States are culturally or linguistically diverse, and school districts in every major U.S. city report a majority of students as minority representation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

As the demographics of our schools' populations change, so do the demographics of those who receive special education services. Yet, Yates and Ortiz (2004) maintain, "At this time special education professionals are no better prepared than general educators to respond to these changes." This need for special educators is alarming. There is a major push in the direction of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) for teachers to develop programs and services to meet the unique needs of the linguistically diverse learner.

It has become very difficult to identify, hire and retain classified personnel such as instructional aides. There usually is no initial professional development for classified personnel who work with special education students, and oftentimes the teacher does not have time to train the new aide. The special education staffing summary does not clearly show the total number of instructional assistants in the district.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Consider developing a "golden coaching" program and employ newly retired teachers to coach new special education teachers for a year.
2. Continue to strengthen collaboration and communications with local universities/colleges with regard to observations, visitations, student teacher training program and other arrangements between the agencies.
3. Develop a two year intensive staff development plan for all special and regular education staff, parents and administrators based on a special education needs assessment. Publish the needs assessment for parents in English and Spanish.
4. Adopt a special education staff development calendar in hard copy and place it online.
5. Conduct ongoing professional development in collaboration with the Curriculum and Instruction Department.
6. Share low-incidence professional development with nearby school districts and the county office of education.
7. Consider having teachers develop and maintain professional portfolios to better communicate their skills and expertise in the field of special education to parents.
8. Utilize special education staff development funding for support of the programs.
9. Collaborate with the Diagnostic School – Fresno, local colleges and universities and Children's Hospital Central California for professional development.

Referral Processes and Student Study Teams

The district is committed to developing and implementing extensive educational interventions for low-performing and at-risk students. Many of the educational interventions, modifications and strategies have been developed, piloted and implemented on demonstration sites by the Special Education Department. Intermediate special education management, support, regional instructional service personnel, special education teachers (resource specialists and baseline teachers) and paraprofessionals provide direct site support to site administrators and regular education staff for implementing interventions, modifications and strategies.

There are three district established policies and procedures for implementing interventions for low-performing and/or high-risk students:

- Student Success Team (SST)
- 504 Plan
- Response to Interventions (RTI)

Student Success Team (SST)

The “FUSD Guide to Special Education 2006-2007” (August 2006), Section 1400, Pages 1400 through page 1412 contain the policy, procedures and forms for the SST. The district does not have a district-level SST coordinator. School site administrators are responsible for implementing the SST. The district has a large number of new site administrators. District level in-service training for site administrators and staff is not evident. Special education regional instructional specialists, school psychologists, and other special education support personnel provide support to site administrators, when requested, to implement the SST process. Special education staff participates, but does not organize or chair the SST.

The implementation and utilization of the SST process is not consistent throughout the district. The process varies from a special education services referral process to extensive documented regular education modifications, interventions and strategies for low-performing and/or high-risk students. Many of the regular interventions and strategies are developed and implemented by special education and baseline teachers (special education teachers who may or may not have students with identified needs for special education services).

A decrease in the severe learning disabilities pupil count category may be attributed to the aggressive intervention strategies provided by some school sites.

504 Plan

The “FUSD Guide to Special Education 2006-2007” (August 2006), Section 1400, Pages 1413 through page 1430B contains the 504 Plan policy, procedures and forms. The district-level 504 Plan coordinator reports to the Curriculum and Instruction Department. School

site administrators are responsible for implementing and monitoring 504 Plans on their sites. District level in-service training for site administrators and staff is not evident.

There is an inconsistent practice of placing students who are exiting special education services on 504 Plans. The plans are not consistently monitored, modified or discontinued when appropriate. The transition and implementation of 504 Plans from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school also is not consistent.

Response to Intervention

The Special Education Department developed and presented the response to intervention (RTI) policy to the Superintendent's Cabinet on Jan. 12, 2006. The Cabinet presentation proposed the use of the SST as a monitoring agent for progress. (RTI presentation, Tier 1, Slide 17.) The Special Education and Curriculum and Instruction departments will make staff presentations on the RTI components in October 2006. District-wide policies, procedures and practices are not developed.

The Special Education Department is piloting the Ready to Learn (RTL) process at an elementary school site, and is coordinating with the Curriculum and Instruction Department to implement the RTI process in 10 additional school sites (the district has 100 school sites). School psychologists and resource instructional service personnel provide support to the site administrators on the implementation of the RTI policy and procedures. Some school sites utilize baseline teachers provided by the Special Education Department to develop and implement RTI educational modifications and interventions for low-performing and high-risk students.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Move SST and RTI policies from the Special Education Guidelines to the Curriculum and Instruction Guidelines.
2. Place the responsibility for administering, implementing and monitoring the SST and RTI policies and procedures with the Curriculum and Instruction Department.
3. Conduct comprehensive mandatory staff development for site administrators and staff on SSTs, 504 Plans and RTIs.
4. Develop an evaluation component to address the site administrator's implementation of consistent practices for SSTs, 504 Plans and RTIs.

5. Utilize the SST team at the site level to implement, modify and monitor the actions of SSTs, 504 Plans and RTLs.
6. Develop district-wide monitoring/data collection system(s) for SSTs, 504 Plans and RTIs.
7. Continue to appropriately utilize current special education and support personnel in the SST process.
8. Assign special education and curriculum and instruction department liaison personnel to develop communication and staff support, and to assist in implementing policies, procedures, strategies and monitoring.
9. Utilize both departments' staff to develop appropriate policies, procedures, and strategies, and to monitor their implementation.
10. Utilize both departments to coordinate development of future policies and procedures affecting the total student population.
11. Utilize resource instructional specialists, support staff (school psychologists) and itinerant special education personnel to provide support and in-service training.
12. Review and modify the fiscal audit trail (see staffing ratios) of regular and special education funding supporting baseline special education teachers and resource specialists who provide direct interventions, modification and strategies for regular education (nonidentified special education) students.

One-to-One (1:1) Paraprofessionals

The district has 1:1 instructional assistants for inclusion and/or special needs students, particularly those with special health care needs and behavioral issues. Currently, 135 special education classroom support assistants (1:1 aides) are reported. However, the district's staffing report identifies 70 1:1 assistants for students with disabilities. As with many school districts in California, the number of 1:1 instructional aides has risen dramatically, and this has significantly affected special education funding and programs.

The Special Education Department procedure to establish the need for a 1:1 aide is titled, "Directions for Establishing IEP-Based Classroom Support Assistance." A footnote on the cover page of the district's 1:1 handbook indicates that six SELPAs in California took this model, but the Fresno Unified model does not include all of the same components as the other six. For example, the interview forms, rubric, and letters to parents regarding services are not included. Therefore, it appears that the model is not complete, has not been reviewed by staff and has not been implemented.

It was indicated that training for specific 1:1 assistance is not provided for classified staff hired or assigned to assist individual students.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Revise the current procedure and implement a 1:1 special assistance policy and procedure for the Special Education Department so that IEP teams can determine if 1:1 assistance is appropriate for a special education student. Include forms for gathering data, interview forms for parents and teachers, procedures for implementation and monitoring effectiveness, and criteria to determine when 1:1 special assistance is no longer needed.
2. Develop a board policy on implementing 1:1 aide support service.
3. Conduct professional development programs to train teachers and 1:1 aides on this model.
4. Train others on the 1:1 program, such as school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and parents.
5. Work with the Human Resources Department and Fiscal Division to develop a job description, budgets and salary for this position.
6. Develop a procedure to follow when a 1:1 support person is absent or otherwise not available.

7. Ensure that IEP teams include an appropriate fading plan in the implementation of a 1:1 program for students.
8. Review the developed policies and procedures with the Fresno Community Advisory Committee (CAC).
9. Identify the administrator responsible for the 1:1 program and establish a target date for its implementation.
10. Develop a procedure for evaluating the effectiveness of the program that includes the number of personnel, students' progress, and budget impact.

Class Sizes

The state has made changes to the California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS) for tracking special education student services and placements.

The district has implemented an intensive elementary instructional program for low-performing and/or high-risk students. This includes utilizing resource specialists to provide intervention services to students not identified as requiring special education services, and assigning and utilizing baseline teachers (RSP certificated and/or special education credentials) based on school enrollment to provide intervention services to students not identified as requiring special education services. Site-level resource specialists and baseline teachers may share or split caseloads. This makes tracking caseload data of special education unduplicated/duplicated services and services to non-special education students difficult.

The district does not document or allocate funding sources for the RSP and baseline teachers to ensure that special education funding is utilized solely for services to special education students and that regular education funding is utilized for regular education students.

The district is currently attempting to address RSP caseload issues to conform to California Education Codes 56362(a)(1), 56362(c), 56362(d) and 56362.1. (See Appendix)

The district has not implemented a management information system (MIS) that can track and provide staffing ratio comparisons. Special education certificated and classified staff that provide special education services are tracked through department budget documents. Current department budget documents show personnel assigned by disability category to sites. Staffing turnover, transfers, retirements, etc., make tracking of staff and FTE allocations difficult.

Budget documents do not track paraprofessionals and 1:1 special assistants separately, and do not indicate assignments of paraprofessionals to certificated staff (supervision). They do indicate assignments of 1:1 special assistants to the student assigned, although this is not done with sign-language interpreters.

The current Assessment Information System (AiS) cannot document the students assigned to special education staff. Assignment reports read: *“Some middle school class assignments may not be correct. Until the problem in the mainframe is fixed, there is nothing AiS can do.”* The duplicated pupil count cannot be accessed, and regular education students assigned to RSP and baseline teachers cannot be determined.

The district’s utilization of 1:1 special education assistants is increasing without a consistent and complete policy, procedure, monitoring or tracking procedure in place.

The district is developing an MIS to track caseload specific to special education and non-special education students being served by each special education instructor.

State and District CBEDS Comparison

The California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) shows 1.08% statewide growth from 2002-03 to 2005-06, with a .16% decrease the past year. The district's CBEDS shows a 2.69% decrease from 2002-03 to 2005-06 with a 2.91% decrease the past two years.

Fresno Unified School District	
YEAR	CBEDS
2002-03	81,222
2003-04 +.23%	81,408
2004-05 -.80%	80,760
2005-06 -2.12%	79,046

State of California	
YEAR	CBEDS
2002-03	6,244,732
2003-04 +.86%	6,298,747
2004-05 +.37%	6,322,096
2005-06 -.15%	6,312,393

The state pupil count shows 1.08% total growth from 2002-03 to 2005-06, while the district's CBEDS enrollment has declined over the past two years by 2,362, or 2.69%. The enrollment decline represents a significant loss of regular and special education revenue.

State and District Pupil Count Comparison by Non-Severe, Low Incidence and Severe Disabilities

Non-Severe Disabilities - District

Year	SLI	OHI	SLD
2002-03	1,884	407	4,681
2003-04	1,941	446	4,294
% +/-	3.03%	9.58%	-8.27%
2004-05	2,023	522	4,064
% +/-	4.22%	17.04%	-5.36%
2005-06	2,110	597	3,681
% +/-	4.30%	14.37%	-9.42%
Average percentage	3.85%	13.66%	-7.68%

State and District Pupil Count Comparison by Non-Severe, Low Incidence and Severe Disabilities

Non-Severe Disabilities - State

YEAR	SLI	OHI	SLD
2002-2003	172,417	28,161	344,571
2003-2004	175,927	32,083	337,884
% +/-	2.04%	13.93%	-1.94%
2004-2005	176,265	35,650	328,381
% +/-	0.19%	11.12%	-2.81%
2005-2006	181,319	40,081	314,817
% +/-	2.87%	12.43%	-4.13%
Average percentage	1.70%	12.49%	-2.96%

The district's non-severe disabilities data show that its growth rate for speech-language impaired students is more than double the state's growth rate. The district's growth rate for other health impaired is slightly higher than the state rate. This may require additional nurse/health aide assistance. The district's rate of decline in the severe learning disabilities category is more than twice the state's rate of decline. This may be due to a combination of factors:

- Declining CBEDS enrollment may include students identified with severe learning disabilities.
- Intensive elementary level interventions, modifications and strategies are provided to low-performing and/or high-risk students.

Low-Incidence Disabilities - Statewide Data

YEAR	HH	DEAF	VI	OI
2002-2003	6,934	4,540	4,624	15,131
2003-2004	7,200	4,510	4,599	15,074
% +/-	3.84%	-0.66%	-0.54%	-0.38%
2004-2005	7,608	4,462	4,798	15,321
% +/-	5.67%	-1.06%	4.33%	1.64%
2005-2006	8,150	4,337	4,761	15,653
% +/-	7.12%	-2.80%	-0.77%	2.17%
AVE %	5.54%	-1.51%	1.01%	1.14%

Low-Incidence Disabilities - Fresno Unified School District Data

YEAR	HH	DEAF	VI	OI
2002-2003	93	63	93	249
2003-2004	95	64	108	258
% +/-	2.15%	1.59%	16.13%	3.61%
2004-2005	91	63	106	258
% +/-	-4.21%	-1.56%	-1.85%	0.00%
2005-2006	95	54	101	263
% +/-	4.40%	-14.29%	-4.72%	1.94%
AVE %	0.78%	-4.75%	3.19%	1.85%

The district's hard of hearing disability percentages have increased more slowly than the state's. The deaf category has significantly decreased, and at a faster rate than the state. This may lead to a leveling, or reduction, in the need for highly trained sign-language interpreters. The district's visually impaired and orthopedically impaired categories are increasing faster than the state rate. This may require additional highly trained staff (Braille, mobility instruction, occupational therapy, physical therapy, nurses/health aides, specialized individual paraprofessional assistants).

Severe Disabilities – Statewide Data

YEAR	MR	ED	DB	MD	AUT	TBI
2002-2003	43,302	26,144	207	6,670	21,066	1,565
2003-2004	44,017	27,292	215	6,606	24,943	1,630
% +/-	1.65%	4.39%	3.86%	-0.96%	18.40%	4.15%
2004-2005	44,263	27,912	266	5,926	29,370	1,747
% +/-	0.56%	2.27%	23.72%	-10.29%	17.75%	7.18%
2005-2006	43,739	27,512	229	6,125	34,668	1,787
% +/-	-1.18%	-1.43%	-13.91%	3.36%	18.04%	2.29%
AVE %	0.34%	1.74%	4.56%	-2.63%	18.06%	4.54%

Severe Disabilities – Fresno Unified School District Data

YEAR	MR	ED	DB	MD	AUT	TBI
2002-2003	688	194	0	21	111	43
2003-2004	704	198	2	17	141	39
% +/-	2.33%	2.06%	100.00%	-19.05%	27.03%	-9.30%
2004-2005	717	241	2	19	179	29
% +/-	1.85%	21.72%	0.00%	11.76%	26.95%	-25.64%
2005-2006	701	248	0	20	206	28
% +/-	-2.23%	2.90%	-100.00%	5.26%	15.08%	-3.45%
Average %	0.65%	8.89%	0.00%	-0.67%	23.02%	-12.80%

The severe disability categories of deaf/blind, multiple disabilities, and traumatic brain injuries yield low numbers that are not easily predicted. The district is well below the state growth rates.

The mentally retarded category is growing at a slow rate. The emotionally disturbed and autism categories are growing significantly, and faster than the statewide rate. This may require additional highly trained certificated and classified district staff and related agency cooperation to provide services.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Implement a CASEMIS that will conform to state reporting requirements.
2. Develop and implement an MIS that can give current and accurate data on:
 - Special Education pupil count: unduplicated and duplicated.
 - Special education unduplicated/duplicated caseload by certificated/licensed personnel.
 - Special education unduplicated/duplicated and regular education caseload by special education certificated/licensed personnel.
 - Special education personnel assignments (including paraprofessionals assigned to certificated personnel).
3. Develop a philosophy of special assistance (one-to-one service) that does not assign personnel to students.
 - The policy and procedures should thoroughly document the need, identify the desired outcomes, and include monitoring and diminishing/terminating of the service to promote student independence.
 - The personnel should not be identified and tracked through the budget process as an assignment to a specific student.

Current Method of Tracking Personnel

The Special Education Department utilizes a spreadsheet program to track certificated and classified personnel through data sorting. The spreadsheet data includes:

- California School Accounting Manual codes
- Central office administration
- Central office instructional staff (itinerant)
- Elementary program, including infant and preschool
- Secondary program

Certificated Instructional codes used are:

CODES	POSITION CODES-CERTIFICATED
	11452 TEACHER, HANDICAPPED, ORTH SDC
	11464 TEACHER, AUTISTIC, SDC
	11476 TEACHER, VIS HNDCP, SDC
	11478 TEACHER, HEARING IMPAIRED, SDC
	11480 TEACHER, LRNG HNDCP, SDC
	11484 TEACHER, SEV LANG DISORDR, SDC
	11492 TEACHER, HANDICAPPED, SEVERELY
	11500 TEACHER, INDIVIDUAL, SMALL GRP-ISGI
	11504 TEACHER, HEARING IMPAIRED
	11517 THERAPIST, SPCH/LANG/HRNG/DIS
	11533 TEACHER, ADAPTIVE, PE
	11556 SPECIALIST, RESOURCE, SP ED
	11560 AUDIOLOGIST,TEACHER, DIS
	11620 TEACHER, SPEC EDUC, VOC ED
	12450 NURSE
	13474 TEACHER, SPEC ASSGN

Classified Instructional codes used are:

CODES	POSITION CODES-CLASSIFIED AIDES	TITLE CODES
	<u>G211800 = G18/ =</u>	<u>G20025 = /25 IA-CHLD AIDE</u>
	<u>G212200 = G22/ =</u>	<u>G20060 = /60 IA-SP ED-LH</u>
	<u>G212200 = G22/ =</u>	<u>G20063 = /63 IA-SP ED/RES</u>
	<u>G212200 = G22/ =</u>	<u>G20064 = /64 IA-SP ED-VH</u>
	<u>G212300 = G23/ =</u>	<u>G20065 = /65 IA-SE-PK/LH</u>
	<u>G212400 = G24/ =</u>	<u>G20061 = /61 IA-SP ED-PH</u>
	<u>G212400 = G24/ =</u>	<u>G20062 = /62 IA-SP ED-SH</u>
	<u>G212700 = G27/ =</u>	<u>G20002 = /02 INTRP CUE I</u>
	<u>G212700 = G27/ =</u>	<u>G20004 = /04 INTRP ORL I</u>
	<u>G212700 = G27/ =</u>	<u>G20006 = /06 INTRP SGN I</u>
	<u>G212700 = G27/ =</u>	<u>G20070 = /70 PARAEDUC CB</u>
	<u>G213000 = G30/ =</u>	<u>G20508 = /508 BRAILLE TRAN</u>
	<u>G213400 = G34/ =</u>	<u>G20003 = /03 INTRP CUE II</u>
	<u>G213400 = G34 =</u>	<u>G20007 = /07 INTRP SGN II</u>
	<u>G213900 = G39/ =</u>	<u>G20020 = /20 INTP CUE III</u>
	<u>G213900 = G39 =</u>	<u>G20022 = /22 INTP SGN III</u>

One-to-one aides are indicated by replacing the “00” in the position code with “11.”

Spreadsheet fields include:

- Titles: Central office, school site
- Certificated code numbers – which may include other data, e.g., 11480B
- Budget tracking data: 6500-1015-5770-1120
- Certificated service type: MM, MS, VI, etc.
- Personnel name
- Level/track of service: (A), (B), PS-K, 4-6, etc.
- Certificated full-time equivalent
- Classified budget tracking: 6500-1553-5750-1110
- Classified code numbers
- Classified name
- Classified service type: SH, RS, Para, etc.
- Classified hours
- Classified full-time equivalent

Certificated and classified personnel data is listed under district central office or school sites.

Fields contain more than one type of data, and the certificated and classified service type fields do not coincide (Certificated MM, Classified SH). Certificated and classified personnel cannot be tracked as a unit (teacher and two aides and/or 1:1 aide).

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Consider expanding the certificated position codes by six decimal places, using the original code to identify the type of service, the first three decimals to represent the site, and the second three decimals to represent the certificated staff.

11452.001089	CODE
11452.000000	TEACHER, HANDICAPPED, ORTH SDC
0.001000	Adams Elementary
0.000089	Janet Jones

2. Expand certificated fields to include the additional designations used, such as 11452B.
3. Expand the classified fields to track the classified position to the certificated personnel.
4. Standardize the service type codes for both certificated and classified.

5. Embed the certificated position codes into the special education budget to allow the tracking of class costs (all personnel and support expenditures) and disability costs (all 11452 ORTH SDC expenditures).
6. Embed the certificated position codes into the CASEMIS data to allow access to each certificated employee's caseload.

SELPA and District Roles and Responsibilities

There are 118 Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA) in California. Of these, 30 are SELPAs composed of a single district. Fresno USD is the fourth largest such SELPA in the state. Single district SELPAs are established pursuant to E. C. Section 56195.1(a).

- 56195.1. The governing board of a district shall elect to do one of the following:
- (a) If of sufficient size and scope, under standards adopted by the board, submit to the superintendent a local plan for the education of all individuals with exceptional needs residing in the district in accordance with Chapter 3 (commencing with Section 56205).

In addition to allocating state and federal special education assistance, the defining role for all SELPAs is the provision of regionalized services as specified in the Education Code:

- 56836.23. Funds for regionalized operations and services and the direct instructional support of program specialists shall be apportioned to the special education local plan areas. As a condition to receiving those funds, the special education local plan area shall ensure that all functions listed below are performed in accordance with the description set forth in its local plan adopted pursuant to Section 56205:
- (a) Coordination of the special education local plan area and the implementation of the local plan.
 - (b) Coordinated system of identification and assessment.
 - (c) Coordinated system of procedural safeguards.
 - (d) Coordinated system of staff development and parent and guardian education.
 - (e) Coordinated system of curriculum development and alignment with the core curriculum.
 - (f) Coordinated system of internal program review, evaluation of the effectiveness of the local plan, and implementation of a local plan accountability mechanism.
 - (g) Coordinated system of data collection and management.
 - (h) Coordination of interagency agreements.
 - (i) Coordination of services to medical facilities.
 - (j) Coordination of services to licensed children's institutions and foster family homes.
 - (k) Preparation and transmission of required special education local plan area reports.
 - (l) Fiscal and logistical support of the community advisory committee.
 - (m) Coordination of transportation services for individuals with exceptional needs.
 - (n) Coordination of career and vocational education and transition services.
 - (o) Assurance of full educational opportunity.
 - (p) Fiscal administration and the allocation of state and federal funds pursuant to Section 56836.01.

(q) Direct instructional program support that may be provided by program specialists in accordance with Section 56368.

56368. (a) A program specialist is a specialist who holds a valid special education credential, clinical services credential, health services credential, or a school psychologist authorization and has advanced training and related experience in the education of individuals with exceptional needs and a specialized in-depth knowledge in preschool disabilities, career vocational development, or one or more areas of major disabling conditions.

(b) A program specialist may do all the following:

(1) Observe, consult with, and assist resource specialists, designated instruction and services instructors, and special class teachers.

(2) Plan programs, coordinate curricular resources, and evaluate effectiveness of programs for individuals with exceptional needs.

(3) Participate in each school's staff development, program development, and innovation of special methods and approaches.

(4) Provide coordination, consultation and program development primarily in one specialized area or areas of his or her expertise.

(5) Be responsible for assuring that pupils have full educational opportunity regardless of the district of residence.

(c) For purposes of Section 41403, a program specialist shall be considered a pupil services employee, as defined in subdivision (c) of Section 41401.

The state provides specific funding to SELPAs for the provision of these services and restricts the use of those funds for such services.

56836.25. Funds received pursuant to this article shall be expended for the purposes specified in Section 56836.23.

Based on the total 2005-06 ADA of 73,406.63, the district can anticipate receiving approximately \$1,036,219.95 to provide regionalized services in the current fiscal year.

While multidistrict and county office SELPAs have an administrative unit to perform specified functions, coordinate specified activities, and provide regionalized services, the administrative unit of a single-district SELPA is the district itself. Consequently, the district performs all SELPA and program services. This may be done by one individual who is assigned to oversee SELPA functions, or may be delegated to several individuals.

In multidistrict and county office SELPAs, the administration employs a SELPA director and other staff to carry out these responsibilities. The degree to which these individuals also have direct instructional program responsibilities varies from SELPA to SELPA.

In single district SELPAs, staff members often have both regionalized service and direct instructional program responsibilities. Thus, the separation between SELPA activities and

program activities is blurred. Such is the case with Fresno USD. While one individual carries the title of SELPA Director/Program Manager, the regionalized service responsibilities are distributed among several individuals. The distinguishing role for the SELPA Director appears to be representing the district at SELPA-focused meetings and serving as the contact with other SELPAs.

There are advantages and disadvantages to this structure. The most positive attribute is that the regionalized services can be supervised by individuals with particular interests and/or competencies. The disadvantage is that the Assistant Superintendent does not have one person solely responsible for regionalized service activity.

Since these responsibilities are distributed to other program managers, it would be of significant value for the SELPA Director/Program Manager to forward SELPA information (notices, minutes, agendas, etc.) to the other Program Managers and the Assistant Superintendent. There may be instances when another Program Manager or the Assistant Superintendent should also attend a SELPA Administrators' meeting because of the issues being discussed. With the prior approval of the SELPA Chair, members may bring guests to meetings.

The program managers seem to clearly understand their regionalized service and instructional program responsibilities. The organizational chart could be revised to reflect the dual sets of responsibilities for each Program Manager. The designation of these two responsibility streams for each Program Manager would provide greater clarity and distinction between the SELPA roles and responsibilities and the program roles and responsibilities of each Program Manager.

The budget does not reflect the newly required use of Goal 5050 (regionalized services) and Goal 5060 (regional program specialist services), so it is not possible to determine if these restricted funds are used for the purposes identified in EC Section 56836.23.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Redraw the organizational chart to clearly delineate the SELPA responsibilities and activities and program responsibilities and activities for each Program Manager.
2. Employ goal/activity codes 5050, regionalized services, and 5060, regional program specialist services, so that the restricted regionalized services funds are monitored.

3. Consider having Program Managers and the Assistant Superintendent accompany the SELPA Director/Program Manager to SELPA administrators' meetings and other appropriate SELPA-focused meetings and/or presentations. Consider the significant topics to be discussed at these meetings to determine which individual, if any, should attend.

Parental and Committee Involvement

The CAC Executive Committee is dedicated to improving the district's culture and environment for children with disabilities, but has expressed numerous concerns about the special education delivery system. The committee has made numerous recommendations, with, they believe, few results. The district's Local Plan contains a sizeable section covering the CAC that describes its membership, governance, duties and recruitment, and appears to meet the legal requirements of a CAC as listed in Education Code Sections 56190, 56191, 56192, 56193, and 56194.

In an attempt to improve communication among parents and school personnel, a Parent Satisfaction Survey has been distributed at IEP meetings, but has drawn minimal response. The last Parent Satisfaction Survey summary was completed in 2004. Some members of the CAC and some of the district's special education staff do not have a positive relationship. This has created distrust, apprehension, and the need from the CAC's perspective for immediate change in the district's special education programs.

Peter Senge, in "Schools that Learn, A Fifth Discipline," 2000, talks about a new comprehensive model for educational renewal.

- 1. Parent empowerment and family support:** The optimal learning environment for a child involves a close collaboration of school and family. Involve parents and empower them to define their own challenges systematically - especially the challenges that might be in the way of an optimal education for their children - and to search out unique solutions that will work for them. Schools then become a resource place for parents as well as their children; they provide services and support (such as a family resource center) that parents have identified as needed in their community.
- 2. Paraprofessionals' jobs and career ladders for parents.** Unemployment, poverty, and high mobility are three key predictors of both family-related problems and limits on school improvement. Find educational and occupational development pathways that strengthen families and improve schools. Parents can attend reading groups facilitated by teachers, volunteer in classrooms, and receive formal training as paraprofessionals. Some will decide to become teachers and service providers themselves, building on this training.
- 3. School readiness, parent education and family support:** Prenatal programs, birth-to-three initiatives, and early childhood education must become a universal entitlement to enhance school readiness. (Studies show that birth weight alone is an important predictor of child learning, health and development.)
- 4. Caring classrooms that improve children's learning while enhancing teachers' and parents' efficacy:** Foster cultural norms of caring, respect for individual differences, high expectations in standards, and success for all; aim structural improvements at the loneliness and isolation of teachers, encouraging them to collaborate with other educators, service providers, and parents.

5. **Improved classroom supports and resources for teachers and children:** Support teachers and stop the “push-out” and “pull-out” of children with special, often short-term needs. Doing this entails placing more helpers in the classroom and develops a parent team and parent-professional teams, which are “on call” to attend to problems in the classroom.
6. **Collaborative leadership:** Principals and superintendents also need supports and new resources, and they gain both in this model. For example, recast principals’ jobs as child and family advocates. They would now work with parents to connect the school with family and community resources and to develop support for student’s transitions from one level to the next.
7. **Educational communities:** Provide learning opportunities for children and youth during nonschool hours. Rainmaker-like parents can be trained to lead these programs, and they can forge strong connections between teachers and community youth development specialists who need to be “on the same page.”
8. **Neighborhood development and community organizations:** Collaborative groups – composed of educators, parents, policy leaders, business representatives, social and health agencies, and media representatives – facilitate and monitor school, neighborhood, and community development initiatives. Instead of implementing just one program or change at a time, this community collaborative enables multiple improvement initiatives, mounted simultaneously on several fronts.
9. **Support for transitions:** Child and youth are supported as they move from one school or grade level to the next and families are supported as they move into new schools and school districts.
10. **Technology enhancement and use:** Use cable television and computer networking as a powerful tool for teaching and learning and for strengthening communities by linking families, schools, homes, neighborhoods, higher education institutions, businesses, and community agencies. For example, technology networks can promote barter systems, skill and resource exchanges and other mutual aid and assistance networks.
11. **Resource development:** Through collaborative grant-writing and pooling existing funds, develop new resources and reallocate existing ones, to give schools more flexibility in mobilizing their efforts.
12. **Simultaneous renewal of high education:** Reform at the school level requires similar, interactive reforms in higher education. Strategic partnerships provide opportunities to improve the education of educators, along with the preparation of social and health service providers.
13. **Policy change:** Change policies affecting accountability, funding, program development and evaluation, supervision, and resource deployment in response to the innovations and achievements in school communities.

Senge believes these 13 strategies are key elements in a new comprehensive model for educational renewal. Many of these strategies address the issues and concerns expressed by members of the CAC and school district staff with regard to parent involvement. Each of these areas is equally important and essential, and can assist in the development of a new collaborative model between the CAC and the district.

FCMAT has suggested that the Executive Committee of the CAC meet with the Assistant Superintendent of Special Services, SELPA Director and the Associate Superintendent of Instruction and form three task force committees. The following committees could be organized with the following responsibilities and representatives:

Task Force Committee – SELPA Director and Two CAC Executive Committee Members

Duties: 1. Present data from all current parent surveys to the CAC. Review other options with the Task Force Committee that may provide better response in terms of parent satisfaction.

Duties: 2. Develop a plan regarding how the recommendations from the special education study, “Aiming High Action Plan,” will be reviewed and implemented.

Duties: 3. Review the current draft of the Parent Handbook and determine a time line as to its completion and availability to parents in both English and Spanish.

Duties: 4. The CAC has regular scheduled meetings with agendas and minutes. Explore the possibility for a CAC Web site containing agendas and minutes of meetings.

Duties: 5. Develop a disability awareness training program for regular education students.

Duties: 6. Develop a needs assessment for parents to determine their priorities for parent education. (Contact Napa Valley Unified for their needs assessment, which is in English and Spanish.)

Duties: 7. Develop a parent education program that would be available to all parents, with specific program topics.

Duties: 8. Develop a parent hot line to respond to parent concerns. Identify a bilingual person in the Special Education Department to receive the calls and translate the information to the SELPA Administrator.

Task Force Committee - Associate Superintendent of Instruction and Two CAC Executive Committee Members

Duties: 1. Review curriculums and instruction to determine appropriate educational strategies being used in classrooms beginning at the high school level to the preschool programs.

Duties: 2. Review Special Education data reports and any other data that shows how special education students are performing. (California Department of Education Special Education Data Report and other information collected by the district or state.)

Duties: 3. Recommend appropriate curriculums and alignments with general education as supported by the Superintendent.

Duties: 4. Obtain clarification for the CAC regarding special education students with IEPs participating in GATE programs.

Task Force Committee - Assistant Superintendent of Special Services and Two CAC Executive Committee Members

Duties: 1. Provide an update on the status of the CAC's request for parental access to a computerized student data system and the status of the district exploring the development and implementation of a computerized IEP database system.

Duties: 2. Parents have expressed concerns regarding the use of special education funds for general education programs. Gather data regarding this issue and develop a Fact Sheet for the CAC to review.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Form three task force committees as suggested. Develop action plans for the suggested task force committees that include time lines for completion. Prioritize areas and who will be responsible for what activity.
2. As quickly as possible, address the issues that have been of major concern to the parents for some time through the task force committees.
3. Receive task force committee reports periodically at the regularly scheduled CAC meetings and district governing board meetings.
4. Consider supporting, through the CAC, the 13 strategies that Senge believes are directions or roadmaps for educational change.

IEP Information System

Beginning in February 2003, the district conducted a lengthy review process for a software provider to customize its Web-based IEP and management information system to meet specified needs. Many other software providers and programs used by other school districts were considered. On September 14, 2004, the district entered into an agreement with an experienced software provider that indicated a willingness to enhance its existing Web-based IEP information system to meet unique district requirements. This was followed on October 18 by a kickoff celebration to introduce the product and the configuration team to staff and parents.

From the beginning the project has been plagued with problems. The vendor failed to make its initial timelines for testing in June 2005, causing staff to return from summer vacation to address project needs. Testing was conducted in November 2005, and the product still had many problems and was a long way from satisfactory. As a result, contract time lines were jeopardized and the district was faced with cost overruns. New time lines were set for another project plan.

After a discussion in which the district staff made it clear that they had lost all faith in the vendor team assigned to them, the vendor assigned a new project team to address the problems and complete the project.

While the vendor clearly had difficulty living up to its promises, these problems were exacerbated by the district. No staff was fully assigned to oversee this project. Any staff time spent on the project was beyond their ongoing duties and responsibilities. Although the project was to begin its pilot implementation this year, requested budget augmentations necessary to prepare for this process were rejected by the district administration, leaving the district unprepared, inadequately staffed, and insufficiently trained. It does not appear that adequate consideration of the costs of staffing, hardware, technical support, training, and training facilities occurred. The vendor also expressed concerns that the configuration team kept changing items throughout the process, particularly with regard to the customized forms.

In October 2006 the product was delivered for final validation; however, the forms tested with only 60% accuracy. District staff spent seven additional days documenting issues and specifications. Forty-five problems were identified when the scenarios used for validation were employed. The vendor indicates that it has responded to this finding and was ready to install the program on October 30. However, the vendor is not sure that the district is ready for the installation because it is insufficiently staffed and trained.

Interviews with district staff suggest that they are increasingly unsure that the project is really ready to go. They fear there are far more problems still hidden in the project and “they don’t know what they don’t know.” They have lost considerable trust and faith in the

vendor and are greatly concerned that they may be starting something that could go terribly awry. They like the idea of the product and, to a person, feel that if it functions as it should, it will be terrific. They just don't think that it will.

Another concern regards accurate representations by the vendor. There were two or three public meetings during the process in which participants, including parents, were assured that the final product would have one-button CASEMIS ability and a parent access portal through which parents could access information about their child's program and progress, and monitor whether or not the specified services were being provided. All parties with whom FCMAT talked, except for the vendor's representatives, were very clear that the vendor made these assurances at the public meetings.

While one-button CASEMIS reporting is not feasible, the project should be able to easily produce CASEMIS and other management information reports. The parent portal, however, is a very important issue since that capacity is so eagerly desired by the parents and was a key factor in selecting the product. However, in discussion with vendor executives, FCMAT was informed that the capacity for parent access to review information about their child is on the "planning roadmap." The team was also informed that while the vendor has received some inquiries on behalf of parents about the feasibility of "service tracking," Fresno USD is the only district that has expressed an active desire for such a feature. The company is considering it but believes it should not come before the system is in place and contains data from the district's system that can be used to develop the enhancement. It is their belief that the feature is at least one and a half to two years away at the earliest. This will be a great disappointment to the parents.

The most crucial issue facing the district at this point is to obtain a reliable system for accruing and using data to produce necessary CASEMIS reports and other meaningful reports for staffing and budget planning. The current systems are largely produced manually, are very difficult to keep current, and have not proved adequate for management purposes. FCMAT had great difficulty determining staffing ratios and relationships because of the inadequacy of the current management reports.

The Special Education Information System (SEIS) developed by the San Joaquin County Office of Education is inexpensive and is currently in use at more than 30 SELPAs. It would not require a high level of local technical support because the data is maintained on the server at San Joaquin COE. It uses its own forms, the recently developed state form, and can customize forms to the district's specifications. This would seem to be an appropriate alternative to going forward with the current project. It would also facilitate the staff's ability to master a computer-based IEP system. This could be an interim solution, while the district analyzes the feasibility of developing a system that would fully integrate with its new technology system.

Whether or not the district decides to go forward with the vendor's product, it is necessary to plan and prepare for the implementation of some computer-based system. This would include consideration of the necessary staffing and training mentioned above. The district currently is not prepared to implement a system. Furthermore, the last assessment of hardware needs is more than two years old and needs updating. Most of the district's PC's run Windows 98 rather than Windows 2000 and do not have the latest version of Adobe. It also appears that the program staff differs widely regarding their willingness and preparation to utilize a computer-based system.

Additional resources are needed to support the implementation of a technology project of this magnitude such as trainers, full-time help desk support and release time for teacher training. There is also a need for access to an adequately equipped facility for computer training.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Reconsider its agreement with the software vendor with the goal of discontinuing the relationship. Consult with legal counsel regarding the contractual obligations involved.
2. Consider implementing the system developed by the San Joaquin County Office of Education.
3. Consider developing its own special education data system over the longer term to coordinate with the rest of the district's technology structure.
4. Immediately plan for and acquire the necessary staff, hardware, facilities for training, and a schedule for phasing in the San Joaquin COE system and, ultimately, its own special education information system.

Appendix

Appendix A - Study Agreement

FISCAL CRISIS AND MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM
STUDY AGREEMENT

August 24, 2006

The FISCAL CRISIS AND MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM (FCMAT), hereinafter referred to as the Team, and the Fresno Unified School District, hereinafter referred to as the District, mutually agree as follows:

1. BASIS OF AGREEMENT

The Team provides a variety of services to school districts and county offices of education upon request. The District has requested that the Team provide for the assignment of professionals to study specific aspects of the Fresno Unified School District operations, in the areas of Technology, Purchasing/Warehouse, and Special Education. These professionals may include staff of the Team, County Offices of Education, the California State Department of Education, school districts, or private contractors. All work shall be performed in accordance with the terms and conditions of this Agreement. Three specialized FCMAT review teams will be formed to conduct the reviews and will work independently of each other.

2. SCOPE OF THE WORK

A. Scope and Objectives of the Study, by areas of operation

The scope and objectives of the Technology review are to:

- 1) Assess the organization and operations of the district's technology services department and make recommendations for improvement.
- 2) Assess the district's technology department staffing and structure and make recommendations for improvement.
- 3) Review the district's administrative and instructional technology programs and make recommendations for improvement.
- 4) Review the district's E-Rate program and make recommendations for improvement.
- 5) Conduct vulnerability and penetration testing from remote site to assess the district's perimeter security and make recommendations for improvement.
- 6) Conduct on-site (physical) review of infrastructure and make recommendations for improvement.
- 7) Assess the district's technology and security policies and make recommendations for improvement.
- 8) Review the district's E-Rate documentation, applications, and procedures

and make recommendations for improvement.

The scope and objectives of the Purchasing/Warehouse review are to:

- 1) Review the District's purchasing functions for compliance with competitive bid requirements, board policies, standard purchasing best practices, and proper internal control.
- 2) Evaluate the purchasing and warehouse procedures and practices to determine operational effectiveness, efficiency, leveraging of buying power, and vendor selection methods.
- 3) Determine whether or not the purchasing and warehouse departments are making the best use of technology.
- 4) Identify the procedural and fiscal impacts of the warehouse operations to determine if the current level of "just in time" purchases versus the items carried in stores stock is the most cost effective and efficient mix to best serve the schools site and departments within the district.
- 5) Suggest areas of improvement and make recommendations as necessary.

The scope and objectives of the Special Education review are to:

- 1) Review the efficiency and effectiveness of the District's Special Education fiscal and program delivery system.
- 2) Review the referral processes and determine effectiveness of student study teams.
- 3) Review the district process on determining the hiring of one-on-one paraprofessionals and make recommendations for improvement.
- 4) Review Special Education staffing ratios and the allocation of FTE teachers to student class size.
- 5) Review the relationship of roles and responsibilities between the Fresno Unified School District SELPA and District programs. Review SELPA allocation funding formula.
- 6) Review the District process of involving parents. Examine the role and functions of the District's and/or SELPA Special Education citizen's advisory committee.
- 7) Review the computerized program the district is attempting to implement regarding IEP's. Make recommendations on effectiveness, timeline for implementation, and cost effectiveness compared to other options that maybe available.

- 8) Review the district processes for MediCal billing and reimbursements for the Special Ed and Health Services divisions.

B. Services and Products to be Provided

- 1) Orientation Meeting - The Teams will conduct an orientation session at the District to brief District management and supervisory personnel on the procedures of the Team and on the purpose and schedule of the study.
- 2) On-site Review - The Teams will conduct an on-site review at the District office and at school sites if necessary.
- 3) Progress Reports - The Teams will hold an exit meeting at the conclusion of the on-site review to inform the District of significant findings and recommendations to that point.
- 4) Exit Letter - The Teams will issue an exit letter approximately 10 days after the exit meeting detailing significant findings and recommendations to date and memorializing the topics discussed in the exit meeting.
- 5) Draft Reports - Sufficient copies of a preliminary draft report will be delivered to the District administration for review and comment.
- 6) Final Report - Sufficient copies of the final study report will be delivered to the District following completion of the review.

3. PROJECT PERSONNEL

The study team will be supervised by Anthony Bridges, Interim Deputy Executive Officer, Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team, Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office. The study team may also include:

Technology Team

- A. Andrew Prestage, FCMAT Management Analyst
- B. Bradley L. White, FCMAT Technology Consultant
- C. Scott Sexsmith, FCMAT Technology Consultant
- D. Greg Lindner, FCMAT Technology Consultant
- E. Gary Habeeb, FCMAT Technology Consultant

Purchasing Team

- A. Michele McClowry, FCMAT Fiscal Intervention Specialist
- B. FCMAT Purchasing Consultant
- C. FCMAT Purchasing Consultant

Special Education Team

- A. Dr. William Gillaspie, FCMAT Management Analyst
- B. Sarge Kennedy, FCMAT Special Education Consultant
- C. Kay Atchison, FCMAT Special Education Consultant
- D. Bill Puddy, FCMAT Special Education Consultant

Other equally qualified consultants will be substituted in the event one of the above noted individuals is unable to participate in the study.

4. PROJECT COSTS

The cost for studies requested pursuant to E.C. 42127.8(d)(1) shall be:

- A. \$500.00 per day for each Team Member while on site, conducting fieldwork at other locations, presenting reports, or participating in meetings.
- B. All out-of-pocket expenses, including travel, meals, lodging, etc. Based on the scope listed in section 2 A, estimated cost is \$60,000. The District will be billed based on actual time and expenses of the study teams.
- C. The District will be invoiced at actual costs, with 50% due following the completion of the on-site review and the remaining 50% due upon acceptance of the final report by the District.

Payments for FCMAT services are payable to Kern County Superintendent of Schools-Administrative Agent.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DISTRICT

- A. The District will provide office and conference room space while on-site reviews are in progress.
- B. The District will provide the following (if requested):
 - 1) A map of the local area
 - 2) Existing policies, regulations and prior reports addressing the study request
 - 3) Current organizational charts
 - 4) Current and four (4) prior year's audit reports
 - 5) Any documents requested on a supplemental listing
- C. The District Administration will review a preliminary draft copy of the study. Any comments regarding the accuracy of the data presented in the report or the practicability of the recommendations will be reviewed with the Team prior to completion of the final report.

Pursuant to EC 45125.1(c), representatives of FCMAT will have limited contact with District pupils. The District shall take appropriate steps to comply with EC 45125.1(c).

6. PROJECT SCHEDULE

The following schedule outlines the planned completion dates for key study milestones.

Technology Review

Orientation: July 12, 2006
Staff Interviews: Estimated October 16-18, 2006
Exit Interviews: Estimated October 18, 2006
Preliminary Report Submitted: Estimated November 2, 2006

Purchasing Review

Orientation: August 18, 2006
Staff Interviews: Estimated September 18 – 21, 2006
Exit Interview: Estimated September 21, 2006
Preliminary Report Submitted: Estimated November 2, 2006

Special Education Review

Orientation: August 18, 2006
Staff Interviews: Estimated September 25 – 29, 2006
Exit Interview: Estimated September 29, 2006
Preliminary Report Submitted: Estimated November 2, 2006

Final Report Submitted To be determined
Board Presentation To be determined

7. CONTACT PERSON

Please print name of contact person: Michael Hanson, Superintendent and Ruth F. Quinto, Chief Financial Officer

Telephone 559-457-6200 FAX 559-457-6202

Internet Address rfquint@fresno.k12.ca.us

Michael E. Hanson, Superintendent Date
Fresno Unified School District

Barbara Dean, Deputy Administrative Officer Date
Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team

In keeping with the provisions of AB1200, the County Superintendent will be notified of this agreement between the District and FCMAT and will receive a copy of the final report.