

**ARRA LAUSD Charter School**

**Special Education Needs Assessment**

**Report of Findings**

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**CROSS & JOFTUS**

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*It is important to remember that success does not mean perfection but steady improvement, and improvement requires trying, assessing, revising, reflecting, and making changes based on past experience.*

Karin Chenoweth, Foreword, *Challenging Change: How Schools and Districts are Improving the Performance of Special Education Students*, 2008

## **Introduction**

Describing the landscape of charter schools in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is a bit like describing an ever-changing cityscape. The buildings vary from block to block; some are integrated into larger complexes (charter management organizations, or CMOs), some are stand-alone operations. Some are remodeled (conversion schools, former district schools converted to charter schools), and some look like small-business start-ups. They represent a wide range of enterprising leadership, talent, energy and, above all, intense focus on the children they serve. Some have organizational features and practices similar to mainstream school districts. Others vary widely from the mainstream in how they attempt to gain operating efficiencies and results. Still others are different as to how they develop the organizational culture that persistently supports children's learning progress.

This is a report of the findings of a needs assessment of Special Education services in LAUSD charter schools conducted by Cross & Joftus, at the request of the district and funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). This study focuses exclusively on how the schools appear to be taking advantage of the flexibility they have as charters to address the needs of all students, particularly those with disabilities. The study also looks at how they bring leadership, commitment and innovation to the demanding challenges of special education. It examines the varied ways they seek and use resources available through the region's Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) infrastructure. Finally, it offers perspectives on how they perceive the advantages of the new LAUSD SELPA focused on charter schools.

This report reveals mostly good news about how students with special needs are being served in LA’s charter schools. Indeed, there are several models of excellence noted here, where all children, including children with disabilities, appear to be learning in deep and inclusive ways. But, like the charter schools themselves, our analysis also indicates that practices vary considerably. In some schools and systems, special education services appear to be out of date, staff are overwhelmed, and they feel they are not receiving the support they need in a timely manner. Additionally, many have mixed feelings about the current LAUSD special education services. Some schools feel disconnected and ill-served, yet others enjoy the protection offered by a larger district system and feel fortunate to be part of that system.

The findings described in this report reflect the variable landscape in which we observed and gathered our data, yet the recommendations for moving forward to address challenges and spread best practices are built on the solid foundation of evidence-based practices and what works for all students, and particularly what works for students with disabilities.

### ***Report Overview***

To explore this landscape in more depth, and to begin to define key features of a new LAUSD Charter SELPA, this report looks at how special education services are working for children in charter schools in LAUSD. More specifically, it examines how the various structures, practices, and regulations shaping charter schools—charter school law and practice; school, CMO, and community culture; curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development; leadership; human capital; and connections to the special education services system in LAUSD—are affecting the provision of special education for students. The report identifies both strengths and challenges, and offers recommendations for addressing those challenges.

### ***Vision and Focus***

Underlying this work is the fundamental premise that *all* students can learn, that public schools must educate *all* students, and, perhaps most importantly—whether they attend a charter school or a traditional public school in LAUSD—collectively, that we

have a responsibility to educate them and care for them. To quote a member of the stakeholder's group, "They are all our kids."

This work also presumes that certain key factors are related to students' academic achievement, and to how students with exceptionalities perform in school. It begins with the vision articulated perhaps most succinctly in *Challenging Change: How Schools and Districts are Improving the Performance of Special Education Students*, a 2008 report from the National Center for Learning Disabilities that looks at how special education is connected to academic achievement.<sup>1</sup>

In *Challenging Change*, the authors identify five key factors underlying academic success for students with disabilities. Successful schools and districts:

- Raise expectations for students with disabilities, and, in turn, have high expectations for all students
- Support and facilitate collaboration between general and special education teachers
- Embody inclusive practices, designed to educate students in the least restrictive environment possible
- Make data-based decisions
- Have high rates of consumer satisfaction—they continually seek to engage students, parents, families, and communities effectively in the education process.

Understood from this perspective, compliance with federal and state special education and civil rights law is simply a given, or a "floor," upon which educators build curriculum and instruction, with supports, modifications, and adaptations to serve students with disabilities. Effective special education is about access to high quality, rigorous standards-based education for all children. It is about systems that are accountable for improving outcomes for all. This vision is seminal in changing the way students with disabilities should be educated. It is critical, therefore, that within the

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<sup>1</sup> Cortiella, C. and Burnette, J. *Challenging Change: How Schools and Districts are Improving the Performance of Special Education Students*. National Center for Learning Disabilities: New York, NY. 2008.

mission and practice of charter schools, there should be policies, practices, and procedures that ensure that all students, including students with disabilities, can and will achieve to high levels when provided with an appropriate and rigorous education.

With this vision and focus in mind, this report surveys the educational landscape in LAUSD charter schools, seeking to identify best and promising practices and, at the same time, to identify areas of need.

### ***A New SELPA Structure***

As part of their authorization requirements, charter schools must adhere to all “applicable federal and state laws and regulations, and applicable policies and procedures pertaining to the provision of special education services (e.g., Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act)” and “to the terms, conditions and requirements of the Modified Consent Decree (MCD) and other court orders imposed upon the District pertaining to special education.”<sup>2</sup> They must follow a strict set of reporting guidelines for all students utilizing specific data systems such as Welligent (for tracking online Individual Education Plans [IEPs] and other related services) and Integrated Student Information System (ISIS), and they are held accountable for the achievement of all students in the same ways as are traditional schools of the district. They must also complete a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the district, “regarding the provision and funding of special education services consistent with the requirements of the LAUSD SELPA Local Plan for Special Education.”<sup>3</sup>

Since the Charter Schools Act in 1992, there have been two options afforded to charter schools for these services. The first enables a school to operate as a “school of the district,” letting the district keep all of the state and federal funding for special education and provide all of the services. The second is to operate as a local education agency (LEA) for purposes of special education, by joining a SELPA in order to access

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<sup>2</sup> See Los Angeles Unified School District, Policy for Charter School Authorizing, January 12, 2010 (accessed electronically March 28, 2011 at [http://notebook.lausd.net/portal/page?\\_pageid=33,1112433&\\_dad=ptl&\\_schema=PTL\\_EP](http://notebook.lausd.net/portal/page?_pageid=33,1112433&_dad=ptl&_schema=PTL_EP)).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

state and federal special education funding. Amongst LA charters, some schools opting for the latter model have joined other SELPAs, including the El Dorado SELPA and the Southwest SELPA. (Other options for SELPA membership are also available, including the Los Angeles County Office of Education's SELPA, Lodi Area SELPA Region (LASER), Mountain Desert, and soon to be others.) For those remaining with the district, a funding model has been used with the district retaining between 27% and 40% of special education funding.<sup>4</sup> This arrangement has proven to be challenging on a number of levels, and LAUSD, California Charter Schools Association (CCSA), and a number of charter school representatives have worked to define a new structure which would create one overarching Administrative Unit with two SELPAs: one designed specifically for charter schools, and the other for LAUSD schools—administered by its own director and governed by the existing Board of Education.

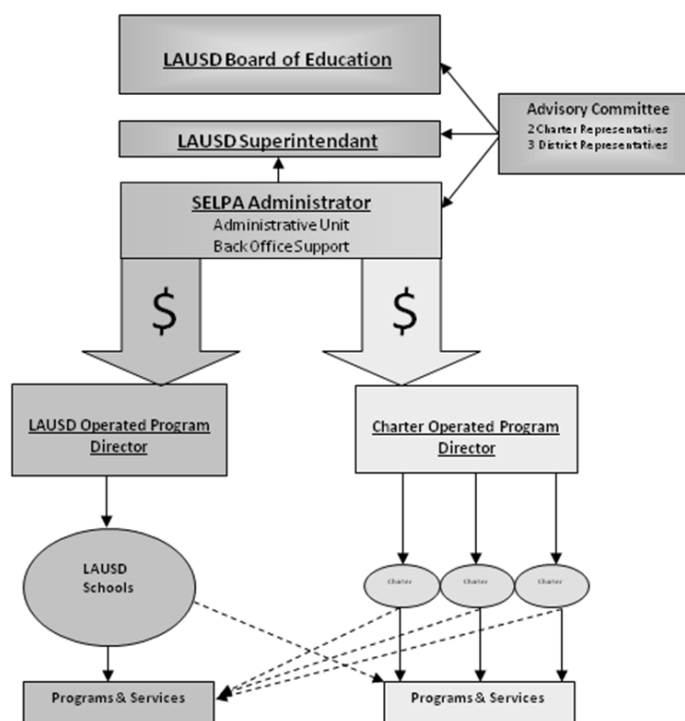
While a rough outline of oversight, representation, process, and funding had been proposed (see Figure 1), at the time of our interviews, many of the details had yet to be defined as to how funds would be allocated, what services would be provided, and who would be hired to administer the SELPA. While this was causing some nervousness among charter leaders, collaboration efforts have continued and the SELPA Director position has been posted.

Will this new plan yield the intended results for charter school students who need special education services? Will it provide both the flexibility and freedom needed, while also offering coherent and well-communicated support and leadership for high-quality special education programming and services? How will an equitable funding structure be ensured? Our discussions with charter leaders shed some light on many of the issues and concerns to be weighed as this plan is finalized. It is our hope that this report and its recommendations can serve as a roadmap for addressing these critical questions.

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<sup>4</sup> "A Plan for SELPA Reorganization: Innovative Options for Charter Schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District" distributed by CCSA, February 2011.

Figure 1. Proposed Administrative Unit with Two SELPAs



CCSA February 2011; January 4, 2011 LAUSD Board Report

### ***Students With Disabilities (SWDs) in LAUSD***

A few statistics about students with disabilities (SWDs) in LAUSD and the pool of students included in our study may help to illuminate our findings.<sup>5</sup> Of the 612,443 (K-12) students with IEPs in the state of California, 77,135 (12.5%) attend regular LAUSD schools. Another 4,686 attend the 121 charter schools currently part of the larger LAUSD SELPA (see Table 1). This group of schools will be referred to as the “study pool.” The remaining LAUSD charter schools not in the study pool are those that have chosen to belong to another SELPA. In some of the schools we visited, 12% or more of their students were labeled as having disabilities. In other schools, however, the percentage was lower. Overall, less than 10% of the students in the study pool have IEPs, compared to 12.4% in LAUSD and 11% in California (see Figure 2). Of those students with IEPs, the majority (63.3%) are classified as having a “Specific Learning Disability” (SLD). Students with specific learning disabilities also comprise the majority of students with disabilities in the LAUSD and state populations (see Figure 3).

<sup>5</sup> All data obtained through CASEMIS 2010



Table 1.

### Primary Disability Categories of Students with IEPs

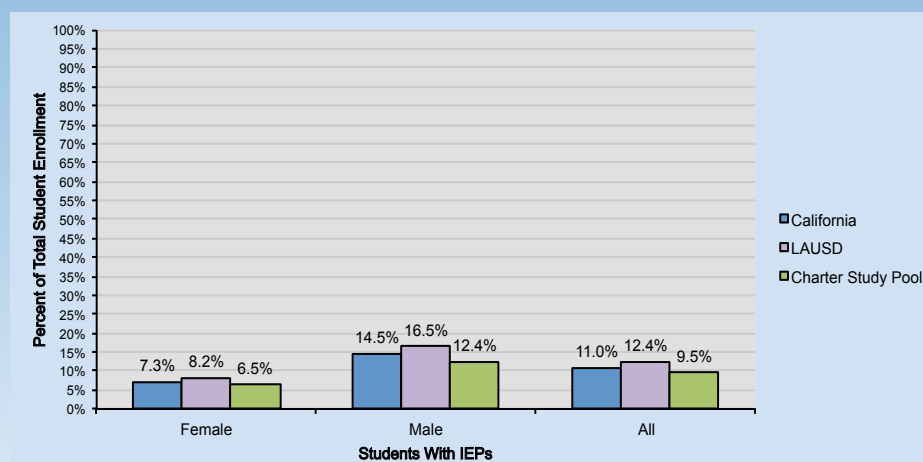
Disability Categories	California		LAUSD		Charter Study Pool	
	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct
Specific Learning Disability (SLD)	276,409	45.13%	41,674	54.03%	2,966	63.29%
Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)	135,804	22.17%	8,812	11.42%	621	13.25%
Autism (AUT)	55,302	9.03%	9,069	11.76%	313	6.68%
Other Health Impairment (OHI)	53,598	8.75%	7,062	9.16%	521	11.12%
Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability (MR/ID)	33,897	5.53%	4,247	5.51%	81	1.73%
Emotional Disturbance (ED)	25,738	4.20%	2,159	2.80%	37	0.79%
Orthopedic Impairment (OI)	11,763	1.92%	2,150	2.79%	43	0.92%
Hard of Hearing (HH)	7,582	1.24%	1,038	1.35%	69	1.47%
Multiple Disability (MD)	3,826	0.62%	3	0.00%	0	0.00%
Visual Impairment (VI)	3,517	0.57%	390	0.51%	17	0.36%
Deafness (DEAF)	3,261	0.53%	380	0.49%	9	0.19%
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)	1,569	0.26%	139	0.18%	9	0.19%
Deaf-Blindness (DB)	107	0.02%	5	0.01%	0	0.00%
Established Medical Disability (EMD) ( 3 and 4 year olds only)	70	0.01%	7	0.01%	0	0.00%
Total	612,443	100.00%	77,135	100.00%	4,686	100.00%



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Figure 2.

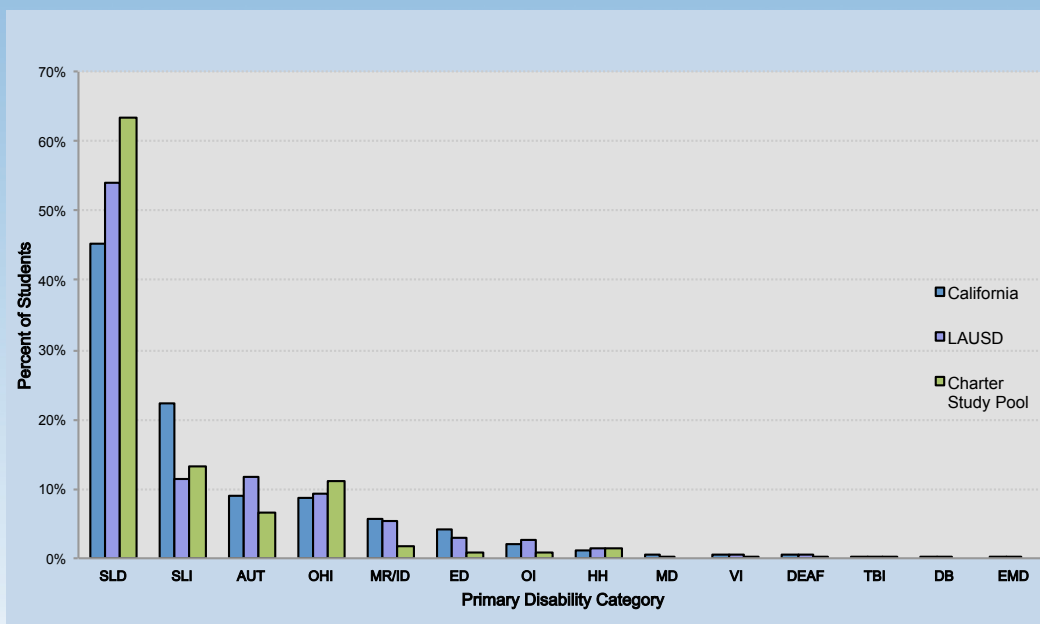
### Less than Ten Percent of All Students in the Charter Study Pool have IEPs



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Figure 3.

Percent of Students With IEPs in Each Disability Category



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## Methodology

The needs assessment process was designed to gather data from a variety of important perspectives to answer one overarching question: “How well are students with special needs being served in LAUSD charter schools, and what supports and services do charter schools need to provide the highest-quality services to these students?”

Answering this critical question requires an extensive process of inquiry into support systems and relationships, resources, teaching practices, school and system leadership, expectations, philosophy and culture, policy, compliance, and data management systems and processes that surround special education services within charter schools and charter management organizations in LAUSD. One could easily spend more than a year on such an investigation given the number (168 schools) and diversity of LAUSD charter schools.

With a short timeframe to carry out the project, however, Cross & Joftus designed an approach that would look deeply at a targeted sample of charter schools which represent a diverse cross-section (size, region, grade levels, Academic Progress Indicator (API) scores, Socioeconomic Status (SES), and IEP percentage) of the 121 schools in the study pool described earlier. We engaged with 31 schools (25.6%) in a variety of ways. Some, by conducting site visits and classroom observations, others by touring campuses and interviewing staff and some by facilitating focus group conversations. Many of these schools are part of larger CMOs and therefore represent a broader set of principles and organizational approaches than the stand-alone schools from which we drew data. By targeting some of these larger CMOs, our outreach, by association, was broader than the 31 schools listed here (see Table 2). Research teams also interviewed leaders from the CCSA, as well as LAUSD Special Education. And, we dove deeply into the databases used to collect and manage student IEP data.

### ***Site Visits***

School visits with classroom observations were conducted at 24 of the 31 school sites, which represent 19% of the 121 schools in the study pool. Observations were preceded by a half-day training for school site and/or CMO representatives. The purpose of the training was to familiarize school representatives with the observation rubric being used and the research behind it (see Appendix A). At each site, the school representatives and a team of Cross & Joftus researchers (one with a general education background and one with a special education background) observed classes together and calibrated their observations before recording a result. Each school received a copy of the data from the observations (a sample data sheet is attached; see Appendix B). A total of 82 LAUSD charter educators received training through this process.

At each school site, 100% of special education settings and 40% of general education classrooms in California Standards Test (CST)-tested grades and subjects were observed, for a total of 320 classrooms in all.

Table 2.

## School Site and CMO Engagement

Schools	Total Enrollment	Students with IEPs	Percent with IEPs	2010 API	PALSS SITE VISIT	Focus Grp/ Interviews	Training
Accelerated	870	62	7.1%	776		X	
Accelerated Elementary Charter	130	12	9.2%	749		X	
Animo Locke HS #1	325	62	19.1%	563	X	X	X
Animo Pat Brown HS	526	45	8.6%	790	X	X	X
Bert Corona Charter School	359	34	9.5%	N/A		X	
Birmingham Community CHS	2,690	331	12.3%	653	X	X	X
CA Acad Lib Studies Early College HS (CALS)	295	28	9.5%	769	X		X
Camino Nuevo Harvard campus	N/A	4	N/A	N/A		X	
CHIME Charter EL	367	38	10.4%	805	X	X	X
CHIME Charter MS	207	30	14.5%	756	X	X	X
Community Chrtr Early Col. HS	424	31	7.3%	753	X	X	X
Discovery Charter Prep. #2	856	26	3.0%	667	X		X
Fenton Ave. School	944	88	9.3%	762	X	X	X
Fernando Pullum Performing Arts HS	131	17	13.0%	567	X	X	X
Frederick Douglass Academy MS	460	36	7.8%	713	X	X	X
Granada Hills Charter HS	4,143	294	7.1%	874	X	X	X
James Jordan MS	208	44	21.2%	701	X		X
Lakeview Charter Academy	311	39	12.5%	851	X		X
Lou Dantzler Prep HS	274	24	8.8%	626	X	X	X
Milagro Charter ES	260	43	16.5%	893	X		X
Montague Charter Academy	1,140	86	7.5%	761	X		X
Multicultural Learning Center interviews	332	33	9.9%	787		X	
Para Los Ninos Charter	358	37	10.3%	699	X		X
Para Los Ninos MS Charter	143	10	7.0%	708	X		X
Santa Rosa Charter Academy	96	17	17.7%	768	X		X
Synergy Charter Academy	155	20	12.9%	897	X	X	X
Synergy Kinetic Academy	231	28	12.1%	802	X	X	X
Vaughn Next Century LC	609	156	25.6%	774	X	X	X
View Park Preparatory Accelerated Charter 54th St.	431	22	5.1%	891		X	
View Park Preparatory Accelerated Charter Middle	356	22	6.2%	805		X	
View Park Preparatory Accelerated High South Crenshaw Blvd	401	19	4.7%	738	X	X	X
Total	17,695	1,738	9.8%				



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### ***Focus Groups and Interviews***

To gather more information about service delivery models that might not be clearly visible while observing classes, in these 24 schools, Cross & Jofitus researchers interviewed additional school and organization leaders, special education staff, parents and students. Interviews targeted important issues of leadership, organizational support, instructional practices, curriculum and assessment, technology support, professional development, and expectations for special education students. In a few cases, phone interviews were conducted with leadership from schools not visited. Focus group researchers also attended the CCSA Annual Conference in March, where they met with groups of charter school representatives. A total of 182 educators were involved in all of these conversations. All focus groups and interviews are noted in Table 2. Protocols for these interviews and focus groups are attached as Appendix C.

### ***Stakeholder Advisory Group***

A guiding principle of our work is that it should be designed and carried out in partnership with key charter school stakeholders from the district, CCSA, the Joint Powers Authority (JPA), a consortium of more than 65 charter school groups in LAUSD), and parents. A Stakeholder Advisory Group was formed in order to help us accomplish this goal. The group first met on March 17, 2011 to hear about the progress of the project and to discuss emerging themes, issues, and questions. More than 20 individuals representing various stakeholder organizations attended the first meeting, evidence of strong interest in the project. A second meeting was held on April 11, 2011. A list of the participants is attached as Appendix D.

The stakeholders will be responsible for continued guidance as we finalize the recommendations and action plans outlined in this report.

### ***Survey***

To cast a larger net, and to gather opinion research from the wider pool of charter schools in the LAUSD SELPA, Cross & Jofstus administered an electronic survey. Surveys were sent to the directors of all charter schools in LAUSD, with a request to forward the survey to their staffs. The survey was designed to probe staff levels of knowledge and opinions about the services and support being provided for students with special needs, and the professional development and tools staff members think they need to do their jobs better. We received 600 responses. The survey protocol is attached as Appendix E.

## **Findings**

A number of clear themes emerged as researchers met with educators and stakeholders, observed classrooms, interviewed parents and students, and read survey responses. These themes are generalized across the diversity of sites and conversations as described in the previous section. Identities have been protected when specific examples or quotes are included, with the exception of the several examples of promising practices observed that are highlighted and acknowledged as practices to build upon. Strengths and challenges are delineated in each section to assist with

eventual professional development design. These themes can be categorized broadly in the areas of: 1) Leadership, Culture and Systems; 2) Teaching and Learning; and 3) Support and Resources for Learning Communities

## **Overarching Themes**

### ***Leadership, Culture and Systems***

In any system, leadership and culture matter. Key leadership and culture questions explored in the research included:

- Does school/CMO leadership understand and value ALL students?
- Do leaders understand and value the unique needs of students with disabilities?
- Is there a Response to Intervention (RtI) model in place? Is it being implemented effectively?
- Is there a culture of continuous improvement in the system? School?
- Is there a culture of distributed leadership?
- Is the CMO's and/or school's special education model current? Are staff (including leadership staff) up-to-date in their understanding of research-based practices for students with disabilities (SWDs)?
- How well are schools and CMOs taking advantage of the flexibility afforded them through the charter process to do things differently or better for all students, including students with disabilities?

During our visits, we were introduced to many strong leaders, doing extraordinary things under sometimes difficult conditions. Our conversations with these leaders revealed the complexities of their jobs, particularly when it comes to serving SWDs in their environments. While several of the school and CMO leaders with whom we spoke were able to articulate a clear vision and strategy for serving the needs of SWDs in their schools and were intelligently and efficiently focusing their resources, many were still struggling with implementation and acquisition of services, professional development for their special educators, and timely distribution of data to make decisions. These challenges were attributed to communication issues with LAUSD, leadership turnover, and small school size or funding.

### *Flexibility and Innovation*

What does added flexibility mean for charter schools in LAUSD? How are they taking advantage of their freedom and flexibility to serve students—*all* students, including students with special needs—better? Does the flexibility spawn innovative approaches to old problems? Though charter schools are free to do many things differently, they must follow federal and state special education laws. They must abide by IDEA, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, as well as various California state laws. Additionally, charters are “schools of the district” in relation to special education and so must belong to the LAUSD SELPA (Special Education Local Plan Area) to receive and support special education services—unless they have opted to exit LAUSD SELPA and join another SELPA.<sup>6</sup>

Though some school leaders with whom we spoke are clearly taking advantage of the opportunity to do things “differently” in order to serve students more effectively, we saw great variability in this aspect of organizational leadership. In some schools and CMOs, for example, we saw co-teaching and dual certification by which all special education teachers are dually certified and Rtl models are well implemented throughout the school. We spoke with leaders who reported that *all* teachers have been and continue to be trained and supported as they work to develop and implement appropriate interventions for *all* students.

On the other hand, we spoke with leaders whose schools were offering only the most traditional and basic services to students with disabilities and did not have a clearly articulated or shared vision or plan for reaching all students.

We also spoke with charter leaders who really wanted to “share back” to the district, who had designed their schools to work in collaboration with the district. Other charter leaders are seeking ways to share buildings and facilities as well as instructional models, teaching supports, and additional resources—so that everyone benefits. There

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<sup>6</sup> See Los Angeles Unified School District, Policy for Charter School Authorizing, January 12, 2010 (accessed electronically March 28, 2011 at [http://notebook.lausd.net/portal/page?\\_pageid=33,1112433&\\_dad=ptl&\\_schema=PTL\\_EP](http://notebook.lausd.net/portal/page?_pageid=33,1112433&_dad=ptl&_schema=PTL_EP)).

is real opportunity here for LAUSD to work collaboratively with these school sites, to enable them to serve as professional development or professional learning schools. The concern expressed, however, is whether or not this sharing will be able to continue, given current funding constraints.

Many charter leaders with whom we spoke appreciate, value, and take advantage of their ability to hire and fire staff. As one leader put it, “We recruit and hire staff who share our no-excuses philosophy. This makes a huge difference in our ability to serve students.” This ability to hire and fire staff enables charters to hire service providers as well. In some cases, however, this appears to be a double-edged sword. As another leader noted, “We appreciate the flexibility we are afforded to hire our own providers, but at the same time, the worst thing is when a provider doesn’t show up for an IEP meeting.”

Charters also have the potential to do things differently in terms of budgeting, and this raises a number of questions in relation to special education services:

- How are/can charters allocate funding differently while maintaining state and federal expenditure requirements for special education funding?
- Is funding available for additional learning time and tutoring, for a wider range of learning experiences? If so, how is that affecting learning?
- How can the new SELPA structure account for this range of opportunities and funding flexibility while continuing to maintain fiscal requirements (e.g., Maintenance of Effort, use of funds for incidental benefit, etc.)?

### *The Unique Systemic Support Needs of Charters*

In California, as elsewhere across the United States, legislation enabling charter schools is intended to stimulate independence, flexibility, and an experimental spirit for improving public education. While these are key components of most charter schools, they alone are not sufficient for improving the success of all students with disabilities. The state’s SELPA structure is designed specifically to meet the needs of those students who attend charter schools. Leaders talked about needing access to a continuum of services—within the CMO or within the SELPA, opportunities to share



resources and training expertise, structures for sharing services, support for parents (training, communication, access to information), continuous and ongoing training for administrators, assistive technology training, and finally, greater clarity around the way the options will work before charters must decide about which option to choose. Leaders emphasized a desire to select providers who share the mission of the school and to evaluate the providers for quality and consistency.

The lifecycle of the charter school—new, emerging, established—makes a difference in terms of services needed, expertise on-hand, and expectations around what the Charter SELPA might provide. A charter school's (and CMO's) ability to take advantage of the flexibility the charter provides depends on the leadership and culture at the school. The lifecycle of the charter can also affect the way in which special education is understood at the school. Has the school been around for a number of years? Is the school's special education model up-to-date? Being current is problematic within CMOs as well, depending on when the school was founded, since both No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and special education legislation have changed over time. As one CCSA special education panelist at the March 8, 2011 conference put it, "Some schools are ahead of the curve, while others are clearly behind it." The type of charter also matters: Is the charter a conversion? If the school is lottery based, how might the lottery affect which students choose to enter? Is the charter a "neighborhood school" that accepts all students in the area? Is it part of a larger CMO?

Part of what must be embedded in the new SELPA is a deep understanding of the wide variety of charters in the LAUSD, and an understanding of who they serve, their governing principles, etc. It also demands an understanding of how they are connected to and/or governed by various CMOs.

Size of the school, of course, matters as well. Smaller charters have fewer dollars to spend on special education resources and staff and less scheduling flexibility to create co-teaching or inclusive education situations. Larger schools have their own

challenges with creating coherent programs, training larger numbers of staff, and gaining consensus around important programmatic issues.

Several of the charter leaders with whom we spoke mentioned that they were interested in shared service arrangements. Many contract out for services now, and as they grow larger (either in school size, or as the CMO to which they belong grows larger), they take on additional staff and specialists. A number identified the desire to create shared services arrangements that would operate across charter schools. This was echoed in the March 17, 2011 Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting as well.

It was clear at the CCSA Annual Conference meetings held on March 8 and 9, 2011 (and in focus group conversations at several schools) that many charter school leaders perceive themselves as the “stepchildren” of their local SELPAs, and this perception clearly extends beyond LAUSD. They observe that many SELPA staff members don’t seem to understand how charters work, why they might be different, and/or why they want more flexibility. Additionally, the immense variety of charter school structures, missions, and operational designs complicates this for both the individual charter school and the SELPAs. To understand one charter school is not to understand any other. This is an issue that must be addressed in the new SELPA structure. The SELPA must also address the needs of CMOs, schools within those CMOs, and independent charters. The success of the new SELPA will likely hinge on its ability to support flexibility and creativity throughout its membership while seeking ways to unify and organize services under one umbrella.

Others, including independent charter schools and organizations, however, see their relationship with LAUSD, and the SELPA generally, in a more positive light. They appreciate the current benefits they receive, and they also value the legal protection that the current SELPA provides. They are excited about the potential of a “charters only SELPA-like structure for LAUSD,” but also nervous about changing what they perceive as largely “working for them” now.

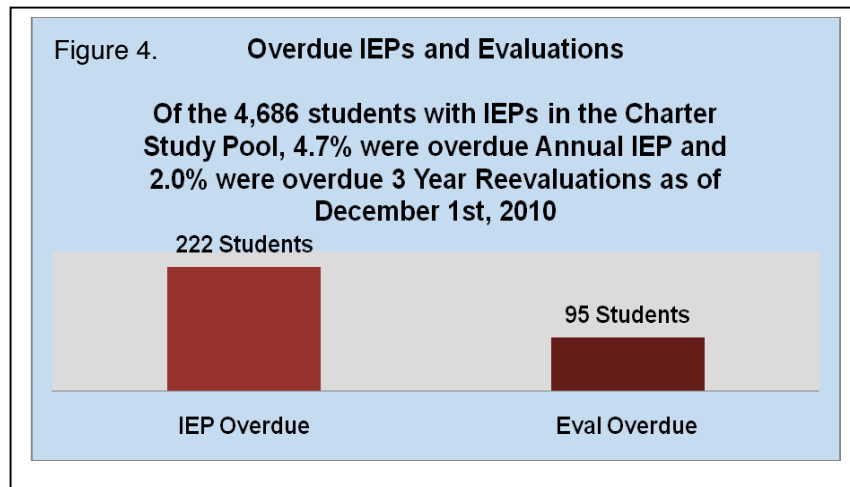
### *Different Understandings of Compliance and Best Practice*

The level of compliance—minimal vs. deep compliance—was an issue we probed during several of our conversations. Some schools and CMOs see compliance as a “floor,” a set of standards they must meet, but beyond that, they provide a whole range of services to students with disabilities. At other schools, however, compliance issues appear to be an ongoing challenge. For example, accommodations on the statewide assessment are permitted. The guidelines and options for students with disabilities are not widely known among charter school staff. It is clear that some students are eligible for accommodations but are not receiving them because school staff do not know what is allowed and don’t understand how to appropriately accommodate on assessments. Some leaders described having limited access to information about compliance and expressed a desire for training to strengthen their ability to comply with the regulations.

In looking at procedures and data systems, we found that RSPs (resource teachers) in at least half of the schools visited did not seem aware of the appropriate procedures around change of placements. For example, the RSP at one school admitted that he often informally counsels parents to remove their son or daughter from the school rather than go about working with LAUSD to change the placement. He said, “Well, if the parent initiates the student leaving, then it is fine.” While other schools did not explicitly state that this was the practice, when asked about how change of placements occurred, we often received vague answers.

Similarly, other procedures such as Manifestation Determinations and 30-day IEPs did not seem to be well implemented in some schools as well. A number of schools reported that they have continual challenges with the Welligent IEP program that is mandated for use by LAUSD, and that this impedes their IEP development and access. This concern was echoed in the Stakeholder group by one member who strongly stated, “Welligent sucks!” California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS) 2010 data underscore this problem as well. Figure 4 illustrates the level of overdue IEP applications and re-evaluations reported for the study

pool. It should be noted that 2% and below is considered the accepted level of performance for both Annual IEPs and 3 Year Re-evaluations by both the United States Department of Education and state educational agencies nationally. Thus, Figure 4 indicates that for the Charter Study Pool 3 year re-evaluations are generally compliant, while overdue annual IEPs are an issue.<sup>7</sup>



CASEMIS data also reveal that the charter pool is more likely to provide appropriate transition documentation in students' IEPs than either the state or the district (see Figures 5 and 6).

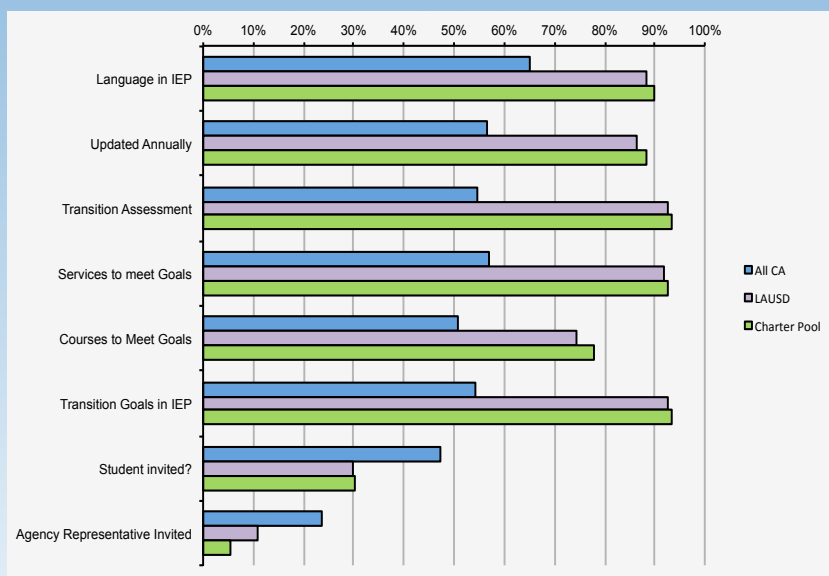
### *Enhancing Communication and Building Trust Across the System*

When examining the degree to which a vision for special education is clearly articulated and supported by policies and systems, it is clear that this is an area of challenge in need of attention. We looked at this issue at the level of the district as well as at the organization and school level. In other words, how well are the district and charters communicating with each other and collaborating to improve services to SWDs? And, how well are charter leaders and school directors communicating with their own staffs and constituents about their vision for serving students with disabilities?

<sup>7</sup> 2% and below is considered the acceptable level of performance for both Annual IEPs and 3 Year re-evaluations by both the United States Department of Education and state educational agencies nationally.

Figure 5.

Students aged 15 or older in the Charter Project Schools are more likely to have Transition related Language in their IEPs



At the level of the district, many charter leaders reported that timely communication is a real challenge.

“We hear about meetings, trainings, and conferences a week after they happen.”

“I just want someone to call me back.”

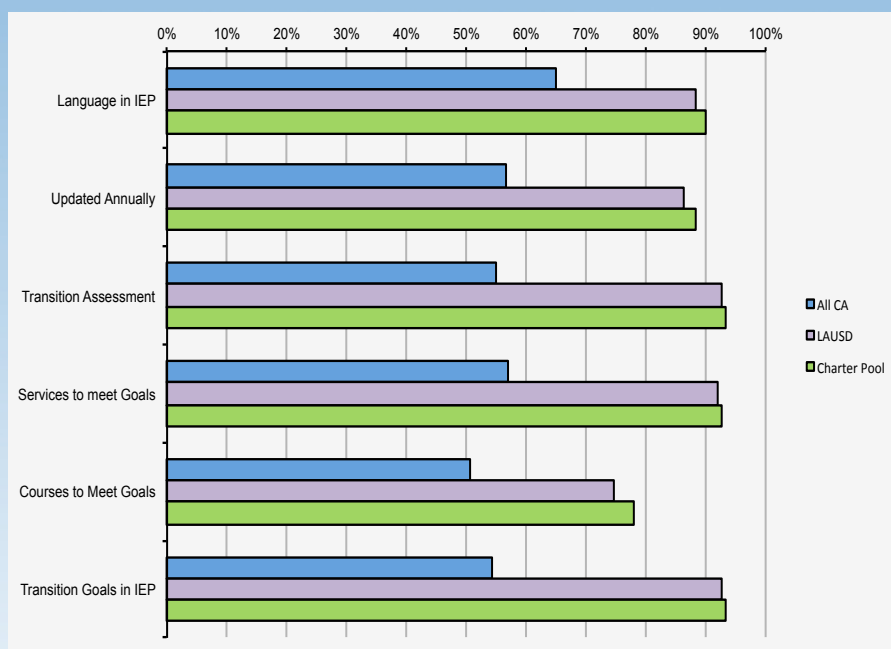
“Responsiveness makes a huge difference.”

--Charter leaders

We heard from some charter leaders that they have generally had a positive relationship with LAUSD. According to one respondent, "LAUSD is getting better at understanding our needs as we develop a more consistent relationship and since Jody (Molodow) came to LAUSD." As another leader put it, “most of the time, we get what we need.” Even these leaders, however, pointed out that communication with the system generally has gotten more challenging, as more charters have sprung up in LAUSD and

Figure 6.

Students aged 15 or older in the Charter Project Schools are more likely to have Transition related Language in their IEPs



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as budgets have gotten tighter. This will be an important area for the new SELPA to address.

At another level of the system, how and what a school or organization leader communicates to staff and stakeholders about a school's or CMO's vision, guidelines, and processes for delivery of special education services is critical. We saw some exemplary, explicit communication informing staff and families of the resources available to them, the policies in place, and the vision for the school for students with disabilities. Partnerships to Uplift Communities (PUC) schools, for example have a handbook for staff and parents that thoroughly describes their vision, policies, procedures, and resources for serving students with special needs. For other schools and systems, however, we saw an absence of such communication or articulation and this appears to be an important area in need of development.

### *Structures to Support Students with More Severe Disabilities*

In addition to understanding how charter schools are serving students with disabilities generally, it is also important to understand how well schools and CMOs are serving *different populations* of students with disabilities. Many school leaders we interviewed reported needing help with behavior issues and with identifying programs that are intended to address behavior concerns. Many of the charter schools we visited struggle to serve their students, most of whom have “mild-to-moderate” disabilities. Few schools appear to be prepared to serve students with more challenging disabilities in the moderate to severe category. This does not appear, however, to be from a lack of effort or belief system: our survey results found that most staff (91%) believe that “administrators and teachers welcome families and students with more complex disabilities and needs.” And 88% feel that “students and staff have access to special education services and specialists that may be necessary to serve students with physical, behavioral, or emotional disabilities.”

That said, while every school had a resource specialist (or specialists) and reported that they had access to support staff (psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists), we did not observe or find any evidence to suggest that an infrastructure exists in many of these sites to support students with more severe needs. In schools serving some students with moderate-to-severe disabilities, accommodations were being made to serve those students; however, it’s clear that most schools we visited would not be prepared to meet the needs of students with more severe disabilities without additional support and training.

For example, at one site, a student had recently enrolled who was classified as Emotionally Disturbed (ED). The RSP and principal stated that the student was extremely disruptive to the classrooms and school as a whole. During the visit, we observed the student out of the classroom, refusing to go to class. The principal, security guard, and RSP were involved in trying unsuccessfully to get the student to return to class. The RSP explained that the student was currently on a modified day schedule, in which she attended school in the morning then went home and took

classes online in the afternoon. Additionally, the school required the mother to attend school with the student. We observed the mother down the hallway during the altercation but not involved in trying to get her child back to the classroom. The staff seemed anxious about what to do and how to proceed with an IEP for this student. This one example (in a school that was otherwise exemplary) may indicate a need for many schools to become better equipped to work with students with more severe needs.

It may also be worth noting that an aspect of many larger CMOs which is viewed as a strength—the comprehensive core curriculum and school-wide discipline plan—may in fact work against schools when it comes to adjusting for students who require more drastic accommodations and modifications. For example, at one middle school observed, many students were beginning the year with extremely low math skills. Instead of trying to differentiate within the curriculum, the school clustered students according to their ability. Students with disabilities and others who were deemed “at-risk” were placed in a separate math class with a lower student-teacher ratio. In theory, this might be an appropriate intervention if students had the ability to move between the low and high classes, but the administrator said that this doesn’t happen. The result is an informal Special Day Class (SDC) classroom, or tracking of these students with little or no evidence of assessment data being utilized to group and regroup students based on growth, needs, and assessed progress.

Some see the encroachment costs they pay as part of the benefit of belonging to the LAUSD SELPA—LAUSD can “find placements” for students that many of the charters we visited cannot. Yet, schools that are serving students with more severe disabilities—such as Camino Nuevo Charter Academy (Harvard), PUC Schools, CHIME Institute Schwarzenegger Community School (CHIME), Bert Corona Charter School, and Granada Hills Charter High School—have aggressively sought funding and partnerships to augment their staffs and programs in order to be a strong option for those students. Still others expressed a desire to serve more students but felt they lacked sufficient resources and support from LAUSD.



Whatever the new SELPA configuration, charter leaders want to ensure that there are resources in place to serve students with more challenging disabilities well. They also want to ensure that their schools will be protected (or insured, in some sense) in the event of an expensive legal challenge.

### *Parents and Community*

A clear strength of most of the schools we visited is their ability to partner with parents and the community to create high-quality educational services that serve entire families and neighborhoods. We saw this in the case of education programs for parents, parent participation in the classrooms, and open campus policies. Several schools reported that they provide weekly progress reports to parents of students with IEPs. Parents with whom we spoke had many positive things to say about their schools:

"My child is really pushed to excel here."

"We bought our house so that our child with disabilities could attend this school."

"Communication with parents is good at this school."

At Montague Charter Academy, which has a high EL (English learner) population, there is a very concerted effort to bring parents into the school. Leaders talk about “celebrating” parents. The campus is open to parents at all times. Ninety-eight percent of parents participate in the kindergarten “Doing Words” program. Parents learn how to assist their children with vocabulary and reading (staff report that it helps reinforce parenting skills), and the school has a Parent Center with a full-time parent liaison. The school also offers daily ESL and citizenship classes for parents. Vaughn Next Century Learning Center also offers ESL classes to parents as part of their daily parent education curriculum, and Vaughn has a Community Health Center on Campus, which is open to the neighborhood. Fenton Avenue schools also boast a community center, and parents see Fenton Avenue as a vital resource in the community. This also appears to be a real strength at a number of Inner City Education Foundation (ICEF) schools.

Despite this overall strength, teachers and members of the stakeholder group noted the need for continued education and support for parents:

"I would like to see more opportunities for autistic children to interact more with their normal peers." (Parent)

"We need to figure out how to better personalize the learning experience for kids with disabilities." (Parent)

"We're becoming swamped by increasing need for counseling to help teachers and families deal with challenging students." (School Resource Teacher)

"I would like to see more active behavioral support for children with autism." (Teacher)

Some parents also offered concerns about educational opportunities in secondary school and beyond. Several noted a perception about a lack of transition services for students. Programs and services for students with disabilities aged 19 to 22 were noted by a few parents as a weakness. Additionally, families who were very satisfied with fully inclusive services in the elementary grades reported being unable to find similar services in secondary charter schools.

Another community stakeholder that can play an important role in supporting charter schools in their efforts to improve supports for students with disabilities are institutes of higher education (IHEs). IHEs credential teachers and house researchers in the field of education. IHEs are always looking for a diversity of practicum sites for their credential candidates as well as research sites for important studies. Professors at local IHEs may have expertise and knowledge that can also be utilized in professional development programs. One such example is the partnership between California State University Northridge and CHIME. In this model, professional development is done collaboratively between Northridge's school of education and CHIME, student teachers are sent to intern at CHIME, and many return to teach after receiving their credential. This type of partnership creates a much-needed feedback loop as well. Too often, IHEs credential new teachers and never know how they are doing in their professions, or if

what they were taught was useful. By creating these relationships with feeder institutions, schools and IHEs can create a more seamless continuum of pre-service and in-service professional development.

### *Safe Spaces for Learning*

All classrooms visited were clean and well organized, and created a space safe for learning. Classroom management practices appeared to be very effective in most schools visited, with students engaged in activities across settings. Clear expectations around behavior school-wide were evident with few exceptions. Students consistently received encouragement and positive feedback for their efforts in the classroom.

High expectations for all students and a culture of achievement were also evident in almost every setting. A common emphasis on building college-going and/or college-ready cultures was evident in many schools. Teachers display student work with regularity and in most cases post standards and expectations for skills and knowledge to frame their lessons. Student college admissions results are posted with pride in high schools and most had strong A-G requirements for all students, including students with disabilities. Staff reported high percentages of students with disabilities who met all graduation requirements and obtained diplomas.

For students whose disabilities are linked to social/emotional issues, consistent behavior expectations across the school are essential. For example, at the two Synergy Schools (Synergy Charter Academy and Synergy Kinetic Academy) the school rules were displayed both in common areas and in classrooms, and teachers were observed using a common language when speaking with students. Students also seemed to know the routine and expectations (i.e., quiet in the hallways, no touching peers when in the hallways, enter the classrooms and begin working right away).

### *Staff Support All Students*

During many of the observations, staff members and administrators with whom we met seemed eager to work with all students and expressed a desire to continually improve their instruction; this was especially true when speaking with the RSP teachers

at each school. All of the RSP teachers mentioned things such as, “It’s my goal to collaborate more with general education teachers next year, so I can really support the students,” and “I’m hoping to get into the classrooms more instead of pulling out all the students.” This was an area of strength for the schools and organizations with whom we engaged. This attitude of wanting to improve service delivery speaks to the potential to implement great programs in charter schools. Some schools had an SDC class for students with moderate to severe disabilities, operated by LAUSD by separate LAUSD staff, and included the students and the teacher in their school community as well. Students identified for special education services are clearly a welcome part of the school community on these campuses.

### ***Teaching and Learning***

Several teaching and learning themes arose as visiting teams observed general education classroom teachers implementing accommodations for students with special needs, as well as paraprofessionals and RSPs working with students. Teams visited resource rooms, learning centers, SDCs, small pullout groups, and speech therapy sessions. They also spoke with RSPs informally about their work and to clarify interventions, IEP use, and supports and tools in place that might not be evident. Visiting teams found that, although most SWDs were being supported within the general education setting for most of their day, it was often unclear what explicit intervention or teaching strategies were being implemented. This is not necessarily a weakness if the instruction in the general education classroom is highly effective and differentiated. Our findings suggest that this is a challenge area for many schools and has significant implications for professional development planning.

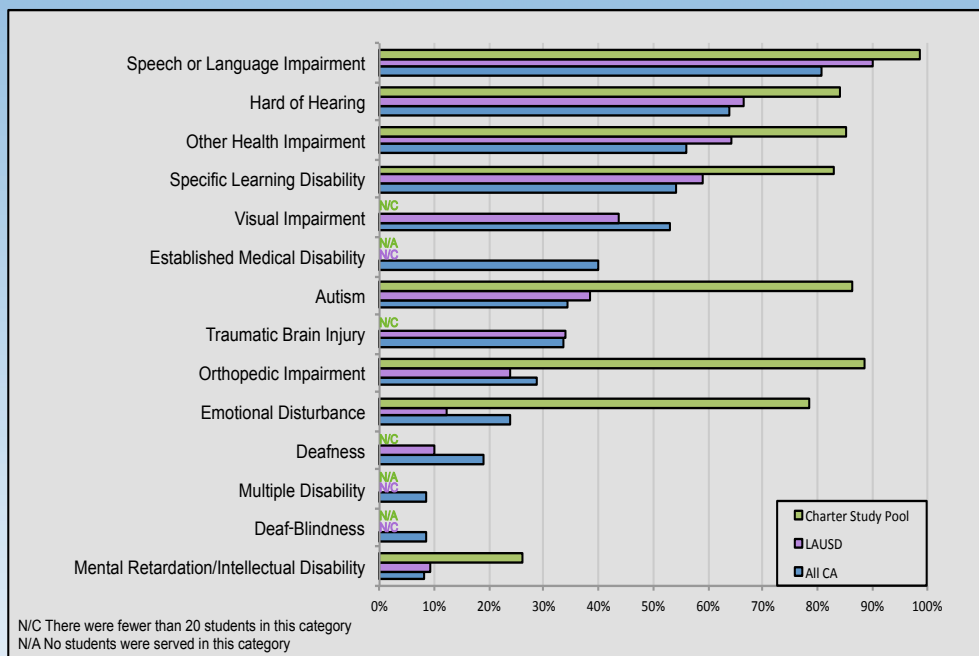
### ***Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)***

An analysis of CASEMIS data provided by the district reveals that 85% of students with IEPs in the charter school study pool are spending, on average, 80% or more of their school day in the general education classroom (see Figure 7). Only 60% of students with IEPs in LAUSD traditional schools spend this much time in general education classrooms. This means that charter schools in our study are doing a better

job of offering a less restrictive environment to their students with special needs than their district peers. It also means, however, that the skills and knowledge of general

Figure 7.

In every disability category applicable to students in the charter study group, more students are served in the regular classroom 80% or more of the time.



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education teachers must be all the more current and nimble, and the collaboration with special education teachers all the more seamless. It also means that, if schools are to begin to serve more students with moderate to severe disabilities, we need to prepare them accordingly if we wish to maintain quality inclusive programs. We observed some highly skilled teachers at all of the schools that we visited. The challenge for all schools, however, remains in the systematic training, reinforcement of skills, and collaborations that are required to offer a high-quality full inclusion model. In some schools and systems we observed, the special education programs and services were isolated from the general program and were viewed as separate, despite the fact that most SWDs

spent the majority of the school day in the general education classroom. There was a lack of clarity about who is or should be responsible for the achievement of outcomes for students with disabilities. The role of the general education teacher in teaching SWDs needs to be more explicitly stated. Many schools recognize this and reported a need for training for general education teachers regarding instructional strategies for students with disabilities.

### *Defining RTI Approaches and their Relationship to Services*

While the percentage of time that the typical student with disabilities spends in the general education setting noted above might indicate that an inclusion model was utilized in most schools, our observations and focus group conversations revealed that this was not necessarily an explicit Response to Intervention (RtI) strategy. There are some strong RtI models being implemented, yet in too many schools there seemed to be a lack of any kind of coherent plan for monitoring the progress of students with disabilities and providing targeted supports within the RtI framework. This does not mean that students with disabilities were not being supported, but simply that they were being supported without the foundation of a coherent RtI or articulated school-wide tiered intervention model. Many schools we visited seemed to focus more on providing “services” to students with disabilities, rather than employing a school-wide evidence-based approach to deliver and monitor those services. Some educators with whom we spoke acknowledged this challenge and requested help with this aspect of their programs; others were just beginning to take on the task of implementing a model, and some seemed unaware of this as an issue.

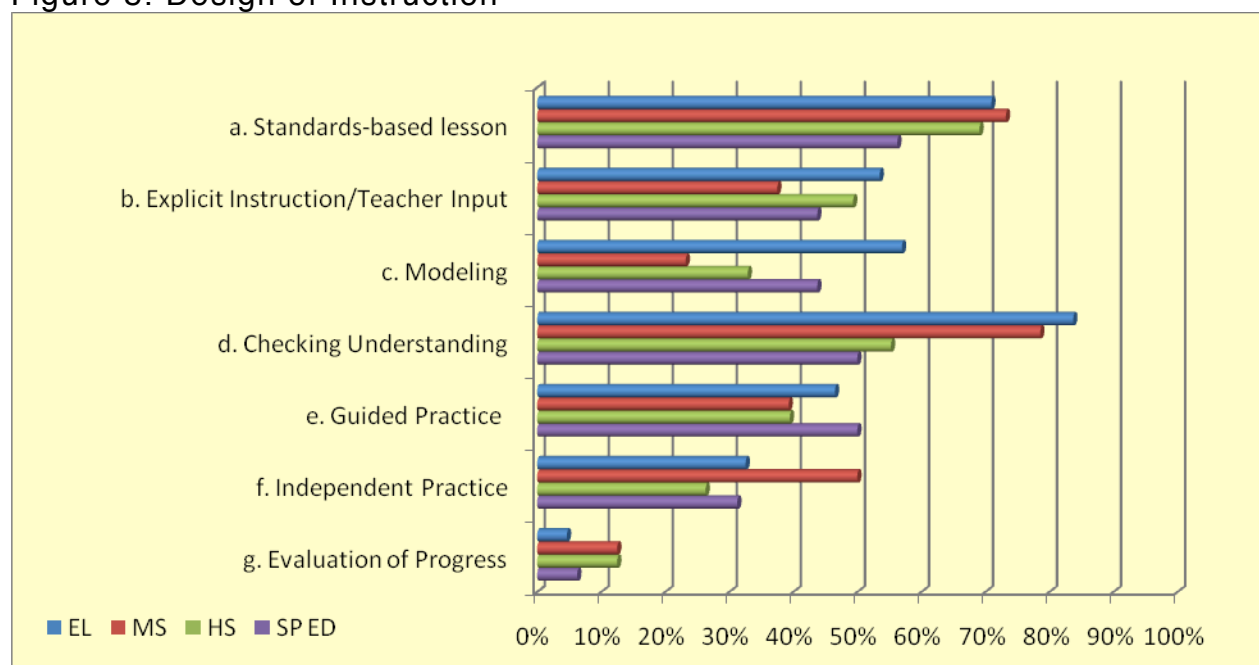
### *Explicit, Standards-Based Instruction in the General Education*

In most schools, visiting teams observed teachers using direct, explicit instruction regularly, and also employing strategies that would support many students with disabilities. For example, teachers were observed modeling mathematical processes, essay structure, and chemistry assignments. Regardless of the cognitive level being utilized, teaching practices were routinely implemented that addressed the needs of most students.

In most cases we observed, students with “mild to moderate” disabilities were being served through a collaborative teaching model, and staff appeared knowledgeable about special education. They were observed collaborating with the general education staff to ensure that students with disabilities were progressing in the core curriculum. For instance, many of the high schools observed utilize a collaboration model for classroom RSP support, with a one-period resource class for special education support or tutoring.

We observed many high-impact teaching and learning practices—including non-linguistic representations and advanced organizers, writing in the content areas, and providing feedback—across the sample. Also notable was the clear focus across the sample of standards-based lessons and teaching practice aligned to the standards. (See Figure 8).

Figure 8. Design of Instruction



While this is a clear area of strength for most of the schools observed, there was also evidence of a lack of use of other high-impact teaching and learning strategies—including vocabulary instruction, building background knowledge, critical thinking, higher order thinking, and use of assessment to plan instruction—which need to be addressed.

A lack of strategies and tools to provide access to the core curriculum is a challenge. CHIME offers some excellent examples of teacher-developed materials designed for the core curriculum but modified to meet the individual learning needs of students with disabilities.

### *Speech and Language Services*

Our observations and conversations revealed that many schools contract for speech and language services with outside agencies. These services utilize a pull-out model for the sessions that are typically 30 minutes long. This approach has both benefits and drawbacks. The benefit of contracting out is that students usually receive reliable service. The downside is that because it is a contract agency the school does not have the ability to implement a cutting-edge special education model with innovative service delivery. More innovative approaches include Speech and Language Professionals (SLPs) going into classrooms and facilitating small groups of learners, particularly in the younger grades. This does not happen with outside agencies. In addition, a critical disconnect occurs between the service being provided and the general education classroom, and collaboration is minimal. SLPs have a tremendous amount to offer general education teachers in terms of teaching strategies if given the opportunity.

Beyond those speech and language services that were contracted out, our teams saw mostly traditional 1:1 pull out services. A more effective model to be considered would include collaborative services to support curriculum for disabled students and a group RtI model of services for students with mild (single sound) articulation errors only. Additionally, professional development for SLPs should be focused on classroom-based assessment, curriculum-relevant intervention strategies, social-pragmatic language support, and single-sound intervention models. This model for service delivery of speech and language services is critical for not only charter employees, but also for contracted services in the areas of speech and language.

### *Differentiation*



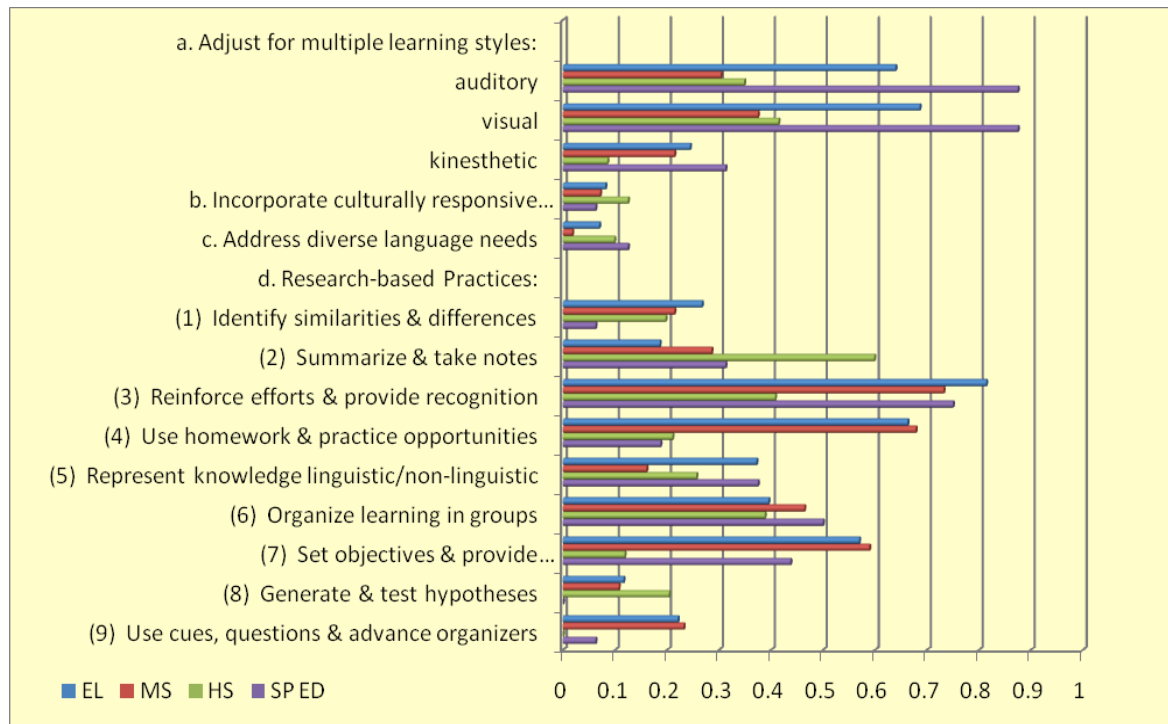
Despite an observed strength in explicit instruction, in some of the schools observed there was an absence of differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students at various levels of achievement, and a lack of instructional variety to address different types of learning modalities. Many teachers in these schools appeared to be unaware of what instructional actions to take with students with extremely low literacy levels, particularly at the high schools. Basic instructional techniques—such as connecting new information to what is already known, checking for understanding, and modeling by doing a ‘think aloud’—were not evident. The type of differentiation observed in many of the classrooms served students who learn at a faster rate than most and did not support students at risk of school failure, including those with special needs.

In the majority of classrooms observed, students demonstrated their learning in very traditional ways. An essential part of meeting the needs of students with disabilities is the teacher’s ability to differentiate and present material in a way that incorporates different learning styles. In 70% of elementary schools, 68% of middle schools, 59% of high schools, and 63% of special education classes, the predominant way students were asked to demonstrate their learning was verbal-linguistic (see Figure 9). Teachers routinely gave verbal directions while using a document camera to reinforce the directions on a worksheet. Students with special needs may be able to demonstrate learning utilizing other modalities such as bodily-kinesthetic or musical rhythmic, and we saw little evidence that these modalities were tapped in either instructional or learning strategies. The most common type of differentiation observed indicated that a few students were working on alternate assignments. More attempts were observed in elementary schools and special day classes to differentiate instruction than in middle or high schools.

Missed opportunities to differentiate within the lesson may be caused by teachers lacking the knowledge, skills, or confidence. One observation team noted that students with disabilities were “invisible” in most of the classrooms they visited. They were not singled out, and if academic supports were available, they were not visible. This can be

viewed as both a strength and a weakness. While it speaks to the strength of a school's inclusion model, schools must remain vigilant to ensure that they are providing intentional—not informal—support to all students.

Figure 9. Research-Based Teaching Strategies Observed



Survey respondents had a different view of the level of differentiation taking place in their classrooms. When asked whether they see evidence that “educators provide equitable opportunities to learn that are based on respect for adaptations for diverse learners,” 93% of survey respondents felt these opportunities were evident or strongly evident in their schools. When asked about whether “students who are struggling are provided with differentiated instruction as needed in whole group, small flexible group, or individually as needed,” 88% said this was evident or strongly evident. Nine percent said it was minimally evident. Again, this discrepancy may be explained by respondents’ understanding of differentiation.

### *Cognitive Rigor*

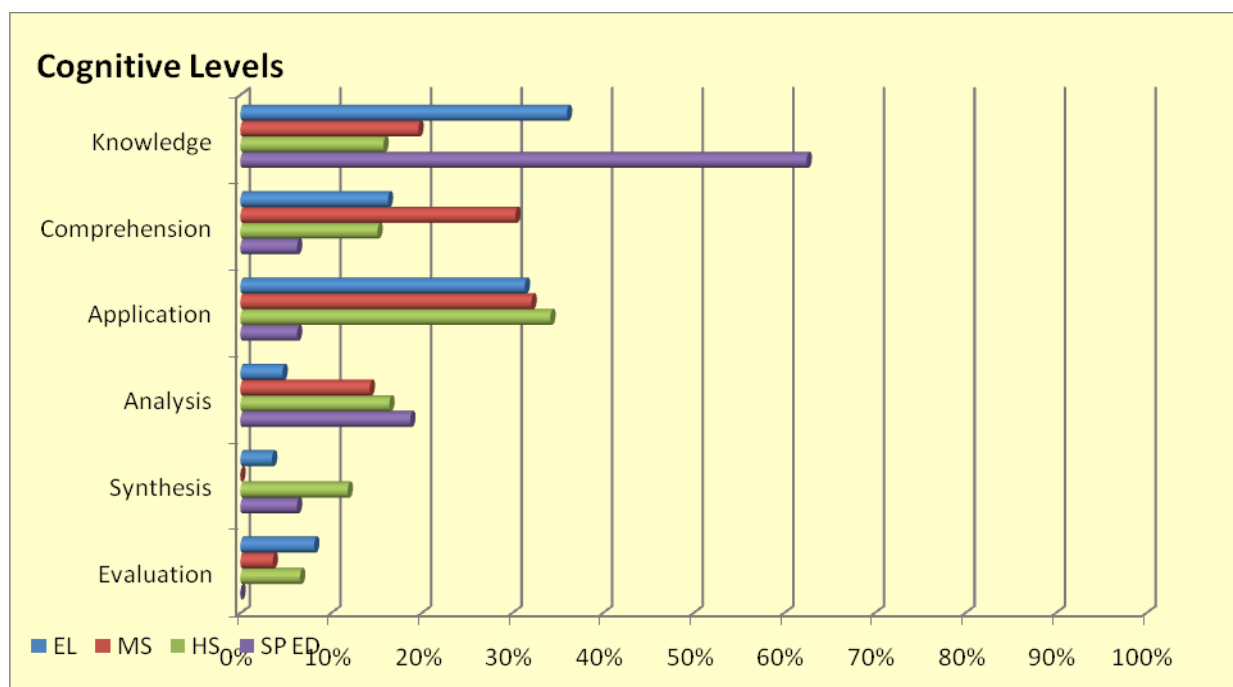
One of the indicators classroom observers are trained to look for with the Cross & Jofus observation protocol is the level of the cognitive task being required of students. This is based on Bloom's Taxonomy and Costa's levels of questioning:<sup>8</sup> knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. These levels tell us whether teachers are asking students to think in ways that process information with higher and higher levels of sophistication. If students are asked only to learn facts (knowledge) but do not comprehend the meaning of those facts, they are operating on the lower end of what we might call cognitive rigor. On the other hand, if students are being asked to take their knowledge, demonstrate their understanding, apply it in a task or situation, analyze what happens, bring in other information and ideas to augment their understanding, and finally, to evaluate their own learning, they are operating at the highest levels of cognitive rigor.

While the emphasis on achievement is high in the schools we visited, observers did not consistently find students being stretched in their thinking beyond the application stage. In over 50% of the special education sessions observed across the sample, the knowledge level was the predominant cognitive level being addressed, with minimal movement beyond application (see Figure 10). In general education settings, this mode

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<sup>8</sup> Bloom's Taxonomy and Costa's Levels of Questioning (accessed electronically April 6, 2011 from <http://daretodifferentiate.wikispaces.com/file/view/NoelleCombsInquiryLesson.pdf>).

Figure 10. Cognitive Rigor



was also strongest in elementary schools (39%), with little progression beyond the application level. Middle and high schools appear to balance cognitive levels more evenly but are still well below 20% beyond the level of application.

This is not an uncommon phenomenon in general, particularly in the teaching of students with disabilities or students below grade level. It may also reflect a disconnect between the high expectations of the organization and the skills or training of teachers in differentiating instruction as described earlier.

Ninety-four percent of survey respondents believe that “subject matter is delivered to students at an appropriately rigorous level.” When asked about self-evaluation, however, 78% noted that “students are empowered to use data to monitor their own progress.” Sixteen percent said this was minimally evident. Defining rigorous practices and looking at examples of the different types of cognitive levels at work in the classroom should be an area under consideration for professional development.

One exceptional example we observed of cognitive rigor, however, occurred at PUC schools where classes use a learning cycle that involves:

- APK (Activating Prior Knowledge)
- EPK (Extending Prior Knowledge)
- Application
- Reflection

Students engage in learning activities, then use an “exit ticket,” which is a reflection/extension of the lesson, and hand it in to the teacher on the way out of class. Another wonderful example of rigor came from Granada Hills where our Project Director (former Director of Special Education for the State of California) observed a Special Day Class being taught by two general education teachers that was on such a high cognitive level that she thought she was in a general education class.

### ***Support and Resources for Learning Communities***

In order to deliver high-quality instruction, teachers must have access to high-quality, evidence-based resources, training, and tools, and the time and space to continuously learn and improve. While visiting campuses and speaking with leaders, we tried to gain an understanding of what types of learning communities were in place and what was available to teachers in each setting. For special education teachers, we found most commonly a sense of isolation from the larger teaching staff of the school. Often they were attending professional development sessions alone, and some were unable to communicate consistently with their partner teachers even when placed directly in “co-teaching” configurations. Paraprofessionals were even more isolated and often not receiving the training needed to keep current with student needs. This is a challenge area but one for which there are also some fine examples in the charter school community to draw on.

### ***Co-Teaching and Collaboration Time***

Co-teaching and collaboration between general and special educators is also frequently singled out in the literature as an essential practice for monitoring and serving the needs of students with disabilities. Survey results suggest that educators believe that this practice is widespread. Moreover, we saw a few excellent models and

examples of collaboration taking place in schools during our site visits. Teachers and specialists in these schools reported meeting at least weekly to review lessons, content in core classes, and needs of students with disabilities. Particularly strong examples of co-teaching and collaboration were observed, for example, at James Jordan Middle School, CHIME, Vaughn, PUC schools, and Granada Hills.

Other sites, however, reported having allocated no time for collaboration between the special education teachers and the general education teachers. Many educators with whom we spoke expressed a desire for these types of interactions and the need for a deeper understanding of their importance. The absence of structured protocols and time for collaboration in some schools may be due to funding constraints, leadership turnover, or small school size. This results in a lack of access to the core curriculum for students with disabilities and may account for the limited success of many students on the state assessment.

### *School-Wide Data-Driven Practice*

Intricately linked to this challenge is the concomitant struggle for obtaining and utilizing data effectively to improve practice. Though we saw some excellent examples of data-driven practice during site visits,<sup>9</sup> in general, this remains an area of challenge for many schools. Effective data-driven practice for special education means that RSPs, paraprofessionals, and general education teachers regularly evaluate the progress of students against the goals and benchmarks delineated in the students' IEPs and other learning plans that may have been implemented by the school. Research has shown that schools using data to regularly and systematically review student progress to re-align instruction, professional development, and services enable positive growth for all students. Evidenced-based tools for screening and progress monitoring are readily available. For example, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), AIMSweb®, System to Enhance Equitable Performance and Placement (STEEP), McGill Action Planning System (MAPS), Edcheckup, and Yearly ProgressPro are

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<sup>9</sup> Some of the schools where we observed an emphasis on data-driven practices include: Granada Hills Charter High School, Partnerships to Uplift Community (PUC) schools, Vaughn, Camino Nuevo, Bert Corona, James Jordan, and Green Dot Schools.

examples of curriculum-based measurement tools that schools may want to consider. Curriculum Based Measures (CBM) is the state-of-the-art assessment measure for Response to Intervention.

Survey responses show more confidence among educators in the use of data than our findings suggest. When asked whether charter school staff saw evidence that “teachers and administrators use data from benchmark classroom, Charter Management Organizations/Education Management Organizations (CMO/EMO) (if appropriate), and state assessments to determine results-based staff development,” 88% responded that this practice was evident or strongly evident in their schools. Seven percent said it was minimally evident. When asked about whether they see evidence that “educators collaboratively function as a community of learners focused on improving student learning using data to inform instruction,” 93% said they believed this practice to be evident or highly evident in their schools.

One possible explanation for the discrepancy between our observations and interviews on the one hand and the survey results on the other may be that our survey reached more respondents and schools than our targeted site visits, suggesting that data-driven practices are implemented more widely in schools that we did not visit. More likely is the possibility that there is a difference between how educators responding only to the survey interpret data-driven decision-making and how the evaluation team interprets it. When we asked educators probing questions during focus groups, we discovered that many educators are using data, but only in a limited, as opposed to a systematic, manner.

### *Use of Assistive and Other Technology*

Use of technology to provide access to the core curriculum or to accommodate individual learning needs was lacking at many of the sites observed. When computers or SmartBoards were in use, they were often used as worksheets or chalkboards. Students completed self-paced lessons, or watched auditory-verbal lessons presented through the Internet or by the teacher. School leaders did talk about the need for more

technology and more training to use assistive technology for students with disabilities. Funding issues were most often cited as the reason for the lack of such tools.

Some locations where technology does appear to be integrated into special education services are CHIME, Birmingham (we observed an SDC class using iPads), Vaughn (READ 180 labs), Fenton (using FM Systems in classrooms for all students), Bert Corona (using Khan Academy), and Camino Nuevo. Additionally, James Jordan Middle School has secured refurbished computers for all 6<sup>th</sup> grade students to utilize at home, pre-loaded with educational software.

As part of the ARRA Special Education Project, Cross & Joftus partnered with Infinitec, LLC, a not-for-profit organization specializing in providing online resources in assistive technologies and training in how to use them. Infinitec staff conducted 10 trainings, reaching 108 educators in 15 schools to date. This will be an ongoing resource, which we hope to help schools access more extensively moving forward.

### *Strengthening Professional Development*

Creating a professional development plan based on data and evidence and targeted to address teaching and learning challenges for all students and all teachers is what every good system and school leader does. Too often, however, special educators and paraprofessionals work in isolation from general educators, attending general education workshops, yet never seeing general education teachers in special education workshops. Too often, educators' interactions with students with disabilities are private, where even building principals have little knowledge of what they do. And too often, as we've heard, they may never see the data or the IEPs that can provide a roadmap for success for their students.

In the best of examples, however, full partnerships and collaborations between special education and general education teachers and administrators are established, and meaningful data and intervention models are utilized in tandem to help students progress in their learning. RSPs, paraprofessionals, and general education teachers



receive the same training on special education practices, and administrators know how and what their students with disabilities are doing – and why.

As this report pointed out earlier about collaboration, we have seen both of these extremes in our visits as well as some variations in the middle. Most schools have implemented time in the school day or week for collaboration, but how that time is spent appeared undefined. We also observed co-teaching models in which special education teachers were acting more like assistants to the general education teacher than true co-teachers. We did see and hear about examples of deep co-teaching in some schools, such as Granada Hills, PUC and CHIME schools, where teachers participate regularly in joint meetings, co-plan, and co-teach.

Our survey asked educators what they felt their school needed in order to raise student achievement, and the most common answer was some sort of learning or professional development. They asked for help with differentiating instruction, with behavior issues, with understanding modifications, and learning about different RtI options. They want training in assistive and other technologies, they want to look at better data, and most of all, they want to work together as a team to address the needs of their students. This was the resounding refrain from both general and special education teachers and administrators—help us figure out a way to do this as partners or as a team.

This is an area to which the new SELPA structure can really add value, particularly for those smaller charters that have limited resources. How can the new SELPA provide training and learning opportunities for teachers and building leaders on the issues they (and we) have identified as most salient? How can schools and CMOs pool resources to provide effective professional development? How can the SELPA help to break down the isolation often felt by special educators, by serving as a convener of communities of practice? When an individual teacher in an individual school is unable to access these opportunities, how can the SELPA create a community that will engage her/him?

## **Data Management and Systems Findings**

LAUSD uses Welligent software to manage information on students with IEPs, and the charters are required to use this software as well. Our data experts had numerous conversations with both charter users and LAUSD administrators in an attempt to better understand the strengths and challenges associated with data management for charter schools. In conversations with charter leaders at the CCSA meeting, it became clear that many leaders would like to find an alternative to Welligent. One leader reported, for example, that a teacher had not changed her name on school records (despite having recently married and adopting a new name) for fear that a name change might cause chaos with her students' Welligent data. Given that a complete overhaul or change of system is unlikely, however, we offer the following observations regarding the current challenges inherent in using Welligent for charter schools.

### ***Existing Resources and Systems within LAUSD***

Our conversations with district officials and charter leaders revealed a number of resources and systems already in place to serve schools in their data management. Each of these resources and systems represents both assets and challenges for charters.

#### ***1. Electronic Newsletter***

LAUSD has a regular e-newsletter that is sent out which focuses on updates, training opportunities, etc. It is not clear, however, that charters are aware of this newsletter or feel it contains relevant information.

#### ***2. EZ Access Application***

This is an application in which administrators can request multiple types of usernames/passwords for employees for systems such as Welligent. Although the form ultimately has to get faxed in, LAUSD has created a central site where the application can be accessed. The difficulty in this system appears to be that charter school employees cannot be issued a Welligent ID/password unless they have a contractor number. Because they are not LAUSD employees, their

administrator (principal) must first approve them as someone who should have access to Welligent, then LAUSD has to issue the charter employee a contractor number. Finally, the application and new contractor number gets forwarded to the appropriate charter-school special-education office, which can then issue a Welligent account. This is a time consuming and inefficient process, and there are complaints that there is too much lag time between the time the charter school administrator sends in the application and when the contractor number is issued.

### *3. Trainings*

LAUSD already has a wide variety of trainings that are held at least four times per month including:

1. Welligent 101: Basics
2. Welligent 102: Intermediate
3. Online New IEP Format Navigation
4. Monitoring IEPs on Welligent
5. Online Caseload Management
6. Related Service Tracker Management

The courses are a combination of on-ground and online formats. These trainings would meet the needs of charter school employees, including RSP, SDC, principal, and related service providers. The key is spreading the word to charter schools that these trainings exist.

### *4. Data Resources*

Welligent can provide data about the timing and frequency with which related services are being provided. This capability could be a useful tool for principals during teacher evaluation and empower them to better track services that are being provided by contract agencies such as speech/language, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. Additionally, LAUSD has agreed to running and tailoring custom data reports to meet the needs of charters.

### ***Challenges for Welligent***

Our research uncovered a number of challenges related to the Welligent system:

1. Welligent does not provide a user's manual, instead relying on online documents and videos for users to self-train. The help portion of the website seems disorganized, requiring the user to hunt through lists of trainings. The Welligent software does not appear to be intuitive, and the learning curve is quite steep.
2. The Welligent system neither interfaces with the data systems used by the schools, nor appears to be a useful interface with the main LAUSD student data system (ISIS). This requires school staff to reenter information that is already in the school or LAUSD student record systems. This process is inefficient and time-consuming and can lead to inaccurate data, missed timelines, and students not receiving needed services or schools not receiving "credit" for services provided.
3. The Welligent system does not appear to be a truly reliable source of student information as students move from one school to another. The student lookup system requires staff to scan a list of students with similar names and zero-in by birthdate, to bring in IEP information from a previous school. Neither the use of the CALPads student identifier nor the special education CASEMIS student identifier appears to improve the transfer process, raising the possibility of misidentifying transfer records.
4. There are a variety of student record systems being used by the charter schools. Although in some instances different systems may be appropriate because of the unique nature of the individual schools, some schools may benefit by pooling technology resources around a common system.
5. School-level professional special education staff are, in some cases, not well supported by information technology staff. At one school, the school IT staff had

no information about what the special education staff did with the information from the school student record system and no understanding of the Welligent software. This places the special education staff in the position of diverting valuable time from the students to learning and managing a complex and often confusing data system.

6. Schools who employ non-public agency services for special education find that providers are often unprepared, unwilling, or unable to support inputting high-quality information into the Welligent system.

Comments at the stakeholder meeting further underscored our understanding of the data systems challenges. Beyond the challenges identified above, the stakeholders raised issues of inadequate support from LAUSD, student records disappearing from the school rolls, and difficulty getting useful information from the system. Neither the schools nor CCSA representatives were aware of the existence of data files from the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) and California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) processes. Our understanding is that school specific student-level data files are available. CASEMIS data submitted by the SELPAs have not been made available to the schools.

## **Recommendations**

Our recommendations are designed to assist LA charter schools in focusing their efforts and resources in some very fundamental but innovative ways. Fundamentally we are suggesting a professional development agenda to both support improvement and implementation efforts already underway as well as to begin new learning. More revolutionary, perhaps, is our recommendation that this learning take place not in traditional ways but within the types of communities and collaborations with other charters, their communities, and the district that will nurture and deepen the learning. These communities and collaborations will also serve to spread best practices and leverage resources to provide the efficiencies of scale that often elude smaller charter

organizations or schools. Finally, we offer some steps for addressing the issues raised in the report regarding the new SELPA structure.

These recommendations are described within three categories:

- **A Network of Communities of Practice (CoPs) and Professional Development (PD)** for continuous learning cycles.

We propose to develop a resource network for special education in charter schools that will serve as a foundation for the launch of the new SELPA and open the door for information exchanges and CoPs for different levels of the system and across diverse charter schools. This network and accompanying PD will focus directly on service provision for students with disabilities across schools, general and special educators, and challenging exceptionalities (Autism, Emotional Disability, etc.) We will develop and deliver with charter partners, effective and innovative service delivery models including co-teaching, inclusive education practices, behavior management and strategies, instructional design utilizing high yield research based instructional strategies, differentiation, etc. The network will be launched with a **Special Education Summit in August of 2011**, and could continue with periodic or monthly PD opportunities throughout the next school year.

- **SELPA Strategic Planning and Supports** for the effective integration of the issues and data revealed in this needs assessment into the plans for the new Charter SELPA. This work will be launched with a facilitated session in June of 2011.
- **Welligent and Data Management Assistance** for improved use and integration of reporting requirements for charters. This work will be launched by creating a Community of Practice for Welligent users and producing a users guide for end users before September 1<sup>st</sup> 2011.

More detail about each of these recommendations is presented below, and a calendar of action steps lays out our priorities for implementing these recommendations.

### **1. *A Network of Communities and Professional Development***

Charter schools, by design, operate for the most part outside of the larger system. Our needs assessment has determined that while this serves them well in many ways, it hinders their ability to form essential Communities of Practice (CoPs) that benefit teachers and students. Forming a network and community of special education practitioners around shared learning and inquiry can help to deepen and apply the knowledge and skills gained from professional development sessions, break down the barriers of isolation that exist, share resources and expertise, and solve problems. These communities can also serve as a bridge between LAUSD and the charter schools by bringing them into deeper conversations and collaborations.

Anthropologists Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave coined the phrase Communities of Practice (CoPs) while studying the practice of apprenticeship on learning. They describe CoPs as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”<sup>10</sup> For Wenger, CoPs are viewed as an essential element to any profession in today’s knowledge economy. In his model, they function for the purposes of 1) problem solving, 2) Requesting and sharing information, 3) seeking experience, 4) reusing assets, 5) coordination and synergy, 6) discussing developments, 7) documenting projects, 8) visits, and 9) mapping knowledge and identifying gaps<sup>11</sup>

For nearly two decades, education practitioners, leaders, and researchers have been calling for a re-examination of how educators, educational leaders, and policymakers can improve their practice and share what they have learned with peers. We have known for many years that the traditional workshop model, wherein an expert

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<sup>10</sup> Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. M., 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Wenger, E., Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction (accessed electronically April 12, 2011 at <http://www.ewenger.com/>).

provides a one-time training session, has a short-lived effect unless followed by relevant experience and feedback loops. Linda Darling-Hammond and other well-known education scholars and organizations such as the National Association of State Directors of Special Education and the United States Department of Education have written extensively on the need to move from individualized professional learning to more job-embedded, collaborative CoPs, or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that can transform schools into collaborative cultures.<sup>12</sup> We know also, in our desire for local control, that too often promising policies and practices do not spread beyond the boundaries of local education agencies, or State Departments of Education. This can be especially problematic in the charter environment, where many schools have been established to operate “outside the system,” to create new ways of educating children.

Cross & Joftus will work with LAUSD to develop both live and online opportunities for a network of such communities to exist, beginning with plans for:

- Regular meetings- Starting with an **Education Summit** in August to showcase national and local best practices
- A calendar of shared professional development tools, resources, and coaching, including structured cross-site visitations
- Integration of an online professional network and resource repository.

Cross & Joftus has partnerships with technology experts who have developed online resource repositories and forums for communication such as California’s Brokers of Expertise Project ([www.myboe.org](http://www.myboe.org)). LAUSD is already in the process of integrating this portal for use in its traditional schools. The SELPA could create its own community within the portal and integrate its resources into the larger resource repository. This is a free and open resource. Funding would only be necessary for customization and integration of content and training.

### *Professional Development and Coaching*

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<sup>12</sup> Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996.



We recommend that the SELPA offer a series of year-long, (up to four years) “on-demand” professional development that includes a continuum of services from basic special education topics to more complex organizational or policy issues. Schools and organizations could choose professional development topics based on their level of need and experience in these areas.

These would not be one-size-fits-all trainings but rather customized to the needs of participating charter groups (schools and/or CMOs) and structured as collaborative learning activities. Sessions would be designed to encourage teams of general educators, special educators, and paraprofessionals to attend and would feature demonstrations of evidence-based practices from national, regional, and local sources. Parents, selected community members, and University partners may also join their schools in attending. Cross & Joftus would work with Stakeholders and LAUSD to further prioritize and develop the curriculum and partner with appropriate providers for delivery.

Some examples would include:

- Research-based, effective and intentionally differentiated instruction
- Developing lessons with appropriate rigor
- Using data and the IEP documents to track student progress and set appropriate goals; communicating with parents of students with disabilities
- Employing effective co-teaching strategies and collaboration models, as well as effective strategies for inclusive education
- Modifying the general education curriculum and the standards to meet the individual educational needs of students with disabilities (SWDs)
- Utilizing a variety of teaching strategies designed around multiple learning modalities

- Exploring and implementing service delivery models that are inclusive for all students—those with mild to moderate, and moderate to severe disabilities
- Developing and continually improving effective strategies for addressing behavioral and emotional disabilities
- Implementing strategies for supporting students identified on the Autism Spectrum
- Understanding and effectively using assistive and other technologies
- Speech and Language: Classroom-based assessment, curriculum-relevant intervention strategies, social-pragmatic language support; single-sound intervention model.

For administrators topics might include:

- Service Delivery Models and RtI—Administrators would have the opportunity to explore and create plans on how to work with students with more severe disabilities within the framework of their individual schools. Staffing, curriculum, trainings, etc. should also be explored so that administrators feel comfortable when a student enrolls and also so they are aware of the resources that exist to support a wide range of students with varying disabilities.
- Communication—Once plans are adopted, administrators would receive guidance in reviewing communication strategies, policies, and procedures to ensure clear and purposeful delivery of services.
- Integrating Data Systems—Administrators would receive training on effective ways to integrate various data systems with Welligent to gain efficiencies in bringing current data and IEPs into teachers' hands.

- **Sharing and Pooling Resources**—Administrators will have the opportunity to discuss ways they might share resources and personnel to more efficiently deliver on their education goals.
- **Data-driven Leadership**—Administrators would share best practices and implement strategies to organize school and/or charter management organizations as learning and data-driven environments.
- **Partnerships, Outreach, and Fund Raising**—Charter schools that have had success with partnerships and fund raising would facilitate and help others to develop outreach plans and strategies.
- **Supervision and evaluation of programs and services**—Administrators would receive help around supervising and evaluating programs and services, especially in relation to the complex and ever-changing special education environment.

### *Coaches*

Cross & Joftus will also be working with LAUSD and the stakeholder group to identify and hire up to 12 professionals who will serve as coaches to work across all charter schools and assist with ongoing learning and implementation of concepts introduced at the Summit and subsequent professional development sessions. These coaches will be recruited from university partners already working with charter schools as well as others in the region.

## **2. SELPA Strategic Planning**

Many charter leaders with whom we spoke were both excited and nervous about the opportunity to join a new LAUSD Charter SELPA. To ease concerns, and to ensure buy-in and support from the outset, it would be helpful for all parties to explore these questions in a transparent fashion, and to commit to developing a SELPA structure and key features that will serve a broad spectrum of LAUSD charter schools effectively and efficiently.

We recommend the development of a half- to full-day session with El Dorado Charter SELPA leaders and the Stakeholders Advisory Group, the JPA, CCSA, and LAUSD to address the critical educational, philosophical, strategic and policy-related questions required to ensure successful membership and participation. Cross & Joftus can help to design and facilitate such a session based on this needs assessment.

Examples of questions and issues raised in our conversations that could be incorporated into such a session include:

- Will there be a “risk pool?” If so, how large will it be? How will it be administered? Where will liability reside? As one CMO leader put it, “one major law suit, and we are out of business.” Or, as another put it, “what do we do with a \$1 million kid?”
- What will due process look like?
- What services will be offered? What will they cost?
- What will the allocation plan look like? What guiding principles will help shape the plan?
- What administrative fees will be charged? How will fees be determined? How will they compare to current encroachment fees? Will schools be allowed to carry over special education funds?
- Will the SELPA help schools and CMOs recruit and retain high-quality special education staff?
- How can the SELPA help foster a learning culture across school and CMO sites, so that best and promising practices are shared, adapted, and continually improved?
- How can a model of shared services be built into the new SELPA? Many schools report needing counselors and social workers—can shared services arrangements be developed to meet those needs? A number of schools also

reported a need for ongoing access to high quality service providers. Can a program be implemented to vet and evaluate contracted providers?

- How will the SELPA be governed? Will there be a “CEO Council” (the El Dorado County Charter SELPA—a California Statewide Charter SELPA—has such a council and sees it as beneficial to the SELPA’s work) or an advisory council that will help guide the work of the SELPA? Other committees that help guide the SELPA’s work?
- How will the new SELPA director be selected? Who will participate in the selection process?
- Will schools be required to continue to use Welligent? If so, how can Welligent be made more user-friendly, and any changes to Welligent be communicated in a timely and effective manner?
- How will the SELPA be designed to meet the unique needs of charter schools? How will it empower charters to serve students in creative ways? How can a continuum of services be created?
- What can be learned from the El Dorado County Charter SELPA’s experience, as well as from other charter friendly SELPAs within California? El Dorado leaders in a presentation at the CCSA Annual Conference pointed out three key factors in their success thus far: 1) a good infrastructure for the SELPA, one that is meaningful and user-friendly; 2) transparency—all documents, including the allocation plan, are available on the SELPA website, so that existing and prospective members have access to all available information (including financial information) before they decide to join; and 3) effective leadership—engaging the charter community as a partner in developing the SELPA, and building and implementing a vision for the SELPA as a provider of best and promising practices.

### **3. Data Management Systems**

Cross & Joftus would like to offer its expertise to help with data management

issues in the following ways:

- ***Resource Development for Users.*** Cross & Joftus will work with charter school staff to develop a written operator's guide for Welligent as well as to produce a list of readily available data sources that schools can access or download. Online users groups will also be created.
- ***Communication Systems between LAUSD and Charters.*** Facilitate cooperation among schools, the various charter organizations, LAUSD, SELPA, and California Department of Education (CDE) in data processing and analyses. Address issues of timing of communications, domain names and access.
- ***Welligent Training for Administrators.*** The goals of this training would be to acquaint administrators with Welligent, teach administrators about new user application, roles, and responsibilities and show administrators how services are tracked and how easily reports can be run.
- ***Welligent Training for Case Managers/Administrators/Designees.*** Utilize already existing manual and courses created by LAUSD (Welligent 101 and Welligent 102), but hold trainings at a charter school site to gain more buy-in and deal with specific charter school issues.
- ***Integration of Charters Back into ISIS.*** LAUSD was under the impression that charter schools had the option a few years ago to remain with the ISIS data system but that the majority opted out because it felt very 'big brother.' However, LAUSD thought it was possible to get charters access again to the SIS system. This would allow student records to follow students if they moved from a district school to a charter, and would allow quicker access to cumulative records, IEPs, and updated student information. It would help keep charters in compliance with IEPs, notify them if a student had an IEP, and cut down on the time it takes to track down student records.

## **Calendar of Action Steps**

The proposed action steps below include a series of iterative tasks that will be developed in partnership with the district, CCSA and Stakeholders. This calendar also reflects our priorities for addressing the recommendations with those of most interest or need labeled “High Priority,” those of strong interest or need labeled “Moderate Priority,” and those of basic interest or need “Priority.”

### **June 2011 – High Priority**

- Trainer of Trainers PD for High Yield Research Based Instructional Strategies
- PD on Inclusive Education Models and Service Delivery Options
- Facilitated Half-Day Strategic Session For LAUSD, JPA, El Dorado SELPA and Stakeholders
- Selection and hiring of coaches
- Selection of Online CoP and Resource Repository Platform

### **August 2011 – High Priority**

- Special Education Summit with Strands Focused on Rti, Literacy Interventions, Behavioral Supports, Universal Design for Learning, Leadership Responsibilities Within Effective Special Education Service Delivery Models, and Training For Utilization of Online Tools and Data Management.
- Ongoing University Credit for Participation in Special Education Summit
- Development of Organizational Structures for LAUSD Charter SELPA to Support Innovative Special Education Options Based on June 2011 Meeting (e.g., Shared Responsibility, Program Specialists in Areas of Behavior, Autism, and Collaboration).
- Integration and Customization of Online Platform to Service CoPs and Resources.

**The following proposed actions are recommendations for potential 4 1-year contract extensions for Cross & Joftus, funded either by the Charters themselves or the new LAUSD Charter SELPA option.**

### **October 2011 – Moderate Priority**

- Development of Data Users CoP for Welligent and Other Data Systems within the Charter Organizations
- Special Education Service Delivery CoP for Both General and Special Education Teams (Can be Both Online and in Person). Topics Might Include Autism, Social Skills Development, Behavioral Support Strategies, CAHSEE Preparation for Students with Disabilities, Teaching Literacy Skills to Cognitively Delayed Middle and High School Students, Co-Teaching and Supporting SWD in General Education Classes in MS/HS).
- Development of Video Resources and Planning Documents on Differentiated Classroom Lessons.

### **December 2011 – Moderate Priority**

- Special Education Service Delivery CoP for Both General and Special Education Teams (Can be Both Online and in Person). Topics Might Include Autism, Social Skills Development, Behavioral Support Strategies, CAHSEE Preparation for Students with Disabilities, Teaching Literacy Skills to Cognitively Delayed Middle and High School Students, Co-Teaching and Supporting SWD in General Education Classes in MS/HS).
- Development of Video Resources and Planning Documents on Differentiated Classroom Lessons.

### **February 2012 - Priority**

- Special Education Service Delivery CoP for Both General and Special Education Teams (Can be Both Online and in Person). Topics Might Include Autism, Social Skills Development, Behavioral Support Strategies, CAHSEE Preparation for Students with Disabilities, Teaching Literacy Skills to Cognitively Delayed Middle and High School Students, Co-Teaching and Supporting SWD in General Education Classes in MS/HS).



- Development of Video Resources and Planning Documents on Differentiated Classroom Lessons.

### **April 2012 - Priority**

- Special Education Service Delivery CoP for Both General and Special Education Teams (Can be Both Online and in Person). Topics Might Include Autism, Social Skills Development, Behavioral Support Strategies, CAHSEE Preparation for Students with Disabilities, Teaching Literacy Skills to Cognitively Delayed Middle and High School Students, Co-Teaching and Supporting SWD in General Education Classes in MS/HS).
- Development of Video Resources and Planning Documents on Differentiated Classroom Lessons.

### **June 2012 - Priority**

- Special Education Service Delivery CoP for Both General and Special Education Teams (Can be Both Online and in Person). Topics Might Include Autism, Social Skills Development, Behavioral Support Strategies, CAHSEE Preparation for Students with Disabilities, Teaching Literacy Skills to Cognitively Delayed Middle and High School Students, Co-Teaching and Supporting SWD in General Education Classes in MS/HS).
- Evaluation and Recommendations for Practices to be Continued or Modified
- Support for Extended School Year (ESY) as Needed.

## **Conclusion and Resources for Further Discussion**

Despite the uniqueness of the many schools we visited, what we saw in the most exemplary places can be summarized in the following ways:

### *Educators Acting on Beliefs*

- Documented goals

- Belief in the ability of ALL students' capacity to learn to high levels—no excuses.
- Belief in the power of community, collaboration, and articulation between educational segments (e.g., K-1 to 2-5, Middle to HS, etc.) Special/General Education collaboration is built into the schedule (during PE, specials, or shortened day) every week.

### *Leaders Building Supports and Systems*

- Principals and school leaders walk the talk of “all students will be successful” by being knowledgeable and responsible for the outcomes for students with disabilities.
- Collaborative meetings that are meaningful—held during the school day, regularly scheduled, with expectations for both collaborators.
- Documented goals and a belief system.
- All teachers receive Professional Development in curriculum, accommodations, modifications, and data analysis.
- Cluster grouping of students to maximize co-teaching, collaboration opportunities, co-planning, and support for students.
- Consistent training for both credentialed and paraprofessional staff, with focus on instruction, planning, use of data to inform instruction, rigor, strategies for accommodations and modifications (not just for students with IEPs).
- All members of the school community are supportive of inclusive education, co-teaching, school-wide Positive Behavior Support (PBS), and methodologies clearly understood and utilized by both general and special educators.
- Service delivery is integrated into school day, not isolated or unrelated activities, to enhance access to core. This includes ancillary support staff such as SLPs, Occupational Therapists (OTs), Physical Therapists (PTs), knowing classroom focus, curricular areas and activities for these professionals are designed to

support students' success in the general curriculum—not isolated pull out to work on unrelated skills.

- Students are tested frequently and grouped and regrouped based on the data to ensure learning.

### *Children Achieving*

- Students with IEPs making significant gains in their learning
- Students with IEPs transitioning from high school to college/post-secondary education and jobs successfully

*“I’m not a special education teacher and I don’t know how to do that, so I hold to the standards and teach what everybody else is learning, and they rise to the occasion.”*

English Teacher supporting Special Day Class Students

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We would like to thank all those schools and organizations who opened their doors, their classrooms, and their filing cabinets to us; who sat down and talked with us when they had so many other things to do; and who were honest about their sources of pride as well as their frustration. Throughout this report, we have identified schools and organizations in which we saw particularly strong examples of practice in action, or in some cases, we named names simply to illustrate a point more clearly. This was done with the support of our stakeholder group and with the hope that we might begin to make some of the most exciting practices more visible across the LA charter landscape. This is not to say that those schools and organizations singled out do not have work to do in some areas and do not face challenges. This is also not to say that those not mentioned here by name are not good schools with dedicated staff. Indeed, the good news of this report is that the LAUSD charter schools we visited and the leaders we spoke with are all capable and eager participants in the journey. We have tried to accurately reflect their needs and challenges as we heard and saw them, in the hope that the new SELPA can begin a new chapter for this important work.

### ***Resources for Further Discussion***

Rubrics for Inclusive Schools:

[http://www.mcie.org/docs/publications/QualityIndicators\\_Inclusive%20Schools.pdf](http://www.mcie.org/docs/publications/QualityIndicators_Inclusive%20Schools.pdf)

<http://www.nccrest.org/publications.html>

<http://samschools.org/index.php/home.html>

Case Studies:

<http://www.ncld.org/publications-a-more>

<http://www.ncld.org/on-capitol-hill/policy-related-publications/challenging-change>

Professional Development:

<http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/mindinstitute/research/npsc/>

<http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/ddcenter/>

[www.rti4success.org](http://www.rti4success.org)

[www.rtinetwork.org](http://www.rtinetwork.org),

[www.centeroninstruction.org](http://www.centeroninstruction.org)

[www.betterhighschools.org](http://www.betterhighschools.org)

[www.progressmonitoring.net](http://www.progressmonitoring.net)

<http://changingbrains.org/>

## **Definitions of Acronyms Used in this Report**

ADA – Americans With Disabilities Act

API – Academic Progress Indicator

APK – Activating Prior Knowledge

ARRA – American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

CAHSEE – California High School Exit Exam

CASEMIS – California Special Education Management Information System

CBM – Curriculum Based Measures

CCSA – California Charter Schools Association

CDE – California Department of Education

CHIME – CHIME Institute Schwarzenegger Community School

CMO – Charter Management Organizations

CoP – Communities of Practice

CST – California Standards Test

DIBELS - Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills

ED – Emotionally Disturbed

EL – English Learner

EMO – Education Management Organization

EPK – Extending Prior Knowledge

ESY – Extended School Year

ICEF – Inner City Education Foundation

IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IEP – Individual Education Plans

IHE – Institutes of Higher Education

ISIS – Integrated Student Information System

JPA – Joint Powers Authority

LASER – Lodi Area SELPA Region

LAUSD – Los Angeles Unified School District

LEA – Local Education Agency

MAPS – McGill Action Planning System

MCD – Modified Consent Decree

MOU – Memorandum of Understanding

NCLB – No Child Left Behind

OT – Occupational Therapy/Therapist

PBS – Positive Behavior Support  
PD – Professional Development  
PLC – Professional Learning Communities  
PT – Physical Therapy/Therapist  
PUC – Partnerships to Uplift Communities

SDC – Special Day Class  
SELPA – Special Education Local Plan Area  
SES – Socio-economic status  
SLP – Speech and Language Professional  
STAR – Standardized Testing and Reporting  
STEEP – System to Enhance Equitable Performance and Placement  
SWD – Students With Disabilities

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