DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION



POSITION PAPER Equity and Access for Students with Disabilities



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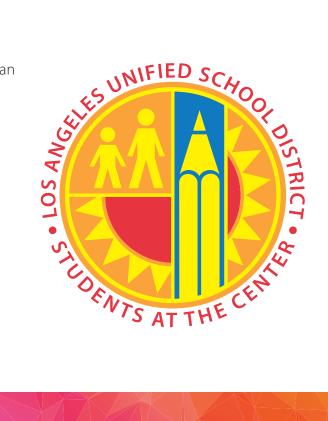
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Position Paper, Executive Summary

Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD) vision and values are committed to success, equity and access for all students. We are making progress towards realizing these for our students but there is additional work that can be done to increase inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities (SWDs) to be educated with their nondisabled peers.

Services and supports for SWDs remain primarily provided by special education teachers in segregated environments, rather than with supports in the general education classroom. This is counter to federal law, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, which states that **special education is a service and not a place**, and asks that students only be removed from the general education classroom when absolutely necessary.¹

Research on the benefits of inclusive education, in which SWDs are taught alongside their nondisabled peers, is clear and unequivocal. Nearly 50 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities is most effective by having high expectations and ensuring access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom.² Inclusion has benefits for both SWDs and their general education peers, including greater academic gains and social skills.³ Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics highlight possible lingering effects of limited educational opportunity: only 21.6% of people with disabilities are participating in the labor force, compared to 67.3% of the total population.⁴ The National Longitudinal Transition Study supports that this discrepancy is linked to inclusion in general education classes; after studying the outcomes of 11,000 students with disabilities, more time spent in general education was positively correlated with better outcomes for SWDs after high school in the areas of employment and independent living.⁵

The position of LAUSD is to bring more students into inclusive settings commensurate with national standards while upholding the tenets of the federal law as stated in IDEA. Our vision for this work is that "we, the LAUSD community, intentionally design and deliver inclusive environments for students at every opportunity." While students with disabilities have had opportunities to be included for many years in our District, we are now pushing for a systemic shift in mindset to be better aligned with the spirit of the law. Based on what we have seen at the schools in our District as well as nationally who have increased opportunities for inclusion, we expect to see academic gains for all students, a positive impact on school culture, and a greater acceptance of diversity as a strength.

¹20 U.S.C. §1412(a)(5)(A)

²Oh-Young, C., & Dhamp; Filler, J. (2015). A meta-analysis of the effects of placement on academic and social skill outcome measures of students with disabilities. Research in Developmental Disabilities, 47, 80–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2015.08.014

³Choi, J. H., Meisenheimer, J. M., McCart, A. B., & Sailor, W. (2016). Improving learning for all students through equity-based inclusive reform practices: Effectiveness of a fully integrated schoolwide model on student reading and math achievement. Remedial and Special Education, online. doi: 10.1177/0741932516644054.

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021, September 3). Table A-6. employment status of the civilian population by sex, age, and disability status, not seasonally adjusted. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved October 5, 2021, from 20 U.S.C. §1412(a)(5)(A)

⁵The Segregation of Students with Disabilities. IDEA Series. (2018). Retrieved from https://www.ncd.gov/sites/default/files/NCD_segregation-SWD_508.pdf

⁶ 34 CFR 300.26(b)(3)

Optimizing Specially Designed Instruction **(SDI) to increase inclusive opportunities is key.** SDI is defined as "adapting, as appropriate to the needs of the child with a disability the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children." ⁶

Inclusion is defined as SWDs spending most or all their time in the general education environment, participating fully with general education peers in the classroom, and taking part in the extracurricular life of the school.

Inclusion is more than sitting in a general education class; true inclusion takes place when a child is learning and meeting IEP goals alongside their typical peers. Inclusion is not the same as mainstreaming, where students "earn" the opportunity to be educated in general education classes, perhaps only for a portion of the class.

Inclusive practices work best when general education and special education teachers regularly co- plan instructional strategies that ensure access to rigorous content. Some of the most successful of these instructional strategies are Universal Design for Learning, Mastery Learning and Grading, and English Language Development strategies for emergent bilingual students. Through greater collaboration of all our educators and educational support staff, we can achieve greater equity and access for all LAUSD learners.

For more information on inclusion in LAUSD, visit https://achieve.lausd.net/spedinclusion

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Equity and Access for Students with Disabilities

BACKGROUND

Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD) vision is to be "a progressive global leader in education, providing a dynamic and inspiring learning experience where all students graduate ready for success." One of our four core district beliefs focuses on equity and access, specifically that "all students have access to high-quality schools, innovative programs and necessary supports. Distribution of resources will be based on the needs of students, schools and community." ²

LAUSD is making continual progress towards these goals. We have increased the number of students taking Advanced Placement classes and raised the four-year cohort graduation rate to an all-time high of 80.9% in the 19-20 school year. These outcomes are a testament to our work at the student, family, community and district leadership levels. We continually develop and improve in ways that are preventative and responsive to the needs of the students we serve. Although this data is encouraging, there is additional work that can be done to increase inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities (SWDs) to be educated with their nondisabled peers.

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that Individual Education Program (IEP) teams determine the least restrictive environment (LRE) for each student qualifying for special education services. This mandate states, "Each public agency must ensure that—to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities... are educated with children who are nondisabled...and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily." SWDs are to be provided necessary supports and services in a general education setting with maximum access to typically developing peers and are only segregated into separate settings after all other options have been exhausted.

The vast majority of SWDs in LAUSD are expected to meet grade level standards, working toward earning a high school diploma. Even though most SWDs have processing deficits, which should be able to be addressed in general education classroms, 45% of all SWDs in LAUSD are in self-contained classroom settings for the majority of the day. ⁴ Services in a self-contained classroom has a profound impact on the on-track graduation rate; in the 20-21 school year, students spending 0-49% of their time in a special education setting were 50.6% on track for graduation, whereas only 8.6% of the students spending 75-100% of their time in a special education setting were. Additionally, only about 2.6% of SWDs educated in self-contained classes are proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) and 2% are proficient in Math (compared to approximately 48.9% and 37%, respectively for their non-disabled peers). ⁵

¹ https://achieve.lausd.net/strategies, Retrieved 8/21/19

²https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/474, Retrieved 8/21/19

³20 U.S.C. §1412(a)(5)(A)

⁴ https://my.lausd.net/opendata/dashboard# Retrieved 10/21/21

⁵ https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/ and LAUSD internal data, retrieved 10/21/21

Furthering equity concerns, certain student groups are disproportionately represented within the SWD population. While African American students make up 7.6% of District students, African American students comprise 11.6% of the students served in Special Day Class settings. In contrast, White students comprise 10.5% of the District's students and only 7.3% of the students served in Special Day Classes. English Learners are also disproportionately represented in special education, as 18.9% of the total LAUSD student population are English Learners but represent 28.4% of the special education population. ⁶

IEP teams are federally mandated to determine the appropriate supports and services across a continuum of placement options for SWDs and are guided by the IDEA's requirement that segregated classes are only appropriate when the "nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily." ⁷ Nationwide, 64.8% of SWDs are included in the general education setting for 80% or more of the day, whereas 55.8% of LAUSD's SWDs are included at the same rate. ⁸ The California Department of Education (CDE) monitors all the school districts and has found LAUSD in need of improvement in determining LRE per the Performance Indicator Review (PIR) of the State Performance Plan since 2018. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, ⁹ some 85-90% of SWDs nationwide are thought to be capable of completing requirements for a high school diploma. However, only 72% of these students graduated in 2020. ¹⁰ Students in LAUSD rank even lower than the national average as only 64.9% of SWDs in LAUSD are graduating high school in four years. ¹¹

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics highlight possible lingering effects of limited educational opportunity; only 22.3% of people with disabilities are participating in the labor force, compared to 67% of the total population. ¹² The National Longitudinal Transition Study supports that this discrepancy is linked to inclusion in general education classes; after studying the outcomes of 11,000 students with disabilities, more time spent in general education was positively correlated with better outcomes after high school in the areas of employment and independent living. ¹³

Increasing inclusive education is well-aligned to California's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. The MTSS Vision is that "every P-12 school will meet the educational needs of all students through access to high quality Tier 1 instruction and a layered continuum of interventions and evidence-based practices. The term 'all' applies to all students, including those who are either high achieving, underachieving and/or struggling to meet grade level content, English Learners (ELs), Standard English Learners (SELs), Students with Disabilities (SWD), expelled students, students in foster care and/or experiencing homelessness, students who experience socioeconomic disadvantages, and gifted/talented learners." Including students with disabilities in general education classrooms is a key element to realizing the vision of MTSS.

⁶ https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/ and LAUSD internal data, retrieved 10/21/21

⁷ 20 U.S.C. §1412(a)(5)(A)

⁸ https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20 204.60.asp Retrieved 10/21/21

⁹ https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp, retrieved 10/21/21

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp, retrieved 10/21/21

https://my.lausd.net/opendata/dashboard# retrieved 10/21/21

LESSONS LEARNED REGARDING INCLUSION

LAUSD is committed to increasing inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities. Instructional delivery models must support all students in achieving maximum educational benefit. We must continue to build the capacity of all teachers to deliver accessible and rigorous instruction and ensure schools have tiers of support for students with unfinished learning.

Thirty years of research studies have analyzed the relationship between class placement and educational outcomes and found increased positive effects for students the greater the time they learn in a general education setting. The benefits for students with and without disabilities being educated together are as follows:

Benefits of Inclusion for SWDs:

- Higher rates of academic performance
- More satisfying and diverse friendships
- Higher student engagement
- Improved communication
- Less disruptive behaviors
- Peer role models for academics, social and behavior skills
- Greater access to general curriculum
- Increased inclusion in postsecondary life
- More successful postsecondary outcomes

Benefits of Inclusion for Students without Disabilities:

- Greater gains in math and reading
- Reduced fear of differences
- Improved self-concept
- Greater empathy
- Increased social cognition
- Better ethical principles ¹⁴

Several schools in LAUSD have already moved to serving all their students in the general education setting and their results mirror these national findings. General and special educators at schools where inclusion is more prevalent report fewer referrals for behavioral concerns, academic gains for all students, and better self-advocacy from students with disabilities- a key indicator of success after high school. Schools have also been increasing opportunities for students with extensive support needs to be with their general education peers through offering modifications in core curriculum classes and ensuring electives, field trips and recreational times are spent together.

¹⁴ https://www.sipinclusion.org/references/ retrieved 10/21/21

Collaborative Planning

Simply placing SWDs in the general education classroom is not enough; a school's culture must transform. A lesson learned from successful inclusion efforts is that collaborative planning time between the general educator and special educator is essential. The general educator is the content area expert and the special educator is the expert in making the content accessible to all students. Taking the time to co-plan and strategize the lesson ensures that the expertise of both educators is maximized. The special educator should not function as a special education assistant in the co-taught classroom, but rather as a learning expert who also leads instruction and helps scaffold supports to increase the learning of all the students in the classroom.

When planning learning targets for all students, schools must make a clear distinction between when they will need to ensure access to rigorous content and when they will be providing intervention in critical skills. At successful sites, general education and special education teachers regularly co-plan instructional strategies that ensure access to rigorous content. Some of the most successful of these instructional strategies are: Universal Design for Learning, differentiation, and English Language Development strategies for emergent bilingual students. All three of these strategies ensure that instruction embeds supports for students in need of the most remediation or acceleration, which also provides necessary supports for other students in the class.



Master Scheduling

Inclusive Master Scheduling is a large part of planning for inclusion, and can greatly facilitate the ability of educators to have time to co-plan during shared conference time. It begins with a school philosophy and adult behaviors that are indicative of equity values and promotes responsible inclusive practices. It recognizes the general education classroom as the first place considered for SWDs as part of the continuum of program options and as appropriately reflected in the student's IEP as the least restrictive environment. Inclusive programs anticipate student needs, based on current data, and link students with school-wide staff and resources. **It is critical that SWDs are scheduled first on the master schedule so that they can be clustered.** Clustering is grouping students with disabilities for services as defined by academic IEP goals; provisions are made for coplanning, co-teaching, and intervention as needed.

Grouping Students

When providing intervention in critical skills, teachers must collaborate to ensure that this instruction is needs-based, data-informed, targeted, and consistently delivered. Students with and without similar needs should be grouped together to receive this instruction and have access to all tiered interventions as appropriate. Some examples of how this may occur are through collaboration during the Early Literacy and Language Program (ELLP) Academies, small-group targeted instruction within the classroom and/or lesson, or access to intervention in a Learning Center.



POSITION

The position of LAUSD is to bring more students into inclusive settings commensurate with national standards while upholding the tenets of the federal law: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004).

Our vision for this work is "We, the LAUSD community, intentionally design and deliver inclusive environments for students at every opportunity." Optimizing Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) to increase inclusive opportunities is key. SDI is defined as "adapting, as appropriate to the needs of the child with a disability the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children." ¹⁵ SWDs must have access to the general curriculum, or any other program to which their nondisabled peers have access, to the maximum extent possible based on individual needs. The general education classroom is where the student has the greatest opportunity to be with their nondisabled peers and should be the first educational setting IEP teams consider. It is important that we remember special education is not a program or setting in itself; special education is intended to provide supports and services to students in the general education program.

Decades of research and experience have demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities is most effective by having high expectations and ensuring access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom- there were already 30 years of research on this topic when IDEA was reauthorized in 2004. This is even more urgent after the pandemic; the National Center on Learning Disabilities report, "Promising Practices to Accelerate Learning for Students with Disabilities During COVID-19 and Beyond," calls on Districts to educate students with disabilities alongside their peers and to prioritize inclusion. ¹⁶

In LAUSD, inclusion is defined as SWDs spending most or all their time in the general education environment, participating fully with general education peers in the classroom, and taking part in the extracurricular life of the school. Inclusion is more than sitting in a general education class; true inclusion takes place when a child is learning and meeting IEP goals alongside their typical peers. Inclusion is not the same as mainstreaming, where students "earn" the opportunity to be educated in general education classes, perhaps only for a portion of the class. Student placement in inclusive settings must align with student IEPs following the IEP process as determined by student IEP teams to address unique student needs.

Additionally, the following elements must exist:

- 1. General education and special education students are educated together;
- 2. Supports, accommodations and modifications are present and implemented within general education classrooms;
- 3. Students experience a sense of belonging, equal membership, acceptance, and feel valued;
- 4. Collaborative integrated services are provided by education teams (e.g., general educators, special educators, related service providers, special education assistants, etc.) with a common vision;
- 5. A systemic philosophy or belief system is shared by all stakeholders; and
- 6. There is a shared sense of responsibility among Special Education and General Education teachers for SWDs.

¹⁵ 34 CFR 300.26(b)(3)

¹⁶ https://www.ncld.org/reports-studies/promising-practices-to-accelerate-learning-for-students-with-disabilities-during-covid-19-and-beyond/ Retrieved 10/21/21

Inclusive practices are most successful when schools have a leadership team made up of various stakeholders that write a plan with input from all constituencies and supports implementation to proficiency. Individual school site inclusion plans include data analysis to examine student progress as well as the following four elements: family partnership, quality IEPs, staff capacity and engagement, and planning for an inclusive student experience.

1. Family Partnership

Schools engage families in efforts toward inclusion by:

- engaging the whole school community in order to educate all families about the benefits of more inclusive settings, including their effects on long-term outcomes for success;
- offering opportunities to provide feedback and participate in the development and improvement of increased inclusive programming; and
- maintaining regular communications with families on their child's individual needs, specific strategies to support their child, and offering training and resources on how they can support their child's success in a more inclusive setting.

2. Quality IEPs

Schools conduct IEP team meetings and ensure SWDs are placed in the least restrictive environment by:

- promoting high-quality conversations about student present levels of performance, educational goals, instructional setting and placement, and needed services through IEPs;
- conducting a least restrictive environment (LRE) analysis to determine the LRE needed for the student to further progress in academic and social emotional skills;
- ensuring students are placed in the least restrictive environment as determined by the IEP team and receive the programming, services, and/or supports that will promote their progress in academic and socioemotional skills; and
- encouraging student participation in the development/implementation of the IEP where appropriate.

3. Staff Capacity and Engagement

Schools increase their staff's capacity and engagement in inclusion by:

- developing and maintaining a shared vision for the inclusion and success of all students across all school staff;
- providing all school staff with ongoing training on IDEA, IEPs, eligibilities, accommodations, academic/ socioemotional supports, and other information that will support high-quality IEP team meeting participation;
- providing data-driven professional development and support for general and special education teachers in Universal Design for Learning, multi-tiered supports, socioemotional learning, team teaching, etc.; and
- providing training for paraprofessionals to deliver academic and socioemotional support to SWDs in general education settings, and helping teachers strategically guide paraprofessionals to maximize student success.

4. Planning for an Inclusive Student Experience

Schools plan for the inclusion of SWDs by:

- developing program offerings that place SWDs first in accessing grade-level content to meet their academic and socioemotional needs in the least restrictive environment possible;
- designing master schedules that promote student inclusion and support, including providing
 opportunities for teachers to collaborate and co-plan for the academic, behavioral, and social needs of all
 students; and
- conducting ongoing & annual data-driven progress monitoring with participation of all stakeholders to continue to improve.

CONCLUSION

LAUSD expects to see more cohesive and engaged school communities as we increase inclusive practices in our schools. We encourage all stakeholders to commit to this work as it will yield academic and social benefits for all our students. To learn more about inclusion in LAUSD and to hear our students' voices about our work ensuring equity and access for all students, visit our website: https://achieve.lausd.net/spedinclusion.



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