



Guadalupe Union School District Special Education Review

June 23, 2009

Joel D. Montero
Chief Executive Officer



CSIS California School Information Services

June 23, 2009

Hugo Lara, Superintendent
Guadalupe Union School District
4465 Ninth Street
PO Box 788
Guadalupe, CA 93434

Dear Superintendent Lara:

In April 2009, the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) entered into an agreement with the Guadalupe Union School District for a study that required FCMAT to perform the following:

1. Conduct a review of the district's special education department and delivery methods and provide recommendations that, if implemented, will enable the district to better serve students in a more efficient manner.

FCMAT visited the district to conduct fieldwork, interview staff, and review documents. This report is the result of that effort. Thank you for allowing us to serve you, and please give our regards to all the employees of the Guadalupe Union School District.

Sincerely,

Joel D. Montero
Chief Executive Officer

FCMAT

Joel D. Montero, Chief Executive Officer

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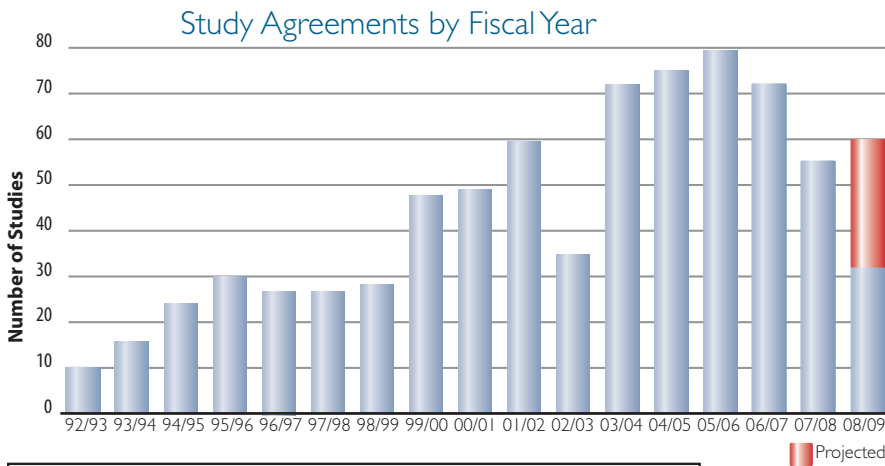
Foreword - FCMAT Background

The Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) was created by legislation in accordance with Assembly Bill 1200 in 1992 as a service to assist local educational agencies (LEAs) in complying with fiscal accountability standards.

AB 1200 was established from a need to ensure that LEAs throughout California were adequately prepared to meet and sustain their financial obligations. AB 1200 is also a statewide plan for county offices of education and school districts to work together on a local level to improve fiscal procedures and accountability standards. The legislation expanded the role of the county office in monitoring school districts under certain fiscal constraints to ensure these districts could meet their financial commitments on a multiyear basis. AB 2756 provides specific responsibilities to FCMAT with regard to districts that have received emergency state loans. These include comprehensive assessments in five major operational areas and periodic reports that identify the district’s progress on the improvement plans.

In January 2006, SB 430 (charter schools) and AB 1366 (community colleges) became law and expanded FCMAT’s services to those types of LEAs.

Since 1992, FCMAT has been engaged to perform nearly 750 reviews for local educational agencies, including school districts, county offices of education, charter schools and community colleges. Services range from fiscal crisis intervention to management review and assistance. FCMAT also provides professional development training. The Kern County Superintendent of Schools is the administrative agent for FCMAT. The agency is guided under the leadership of Joel D. Montero, Chief Executive Officer, with funding derived through appropriations in the state budget and a modest fee schedule for charges to requesting agencies.



| | |
|---|---------------|
| Total Number of Studies..... | 743 |
| Total Number of Districts in CA.... | 982 |
| ● Management Assistance..... | 705 (94.886%) |
| ● Fiscal Crisis/Emergency..... | 38 (5.114%) |
| Note: Some districts had multiple studies. | |
| ● Districts (7) that have received emergency loans from the state. (Rev. 1/22/09) | |

Introduction

Background

Located in northwestern Santa Barbara County, the Guadalupe Union School District serves students in kindergarten through eighth grade and is composed of two schools, Mary Buren School (K-5) and Kermit McKenzie Junior High School (6-8)

The district had an enrollment of 1,127 students for the 2008-09 school year. Enrollment by ethnicity indicates that 92.6% of the student population is Hispanic or Latino, and half are English learners.

In June 2009, the Guadalupe school district requested that the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) review the district's special education programs and services. This request was made because of declining enrollment and a total general fund contribution of 49% necessary to cover the operational costs of special education and transportation.

The study agreement specifies that FCMAT will perform the following.

1. Conduct a review of the district's special education department and delivery methods and provide recommendations that if implemented will enable the district to better serve students in a more efficient manner.

Study Team

The study team was composed of the following members:

William P. Gillaspie, Ed.D
FCMAT Chief Management Analyst
Sacramento, California

JoAnn Murphy
FCMAT Special Education Consultant
Santee, California

Leonel Martínez
FCMAT Public Information Specialist
Bakersfield, CA

Study Guidelines

FCMAT visited the district on June 4 and 5 2009 to conduct interviews, collect data and review documents. This report is the result of those activities and is divided into the following sections:

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Fiscal Review
- III. Program Review

Executive Summary

Over the past three years, the Guadalupe Union School District has had to increase its general fund contribution to support special education programs and associated transportation services. These increases are common in most districts; however, the average general fund contribution for special education in districts throughout the state is 28%. Guadalupe Union had a 49% contribution for the 2008-09 school year.

For many years, the district contracted with the Santa Barbara County Office of Education for special education and the related transportation for students with disabilities. In the 1992-93 school year, the district began providing special education and transportation services for its own students. However, the appropriate state transfer form to identify the district as a pupil transportation provider for state reimbursement purposes was never negotiated with the county office. As a result, the district has not submitted a state Annual Report of Pupil Transportation, or Form TRAN, for pupil transportation reimbursement since 1992-93, when it began providing transportation services for its own special education students. The district receives no specific funding for transportation, and the entire cost for this service comes from the general fund. This report includes recommendation to assist the district in claiming the appropriate transportation funding.

To maintain a balanced budget for the 2009-10 school year, the district will reduce its staff for a savings of \$1.3 million. Twelve certificated positions were reduced, including the psychologist/coordinator of special education, the director of curriculum and a counselor. FCMAT concurs with the district's recommendation for staff reductions to achieve the necessary budgetary reductions.

The district has been cautious in its use of special education resources. As a result, the program is efficient. This report provides suggestions to increase efficiency in transportation, student information management, staff training and support.

Findings and Recommendations

Fiscal Review

The Guadalupe Union School District general fund budget is approximately \$10.5 million. The special education operating budget was \$876,000 in 2008-09, including a general fund contribution of \$330,000. An additional general fund contribution of \$100,000 is required to cover special education transportation. The general education contribution for special education and transportation represents 49% of the special education operating budget. The statewide average reported by School Services, Inc is 28%. Over the past three years, the district has continued to increase the general fund contribution for both special education and transportation for students with disabilities. The data in the following demonstrates the increases in both areas from 2006 to 2009.

| Adopted Budget Year | General Fund Contribution | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Special Education | Transportation (Special Education) |
| 2006-07 | 268,784 | 76,467 |
| 2007-08 | 294,882 | 93,647 |
| 2008-09 | 333,000 | 110,000 |

As a participating member of the Santa Barbara Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA), the district accesses regional programs for students who are severely handicapped, emotionally disturbed, deaf and hard of hearing, visually impaired and for 26 preschool pupils. The district also provides transportation for its students to programs in the SELPA and county office. Differing salary schedules, placements on salary schedules or a combination of both can make cost containment difficult for a small district like Guadalupe Union. As a result the district must rely on regional programs to ensure the provision of special education and related services for students who require special day class (SDC).

The Santa Barbara SELPA has established caseloads for all regional classes since 1998. A review of the caseload average for 2007-08 and the December caseload average for 2008 indicates that these programs continue to operate within SELPA-established averages. As the Santa Barbara SELPA initiates a shift to a pay-as-you-go services model for students in regional SDC classes, the district should explore other options and the cost-effectiveness of joining nearby districts such as the Santa Maria-Bonita School District to share special education resources. This may reduce both transportation and program costs.

Transportation

For many years, the district contracted with the Santa Barbara County Office of Education for special education and the related transportation. In the 1992-93 school year, the district began providing its own special education programs and transportation. However, it did not negotiate a Form 141-T, or transfers-out form, with the county office to identify the district as a pupil transportation provider and begin claiming funding to transport these students. Therefore, the district has not received reimbursement for 15 years of transportation even though it was eligible. The entire cost for this service, which is approximately \$100,000 per year, is supported by the unrestricted general fund.

State law does not allow the district to claim reimbursement for previous years. However, Guadalupe Union should immediately negotiate a 141-T or transfer out form with the county office and begin submitting reimbursement claims on state Form TRAN. To become authorized to begin submitting a TRAN report, the district should negotiate a 141-T or transfer the county office since that entity was the last contract provider prior to 1991-92 budget year. The negotiated transfer amount from the county office program should be based on historical data from the last year the county office Guadalupe Union with transportation services. Although the district's reimbursable expense is greater than when it ceased to receive transportation services from the county office program, the 1991-92 budget year will serve as their legitimate base year for the reimbursement calculation.

Identification Rate for Students with Disabilities

Analyzing the identification trends in the California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS) report is an effective method of determining whether a district overidentifies students for special education. This report is produced and submitted annually to the California Department of Education through the Santa Barbara County SELPA. The data presented in the following indicates that the average identification rate for district students in K-8 maintains at or below the statewide average. There is no indication that the district overidentifies students for special education.

CASEMIS Data Comparison of Percentage of Students in Special Education (K-8)

| School Year | Guadalupe | Santa Barbara County | State |
|-------------|-----------|----------------------|-------|
| 2006- 07 | 10.2% | 10.7% | 11% |
| 2007- 08 | 11.2% | 11% | 11% |
| 2008-09 | 10.1% | 11% | 11% |

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Compare costs of the current transportation provider with other local district transportation services that could be accessed through some type of interdistrict agreement to reduce the impact of rising transportation costs.

2. Negotiate transfer out with Form 141-T using the 1991-92 fiscal year as the base year for reimbursement with the county office. The district should then begin claiming for reimbursement for transportation on the state TRANS report.
3. Analyze the excess costs of regional SDC classes operated by the county office and local SDC placements in other districts. The district should consider adopting the most cost efficient-methods for program flexibility and transportation costs.

Program Review

Proposed Reductions for 2009-10

The district is working to maintain a balanced budget for the 2009-10 school year. To accomplish this, the budget must be reduced by \$1.3 million in the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years. Thus far, this has resulted in the reduction of 12 certificated positions, including district psychologist/coordinator of special education, director of curriculum and a school counselor.

The district staff indicated that 60% of the coordinator's time is spent in IEP meetings and other activities to coordinate special education programs for 114 students. The remaining 40% is spent as a district psychologist. The coordinator does not have an administrative credential. As a result, the director of curriculum evaluated the special education certificated and classified staff in 2008-09. The coordinator of special education and the director of curriculum positions are recommended for elimination in the 2009-10 school year, and the principals would be assigned to evaluate employees and supervise programs. FCMAT concurs with the district's recommendations to eliminate the coordinator of special education. The responsibility for overseeing special education programs and services can be effectively assumed by school site principals with appropriate training.

The district is required to continue providing school psychologist services for assessments, evaluations and counseling designated on Individualized Education Plans (IEP) for students with disabilities. To maximize efficiency with a small special education population of 114 students, the district should explore options for having a part-time psychologist through an interdistrict or county office agreement.

Special Education Information System (SEIS)

The district uses the Special Education Information System (SEIS) to develop a centralized IEP and student records database. This system has a built-in CASEMIS error check and IEP affirm/attest process that should facilitate the provision of accurate CASEMIS data throughout the year. The system is designed to streamline the district's twice-yearly CASEMIS reporting.

The district's operational procedures regarding the IEP process and CASEMIS data are inefficient. The process requires all IEPs to be affirmed by a full-time clerical support staff member before being entered into CASEMIS. When errors are found, the IEP is returned to the teacher to correct and resubmit. IEPs submitted on the last day of school may contain several errors that must be corrected before submission to CASEMIS for the June 2009 count. This requires a minimum of 5-7 additional days of clerical support to complete the CASEMIS data entry required for the June pupil count, a redundant process. With proper training and accountability, IEPs can be completed in compliance with federal and state law without administrative operational overlays and redundancy.

Transportation Procedures

All district special education students receiving transportation services also receive door-to-door transportation services. This exceeds the mandated requirement for transportation as a related service under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). If a student with a disability is capable of using the same transportation services as a nondisabled student, the IDEA does not require transportation to be listed as a related service in the IEP. Transportation decisions generally require collaboration and consensus among parents, educators and transportation personnel. The district should provide guidelines for transportation such as defining when door-to-door service is a necessary component of the IEP and when students can walk to a pick-up point. The IEP should define the transportation needs of the child.

Staffing Ratios

FCMAT reviewed staffing caseloads for special day classes, resource specialist and speech and language. The staffing benchmarks developed by School Services of California were used to determine the effectiveness of special day class caseloads. The district's SDC caseloads are well within the established staffing benchmarks outlined in the following table:

Comparative Analysis of SDC Benchmarks established by School Services (SSC)

| Disability | School Services of California | Guadalupe School District |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Severely Handicapped | 10-12 students, 2 aides | 12 students, 2.5 aides |
| Nonseverely Handicapped | 12-15 students, 1 aide | 15 students, 1 aide |

SDC classes are appropriately staffed with teacher and instructional aide support. Resource specialists have average caseloads of 23 and are also appropriately staffed with teacher and instructional aide support. Speech pathologists caseloads are also appropriate; however, the district should plan for the support of an interpreter for bilingual students during assessment. A bilingual resource should be assigned to support speech and language assessment in Spanish.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Finalize the reduction in force for the coordinator of special education position at a cost savings of \$40,436 per year.
2. Explore options to share school psychologist resources with either the county office or a nearby district through a cooperative arrangement.

3. Use American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds to provide staff and administrator training on the IEP process and compliance. Specific training should be provided for site administrators on information necessary to provide guidance and support to special education programs.
4. Provide teachers with training on SEIS to ensure that all IEPs are developed in conformance with the law and submitted to the district ready for submission to CASEMIS. ARRA funds should be used for this purpose.
5. Use ARRA funds to upgrade the efficiency of the SEIS system of student information to eliminate redundancy and ensure that site administrators have up-to-date compliance information on time lines for evaluations and overall IEP compliance.
6. Increase teacher accountability for accuracy in IEP development
7. Establish accountability requirements for timely submission of accurate IEP data before teachers leave for the summer in June. This can be included as a check-off requirement with the school site principal and verified by the special education CASEMIS clerk.
8. Develop board policy and procedure for transportation as a related service on the IEP. Guidelines should be provided for IEP teams regarding the criteria for door-to-door transportation as distinguished from pick up at a designated bus stop.

Appendix

A. Study Agreement

FCMAT

FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT
ASSISTANCE TEAM

CSIS California School Information Services

FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM
STUDY AGREEMENT
April 20, 2009

The FISCAL CRISIS AND MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM (FCMAT), hereinafter referred to as the Team, and the Guadalupe Union 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 Guadalupe Union School District operations. 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.

2. SCOPE OF THE WORK

A. Scope and Objectives of the Study

The scope and objectives of this study are to:

- 1) Conduct a review of the District's Special Education Department and delivery methods and provide recommendations that, if implemented, will enable the District to better serve students in a more efficient manner.

District to brief District management and staff on the procedures of the Team and on the purpose and schedule of the study.

- 2) On-site Review - The Team will conduct on-site meetings at the District office to gather documentation and conduct interviews. The Team will request assistance from the District in setting up interview schedules with staff.
- 3) Progress Reports - The Team will hold an exit meeting at the conclusion of the on-site reviews to inform the District representatives of significant findings and recommendations to that point.
- 4) Exit Letter - The Team 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.
- 7) Follow-Up Support – Six months after the completion of the study, FCMAT will return to the District, if requested, to confirm the District’s progress in implementing the recommendations included in the report, at no costs. Status of the recommendations will be documented to the District in a FCMAT Management Letter.

3. PROJECT PERSONNEL

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

- A. Dr. William Gillaspie, FCMAT Chief Management Analyst
- B. JoAnn Murphy, 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, preparing and presenting reports, or participating in meetings.
- B. All out-of-pocket expenses, including travel, meals, lodging, etc. Based on the elements noted in section 2 A, the total cost of the study is estimated at \$6,000. The District will be invoiced at actual costs, with 50% of the estimated cost due following the completion of the on-site review and the remaining amount due upon acceptance of the final report by the District.
- C. Any change to the scope will affect the estimate of total cost.

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:

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Orientation: | June, 2009 |
| Staff Interviews: | June, 2009 |
| Exit Interviews: | June, 2009 |
| Preliminary Report Submitted: | mid to late July, 2009 |
| Final Report Submitted: | to be determined |
| Board Presentation: | to be determined |
| Follow-Up Support: | If requested |

7. CONTACT PERSON

Please print name of contact person: Kim Greer, Director of Business Svcs

Telephone 805 343-6354 FAX _____

Internet Address kgreer@sbceo.org

Hugo E. Lara _____ 5-13-09
 Hugo Lara, Superintendent Date
 Guadalupe Union School District

Barbara Dean
 _____ April 20, 2009
 Barbara (Dean) Murphy, 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.