

# Davis Joint Unified School District Special Education Review

Final Report

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**Dona Meinders, Tori Ballew, Dustin  
Bindreiff, Ann Hern, and Tina Tranzor**

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# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Major Discoveries</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>What We Found: Five Themes</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Recommendation Highlights</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Theme 1: VISION</b>	<b>18</b>
Strengths	18
Key Discoveries	19
Data Review and Analysis	20
In Their Own Voices	22
Why It Matters	23
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Resources for Theme 1</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Theme 2: Structures</b>	<b>0</b>
Strengths	0
Key Discoveries	1
Data Review and Analysis	3
In Their Own Voices	13
Why It Matters	14
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Resources for Theme 2</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Theme 3: PROCESS</b>	<b>19</b>
Strengths	19
Key Discoveries	20
Data Review and Analysis	20
In Their Own Voices	23
Why It Matters	25
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Resources for Theme 3</b>	<b>32</b>

<b>Theme 4: INSTRUCTION</b>	<b>34</b>
Strengths	34
Key Discoveries	35
Data Review and Analysis	37
Why It Matters	62
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Resources for Theme 4</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Theme 5: CULTURE</b>	<b>71</b>
Strengths	71
Key Discoveries	71
Data Review and Analysis	74
In Their Own Voices	82
<b>Why It Matters</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Resources for Theme 5</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>89</b>
For an overall implementation process, see Appendix A.	89
For an Universal Design for Learning implementation plan, see Appendix B.	89
<b>Appendix A: Suggestion for Implementing Recommendations</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Appendix B: Multi-Tiered System of Supports Implementation Plan</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>101</b>

# Executive Summary

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Special education programs exist within a larger educational system and are designed to serve the needs of students who require additional support to meet the outcomes identified by the teachers, administrators, parents, students, and other team members. Well-designed special education programs are collegial and inclusive and are part of a continuum of services and supports designed to meet the diverse needs of students with individualized education programs (IEPs) in their Least Restrictive Environment. A well-implemented special education system is both effective and efficient in the delivery of special education services that meet the progressive academic and functional goals of the students in the district.

## Evaluation Notes

**Why:** This evaluation examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the Davis Joint Unified School District's special education program.

**How:** Our analyses are based on interviews, focus groups, surveys, observations, and document reviews.

**Who:** Special and general education teachers, psychologists, special education paraeducators, and parents participated in this study.

**When:** The majority of the review took place from January 2022 to August 2022.

## Introduction

Davis Joint Unified School District (DJUSD) is a pre-K–12 public school district that covers the southeastern section of Yolo County and a small part of Solano County. DJUSD provides a variety of educational programs to approximately 8,500 students in grades TK-12, at over 16 school sites and campuses. The schools include a diverse mix of options including: six neighborhood elementary schools and four choice elementary programs; three neighborhood junior high schools and one charter junior high; one comprehensive senior high, a continuation high school and a charter high school; as well as a K-12 school for independent study, a preschool program and an adult school.

DJUSD partnered with WestEd to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the district's special education programs and services. The district's goal for this study is to understand the current level of success of the district's special education program and to identify overall programmatic and

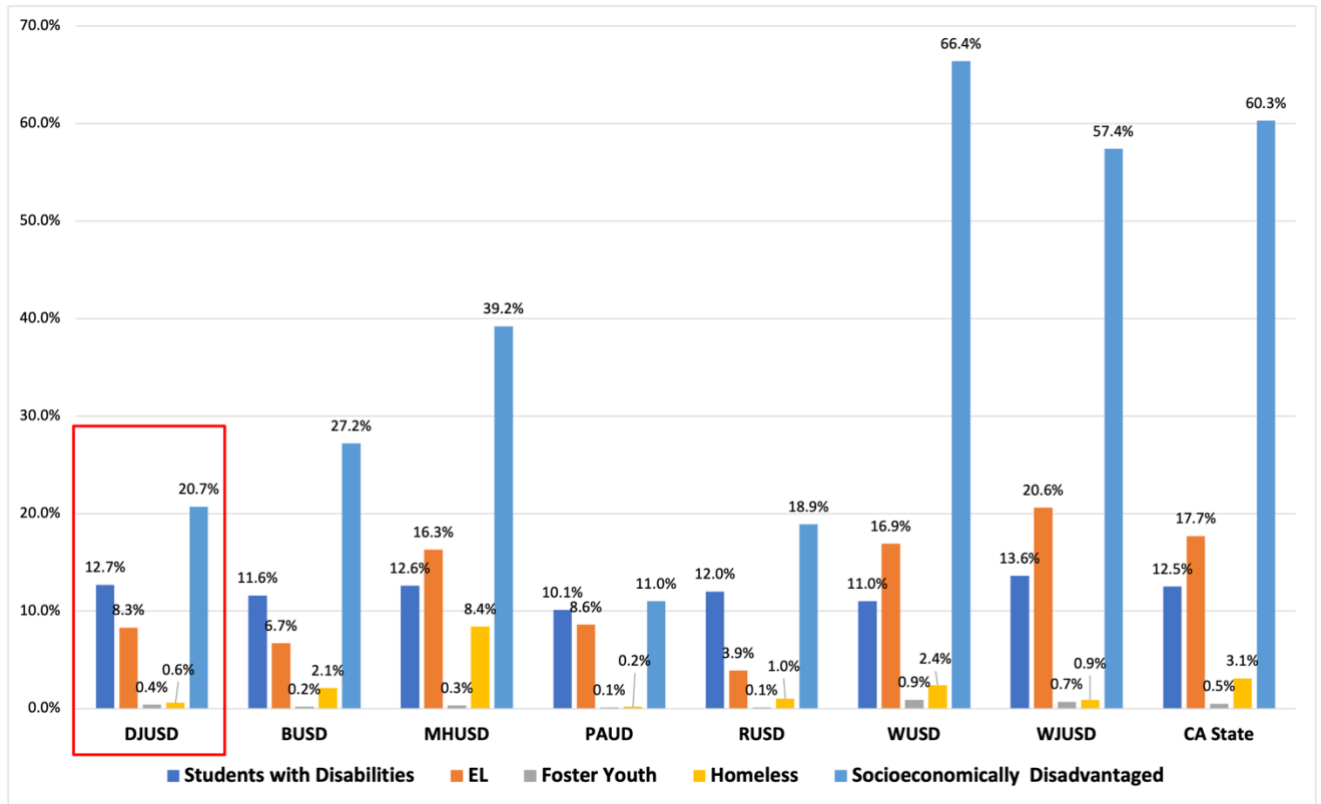
organizational improvements for increasing progress for students with disabilities efficiently and effectively. WestEd's approach to reviewing the DJUSD special education program is drawn from research on systems thinking, organizational development, leadership and instructional practices, and school system structures designed to support all learners.

This report aims to provide DJUSD with an objective analysis and a set of recommendations that can be used to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its special education program while also honoring the strengths of the district's current structure and approach. The recommendations are intended to be used as a catalyst for dialogue and collaboration within the district as a means of charting a course for effective, efficient, and inclusive programs and services for all students with disabilities.

The WestEd team reviewed multiple data sources across DJUSD to provide an overall context for the analysis and an understanding of the workings of the district. Data was collected and analyzed from stakeholder focus groups, surveys, interviews, school observations, and reviews of IEPs. DJUSD also provided data, policy and procedural documents, and district-level plans and initiatives, all of which were reviewed for consistent application across the district.

In addition, WestEd worked with DJUSD to choose peer districts with similar demographics in order to compare statewide and regional data, highlight any structures or processes used by the districts that may positively impact their results with students with disabilities, and inform DJUSD's structures and processes. Six peer districts were selected: Berkeley Unified (BUSD), Morgan Hill Unified (MHUSD), Palo Alto Unified (PAUSD), Rocklin Unified (RUSD), Washington Unified (WUSD), and Woodland Joint Unified (WJUSD). Four of the peer districts were selected due to similar demographics to DJUSD (BUSD, MHUSD, PAUSD, and RUSD) and two of the peer districts (WUSD and WJUSD) were selected as neighboring districts to DJUSD. These peer districts are discussed in detail in Theme 1 and are used throughout the report as examples of how students with disabilities are performing in similar districts. Figure 1 highlights the demographics of the district and DJUSD.

**Figure 1. Demographics of Peer Districts FY 2021**



Source: Source: California Department of Education Dashboard 2021: <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/>

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years has caused unprecedented disruption and changes in our education system across the county. The sudden shift to online instruction, ever changing and evolving mandates, staffing shortages, and changes in student enrollment, to name a few, have caused an interruption in our educational system and has impacted our traditional processes and cycles. These issues will be noted where appropriate in this report, but the scope of the report will examine the system prior to the pandemic, as well, in order to provide an overall view of where the system was heading and where it needs to evolve to address the current situation.

It is important to note that there are many assets and positive structures within DJUSD that the district is responsible for creating, implementing, and maintaining; and we witnessed these assets and structures as evidenced in our analysis. Overall, we observed that DJUSD's special education program is competently run by staff dedicated to ensuring the program is compliant, cost-conscious, and of high quality. The style and structure used to manage the special education program has its strengths and areas in need of improvement. So, although we consider the strengths of the program to be considerable and deserving of commendation, the purpose of this study is to offer recommendations for improvement. Hence, this report places more focus on identified gaps, since they are the basis for

improvement. **The fact that more words and space are dedicated to areas for improvement should not be taken as a sign that they outweigh DJUSD's strengths.**

## Methodology

### *Online Surveys for Staff, Administration, and Parents*

Online surveys were created and implemented to provide school staff, school administration, and parents an opportunity to contribute their perspectives on relevant areas of inquiry. Surveyed groups included school administrators, special education area managers, special education teachers, special education providers of related services (e.g., speech-language pathologists, psychologists), general education teachers, paraeducators, and parents/family members. There were three different surveys: one for staff working on a school site, one for central office administrators at the district level, and one for parents of students receiving special education services. The number of respondents for each of the surveys included:

- School site staff – 351
- Parents of students receiving special education services – 215
- Central Office administrators – 6

### *Extant Data*

The following data was collected from data provided by DJUSD and from the websites of the California Department of Education (CDE), and peer districts:

- Student demographic, enrollment, attendance, and achievement data
- Educational environments of students with disabilities (Least Restrictive Environment settings) and the percentage of time students with IEPs have access to general education settings
- Exiting data (rates of graduation and postsecondary outcomes)
- Results of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) and the California Alternate Assessment (CAA) in the areas of English language arts (ELA) and mathematics
- Special education student information and forms accessed through the district's online Individualized Education Program (IEP) system
- Historical data in the form of prior external evaluations and reviews of the district
- District plans related to instructional programming, such as a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), special education services, and key initiatives
- State monitoring reports and supporting documentation
- Whenever possible, state, and local data from similar school districts in California. These school districts were identified by DJUSD as appropriate to use for comparison

### *Individualized Education Program Documentation*

As part of the review, 22 IEPs for Davis Joint Unified School District (DJUSD) were reviewed to assess whether they were reasonably calculated to provide educational benefit. This was defined in 1982



when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in *Board of Education v. Rowley*, that an IEP must be reasonably calculated to enable a child with disabilities to receive educational benefit. A free appropriate public education (FAPE) and the LRE became the guiding standard to ensure that children are afforded opportunities to benefit from education provided to them. In 2016, the Supreme Court expanded this standard and rules, in *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, that an IEP must be calculated to enable a child to make meaningful progress and that the IEP must require meaningful educational benefit. For an IEP to meet the standard of meaningful educational benefit, it must be a meaningful cohesive document that is utilized as an instructional framework and a guide for ensuring that the child is benefiting from the education provided.

The educational benefit review process is different from a compliance review. A compliance review monitors for the inclusion of components of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the IEP; an educational benefit review looks for interconnectedness of the components. The main components to determine educational benefit were:

- Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance, to include the impact of the disability on the ability to access the general curriculum
- Measurable Goals
- Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) or Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI) as it is more frequently referred to in California, which defines how the student's specific unique needs resulting from the disability will be met
- Least Restrictive Environment – requirement found in the federal law Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that students with disabilities receive their education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers.
- Description of any Potential Harmful Effects which must be considered by the IEP team when deciding on placement options.

### **Small Group and Individual Interviews and Focus Groups**

From February through June of 2022, WestEd staff used the Zoom platform to conduct a total of 5 small group interviews, 14 individual interviews, and 32 focus group interviews hearing from approximately 325 individuals from all stakeholder groups across special education, general education, site administrators, district administrators, and parent/family members.

### **Data Analysis**

The qualitative and quantitative analyses were checked using standard procedures such as cross-method and cross-information triangulation of discoveries, negative case analyses (i.e., explicit search and explanation of discrepant information), the careful examination of records, and checking with select key partners to ensure the veracity of conclusions. A theming process was used to analyze the qualitative focus group data:

- Thematic content analysis procedures were used to identify significant statements (those that contributed to answering evaluation questions).
- Significant statements were tagged with the main point or meaning.
- Similar tags were grouped, creating codes.
- Codes were grouped by similar themes, which were then analyzed to inform the main discoveries for consideration.

Quantitative analyses were conducted on survey results and secondary data sources, such as student outcome data from CDE's website on accountability. Comparison groups and multiple reviews by WestEd staff were used to check the accuracy and reasonableness of the quantitative analysis.

For both qualitative and quantitative analysis, WestEd collaborated with district leaders to identify and talk through the meanings of the discoveries and to merge the quantitative and qualitative data to tell the full story of the evaluation.

The discoveries from the data collection process have been analyzed and cross-referenced to identify five key themes that arose across all the areas we explored. These key themes are summarized next, in the section, *What We Found: Five Themes*, and followed by a synopsis of the recommendations suggested under each theme.

The body of the report describes each theme in detail. The description of each theme includes four sections:

- **Strengths:** Existing areas within the District from which to build.
- **Key Discoveries:** Presents key data and discoveries under the theme.
- **In Their Own Words:** Features quotes that substantiate the discoveries. These quotes are taken from the interviews, focus groups, and surveys of administration, staff, and parents.
- **Why It Matters:** Describes why the theme and recommendations are important considerations for improving outcomes for students with disabilities as well as all students.
- **Recommendations:** Describes each recommendation in detail.

## Major Discoveries

Changes in the DJUSD enrollment rate for students with disabilities has increased while the total student enrollment has had an overall cumulative decrease. Specifically, from FY 2018 through FY 2021 the district's total enrollment **decreased** by 4.6% and the enrollment for students with disabilities **increased** significantly higher at 14.9%. (Figure 2).

DJUSD's students with disabilities as a percentage of the total enrollment compared with the peer districts and the State of CA indicates that:

- all of the districts and the state overall have experienced increases in their students with disabilities over the five year period.
- DJUSD's rate of increase in the percentage of students with disabilities is the highest of the peer districts and the state average.
- DJUSD has the second highest percent of students with disabilities of the peer districts and is above the state average.
- These two data points point to a lack of other supports and services available to students as they begin to struggle and that the increase in special education placements over the last two years indicates that the additional supports and/or interventions were not sufficient to support the needs of the students who were struggling in general education so special education placement was viewed as the only way that additional support could be accessed.

These two data points are important to monitor over the years to ensure that the District has preventative interventions and supports in place in general education to assist students who may need this assistance to experience advancement on state standards and their overall educational program. In addition to these strategies, DJUSD should also review its special education referral practices to include and align with interventions, strategies, and assessments used in general education before a student is referred for special education. If pre-referral interventions and strategies are not utilized, then students may continue to experience a lack of an appropriate level of growth and success within the general education class causing the need for additional supports from special education which are often limited or only available in more restrictive programs. Preventative, early interventions and supports under a systemic framework such as a Multi-Tiered System of Supports, are often not in place in districts where there are high percentages of students with disabilities.

Overall, WestEd's data analysis shows that while there are many parts of the DJUSD program which are successful, but there is also a need for a systematic plan for a coherent organizational structure, data collection, and fiscal transparency. The discoveries in this report show that the district should consider staff and parent concerns regarding the structure of the district and where to access support. Additionally, the data reflects the need to maintain compliant IEPs and ensure that they are also written to be educationally beneficial for their students. We also found that the achievement gap between the students with disabilities and the students without disabilities for English Language Arts (ELA) averaged 47% points below the students without disabilities and was 45% points below in mathematics. This indicates that the students with disabilities are not succeeding at the same rate as their peers without disabilities.

The data collected also shows a need for a common definition and understanding of what inclusion means or should mean in DJUSD. There is a clear belief and respect for the value of inclusion and the staff and parents in the district take great pride in their reputation as a model inclusion district. We also found that while there is a deep belief in the value of inclusive education, there is also often a belief that the students with IEPs are visitors to the general education class and the overall

responsibility for the accommodations and support that are needed to address the student's needs should come solely from special education staff.

Finally, DJUSD would benefit from more professional development around the areas of Multi-Tiered System of Supports, Universal Design for Learning, instruction of dually identified multilingual learners, co-teaching model of instruction, and IDEA compliance for administrators. Working with staff to understand how these areas align with the mission, vision, values, and goals of the district and of the special education department would help with the clarity and coherence within the system. These areas of need are supported by the discoveries in this report as well as research on student achievement.

## What We Found: Five Themes



### **THEME 1: VISION** *Alignment and System Of Support*

**Systems**

There is a need for an aligned system-wide, collaborative, and integrated instructional model of a tiered system of support that reflects a proactive shared responsibility for learning and intervention for all students by special education and general education staff, families, and community partners.



### **THEME 2: STRUCTURES** *Student Enrollment And Comparison Analysis*

The District's growth in the student with disabilities (SWD) population has outpaced the growth for the enrollment of total students and the challenges that emerged due to the pandemic have impacted program size and structure.



### **THEME 3: PROCESS** *Policy, Procedures, and Communication*

DJUSD's special education department has developed structures and written policies and procedures but is lacking clear processes for consistently updating, communicating, implementing, and monitoring use of these.



### **Theme 4: INSTRUCTION** *Increasing Access and Achievement*

DJUSD has the opportunity to make systemic changes to allow students with disabilities improved access to inclusive environments in order to positively impact academic and social achievement by recognizing that students with disabilities have a place in the general education classroom and by aligning the supports and services and building staff capacity to provide access and improved progress in the general environment and curriculum.



### **Theme 5: CULTURE** *Improving Equity, Climate, and Capacity*

There is a continued need to provide school staff and administrators with collaborative, high-quality, system wide professional development focused on optimizing the access and engagement that students with disabilities have to general education, through differentiating and accommodating instruction, and improving equity, behavioral and social-emotional systematic instruction, and intervention.

## Recommendation Highlights

The following are summaries of the recommendations by theme, however, the themes and recommendations are interwoven across the system and as such, should be approached as part of a systematic plan for overall systemic improvements aligned with the District's mission, vision, values, and goals. To develop a long-term systemic plan for aligning and integrating the themes and processes, it

is recommended that the District utilizes the Multi-Tiered System of Supports teaming structures described under Theme 1 to align and prioritize the development of the overall district plan.

### **Theme 1: VISION: Improving Systems Alignment and System of Support**

As the DJUSD's vision and mission are currently being revisited and revised to reflect and reinforce the focus on access and inclusion of all learners, there will be a need to reflect and redesign the overall structures and systems within the District to implement this new vision. This new vision and mission will create the need for an aligned system-wide, collaborative, and integrated instructional model of tiered systems of support that reflects a shared responsibility of learning and intervention for all students by special education and general education staff, families, and community partners. As the DJUSD's has already begun to implement their version of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework it will be important to re-engage and redesign their system and processes to align with the vision and mission.

As the DJUSD's Multi-Tiered System of Supports is being developed and implemented systematically across the district, it will be important to consider the following:

- Re-engage in design and implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports by creating and assigning working teams to identify and clearly define each tier of the system.
  - This should include entry and exit criteria, specific interventions to be used within each tier, and data monitoring processes to ensure consistency of support across the district.
  - Within these tier definitions, special considerations should be made related to the inclusivity and accessibility of Tier 1 instruction.
  - Staff from special education should be involved in all aspects of the design process.
- Building staff capacity for developing a robust and flexible Tier 1 which is grounded in the principles of Universal Design for Learning provides a solid foundation for the other tiers of support.
- Consider tasking the teams with defining and improving the pre-referral/referral process for special education in order to ensure alignment of this process under the Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework, and consider developing accompanying policies and procedures in concert with the recommendations of this report.
- Lastly, evaluate the extent to which general education and special education teachers have the structured time and clearly defined processes necessary to create truly robust and research based inclusive general education settings.

### **Theme 2: STRUCTURES: Student Enrollment and Comparison Analysis**

DJUSD has experienced an increase in the enrollment of students with disabilities which is often representative of the need for additional interventions and supports within general education to assist students as they begin to struggle. This reinforces the need for implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework to systematically develop and align resources to address the needs of all students. Focusing on designing the system to focus on the prevention of school failure by providing interventions and supports within Tier 1 (general education classrooms) and designing more intensive

supports as needed based on accurate data, will provide the just in time support that is often needed for students to experience success.

To design the system to address the needs of student population as it changes over time will require a system which includes:

- The use of systematic ongoing processes for data collection, analysis, and accessibility across all areas including:
  - Data on classroom and intervention tracking, demographic, and special education indicator data in order to guide decision-making for systemic improvements.
  - Development of a transparent data collection, analysis, and accessibility plan that has protocols in place for district financial and achievement data with ongoing review and analysis by leadership teams.

### ***Theme 3: PROCESS: Implementing Policy, Procedures, and Processes***

DJUSD's special education department has developed some structures and written policies and procedures but is lacking clear processes for consistently updating, training, implementing, and monitoring the use of these. DJUSD should consider creating a team of stakeholders to review and revise the district's handbook for special education procedures to align with the Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework and processes. This will include:

- The special education procedural handbook will provide clarity and guidance for administrators, teachers, paraeducators, parents, and students regarding the entire special education program.
- Begin by establishing a clear vision and mission for the special education programs, which is aligned with the District's vision and mission and the Multi-Tiered System of Supports processes along with the required special education processes will provide a common understanding of the purposes and goals of the special education program.
  - Doing this would address some of the concerns expressed by staff regarding a consistent direction and clarity of what is required to develop a program that is not only compliant but also produces educational benefit for the students with IEPs.
- Establish a communication plan for the department that emphasizes solid bi-directional feedback and input and disseminates information about the work of the department as it connects to DJUSD's mission, vision, values, and goals for students, staff, the community, and other stakeholders.
- Develop a process for reviewing and updating the procedural manual to update on an ongoing basis.

### ***Theme 4: INSTRUCTION: Increasing Access and Achievement***

While DJUSD's students with disabilities have experienced success due to the access to general education through the strong belief in full inclusion, the district has the opportunity to make systemic changes to improve the instructional design and support which will provide students with disabilities

increased access to high-quality support in the inclusive environments. This will positively impact academic and social achievement by recognizing that students with IEPs have a place in the general education classroom first and foremost and by aligning the supports and services to provide improved access and engagement in the general environment and curriculum, students will experience greater success overall.

DJUSD should

- Develop common values and goals for building equitable and inclusive access to schools by encouraging a discussion regarding the beliefs of teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders about building equitable and inclusive classrooms.
  - Use the discussions to explore attitudes, develop common norms for supporting students, implement a bias-free, positive program culture, identify what's working and not working in collaborative structures between special education and general education staff, and look at the district's actual data related to its inclusion rate.
  - The desired outcome of such discussions would be to establish collective commitments that would guide inclusive goals and successful results for students with IEPs across the district.
  - Then develop a common definition across DJUSD of what it means to be an inclusive district.
- Build staff capacity to implement a more aligned and cohesive system focused on good first instruction in general education through the use of Universal Design for Learning Principles and specialized academic instruction in the inclusive classroom.
- Design staff support roles and services to accommodate the new structures.

### **Theme 5: CULTURE: Improving Equity, Culture, and Climate**

Throughout this year of uncertainty, issues relating to the climate and culture of the district have increased dramatically. Staff, student, and family mental health and wellness has struggled and the need for new ways to provide support in the areas of social/emotional and mental health has never been more necessary. It will be important for the District to build new structures and vehicles for providing these supports on a continuing basis.

There is also a continued need to provide school staff and administration with collaborative, high-quality, system wide professional development focused on optimizing the access and engagement that students with IEPs have to general education.

The emphasis of the professional development should include:



- Building staff capacity to provide differentiating and accommodating instruction and Universal Design for Learning lesson design
- Improving behavioral and social/emotional systematic instruction through the use of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) along with more intensive interventions in Tiers 2 and 3.
- Providing training and coaching to site leaders to help build their capacity to fulfill their role as a local educational agency (LEA) representative at an IEP meeting, take more responsibility for this role, and create clarity and consistency across the district.
- Increasing ways to engage families in more open and two-way communication will provide opportunities for families to provide input into the program as well as engage with each other in supportive dialogue
- The District should provide an improved process for mentorship and coaching for the first two years of a new special education teacher's tenure and provide IEP support for new and veteran teachers who may need support.

Issues of limited availability of substitutes and ongoing absences by staff due to the continuing issues brought about by the pandemic, has created challenges in the provision of professional development. In addition, paraeducators have been leaving the district often due to low pay, stress caused by having additional duties due to the unfilled positions, and lack of training in preparation for their positions. These challenges will have to be addressed through new and creative strategies but can become part of the discussion by staff to identify where and how to build job-embedded professional development into the process. It is recommended that the District could begin by identifying specific staff needs through student outcome data, staff surveys, teacher goals, classroom observations, exploring site master schedules to identify where formal collaboration happens, and other similar information.

## Theme 1: VISION

### *Improving Systems Alignment and System Of Support*

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**There is a need for an aligned system-wide, collaborative, and integrated instructional model of a tiered system of support that reflects a shared responsibility for learning and intervention for all students by special education and general education staff, families, and community partners.**

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### Strengths

We commend DJUSD for the strong sense of commitment its staff and families have to the vision of ensuring access to inclusive and equitable education for all students, particularly for the students with IEPs. Strengths that emerged through our work with DJUSD include a sense of pride in their long standing commitment to inclusive education and a strong desire for high outcomes for all students. Additional strengths that emerged include:

- Interview and focus group participants acknowledged, with pride, the District's overarching focus on inclusive education which has provided access to general education classes and instruction for most of the students with IEPs.
- Many families indicated that this focus was the reason they selected DJUSD for their child's educational program.
- Staff indicated an overwhelming support for and belief in the vision of full inclusion.
- It is clear that the full inclusion program has benefited the DJUSD students and families as indicated by the many staff and parents comments on the high-quality, ongoing care and commitment that the district has shown to their students.
- There were many instances where staff were commended for going above and beyond to ensure that the students in their care were receiving the services and supports they needed.
- It was also clear that there is a desire to align and strengthen the systems and processes to create improved inclusive opportunities, supportive environments, and better results for all students.
- DJUSD has a strong vision and commitment to ensuring the equity and inclusive culture of the district continues and is poised to find ways to continue to improve on that vision.
- Staff commented on the benefits that inclusive education has had for all of DJUSD's students by creating an overall sense of belonging and feelings of support for diversity.

## Key Discoveries

### *Systems Alignment*

- In focus groups, interviews, and surveys staff frequently mentioned that:
  - the various departments in the district operate in silos without much collaboration
  - many of the school sites also operated in silos with their own processes, materials, and procedures
  - policies are applied inconsistently across the district and that there are often conflicting responses to questions about processes from district administrators

### *Pre-Referral Interventions*

The following are responses from the surveys, interviews, and focus groups related to pre-referral interventions:

- On the surveys:
  - 35% of staff indicated that high-quality pre-referral interventions were not being provided by general education teachers for struggling learners.
  - 47% of the staff indicated that there is not an effective tiered intervention system in use at their school to support struggling learners.
  - Staff indicated that the pre-referral process was not timely (42%) nor efficient (52%) and that often the process was slow due to staffing and scheduling issues.
- Staff frequently reported that the pre-referral process and the referral process for special education was not viewed or aligned as part of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports process for students who are struggling.

### *Multi-Tiered System of Supports*

- In focus groups, staff indicated that:
  - There is an inconsistent process across the district for identifying, providing interventions, data collection, and progress monitoring for learners who are struggling in the general education classroom with both academic and behavioral challenges.
  - Prior to the pandemic, DJUSD began the process of designing and implementing a district-wide Multi-Tiered System of Supports process but that the implementation process has been interrupted due to the pandemic and is now being implemented inconsistently across the district.

- Multi-Tiered System of Supports is a key initiative but it was often described as being built in small pockets throughout the district without a consistent process for implementation. Staff also indicated that they would like to scale up Multi-Tiered System of Supports with a consistent, system-wide implementation
- There is a need for additional professional development regarding Multi-Tiered System of Supports that is defined and monitored for consistent application.
  - Staff also recognize the need for additional training and guidance in order to provide support and access for students with diverse needs in the general education classroom to allow for full access and engagement in lessons.

## Data Review and Analysis

The following data expands upon the Key Discoveries.

### *Multi-Tiered System of Supports*

The District has articulated a clear vision for moving forward towards an equitable and inclusive system, which provides supports for all students, families, and staff to grow and progress to their greatest ability as is reflected in the District's vision and mission:

*The mission of Davis Joint Unified School District, a leading center of educational innovation, is to ignite a love of learning and equip each student with the knowledge, skills, character, and well-being to thrive and contribute to an evolving and increasingly-connected world, through a system characterized by:*

- *Optimal conditions and environments for all students to learn*
- *A team of talented, resourceful, and caring staff*
- *Transforming teaching, learning, and operations in our continuing pursuit of excellence*
- *Resourceful, transparent, and responsible fiscal planning, and*
- *A diverse and inclusive culture*

In addition, the mission of the special education department of DJUSD is:

*The mission of DJUSD Department of Special Education is to support all students with disabilities in achieving their highest potential in the areas of academics, communication, social skills and life skills to become included, productive, members of the community.*

DJUSD has also developed a strong commitment to equity as evidenced by their Board resolution *We All Belong: Safe and Welcoming Schools for All* which was passed in 2017 and states:

*DJUSD shall be a place where all students, employees and families feel welcome and safe regardless of their immigration status, race, color, ancestry, national origin, ethnic group identification, age, religion, marital or parental status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or gender expression.*

To align these various priorities, DJUSD began the process of building a system that supports the various needs of the diverse student population by undertaking and designing a system of supports with the implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework. As stated on the DJUSD website, the District beginning implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports in the 2018-19 school year by focusing their efforts on *organizing resources, aligning structures, policies, and practices, and ensuring that this alignment is adequately resourced so that schools can optimize supports to best meet the academic, behavioral, and social emotional needs of their students.*

Throughout our data gathering, we found many comments and examples of the current status of the implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports in DJUSD.

- In interviews, focus groups, and surveys, staff mentioned that the Multi-Tiered System of Supports process was just starting but has been put on pause since the pandemic. Administrators mentioned that it is viewed as an important initiative which has been implemented in varying levels across the district.
- Training has been held, data protocols have been developed, monthly Multi-Tiered System of Supports collaboration meetings established at each site but often function very differently.
- Some sites have stayed the course and still have focused on the work but the focus district wide has waned.
- A dedicated staff position supporting the implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework (Differentiation Specialist) was created to support teachers with lessons and instructional approaches within the Multi-Tiered System of Supports and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports interventions.
- Implementation of processes for creating, screening, and implementing Tier 2 and 3 supports and interventions were inconsistent from site to site across the district.

### **Pre-referral interventions**

As part of the review of the alignment of systems across DJUSD, pre-referral interventions were examined. Pre-referral interventions are a powerful strategy to both intervene early to assist students with additional support they need and to use as a diagnostic tool to better understand the needs of students on the cusp of being referred to special education. We found the following:

- Pre-referral interventions exist in some sites but overall, the process is not well defined as a district wide strategy and therefore varies from site to site.
- Many staff reported that the pre-referral process is often skipped in favor of a direct referral for special education assessment without any interventions attempted.
- The Multi-Tiered System of Supports process and the referral process or Student Study Team (SST) process are not well linked and protocols are not in place allowing each site to do it differently.

As DJUSD and all schools across the country are beginning to emerge from the last two tumultuous years and we are all learning to live in this reality, it will be necessary to re-envision and re-engage in creating and implementing new systems which are designed to address the needs of all learners. New areas of need have arisen and it has become clear that going back to business as usual does not address the new reality. This provides an opportunity for DJUSD to build a system of supports that is based on student needs and provides a preventative focus on supporting students when they are beginning to struggle. It also creates an opportunity for the District to pause and re-think their overall vision and re-engage staff, students, and families in creating the new vision and redesign of the process of how to get there. The following considerations are suggested as the District moves forward:

- Within these re-engagement strategies, it will be critical to revisit the district's Multi-Tiered System of Supports processes and specifically define the tiers of intervention and support and implementation process.
  - This will include identifying ways to make the tiers more robust and inclusive to accommodate the changing levels of need students are experiencing related to the pandemic.
- Continuing to focus on building the system of supports for ensuring access, engagement, and success for all students should be at the heart of the design.
- As DJUSD designs their system, it will be important to focus on a design that provides an increased emphasis on **preventing** school failure by identifying and intervening early when students need extra support and providing focused intensive supports when and where they are needed.
- By focusing on creating, defining, and implementing a system of supports DJUSD will be able to design the system that is less in crisis mode and more focused on being proactive with immediately available supports.

## In Their Own Voices

Summary of feedback from focus groups, interviews, and surveys related to Theme 1:

Summary of feedback from **Staff**:

### Strengths

- *We are a full inclusion district, and I think we all strongly believe that this is the right thing to do for students.*
- *At some sites, staff collaborate well to ensure that students are being provided pre-referral interventions.*
- *Interventions for reading are working well at a few of the elementary sites.*

### Challenges

- *The Multi-Tiered System of Supports process is not consistent or cohesive across the district. Every site does something different for Multi-Tiered System of Supports.*
- *Referral process is inconsistent and not always aligned with or part of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports process.*
- *There is a lack of clarity on the Multi-Tiered System of Supports process, in particular:*
  - *when and how pre-referral interventions should be used*
  - *what supports and strategies are designed for and in use for each Tier*
  - *what the defined staff roles within the system of supports should be*
  - *what data is being collected and used to determine effectiveness of interventions.*

### Why It Matters

**Systems alignment.** DJUSD leadership and the Board of Education keep the mission, vision, value, and goals at the forefront of district wide deliberations and decision-making. They also provide essential guidance and support for schools. The district must have the capacity to develop and articulate both a vision and a set of practices that send a clear message of what policies, procedures, and actions schools and programs are to model.<sup>1</sup> The authenticity of this message is affirmed through the district's development of a strategic plan for a special education program that manifests the mission, vision, value, and goals and then the district's establishment of the conditions necessary for principals and teacher leaders to implement the program effectively.

#### In Their Own Voices

*"We need to let the MTSS system work in a consistent way across the district."*

**Site Principal**

Considerations for implementation of an aligned system:

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace Foundation, 2013

- A prevalent theme that resonated throughout interviews, focus groups, and surveys was that DJUSD does not have a cohesive, consistent system of interventions or supports to assist students when they struggle with learning or behavior.
- There is a critical need to nurture and propagate a mindset of shared responsibility among teachers, administrators, and staff not only in the program they work in but in all areas of work across the District.

**Multi-Tiered System of Support.** Through the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports, the learning of *all* students, including students with disabilities and multilingual learners, are supported through clear initiatives, resources, and continuous improvement. A Multi-Tiered System of Supports provides a framework for designing and organizing system-wide resources, strategies, and practices that result in improved academic, behavioral, and social outcomes for all learners, regardless of whether they are struggling or have advanced learning needs. The principles and practices of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports are based on what research has shown to be effective in both creating and successfully sustaining systemic changes as well as identifying what is necessary to provide the most effective instruction to all students. A Multi-Tiered System of Supports focuses on state standards, core instruction, differentiated learning, student-centered learning, individualized student needs, and the alignment of systems necessary for student success.

Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports involves significant paradigm shifts. Often, past response to intervention (RtI) programs were structured with a focus on interventions for a few students. In comparison, a Multi-Tiered System of Supports systematically addresses prevention for all students. A sound Multi-Tiered System of Supports begins with:

- A focus on high-quality, best first instruction within the general education class (Tier 1), which is designed to support the needs of all learners through the use of the Universal Design for Learning framework.
  - Specifically, within Tier 1 instruction, students experience learning environments with clear learning objectives and concrete success criteria aligned to the rigor of the standards.
  - These key ideas are also represented in culturally affirming ways, and with embedded options allowing students to have multiple ways to show mastery. This flexible, inclusive, and standards aligned core instruction creates a solid foundation for a district's tiers of support.
  - Through universal screening and regular progress monitoring, a Multi-Tiered System of Supports allows staff to more quickly move from identifying which students need help to providing the specific assistance necessary to support each student's needs.



- This shift requires districts and schools to move from simply having programs and people available, to intentionally designing and redesigning services and supports so that they match the needs of students.

Another important aspect of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports is collaboration. Collaborative educational decisions are based on data derived from frequent monitoring of student performance and rate of learning that addresses the linguistic, academic, and social-emotional needs and opportunities of every student. Collaboration promotes a continuum of evidence-based supports and interventions with increasing levels of intensity and duration that address students' specific and individualized needs.

It is also important to:

- ensure that all staff understand their role in the system of support and receive the appropriate training and coaching to develop their capacity to provide the appropriate support.
- commit the time to identify the various roles and responsibilities of all staff in the Multi-Tiered System of Supports process and provide them the training support needed to build their skills to ensure staff are available and used in the most effective and efficient manner.

**Multi-Tiered System of Supports inclusive practices.** Inclusive practices are an important part of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports process (see Theme 4). It is critical that district and site leaders play a role in implementing inclusive practices in their schools. Principals and teachers must have a deep knowledge of inclusive practices and how they will be demonstrated in the school.

Having a philosophy of inclusiveness means that:

- In addition to determining the provision of services and placement, the entire school staff must understand the needs and instructional strategies that best support the diverse learning needs of students in their classes.
- Leadership must guide the process and work with staff to understand inclusive practices by including staff in designing a framework for which inclusive practices may be integrated into the school culture.
- They also must support the assessment and monitoring of their students' access to general education classes and the degree they are living up to these inclusive values as evidenced in their actual practices.
- Additionally, these administrators must create protected times where special education staff and general education staff can collaborate on a regular basis about instruction

and instructional supports that have yet to happen. This allows students to come into classes that are ready for them from the beginning.

- District administrators and key instructional staff should know the current rates of inclusion within each school in the district and have key goals and aligned strategies for monitoring and continuing to improve the success of the program overtime.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested actions that would provide a sense of common purpose, direction, language, and actions across the DJUSD's special education programs.

### *Recommendation 1: Consider updating and re-engaging the district's mission, vision, values and goals.*

A clear vision and mission will provide a common understanding of the purposes and goals for the district and will address concerns regarding a consistent direction by school staff. Vision and mission statements answer the following questions: Why do we exist? Who do we serve? What is our purpose? How do we aspire to serve? What are our values? It will be important to include stakeholders in the development of the statements, share widely, and revisit and reiterate often.

Once established, it will be important to align the special education strategic planning to the District's vision and mission, values, and goals and develop a communication plan for engaging all staff in understanding and implementing the next steps.

This process should include:

- clearly and regularly articulating the district's mission, vision, values, and goals and disseminating to staff, community, students, and stakeholders
- checking often with staff to ensure understanding of the mission, vision, values, and goals
- ensuring that all communication reflects the mission, vision, values, and goals and that decisions are anchored to the tenets of the mission, vision, values, and goals, from boardroom to classroom
- creating a process for communicating topics and considerations to sites, using a cycle of inquiry, and investigating questions
- ensuring that appropriate data is available and used for all discussions and decision points, and
- ensuring that stakeholders have clarity around decision-making.

### *Recommendation 2: Create a new or re-engage an Multi-Tiered System of Supports leadership team to develop, articulate, and implement the district wide sustainable Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework (as outlined in the section on Multi-Tiered System of Supports implementation in Appendix A).*

While DJUSD had already begun to develop a system-wide approach for Multi-Tiered System of Supports, it is not being applied in a consistent way across the district. There is a need for a re-

engagement and renewed process to ensure that all staff are clear and engaged in the process. It is suggested that:

- DJUSD engage a Multi-Tiered System of Supports executive leadership team to guide the implementation and development of a common framework for implementation.
- The Multi-Tiered System of Supports executive leadership team should establish or reestablish working teams to design how to carry out the actions developed by the leadership team.
  - One such team should consider selecting research-based, best-practices and programs for Tiers 1, 2, and 3 and provide ongoing professional development to ensure implementation of the framework with fidelity.
  - Another team should focus on finding a strategy to collect and monitor who is accessing Tier 2 and 3 interventions, for how long, and their rates of success in attaining educational goals as a result of these services.
- Effective professional development might include instructional coaches working directly with those implementing the programs. Consider a collaborative model of support at each tier that would employ the talents and expertise of both general education and special education staff.

***Recommendation 3: Ensure clear alignment across all levels of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports system as it is developed and implemented.***

The Multi-Tiered System of Supports leadership team should assign a workgroup to identify and ensure that the instructional supports are aligned and that all levels of the tiered system are clearly defined within each tier.

- Tier 1 should be a standards aligned and inclusive core instruction that uses the principles of Universal Design for Learning as an instructional framework to mitigate some of the need for intervention, provide improved access to core instruction in the general education classroom for students with IEPs, and support the learning needs of all diverse learners.
- Core instruction should provide students with ample opportunity to reflect on their own learning and the degree they are meeting classroom learning goals. In addition, the team should determine universal supports for behavior, such as a consistent approach to Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports as well as academic needs.

***Recommendation 4: Enhance the comprehensive Multi-Tiered System of Supports process with consistency by developing a manual. The district's Multi-Tiered System of Supports process should be documented, clearly communicated, and upheld by administration as an integral part of the commitment to improving outcomes for all students.***

Develop a comprehensive manual that provides important information and local guidance about the Multi-Tiered System of Supports and details district wide policies and structures for identifying students who are struggling academically and behaviorally. This would include:

- Aligning the process for pre-referral interventions and referral for special education into the systematic process for the tiers.
- The purpose of the manual is to provide guidance to educators on how to use the Multi-Tiered System of Supports within a problem-solving framework that informs instructional decisions and supports.
- Policies for Multi-Tiered System of Supports referral structures should include a process that monitors the degree referred students have experienced a true and equitable representation of the district's espoused vision of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports and the DJSUD's model for the tiers of support.

## Resources for Theme 1

### **Data-Based Decision Making Protocol:**

The following three models help teams when they are trying to decide how to proceed with student-level problem solving and data-informed decision making.

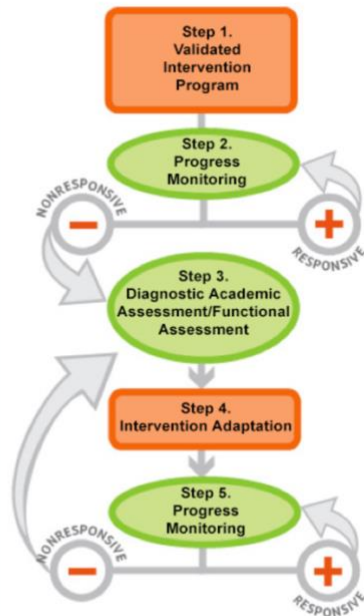
- The first one, the IRIS Center's model for Data-Based Individualization for Intensive Interventions, is the most simplistic and a good guide from which to begin.
- The second is a process our WestEd Multi-Tiered System of Supports team has found useful in their work assisting districts with the implementation process.

## Multi-Tiered System of Supports models for problem solving and decision making.

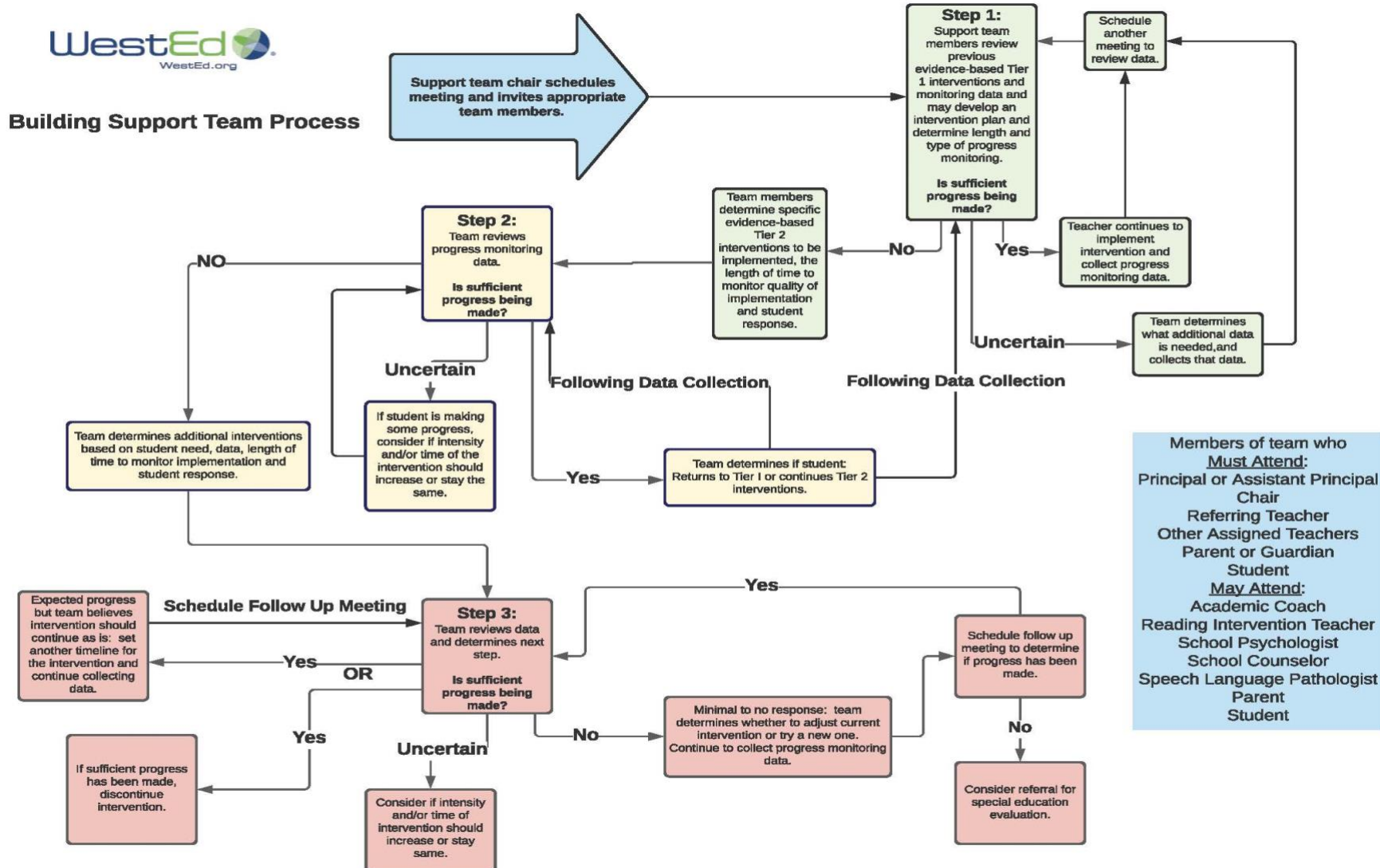
- IRIS Center Data-Based Individualization for Intensive Intervention:  
<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/dbi2/cresource/q1/p01/> - content

### IRIS Center Model for Data-Based Individualization for Intensive Interventions

DBI Steps
<b>Step 1. Validated Intervention Program:</b> Make the secondary intervention more intensive through quantitative changes to the instruction that a student receives.
<b>Step 2. Progress Monitoring:</b> Evaluate the student's response to the intensified intervention by collecting <a href="#">progress monitoring</a> data.
<b>Step 3. Diagnostic Assessment:</b> Collect and review data (e.g., progress monitoring data, student work samples, observations) to identify areas of difficulty and to make informed decisions about how to adapt the intervention.
<b>Step 4. Intervention Adaptation:</b> Adapt the intervention based on the student's needs as determined by the diagnostic assessment.
<b>Step 5. Progress Monitoring:</b> Continue to collect progress monitoring data to evaluate the student's response to the instructional adaptations.



### WestEd Tiered Intervention Flow Chart



## Theme 2: Structures

### *Student Enrollment and Comparison Analysis*

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**The District's student with disabilities (SWD) population growth has outpaced the growth for the enrollment of total students and the challenges that emerged due to the pandemic have impacted program size and structure.**

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### Strengths

DJUSD is a district with many and varied programs, services, and resources available to support the students, families, and staff across the district. Comments from parents and staff indicated:

- There is a high degree of satisfaction with the resources that were available at their particular school site.
- Many comments on how hard staff worked to ensure that students were receiving what they needed to succeed.
- Parents frequently commented on how the staff and structure has made a difference in their students' learning.

The District has been able to fund many different initiatives over the years and has created some structures to support various initiatives. Many of the structures that exist are adequate to support the needs of the students across the district.

- The Business Services Team utilizes a systems approach both inter department and intra department which supports collaboration, communication and transparency and keeps the focus on the overall system.
- The district has continued to fund support for full inclusion mainly through the use of paraeducators.

## Key Discoveries

To support the continuous improvement process, DJUSD would benefit from alignment and increased use by staff in the ongoing review of data. This includes a focus on collecting, analyzing, and problem solving across many areas including classroom and intervention tracking data, demographic, and special education indicator data in order to guide decision-making for systemic improvements as the data and Key Discoveries below indicate.

### *Enrollment and Incidence of Disability*

- From FY 2017 to FY 2022, DJUSD's enrollment for students with disabilities averaged 999 students, or 11.8% of total enrollment. During this time, the **cumulative increase** in enrollment of students with disabilities was 14.85%, while the **cumulative decrease** in total enrollment was -4.65%. (Figure 2).
- From FYs 2017-2021, DJUSD's students with disabilities as a percent of the total enrollment increased by 2.8% from 9.9% to 12.7%. This was the highest increase across the peer districts and the state of CA average. (Figure 3).
- From FYs 2020-2022, the proportion of disability by incidence in DJUSD has varied a bit. There has been a slight increase in the categories of autism of 1.4%, intellectual disabilities of 0.2%, other health impaired of 0.7%, and other of 0.3%. and students with emotional disturbance of 1.3%. There have been decreases in the categories of emotional disturbance of 1.3%, speech/language impairment of 3.8%, specific learning disabilities of 4.4%. (Figure 4).

### *District Expenditures*

- For 2022-23, the district is projecting a significant increase in Special Education Program expenditures of 17.90% and a decrease in expenditures in the General Fund of 2.15% over the prior year. (Figure 5).
- Personnel comprise most of the program expenses, with 80.9% of projected expenditures for 2022-23 budget. While this is below the 85% an average school district spends on staff compensation in the unrestricted general fund it is not uncommon to see this trend in special education programs due to the need to utilize contracted service providers, non-public schools/agencies to support student needs. (Figure 6).
- The total cost of the Special Education Program has a cumulative increase in expenditures of approximately \$4.33 million (22.36%) between 2018-19 and 2022-23 planned. (Figure 7).
- Certificated salary cost increased by \$1.29 million (21.04%) when comparing 2018-19 to 2022-23 but planned and classified salaries remained relatively flat over the same comparison with a \$ .07 million (.01%) increase. (Figure 8).
- The District ranks 4th in the comparison group for the percent of General Fund budget expended to support special education in 2020-21. (Figure 9).



### ***Impact of the Pandemic***

- Student enrollment and absenteeism has fluctuated greatly.
- Student learning has been impacted and behavioral issues have increased due to stress, mental health needs, and loss of typical routine and structure.
- Staff physical and mental health issues and needs have increased due to challenges related to the pandemic.
- Staff burnout and stress levels are exceptionally high.
- Recruiting and retaining staff has risen to an area of critical need particularly for special education paraprofessionals, teachers, and related service personnel.

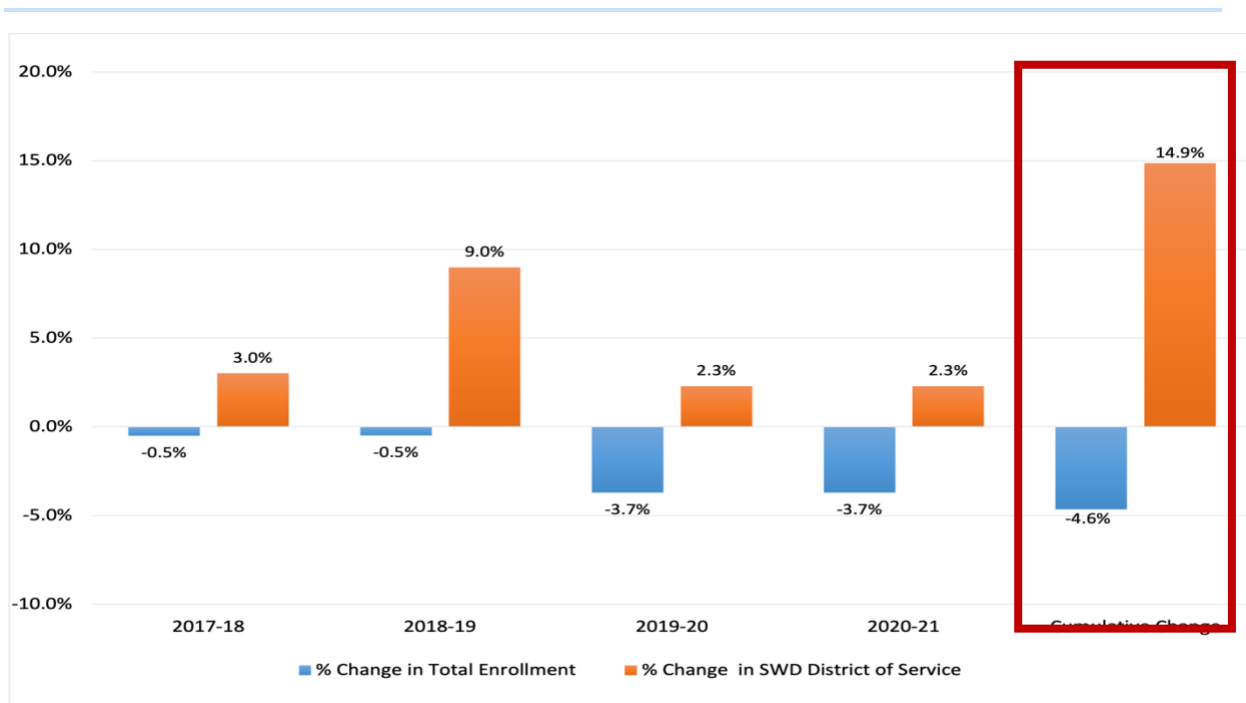
## Data Review and Analysis

The following data expands upon the Key Discoveries.

**Enrollment and Demographics.** The overall total enrollment of students in DJUSD has decreased over the last five years but the enrollment of students with IEPs has increased substantially.

Figure 2 represents the percent of cumulative change in the enrollment of students with disabilities compared to the total enrollment of the district. For the time period from FYs 2018-2021 the overall cumulative enrollment of the students with disabilities in DJUSD increased by 14.9% while the overall cumulative total enrollment decreased by 4.6%.

**Figure 2. DJUSD Percentage Change in Total Enrollment and in Enrollment of Students with Disabilities, FY 2018 through FY 2022**



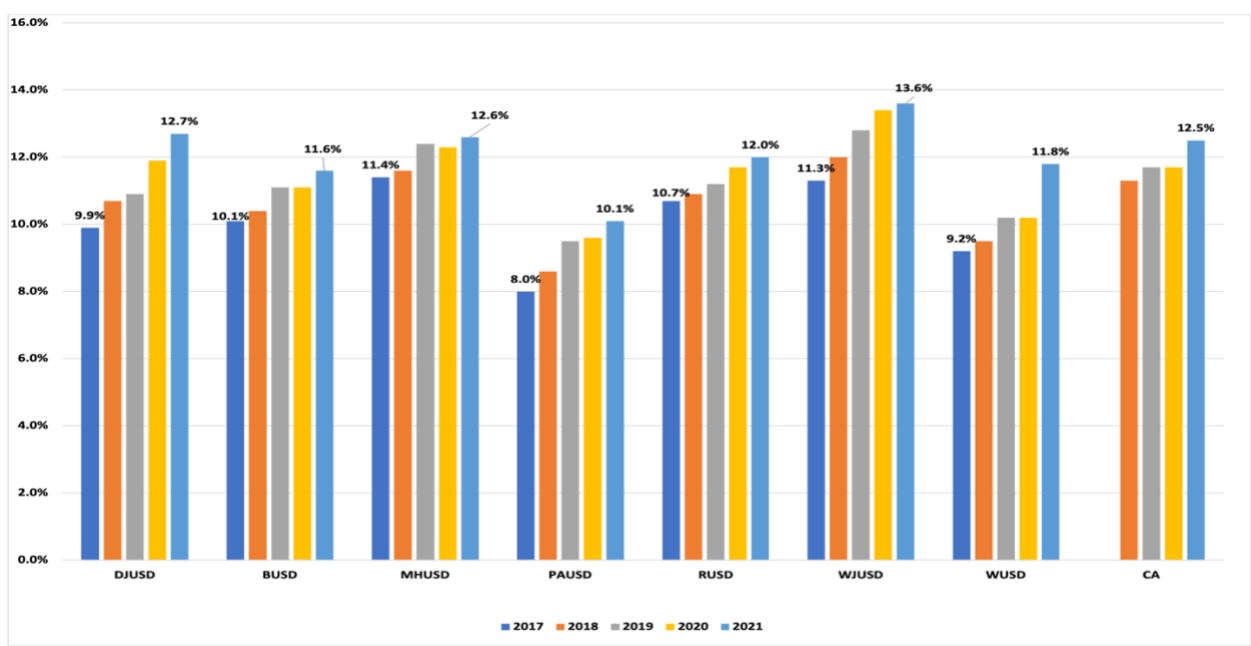
**Source:** California Department of Education DataQuest 2021: <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

In districts where trends like this exist, it is often indicative that there are few options for support for students who are experiencing challenges in the academic program and thus special education is seen as one of the only options for additional support.

This appears to be part of the reason for the increase in enrollment for students with IEPs in DJUSD but it is also a district that families move to due to the reputation of their full inclusion program which is also a reason for the increase. To further investigate this large increase in the students with IEPs over the years, we looked at the overall percentage of the total enrollment of the district of students with disabilities/IEPs.

Figure 3 shows the students with disabilities as a percentage of the total enrollment compared with the peer districts and the State of CA. When comparing DJUSD's percent of students with disabilities with other similar districts in California and the state as a whole, we see that all of the districts and the state have experienced increases over the five years. In 2021, DJUSD had the second highest percent of students with disabilities of the peer districts and was above the state average.

**Figure 3. DJUSD Percentage of Students with Disabilities as a Percentage of Total Enrollment Compared with that of Peer Districts in FYs 2017-2021**



Source: California Department of Education Dashboard 2021: <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/>

The overall percentage of growth in the percent of students with disabilities in relation to the total enrollment in DJUSD and across the peer districts and the state of CA from 2017 to 2021 is:

- DJUSD 2.8%
- BUSD 1.5%
- MHUSD 1.2%
- PAUSD 2.1%
- RUSD 1.3%
- WJUSD 2.3%
- WUSD 2.6%
- CA 1.2% (2018-2021)

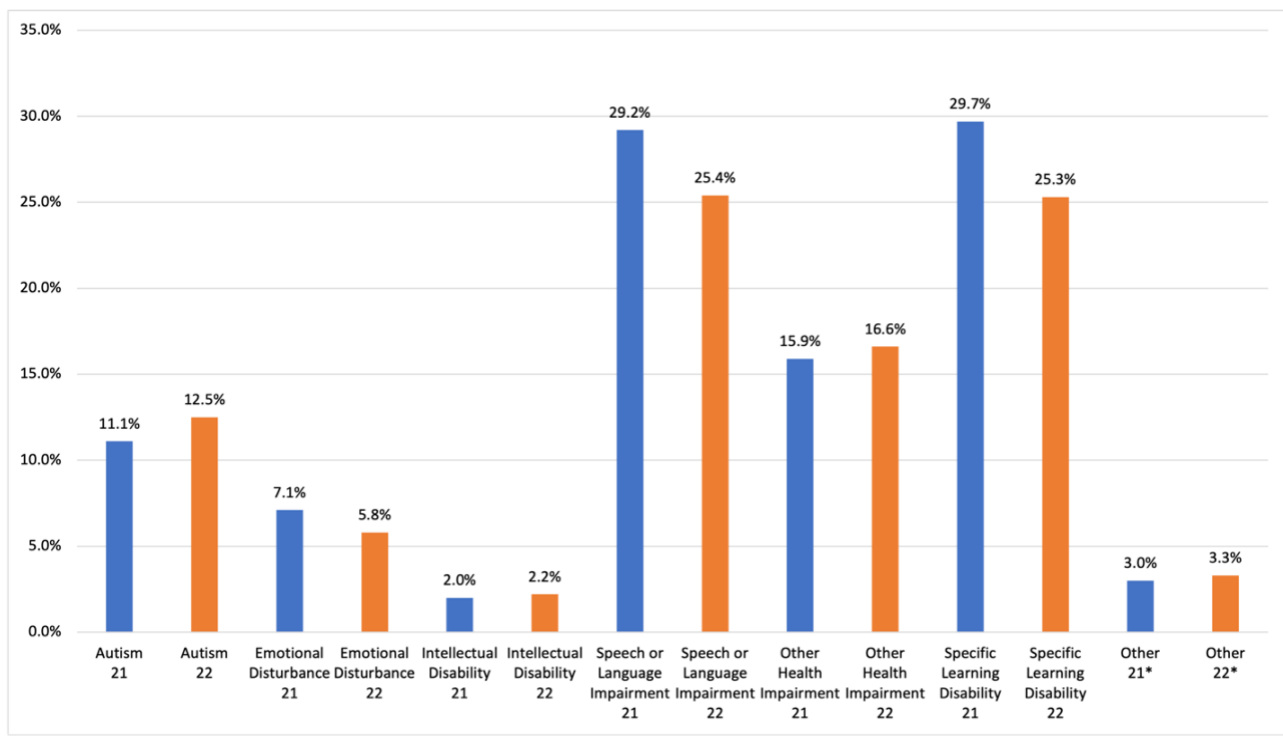
This data indicates that:

- DJUSD has had the largest rate of growth across the peer districts and state of CA from 2017 to 2021 in the percent of students with disabilities.
- This data paired with the increase in the cumulative enrollment of students with disabilities compared with the decrease in total enrollment from 2017-2022 (Figure 2) points to an over enrollment into special education in DJUSD.
- While the percentage of students with disabilities currently is not considered overly high, districts that have a high focus on inclusion typically have lower rates of students being referred for special education services due to the increased accessibility and support in the general education classes and other options for interventions being provided.
- The increased need for special education placements over the last two years indicates that the additional supports and/or interventions were not sufficient to support the needs of the students who were struggling in general education and special education placement was where additional support could be accessed.

Other data throughout this report also suggests that the system of supports for students who are struggling is in its infancy and just beginning to develop other options for students who are experiencing challenges with the academics in the district and has not yet yielded any significant results. It is suggested that the District continue to monitor this data to ensure that students who need additional supports are being provided the appropriate levels of interventions, supports, and services.

Figure 4 represents the proportion of disability by incidence in DJUSD for the years 2020-2021 and 2021-22. There has been a slight increase in the categories of autism of 1.4%, intellectual disabilities of 0.2%, other health impaired of 0.7%, and other of 0.3%. There have been decreases in the categories of emotional disturbance of 1.3%, speech/language impairment of 3.8%, specific learning disabilities of 4.4%.

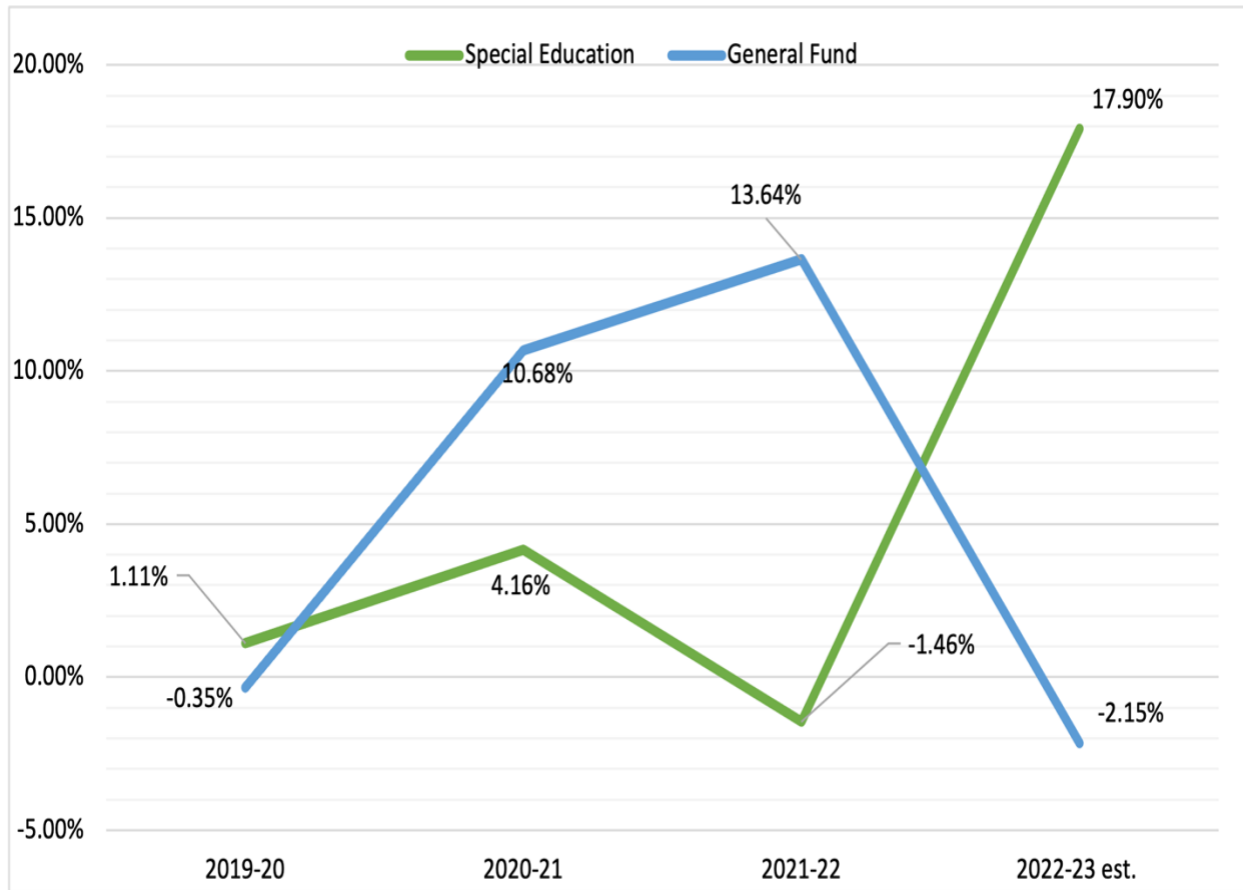
**Figure 4. DJUSD Percentage of Incidence of Disabilities in FYs 2021 and 2022**



Source: District Supplied Data

Figure 5 shows the comparison of year-over-year costs for DJUSD for FYs 20-23 (Projected). For 2022-23 year, the district is projecting a significant increase in Special Education Program expenditures of 17.90% and a decrease in expenditures in the General Fund of 2.15% over the prior year.

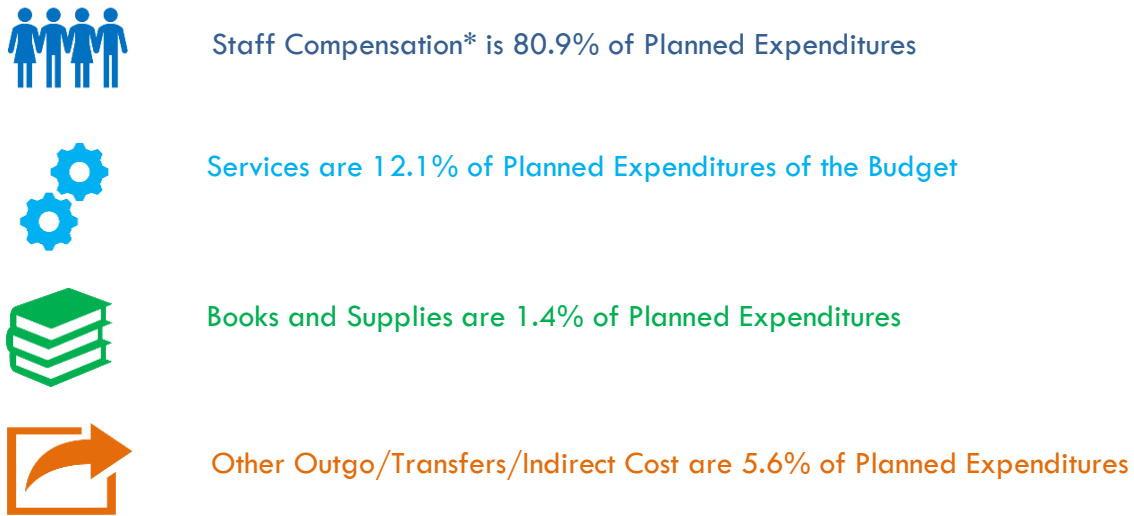
**Figure 5. Comparison of year-over-year cost for the DJUSD Combined General Fund and the special education program expenditures**



Source: District supplied data

Figure 6 shows the DJUSD planned expenditure type as a percentage of the special education program Standardized Account Code Structure (SACS) goal classification 5XXX and restricted general fund. Personnel comprise most of the program expenses, with 80.9% of projected expenditures for 2022-23 budget. While this is below the 85% an average school district spends on staff compensation in the unrestricted general fund, it is not uncommon to see this trend in special education programs due to the need to utilize contracted service providers, non-public schools/agencies to support student needs.

**Figure 6. 2022-23 DJUSD planned expenditure type as a percentage of the special education program Standardized Account Code Structure (SACS) goal classification 5XXX and restricted general fund**








\*staff compensation includes the cost of salary and benefits

Source: District supplied data

Figure 7 shows the special education expenditures over time by type. The total cost of the Special Education Program has a cumulative increase in expenditures of approximately \$4.33 million (22.36%) between 2018-19 and 2022-23 planned.

**Figure 7. DJUSD special education expenditures over time by type, SACS goal classification 5XXX unrestricted and restricted general fund**

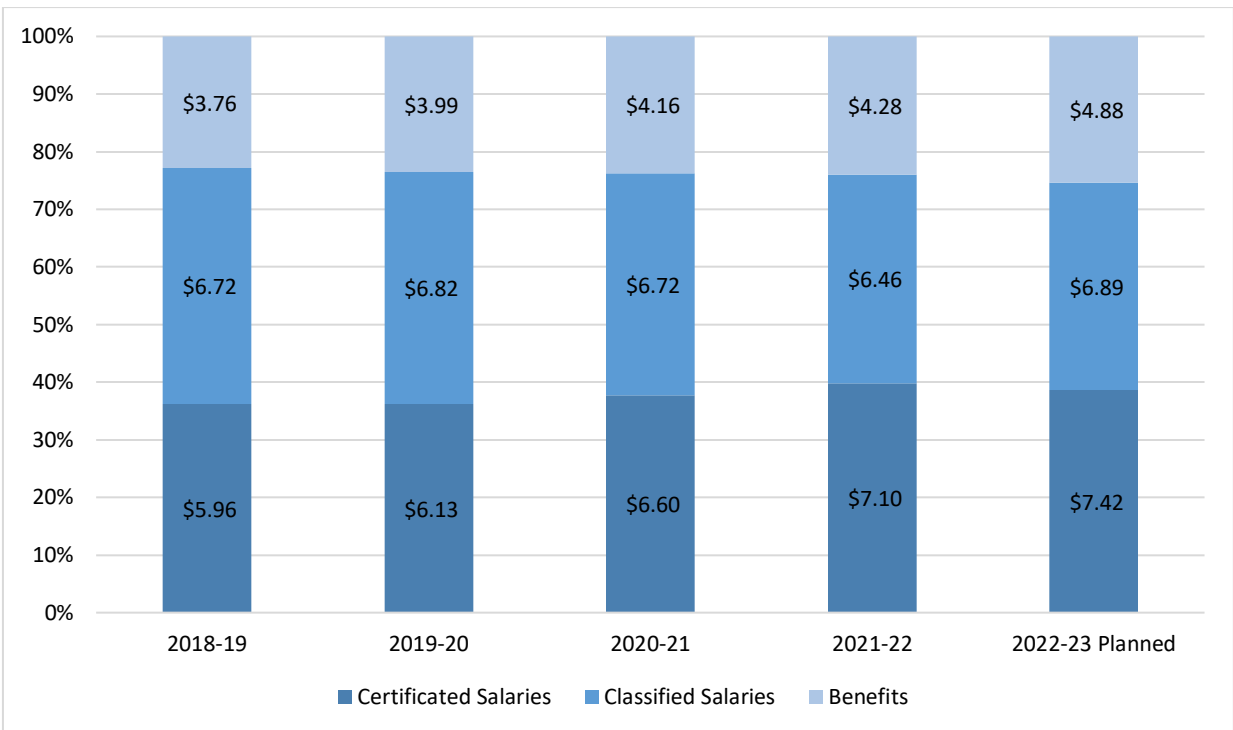
Amount In Millions	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23 Planned
 Staff Compensation Expense	\$16.44	\$16.94	\$17.49	\$18.17	\$19.19
 Services Expense	\$1.77	\$1.57	\$1.85	\$2.68	\$2.88
 Books, Supplies and Equipment Expense	\$.14	\$.08	\$.11	\$.32	\$.33
 Other Outgo/Transfers Indirect Costs	\$1.04	\$1.01	\$.97	\$1.49	\$1.32
 Total Program	\$19.39	\$19.60	\$20.42	\$22.67	\$23.72

Source: District supplied data



Figure 8 represents DJUSD's special education expenditures for compensation in millions for the FYs 2019-2023. Certificated salary cost increased by \$1.29 million (21.04%) when comparing 2018-19 to 2022-23 (planned) and classified salaries remained relatively flat over the same comparison with a \$.07 million (.01%) increase.

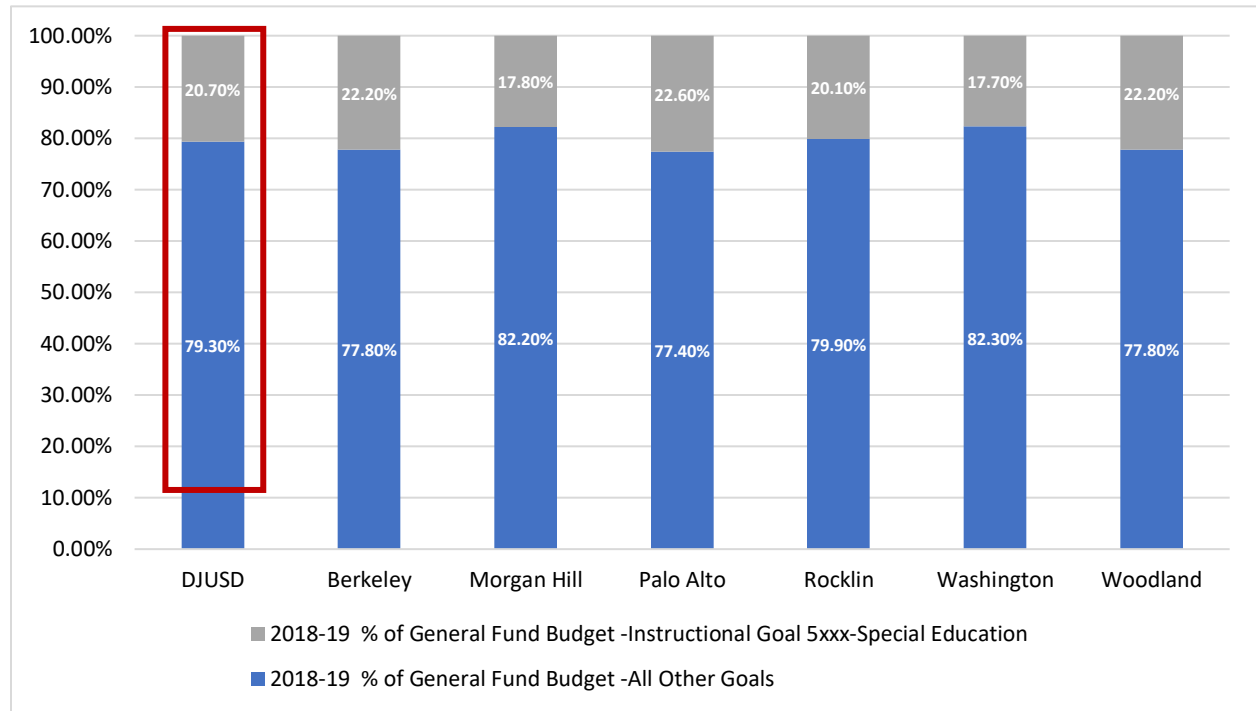
**Figure 8. DJUSD Special Education Expenditures for Compensation in millions FYs 2019-2023**



Source: District supplied data

Figure 9 shows the percent of general fund and instructional goal 5xxx special education expenditures for FY 21 for DJUSD and the peer districts. The District ranks 4th in the comparison group for the percent of General Fund budget expended to support special education in 2020-21.

**Figure 9. DJUSD percent of General Fund and Instructional Goal 5xxx Special Education expenditures compared FY 21 for peer districts**



**Source:** District supplied data

Additional data throughout this report will indicate that issues of adequate staffing are at the forefront of many of the concerns expressed by stakeholders. Comments from interviews, focus groups, and surveys, from staff and parents expressed concerns that the levels of staffing for special education was not sufficient. Teachers expressed grave concerns with the sizes of their

caseloads and case management responsibilities along with required assessments for new referrals and IEPs of existing students. Comments concerning staffing include:

- Paraeducators have been stretched to the point that many have left the district.
- General education staff have expressed concern with the lack of availability of special education staff both for collaborating and planning for supporting the students who are being included but also for providing timely responses to issues of challenging behavior.
- Special education staff also expressed concern for the amount of support they are provided from the district office.
  - The program specialists are stretched too thin with little time to provide support for instructional needs as their time is often consumed with crisis management. The level of administrative support in the special education department is not sufficient for a district this size.
  - One director and two program specialists is not adequate to provide compliance monitoring as well as instructional leadership support to the special education staff. In addition, there are instructional coaches or teachers on special assignment (TOSAs) in general education and English learner departments but there are not any in special education.
  - While these coaches do try to integrate strategies to support all learners, they do not specifically support special education staff. In addition, many special education teachers expressed the desire for administrative support for scheduling IEPs meetings and assisting with filing and tracking paperwork.
- Parents also expressed a desire for a parent coordinator/liaison who would be available to assist parents with navigating the system and assisting when they have an issue. It will be up to the district leadership as they develop short and long term plans for overall systemic improvement in the systems to determine if staffing roles for new or existing staff will be added or reallocated. It is recommended that overall staffing changes be viewed as part of a thoughtful and thorough examination of structural changes that will occur as part of the systemic improvement process and be done in a planful way.

Concerns were also expressed by special education teachers of being district-wide staff who can be reassigned to a new site at any time. These concerns include:

- This has created a lack of belonging to the school site in which staff are working and has hindered efforts to collaborate in a long term way with general education teachers on site.
- The teachers indicated that they are not evaluated by the site principal and are hired by the special education leadership thus impacting their feeling of belonging and being part of the campus where the work.
- Suggestions from teachers and administrators to consider assigning more of the leadership of the special education staff to the site principals.
- While it is important to allow for the flexibility of special education staffing assignments based on the ever changing population of students with IEPs, it is recommended that

developing a more collaborative model of supervision and support for special education staff between the special education department and site leadership be implemented.

As the recommendations in this report suggest, there is a need for a re-examination of the system of supports and service that currently exists in the district. The successes of the "Davis Full Inclusion" model should be celebrated but the challenges that have come about over the last two years as well as the evolution of the research and evidence-base for improved methods and strategies for educational success for all students, creates an opportunity to take a thoughtful and deliberate approach to systemic improvement. It is recommended that the district create a strategic approach to engaging all stakeholders in developing this new and more collaborative approach to inclusion that truly builds a system that will support all learners to achieve their greatest potential.

## In Their Own Voices

### Summary of feedback from focus groups, interviews, and surveys related to Theme 1:

Summary of feedback from **Staff**:

#### Strengths:

- *Staff work very hard to support student needs.*
- *Staff care deeply about their students.*

#### Challenges

- *There is not enough staff to meet the student needs.*
- *Staff vacancies not being filled due to lack of available applicants.*
- *Our caseloads and case management responsibilities are too high to manage along with all of the meetings, paperwork, and assessments for which they are responsible.*
- *Our program specialists are spread way too thin and they spend all of their time putting out fires. It is sometimes difficult to get responses to our questions in a timely fashion.*

Summary of feedback from **Parents**:

#### Strengths

- *Children are making progress.*
- *Children have access to different services and supports.*
- *Appreciate the access to full inclusion.*
- *At the school level - incredible collaboration with all of the inclusion resources (case managers, paras) to the mainstream teachers, counselors, Vice/Principals. We've experienced nothing short of awesome.*

### **Challenges**

- *There sometimes doesn't seem to be enough staff to support the IEP needs.*
- *Due to issues of communication, frequent suggestions were made about hiring a special education parent coordinator/liaison who could help parents to navigate the system, paperwork, and provide resources and training.*
- *There seems to be a need for a more coordinated system of gathering and sharing information and providing information and reports before IEP meetings.*
- *I do not always receive the reports for the IEP meeting prior to the meeting so I do not feel prepared to fully participate in the meeting.*

### **Why It Matters**

**Design and costs.** The cost of special education services is driven by factors that include, but are not limited to, the number of students, the way services are provided, the quality and responsiveness of such services to meet students' needs, and a district's systematic organization of instructional services and support staff.

Throughout the United States, special education programs are often cited as being costly but having varying degrees of reported impact and effectiveness. Districts that have been able to create highly effective special education programs have:

- put efficient processes in place,
- invested in building staff capacity to complete critical functions and offer high-quality activities, and
- staffed at appropriate, cost-effective levels that are aligned with student needs.
- routinely review trends on the incidence of disability by type over time to find when the district may need to create or phase out programs and mitigate potential areas of over-identification.

**Best first instruction in the general curriculum.** Addressing challenges with the notion of "best first instruction in the general curriculum" will help remedy some of the problems that occur in

special education: the over-identification of students in certain ethnic groups, the large numbers of students who might be given the “disability” label and the challenges schools face when their special education enrollments are high and funding for specialized supports and services is increasingly limited.<sup>2</sup>

Studies have found that the single most consistently significant predictor of academic achievement for students with disabilities, despite the local education agency, grade level, and content area, is the performance of general education students.<sup>3</sup> Successful inclusion of the students with IEPs in the general education classroom also depends upon:

- Creating an optimal environment for best first teaching through implementing a district-wide Multi-Tiered System of Supports model (Theme 1) which includes:
  - The supports and services being in place to provide access to the general education instruction through the use of appropriate accommodations and differentiation designed to address the learning needs of all the students in the classroom.
  - The use of the principles of Universal Design for Learning in developing lessons which are designed to provide options in how students engage with content, understand content through different representations, and show their understanding of content through multiple means of action and expression.
  - Use of these will empower special education service providers to have a rich learning environment with options and embedded supports to tie Specialized Academic Instructional strategies to in an inclusive and holistic way.
  - Additionally, these global instructional supports will contribute to all staff members and stakeholders having clarity and feeling ownership, which will support the learning of all students and ultimately provide greater access for students with disabilities.

**Staffing costs.** As with most K–12 education, personnel comprises the majority of program expenditures. An important part of ensuring that special education services are cost-effective and of high quality is utilizing staffing ratios, performing routine reviews of staffing levels and assignments, and analyzing the effectiveness of position functions in terms of student needs.

**Enrollment.** The cost of special education services is driven by factors that include, but are not limited to:

- the number of students,

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<sup>2</sup> Balcom, F., 2011

<sup>3</sup> Malmgren, K., 2005

- the way services are provided,
- the quality and responsiveness of such services to meet students' needs, and
- the district's systematic organization of instructional services and support staff.

If the enrollment of students receiving special education services continues to increase and expenditures do not adjust in proportion with enrollment, there will continue to be an imbalance between the increases in costs for the special education program compared with those for DJUSD's overall educational program. Growth in this imbalance will create budget tension over time.

**Data.** None of the recommendations proposed in this report can be achieved without data collection, analysis, and accessibility. For districts to make sound decisions, they must base those decisions on data that is collected and analyzed regularly. Additionally, data should be easily accessible to staff and the public at large. The transparency and accessibility of district data builds trust with stakeholders and leads to beneficial conversations that can improve student outcomes.

## Recommendations

***Recommendation 1: As part of the overall district strategic planning process, it will be important to review the roles and responsibilities of all instructional staff, related service personnel, and administrative support to determine where each type of staff position fits into the system of supports and how to best utilize the skills and expertise in the most efficient and effective way.***

Part of ensuring alignment of a system is being thoughtful and proactive when implementing new initiatives. Carefully planning for use of staff and providing the appropriate training ensures that all staff are working together and part of the system. By doing this, existing staff may be utilized in a more effective and efficient manner and the need for new staff may be greatly reduced.

***Recommendation 2: The District should develop a process to routinely analyze special education program expenditures to determine areas of cost savings and proactively manage its Special Education annual Maintenance of Effort (MOE) to ensure annual requirements are met.***

This will be especially important since pandemic related factors such as school closures and hybrid learning models may have had an impact on expenditure levels. For additional guidance on managing the Special Education MOE see the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team Fiscal Alert found here <https://www.fcmat.org/PublicationsReports/Fiscal-Alert-Special-Education-MOE-4-2021.pdf>

Additionally, federal relief and stimulus aid bills have provided a welcomed and vital resource to local education agencies to address the impacts of COVID-19 on students, families, and educators.

The range of activities that can be supported by these funds is broad and while welcomed, these funds are one-time in nature and must be used over the course of the next two years. Therefore, careful planning and consideration of how best to leverage these funds to support student well-being and learning is called for in order to optimize positive systemic impacts for students.

***Recommendation 3: Annually review trends on the incidence of disabilities by type to be proactive in determining what programs the district considers creating or phasing out, as well as mitigate the potential of over identification.***

The District should consider further study and disaggregation of the special education data. Disaggregation may reveal systemic weaknesses in special education placements and instructional practices. Example areas to explore are:

- Review the District's identification practices ensuring consistency across the District.
- Explore the variances between statewide and District incidence of disability rates, to ensure that current identification practices are not contributing to over identification of certain disabilities.

***Recommendation 4: Adopt a comprehensive decision-making model to ensure that supports for students with IEPs are based on support needs, not personnel needed.***<sup>4</sup>

Often districts use paraprofessionals to support related services for students with IEPs. While paraprofessionals, when appropriately trained and supervised, provide specific supports to students, these supports should be supplemental in nature. In considering the use of paraprofessionals, it is important to first explore other resources and supports available to determine if the use of paraprofessional services is the most appropriate option.<sup>5</sup> Universal Design for Learning which is part of the foundation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports, suggest many alternatives to assigning a paraprofessional that benefits all students, which include:

- Using cooperative learning practices with structure supports
- Visual schedule and supports
- Task analysis support
- Teaching self-management strategies
- Increasing training to existing staff in making accommodations
- Using assistive technology to assist the student
- Utilizing co-teaching with two licensed teachers<sup>6</sup>

***Recommendation 5: Actively engage in proactively planning for staffing shortages and increasing retention of staff.***

The Learning Policy Institute and the Center for Great Teachers and Leaders (GTL Center) have developed a [Solutions Toolkit for Teacher Shortages](#). In addition, the GTL Center has resources

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<sup>4</sup> Mueller, P. H., 2001

<sup>5</sup> KSDE, 2018

<sup>6</sup> KSDE, 2018)



devoted to shortages in special education teachers. The [Analyzing Special Education Teacher Shortages: Data Tool for Practitioners](#) includes a tool for collecting and analyzing data along with strategies for remediating the issues. The GTL Center has also partnered with the CEEDAR Center to develop a policy brief on [Preparing and Retaining Effective Special Education Teachers: Short-Term Strategies for Long-Term Solutions](#) and [Short-Term Strategies for Dealing With Shortages of Special Education Teachers](#)<sup>7</sup> which includes strategies that can be implemented at a district level.

## Resources for Theme 2

### Special Education MOE

- Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) Fiscal Alert found at: <https://www.fcmat.org/PublicationsReports/Fiscal-Alert-Special-Ed-MOE-4-2021.pdf>

### Recruitment and Retention

- Center for Great Teachers and Leaders (GTL Center) have developed a
  - [Solutions Toolkit for Teacher Shortages](#).
  - In addition, the GTL Center has resources devoted to shortages in special education teachers. The [Analyzing Special Education Teacher Shortages: Data Tool for Practitioners](#) includes a tool for collecting and analyzing data along with strategies for remediating the issues.
- The GTL Center has also partnered with the CEEDAR Center to develop a policy brief on:
  - [Preparing and Retaining Effective Special Education Teachers: Short-Term Strategies for Long-Term Solutions](#) and
  - [Short-Term Strategies for Dealing With Shortages of Special Education Teachers](#).

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<sup>7</sup> Kamman, M., 2019

## Theme 3: PROCESS

### *Policy, Procedures, and Communication*

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**DJUSD's special education department has developed structures and written policies and procedures but is lacking clear processes for consistently updating, communicating, implementing, and monitoring the use of these to guide consistency and efficiency in the provision of special education services.**

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### **Strengths**

WestEd's review of the district's IEPs revealed that, in terms of basic compliance, most of the staff understand how to complete the components of the IEP. The data shows that 85% of the IEPs reviewed indicate that the staff understand how to develop Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance which include data and contain the pertinent current classroom information that paints a picture of the child. This speaks to a procedural knowledge of ensuring all pieces of the IEP are complete and that data included in the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance guides the development of the goals and services.

Additionally:

- 91% of reviewed IEPs included information from the parents
- 91% of reviewed IEPs included goals that are measurable
- 68% of reviewed IEPs clearly stated how the disability impacts the student in accessing the curriculum
- 85% of reviewed IEPs contained information on present levels with quantitative data
- 77% of reviewed IEPs contained goals that reflected the needs as described in the present levels and their impact on the disability.

## Key Discoveries

- A key issue identified in the focus groups, interviews, and surveys was that staff (particularly new staff) were sometimes unclear about their defined roles and responsibilities, special education procedures, and where to locate the information or seek assistance.
- The District's procedural guide, which defines its' special education policies, procedures, and staff roles needs to be updated and a process for engaging staff in ongoing review and use of procedures is needed.
- A consistent theme throughout the IEP reviews, focus groups, interviews, and surveys was the lack of a common understanding of Specialized Academic Instruction.
  - Some staff (both general and special education) indicated that they need to have a better understanding of the overall purpose of special education, which is to deliver Specialized Academic Instruction and related services to students who have a disability and whose disability adversely impacts them in accessing the curriculum, and how it works within an inclusive environment.
- Policies and procedures for pre-referral interventions and referral for special education are in need of updating and aligning with the Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework to streamline the process for improving alignment in accessing supports and services across the system.
- As stated above, WestEd's review of the district's IEPs revealed that, in terms of basic compliance, most of the staff understand how to complete the components of the IEP.
  - But there were several consistent issues that were noted throughout the IEPs reviewed. These included:
    - Limited understanding of the connection between measurable goals and the student's needs. Goals were developed from an academic standpoint not necessarily related to the individual needs of the student.
    - Lack of a common understanding of Specialized Academic Instruction, its purpose, and how it is delivered.
    - A clear Potential Harmful Effects statement that addresses the specific student's needs, potential harm, and considerations for determining placement was missing in all reviewed IEPs.
    - Limited support identified for dually identified students who are English learners and a student with a disability.

## Data Review and Analysis

The following data expands upon the Key Discoveries.

**Consistent Policies and Procedures.** As discussed in Theme 1, there is a need for increased alignment across the DJUSD referral process for special education (Student Study Team process) and the Multi-Tiered System of Supports process.

In interviews, focus groups, and surveys, both general and special education teachers reported the following:

- That the time it took for a student to receive services after a referral for special education was lengthy and detrimental to the student's outcome.
- Staff sent a clear message regarding their desire for a quicker, more efficient referral process, and
- Expressed a desire for a process for staff to develop a deeper knowledge of pre-referral interventions and strategies that support students when they struggle in their classroom.

Updating and aligning these processes to clarify how the Student Study Team process and Multi-Tiered System of Supports processes interact would improve the efficiency of the intervention processes and provide additional information about the student's needs from the attempted pre-referral interventions. This creates an opportunity for DJUSD to engage with teachers and administrators collaboratively to transform practices around students with disabilities and students who are experiencing challenges with both behavior and academics but do not qualify for special education services so that all students are better served. This can be achieved by:

- Exploring and expanding Universal Design for Learning to provide the best first instruction which makes learning more accessible for all students.
- Building staff capacity to be proactive and create lessons which are accessible for all learners rather than reactive to students who are struggling with more traditional one-size-fits-all instruction.
- Creating a collaborative tiered support system with interventions which are monitored and adjusted when needed and aligning all with inclusive practices and supports will help to ensure that all students are receiving the supports to be successful.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP) Review.** As described in the previous section, WestEd's educational benefit review process is different from a compliance review. A compliance review monitors for the inclusion of components of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the IEP; an educational benefit review looks for interconnectedness of the components. The main components to determine educational benefit were:

- Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance, to include the impact of the disability on the student's ability to access the general curriculum
- Measurable Goals
- Specialized Academic Instruction

- Least Restrictive Environment
- Consideration of Potential Harmful Effects

As previously stated, WestEd's review of the district's IEPs revealed that, in terms of basic compliance, most of the staff understand how to complete the components of the IEP. In addition to the strengths listed above, the IEPs reviewed also contained some issues that should be addressed to mitigate any possible compliance issues:

- 75% of IEPs reviewed for students identified as English learners **did not** have linguistically appropriate goals.
- 100% of IEPs reviewed for students identified as English learners **did not** have their language needs described.

From an educational benefit perspective, however, our review showed that in general, there is not a clear understanding of the role of the special education teacher and the Specialized Academic Instruction the student needs to access the general curriculum. Clear descriptions of the educational needs that stem from the child's disability and information about the Specialized Academic instruction are missing from the IEPs. There were several consistent issues that were noted throughout the IEPs reviewed including:

- Limited understanding of the connection of measurable goals and the student's needs.
- Goals were not always individualized for students' diverse needs. Instead, at times they were tied to skills well beyond what would be attainable based on the stated present levels of the student.
  - When making individualized goals based on modified standards, district educators need to explore ways to create goals at the intersection of students' present level of understanding and the prerequisite skills of their grade level standards.
- A clear Potential Harmful Effects statement that addresses the specific student's needs, potential harm, and considerations for determining placement was missing in all reviewed IEPs.
- Limited support for dually identified students who are English learners and a student with a disability.
- Too many goals developed in many of the IEPs to be achieved within a year.
- Although 91% of IEPs reviewed contained parent concerns, they were often limited and brief.

### **Measurable Goals**

Measurable goals must demonstrate a correlation between the needs listed in the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance and the goal. The goal needs to describe the skill and level of performance that will be achieved in the year allowing the child to make progress in the general curriculum.

Of the IEPs reviewed,

- 77% show goals that reflect the student needs as described in the present levels and impact on the disability.

- However, the impact statement that describes how a student's disability affects involvement and progress in the general curriculum was not always clear regarding the specific student and there was little connection to the disability, service, and desired outcomes.

### **Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI)**

The IEPs reviewed did not specifically describe the Specialized Academic Instruction as to what the teacher or other types of supplementary supports and services will be provided. While the goals tell what the student will do, the IEPs lack a description of the specific supports and services to be delivered to help the students achieve the goals.

### **IEP-at-a-Glance**

General education teachers reported that there is not a consistent process for how and when this information is provided to the general education teacher. Sometimes it arrives via email prior to classes beginning and sometimes they receive it a few weeks into the year. Many of the comments indicated that the information was often not specific enough and didn't contain enough information about the student's needs and how to best accommodate them. Teachers frequently commented that they would like to have more time to collaborate with the special education teachers as the information they were able to receive from discussions with the special education teachers was very helpful.

## **In Their Own Voices**

### **Summary of feedback from focus groups, interviews, and surveys related to Theme 3:**

Summary of feedback from **Staff:**

#### **Strengths:**

- *Staff work very hard to support student needs.*
- *Staff care deeply about their students and want to make improvements in processes to support their needs.*
- *Having assigned IEP days for each site is very helpful.*

#### **Challenges**

- *Our procedures and policies are not being consistently followed across buildings to ensure equitable access to supports.*

- *Staff do not have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in supporting the needs of students with disabilities.*
- *Communication and feedback loops are lacking and should be developed to allow for sharing and updating information in a bi-directional way.*
- *The IEP at a glance and sharing process differs from teacher to teacher. There should be a consistent and streamlined process for sharing the IEP information.*
- *The definitions for types of accommodations and how they are applied varies from teacher to teacher. Need more consistency and understanding about these.*

#### Summary of feedback from **Parents**:

##### **Strengths**

- *Appreciate the time and effort that staff put into the IEP and designing the supports that are needed for students.*
- *Children have access to different services and supports.*

##### **Challenges**

- *The school needs to have better communication between the special education teacher and regular teacher and to the parents.*
- *More communication with parents about their student's progress is needed.*
- *Provide more information for teachers and paraeducators on the types of disabilities and the best approaches to use for each.*
- *There needs to be more opportunities for providing input on the needs of our students and places for parents to connect with each other.*
- *Paperwork for the IEP is often not shared before the IEP meeting so that parents can review and understand the information. This makes it difficult for us to truly participate in the IEP.*

## Why It Matters

**Consistent policies and procedures.** Navigating the special education process can be difficult. Facilitating an effective process starts with developing a plan for special education that focuses on concrete steps to prioritize efforts, allocate resources effectively, and align stakeholders and staff to the goals of the special education department. These should include:

- The use of regular, ongoing planning which engages a continuous improvement process to continually use program and student data to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.
- Establishing consistent policies, procedures, and processes ensures that students with disabilities or suspected disabilities will be identified, evaluated, and provided appropriate educational services in the Least Restrictive Environment and in accordance with federal, state, and district requirements.
- Training on these policies helps to clearly define the special education rules, regulations, procedures, and protocols for schools and staff to follow.

While a strong and engaged district office is crucial to achieving significant school improvement, leadership must be distributed to build a solid commitment among all staff and stakeholders. Principals, teachers, school staff, and parents can all play a role in the effective leadership of a school site.<sup>8</sup> In addition, district leadership has been found to have a positive influence on turning around low-performing schools.<sup>9</sup> The District supports overarching policy and procedure coherence and can ensure that schools have the necessary resources to maintain improvements that help advance the achievement of students with disabilities and their peers.<sup>10</sup>

**Procedure manual.** DJUSD's special education policies, procedures, and protocols must be reviewed, frequently updated, and communicated effectively and so that they improve the efficiency of the overall special education services thus improving the outcomes of students receiving special education services.

- By utilizing a procedure manual that outlines policies, procedures, and protocol clearly and consistently, staff are not only able to create compliant IEPs, but they also provide the Specialized Academic Instruction that results in educational benefit for the student.

### In Their Own Voices

*“Communication needs to be clear from the district office about policies and procedures. It is so challenging when each school has a different policy and procedure for how things are done.”*

School Site Staff

<sup>8</sup> Shannon & Bylsma, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Baroody, 2011

<sup>10</sup> Fullan, 2004; Huberman, 2011; Lane, 2009



- In addition, the implementation of a procedure manual ensures consistent and equitable practices in special education throughout DJUSD.

**Specialized Academic instruction.** The mandate of Specialized Academic Instruction can be found in IDEA, which defines Specialized Academic Instruction as:

*adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction (i) to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability and (ii) to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children.<sup>11</sup>*

Specialized Academic Instruction is not an instructional strategy but rather an educational plan that is individually designed by the IEP team to support the student's access to the general education curriculum and to meet specific goals.

Improved organizational outcomes for special education begin with students with disabilities receiving appropriate and targeted Specialized Academic Instruction, which is the vehicle that ensures students with disabilities have access to grade-level academic standards. For students with disabilities to receive high-quality instruction and services, Specialized Academic Instruction must be clearly defined so all staff understand their roles and responsibilities in delivering specialized academic instruction. This involves:

- Adapting instructional content, design lessons, and methods of delivery to address the individual needs of each student with a disability.
- Viewing the IEP as an instructional framework that specifically outlines a student's current level of performance, develops goals based on the needs identified, and provides the Specialized Academic Instruction to meet those goals.
- Focusing the Specialized Academic Instruction on providing what is needed to access the curriculum, not reteaching.
- In addition, the IEP must define the role of the special education teacher, their role in providing or supporting Specialized Academic Instruction, and describe the Least Restrictive Environment and inclusive practices.

**Communication.** Communication in schools has been widely studied in terms of type, frequency, and medium. Effective communication has been shown to improve productivity, increase job satisfaction, and have a positive effect on absenteeism and turnover rates.<sup>12</sup> Effective communication leads to improved organizational outcomes. Bi-directional communication protocols addressing the Mission, Vision, Values and Goals and the continuous improvement aim statement

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<sup>11</sup> Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1990

<sup>12</sup> Miller, 1990

are essential to implementation and sustainability of the system. All invested partners must be actively engaged to ensure they have a voice and role in the system—family, students, educators, community partners, etc.

**Educationally beneficial IEPs.** A compliant, educationally beneficial IEP is the foundation for providing Specialized Academic Instruction in the Least Restrictive Environment for students with disabilities. Many DJUSD staff voiced their concerns regarding the lack of professional development for IEP development, and from the data, IEP reviews confirm this is needed. Professional development in the area of special education policy and procedures is an ongoing process that requires annual updates, reviews, and checks for fidelity of implementation.

In 1982 the US Supreme Court ruled in *Board of Education v. Rowley* that:

- an IEP must be reasonably calculated to enable a child with disabilities to receive educational benefit.
- A free appropriate public education (FAPE) and the Least Restrictive Environment became the guiding standard to ensure a child is afforded an opportunity to benefit from the education provided to them. In 2016, the US Supreme Court expanded this standard in *Andrew F. v. Douglas County School District* and ruled that an IEP must be calculated to enable a child to make progress.
- This ruling set the bar that an IEP must require meaningful educational benefit.
- For an IEP to meet the standard of meaningful educational benefit, it must be a meaningful cohesive document that is utilized as an instructional framework as a guide for ensuring that the child is benefiting from the education provided.

Least Restrictive Environment is a principle that determines where a student will spend their time AND how special education services will be provided. Least Restrictive Environment does not refer to a specific setting but rather identifies what services and supports a student needs to access the curriculum and where and how those services and supports can be provided. Placement is the continuum of services that ranges from the least restrictive setting to the most restrictive setting.

**Within a district's definition of a continuum of services, district educators must adopt an inclusive mindset, set of beliefs, and corresponding priorities to keep an orientation toward inclusion and inclusive opportunities for all students, even those with the most complex needs.**

## Recommendations

The following recommendations address special education policy and process.

***Recommendation 1: Consider updating and aligning the special education department's vision and mission to the re-designed vision and mission of the district.***

As defined under Theme 1, a clear vision and mission will provide a common understanding of the purposes and goals for the special education program and will address concerns regarding a consistent direction by school staff.

- Vision and mission statements answer the following questions:
  - *How do we align with and support the district mission, vision, values, and goals?*
  - *Why do we exist?*
  - *Who do we serve?*
  - *What is our purpose?*
  - *How do we aspire to serve? and*
  - *What are our values?*
- Include all stakeholders in the development of the statements, share widely, and revisit and reiterate often.

In addition, establishing a communication plan for the special education department related to its mission, vision, values, and goals using a process as outlined in Theme 1, Recommendation 1 will ensure that staff have a voice in developing and disseminating the DJUSD policies.

***Recommendation 2: Establish a special education district improvement team that aligns with the district vision and mission, utilizes data collected, articulates efforts, and communicates results to site teams, district departments, and the Board of Education through a strategic plan.***

Convene a team of stakeholders to develop a new strategic plan for special education as a part of the overall district strategic plan development. Collaboratively create agreed-upon goals and determine a process by which the department investigates barriers, utilizes a cycle of improvement for positive change, and implements a data collection process that measures change. Share the strategic plan with all stakeholders and invite them to be part of the process.

***Recommendation 3: Establish a team that is responsible for the reviewing, updating, communicating, training, implementing, and oversight of a policy, procedure, and protocol manual on an ongoing basis.***

The special education manual should be the “go-to” document that ensures consistent direction and interpretation for a variety of audiences. It will allow principals to deliver consistent messages both within and across sites and will assist new staff as well as existing staff with a clear reference of DJUSD’s processes. Ensure the manual is updated yearly or as needed when the state’s special education policies change.

- Distribute the manual and build staff capacity for implementation. Once complete, widely distribute (or post online) a comprehensive special education manual that assists local and district staff in consistently implementing the procedures that support special education policy.
- The manual can be used to:
  - build and reinforce a common understanding of special education policies and procedures.
  - Operationalize the policies and procedures and ensure the policies and procedures manual operationalizes the procedures for identifying, evaluating, placing, servicing, and exiting students with disabilities from special education.
  - Translate the policy decisions to classroom practice as appropriate.
- Develop a plan for the implementation of district wide processes for pre-referral interventions and referral to special education that incorporates consistent expectations and protocols.

***Recommendation 4: Define Specialized Academic Instruction for staff and administrators.***

Defining the purpose of special education and Specialized Academic Instruction will help clarify the roles and responsibilities of all staff. Providing a clear vision and corresponding examples for what Specialized Academic Instruction is and is not, how it will support students with disabilities, and who is responsible for what will facilitate appropriate access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities. These definitions should also define what delivery of Specialized Academic Instruction looks like within a classroom employing Universal Design for Learning,

including but not limited to, the specific engagement strategies, representation options, and expression choices individual students on IEPs need to be successful in general education programming.

***Recommendation 5: Work with and align to the Multi-Tiered System of Supports implementation redesign process (Theme 1) to examine the SST/pre-referral/referral process to be an aligned part of the overall process.***

In working together on this process, DJUSD can uncover the root cause of concerns about the pre-referral/referral process and determine any challenges to, gaps or discrepancies in, or lack of understanding of the process. An optimal pre-referral intervention process uses a problem-solving team to identify, develop, and implement effective interventions and teaching strategies to support students at risk and to provide teachers with support throughout the process. Furthermore, such a process reflects a highly collaborative approach that treats policy, process, and practice within general education as a service to all students.

***Recommendation 6: Train all staff on their roles in the special education process and clearly define where and how special education supports fit in the Multi-Tiered System of Supports process.***

Identification, evaluation, placement, and provision of services are inconsistent across DJUSD. Providing the training of both special and general educators on the special education process will, ideally, articulate the pre-referral and identification processes, evaluation and eligibility determination, IEP development, monitoring and accountability processes, exit criteria for students, staffing roles, responsibilities, ratios, parent roles and responsibilities, district policies, and other related topics. Training would provide clarity and guidance regarding the entire program for administrators, teachers, paraeducators, parents, and students.

***Recommendation 7: Build the capacity of site principals to fulfill their role as an LEA representative at an IEP meeting by providing training and coaching site leaders to take on more responsibility for this role.***

Site principals have a role to fulfill as a district administrator during an IEP meeting and as the instructional leader for all of the students on their campus. While some principals are comfortable with and fulfilling this role already, many are not. Building the capacity of principals to understand their role and responsibility to oversee and ensure that the needs of the students receiving special education services are being appropriately addressed. Professional development as well as coaching support will be necessary to build the overall capacity of site leaders to assume more of this responsibility.

***Recommendation 8: Provide training on the IEP process through an inclusive lens rather than a compliance lens.***

DJUSD has the knowledge and skills to develop compliant IEPs. However, although mostly compliant, the IEPs are not always cohesive documents that provide the instructional frameworks to ensure meaningful educational benefit. Missing from many of the IEPs are clear descriptions of the educational needs that stem from the student's disability and information about the Specialized Academic Instruction and related services the student needs. Train special educators on

developing an IEP that identifies a student's needs and includes Specialized Academic Instruction to meet those needs. This process can include the following:

- Develop and implement training for staff that reinforces that an IEP should be an instructional framework. Its components should be connected rather than simply included — IDEA clearly states that a relationship should exist between an IEP and classroom activities. For an IEP to meet the standard of requiring meaningful educational benefit, it must be a meaningful, cohesive document that can be used as a guide for ensuring the student is benefiting from the education provided.
- Train special educators on developing IEPs that identifies a student's needs and includes the Specialized Academic Instruction and measurable goals to meet those needs.
- Provide training on the educational benefits of developing IEPs that align present levels, needs, goals, and services.
- Include information on how to determine the least restrictive environment of students and the role of the special education teacher.
- Revisit decisions on how the Least Restrictive Environment is determined. Consider coalescing a group to discuss and define Least Restrictive Environment and how to communicate that Least Restrictive Environment is not a place or a setting but, rather, program decisions about what services and supports a student needs to be successful and includes where and how those services will be provided.

***Recommendation 9: Create policies and procedures for identifying, evaluating, and using appropriate instructional practices for students with disabilities who are multilingual learners.***

Addressing and defining common practices related to students with disabilities who are multilingual learners will assist staff in meeting the unique needs of these students. Policies and procedures should include identifying appropriate and consistent pre-referral strategies, differentiating between language learning needs and a disability, implementing a clear referral process for multilingual learners, and appropriate instructional practices.

Appropriate disability identification processes that evaluate the student's disability-related educational needs and not the student's English language skills will help school personnel accurately identify students in need of disability-related services.

- The pre-referral process provides instructional support within the Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework.
- Through the use of comparative data collected in the process, teams can make objective, data-driven decisions about whether to refer a student for an evaluation.
- Additionally, policy needs to make clear that the LEA must provide students with disabilities who are multilingual with both the language assistance and disability-related services they are entitled to under federal law.

These policies and procedures should be developed in collaboration with both the EL staff and the special education staff so as to model practices needed in identifying a multilingual learner with disabilities.

## Resources for Theme 3

### Roles and Responsibilities Resource Recommendations

- Giangreco, M. F., Suter, J. C., Graf, V., (2018) [Roles of Team Members Supporting Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms](#) Appendix F
- Sabia, R., Thurlow, M., (2021). [Understanding the Role of the Paraprofessional in Your Child's Inclusive Classroom](#). TIES Center Brief # 7
- [Paras in Inclusive Schools](#), Stetson & Associates, Inc. 2019
- [What Are the Roles of Principals in Successful Inclusive Schools?](#) Inclusive Schools Network Blog, August 2019.

### Educational Benefit Review Resource Recommendations

- [Fast Five: Five Questions Answered about Educational Benefit Review](#), (2021) National Center for Systemic Improvement.
- [Educational Benefit Review IEP Tool Kit](#), (2021) Matrix Parent Network and Resource Center
- [Educational Benefit Training Module](#), (2018) El Dorado Charter SELPA

### Multilingual Learner Resource Recommendations

- [Improving Outcomes for English Learners with Disabilities](#) SELPA Content Lead. Imperial County SELPA was selected as the Content Lead by CDE and California Collaborative for Education Excellence to provide statewide in-person and virtual training opportunities for teachers, teacher-leads/coaches, support personnel, general & special education service providers, and administrators.
- Resource pages:
  - [Linguistically Appropriate Goals and Objectives](#) Padlet with materials, resources, and training videos.
  - [Pre-referral and Referral Process for ELs with Suspected Disabilities](#) Padlet with materials, resources, and training videos.
    - [Pre-Referral Flowchart](#): Team considerations for use prior to referral of a Multilingual Learner for Initial Special Education Assessment.
  - [Assessment of ELs for Special Education Eligibility](#) Padlet with materials, resources, and training videos.
- [Multilingual Learning Toolkit](#) is an online hub of research-based key principles, instructional practices, and accompanying resources, and is the result of a collaborative effort between

practitioners, experts, and researchers. The key audience for this work is teachers who work with Multilingual Learner children in PreK-3rd Grade as well as program administrators and higher education faculty members.



## Theme 4: INSTRUCTION

### *Increasing Access and Achievement*

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**DJUSD has the opportunity to make systemic changes to allow students with disabilities improved access to inclusive environments in order to positively impact academic and social achievement by recognizing that students with disabilities have a place in the general education classroom and by aligning the supports and services and building staff capacity to provide access and improved progress in the general environment and curriculum.**

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#### Strengths

DJUSD has had a strong commitment to full inclusion since 1989 when they developed services for their students with moderate to severe needs who were being served in self-contained programs run by the Yolo County Office of Education; thus, becoming the first school district in California to start a full inclusion program. In 2018, DJUSD was recognized by the state of California as an Exemplary School District due to its' inclusion program. (Full data for the following statements can be found throughout this theme.)

- DJUSD's rates of inclusion (amount of time that students with disabilities spend in the general education classroom) are above the state average for all ages.

The access to general education classrooms has positively impacted the achievement of the students with disabilities in DJUSD as can be seen by the following data:

- DJUSD's scores on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) statewide assessment in English Language Arts and mathematics for the students with disabilities was higher than the state average and all but one of the peer districts.
- DJUSD's scores for students with disabilities who met the state standard on the California Alternate Assessment was above the state average and most of the peer districts in English Language Arts and mathematics.
- DJUSD's graduation rate for the students with disabilities was highest of the peer districts and just below the state target.

## Key Discoveries

Key data from interviews, focus groups, surveys, and state indicator data.

### Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

- DJUSD is well above the state target for students with IEPs ages 6-21 participating in the general education classroom more than 80% of the time and well under the upper limit target for students for students participating in the general education classroom less than 40% of the time and in separate placements (i.e., separate school, residential facility, homebound/hospital). (Table 1).
- For preschool children with IEPs ages 3-5 years, the district is well above the state target for percentage of students participating in regular early childhood programs and within the target for the amount of time students with IEPs are attending self-contained special education programs from 2016 through 2019 but was outside of the state target in FY 2020. (Table 2).
- When comparing the Least Restrictive Environment data for students ages 6-21 for DJUSD with all of the peer districts, and the state target for FY 2016 through 2020. As compared to the peer districts, DJUSD's rates Least Restrictive Environment Indicator 5A is slightly lower than BUSD and similar to PAUSD and WJUSD but above MHUSD, RUSD, WUSD, and the state of California target for all of the years. (Figure 10).
- The data for the percent of children aged 3 through 5 receiving the majority of special education in a regular early childhood program, indicates that DJUSD was mostly similar to BUSD and PAUSD who are all substantially above the target for all of the years. The rate for DJUSD dropped in FY 2020 but was still above the state target and MHUSD, RUSD, WUSD, and WJUSD. (Figure 11).
- 74% of parents respondents on the survey indicated that they were satisfied with the amount of time their student is included in the general education setting.
- There were also comments from parents who felt that their students were not being given the supports to succeed in the general education classroom leading to a widening achievement and expectation gap.
- Of note, there were also frequent comments from parents and staff regarding the need for some additional options for students who need specialized instruction or a smaller, quieter environment where they can learn.
- Staff indicated that there is a lack of support options, in the inclusive setting, for some students specifically those with behavior challenges.
- Further comments indicated that there is a lack of training and collaboration time for general education teachers with special education teachers to allow for co-planning and supports for included students. Comments included:

- Lack of training for paraeducators and general education staff was frequently mentioned by staff as a challenge.
- Issues with availability of paraeducators and of substitute paraeducators and teachers was frequently mentioned as well as paraeducators have left and it has been difficult to find replacement staff.
- Lack of options for students with severe behavior challenges was frequently mentioned by general education staff as disruptions in their classes, particularly upon returning from closures due to COVID.
- Staff expressed a lack of a common definition or understanding of what “inclusion” means for DJUSD and understanding of their role in supporting students.

### Academic Achievement

- The four-year graduation rate for DJUSD students with disabilities has been at 88% for the last two years which is above the peer districts but is just below the state target of 90%. (Figure 12).
- The scores of students with disabilities on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress for DJUSD is higher than the state average scores and above all of the peer districts scores with the exception of PAUSD in English Language Arts (Figure 13) and mathematics assessment (Figure 16) for FYs 2016-2019.
- The percentage of students with disabilities who met the state standards for English Language Arts on the **California Alternate Assessment** for FYs 2016-2019 for DJUSD was well above the state of California average scores and above all of the peer districts. (Figure 14).
- The achievement gap between the scores for the students with disabilities and the students without disabilities on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress in English Language Arts for DJUSD students for FYs 2016-2021 averaged 47% (with the exception of FY 2021 which may have been impacted by COVID). (Figure 15).
- The percentage of students with disabilities who met the state standards for Mathematics on the **California Alternate Assessment** for FYs 2016-2019 for DJUSD was well above the state of California average scores and above all of the peer districts with the exception of PAUSD. (Figure 17)
- The California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Mathematics achievement gap data for DJUSD students with and without disabilities for FYs 2016-2021 indicates that, with the exception of FY 2021 which may have been impacted by COVID, the average of the gap across the years was 45%. (Figure 18).

### Instruction

Of the staff surveyed:

- 68% indicated that time is **not** allotted for collaboration between general and special education teachers to plan for students with disabilities who are included in the general education classroom.
- 48% of staff surveyed indicated that general education teachers **do not** have the knowledge and skills to accommodate the needs of students who receive special education in their classrooms.
- 74% of staff surveyed indicated that there are **not** sufficient opportunities for general education staff to learn about the behavioral needs and supports for students with disabilities;
- 44% of staff surveyed indicated that there are **not** sufficient opportunities for special education staff to learn about general education curriculum.
- 50% of the administrators surveyed indicated that the current organizational structure in special education **does not** have the potential to support site administrators and site special education teams in ensuring quality education for students with IEPs.
- 67% of the administrators surveyed indicated that staffing ratios for related service providers are **not** adequate to meet the needs of the students with IEPs.
- 83% of the administrators surveyed indicated that there are **not** sufficient professional development opportunities for administrative staff to learn about supporting the needs of students with disabilities.

### Data Review and Analysis

The following data and analysis provide examples of the current status of access, to general education and instructional outcomes, for the students with IEPs in DJUSD.

Some of the following data are from federally defined special education indicators. Targets for most of these indicators established by either the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) or which are set by the states who then monitor the districts for progress towards the targets. The state is required to report the data from the local districts on all of the special education indicators to OSEP which then monitors the state for the progress of their local education agencies (LEAs).

Ongoing monitoring of the achievement gap through assessment data as well the rates in many other areas such as graduation, suspension/expulsion, dropout, attendance, and discipline will help to determine the success of systemic improvement efforts.

Table 1 indicates the data for DJUSD related to the established state targets for the three areas of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) which is Special Education Indicator 5: Education environments (children 6-21):

Percent of children with IEPs aged 6 through 21 served:

- A. Inside the regular class 80% or more of the day.
- B. Inside the regular class less than 40% of the day; and
- C. In separate schools, residential facilities, or homebound/hospital placements. (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(A))

The Table 1 data shows that the data for the Least Restrictive Environment indicator for FY 2016 through 2020 and shows that DJUSD is well above the state target for the target for Least Restrictive Environment indicator 5A, the percent of students who are in the general education environment for 80% or more of their day. For 5B, the percent of students who are in the regular class less than 40% of their day (which should be lower than the state target), DJUSD is under the state target for all of the years and is under the state target for 5C, the percent of students who are in separate placements for all four years.

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**Table 1. DJUSD Compared to the State Targets for School-Age Students with Disabilities within the Least Restrictive Environment, FYs 2016 through 2020**

Year	DJUSD ≥80%	5A State target	DJUSD ≤40%	5B State target	DJUSD separate schools, residential facilities, homebound/ hospital placements	5C State target
2016	65.03%	≥49.20%	8.83%	<24.60%	2.87%	<4.40%
2017	66.26 %	≥50.20%	8.60%	<23.60%	2.91%	<4.20%
2018	69.98%	≥51.20%	6.55%	<22.60%	1.87%	<4.00%
2019	72.06%	≥52.20%	4.79%	<21.60%	1.07%	<3.80%
2020	72.04%	≥53.20%	4.69%	<20.60%	0.90%	<3.60%

Source: CA System Improvement Leads Data tools: <https://aprindicators.systemimprovement.org/>

Indicator 6 Preschool environments: Percent of children aged 3 through 5 with IEPs attending a:

- A. Regular early childhood program and receiving the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program; and
- B. Separate special education class, separate school, or residential facility. (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(A))

Table 2 shows the data for DJUSD in relation to the state targets for Indicator 6.

- DJUSD data for 6A indicates that the District is well above the state target for 6A which measures the percent of students who are receiving the majority of special education services in regular early childhood programs.
- DJUSD is well below the state target for 6B (which is the measure of the percent of students who receive their special education services in a separate setting) for all years with the **exception of FY 2020** where the District was outside of the state target. Results from FY 2020 may have been impacted by issues related to the pandemic and will need to have increased focus to identify any continuing issues.

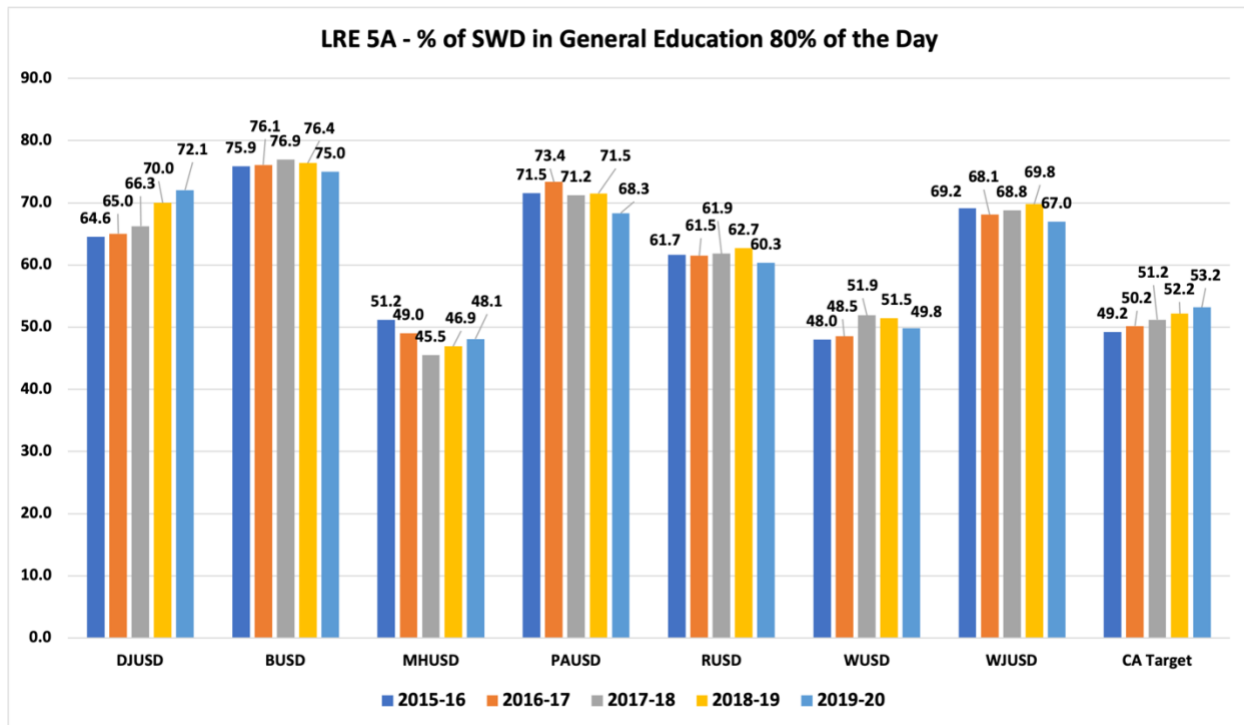
**Table 2. DJUSD Compared to the State Target for Preschool Students with Disabilities in the LRE, FYs 2016 through 2020**

Yea	DJUSD In Regular EC Program	6A State target	DJUSD Separate Facility	6B State target
2016	86.75%	≥32.90%	12.05%	≤34.40%
2017	78.82%	≥33.90%	15.29%	≤33.40%
2018	79.07%	≥34.90%	13.95%	≤32.40%
2019	79.07%	≥35.90%	19.77%	≤31.40%
2020	50.85%	≥36.90%	37.29%	≤30.40%

Source: CA System Improvement Leads Data tools: <https://aprinicators.systemimprovement.org/>

Figure 10 shows the Least Restrictive Environment data for students ages 6-21 for DJUSD, all of the peer districts, and the state target for FY 2016 through 2020. As compared to the peer districts, DJUSD's rates for Least Restrictive Environment 5A is slightly lower than BUSD and similar to PAUSD and WJUSD but above MHUSD, RUSD, WUSD, and the state of California target for all of the years.

**Figure 10. DJUSD Compared with the Peer Districts and the State Target for Students with Disabilities Ages 6-21 for LRE Indicator 5A for FYs 2016-2020**

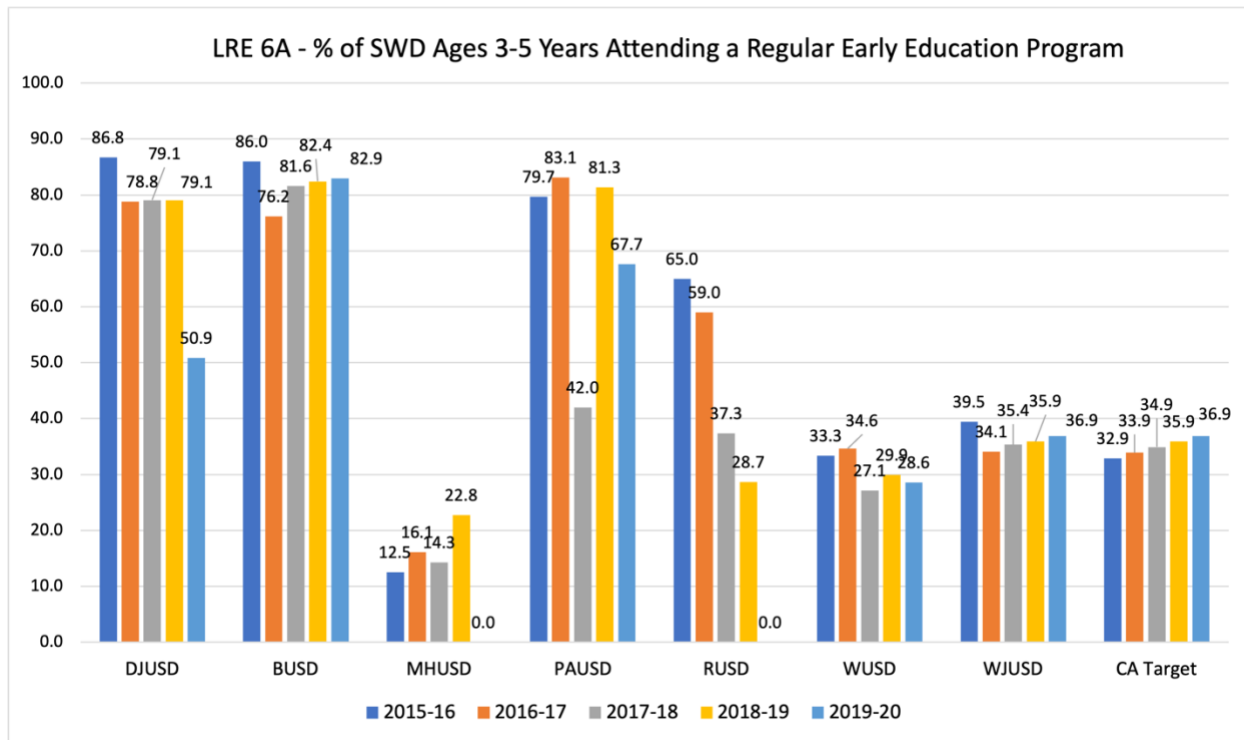


Source: CA System Improvement Leads Data tools: <https://aprindicators.systemimprovement.org/>



Figure 11 shows the data for Least Restrictive Environment Indicator 6A which is the percentage of children aged 3 through 5 with IEPs attending a regular early childhood program and receiving the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program. The data indicates that DJUSD was mostly similar to BUSD and PAUSD who are all substantially above the target for all of the years. The rate for DJUSD dropped in FY 2020 but was still above the state target and MHUSD, RUSD, WUSD, and WJUSD.

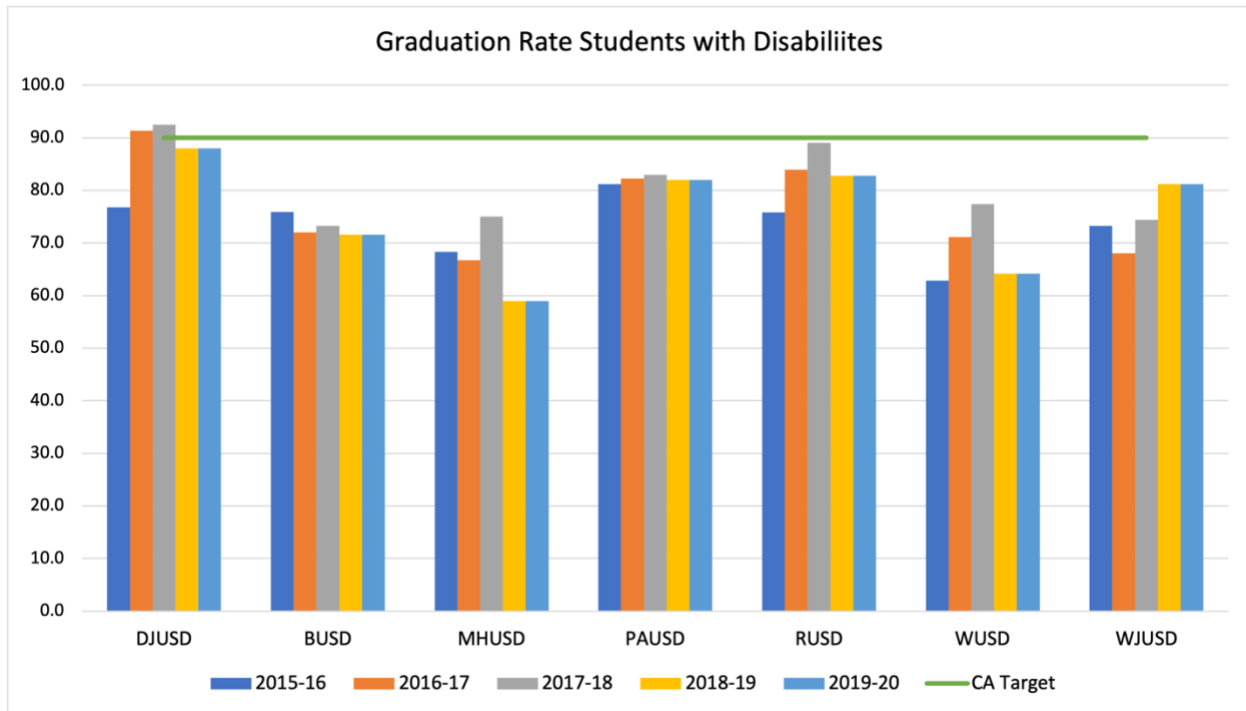
**Figure 11. DJUSD Compared with the Peer Districts and the State Target for Students with Disabilities Ages 3-5 for LRE Indicator 6A for FYs 2016-2020**



Source: CA System Improvement Leads Data tools: <https://aprinicators.systemimprovement.org/>

Figure 12 shows data for the percent of students with disabilities who graduated in four years for DJUSD, the peer districts, and the state. While DJUSD's percentage of students who graduated in four years exceeded that of the peer districts, they have only met the state target for two of the five years of data. DJUSD's data for the most recent years FYs 2019 and 2020 was 87.9% which was just below the state target of 90%.

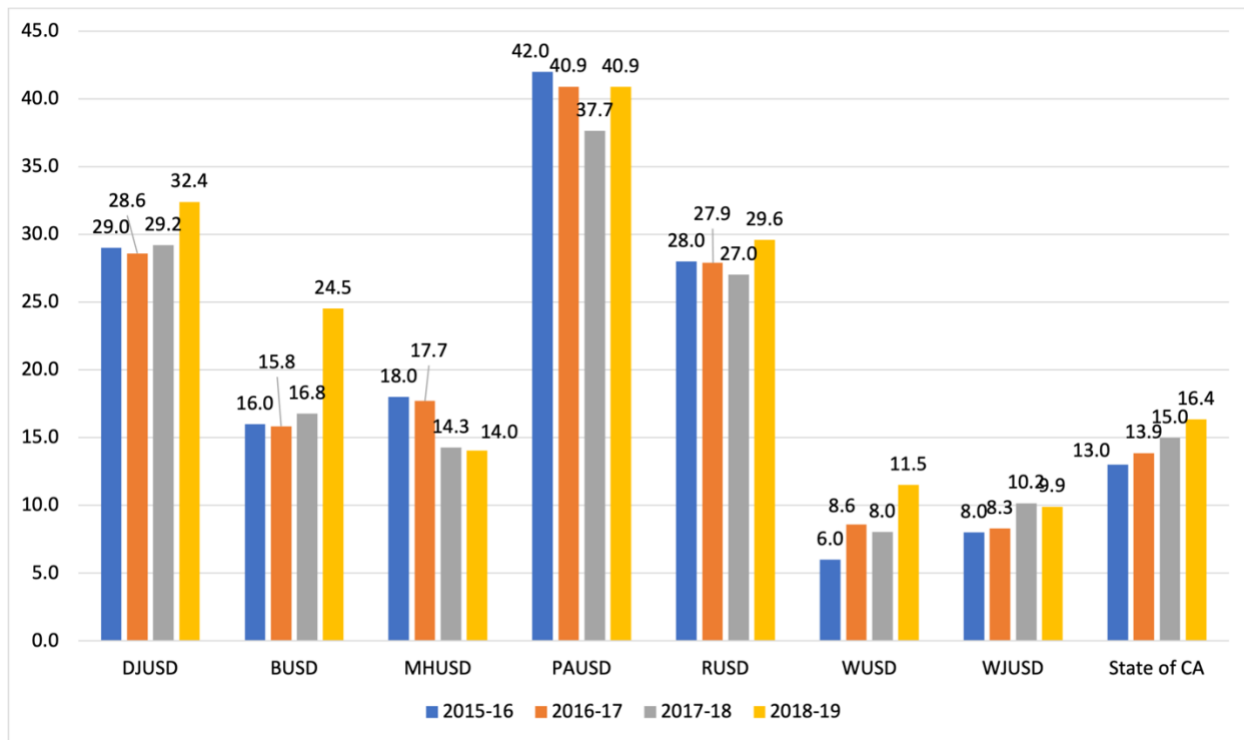
**Figure 12. DJUSD Compared with the Peer Districts and the State Target for Percent of Students with Disabilities Who Graduated in Four Years for FYs 2016-20**



Source: CA System Improvement Leads Data tools: <https://aprindicators.systemimprovement.org/>

Figure 13 shows data for the percentage of students who met the state standard for English Language Arts (ELA) on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) for FYs 2016-2019. The percent of students with disabilities who met the state standards for DJUSD was well above the state of California average scores and above all of the peer districts with the exception of PAUSD.

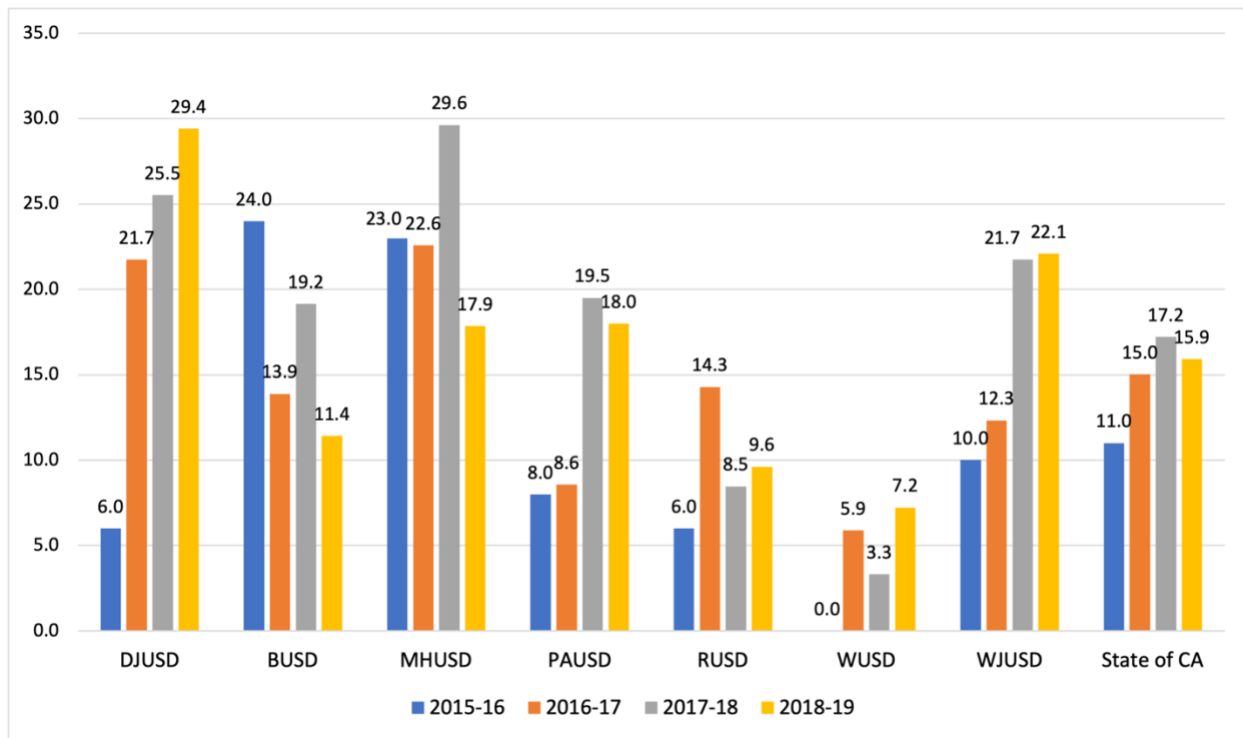
**Figure 13. DJUSD Compared with the Peer Districts and the State for Percent of SWD who Met the State Standards for English Language Arts (ELA) on the CAASPP for FYs 2016-19**



Source: CAASPP Website Data: <https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/Default>

Figure 14 shows data for the percentage of students with disabilities who met the state standards for English Language Arts (ELA) on the California Alternate Assessment for FYs 2016-2019. The percent of students with disabilities who met the state standards for DJUSD was well above the state of California average scores and above most of the peer districts.

**Figure 14. DJUSD Compared with the Peer Districts and the State of California for Percent of Students with Disabilities who Met the State Standard on the CA Alternate Assessment for English Language Arts (ELA) for FYs 2016-2019**

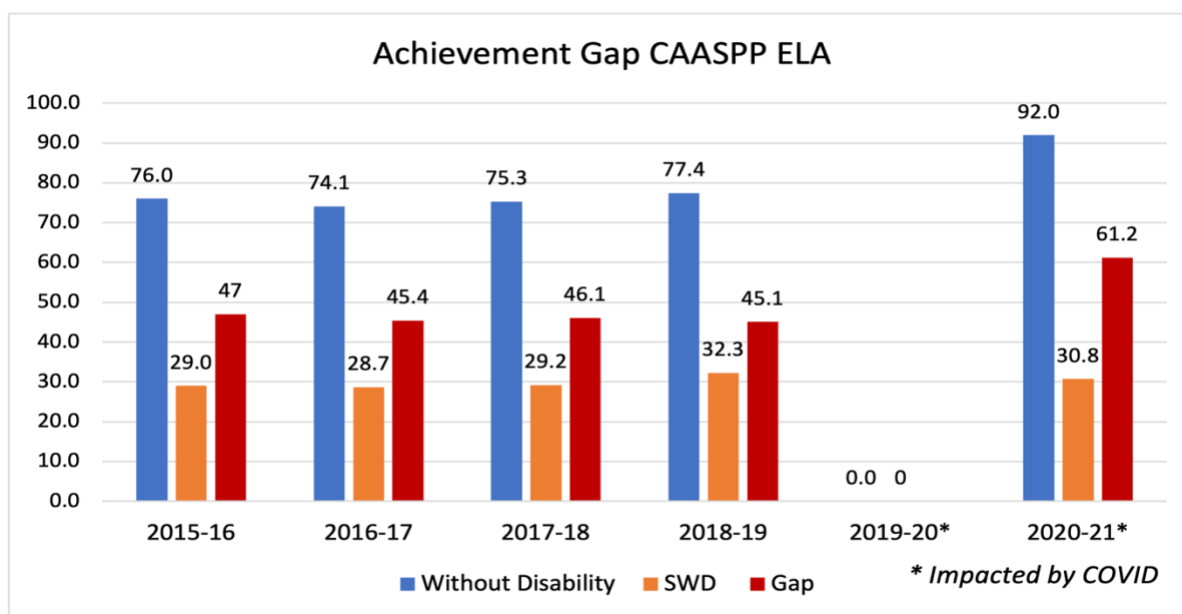


Source: CAASPP Website Data: <https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/Default>

Figure 15 shows California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress for English Language Arts data for DJUSD students with and without disabilities for FYs 2016-2021. The achievement gap between the scores for the students with and without disabilities is represented on the graph by the red bar for each year. With the exception of FY 2021 which may have been impacted by COVID, the average of the gap across the other four years was 47%. Compared to the state of California and the peer districts whose average achievement gaps ranged:

- DJUSD – 47%
- BUSD – 62%
- MHUSD – 43%
- PAUSD – 46%
- RUSD – 48%
- WUSD – 38%
- WJUSD – 20%
- CA State – 39%

**Figure 15. DJUSD Achievement Gap between Percent of Students With and Without Disabilities who Met the State Standard for English Language Arts (ELA) on the CAASPP for FYs 2016-21**



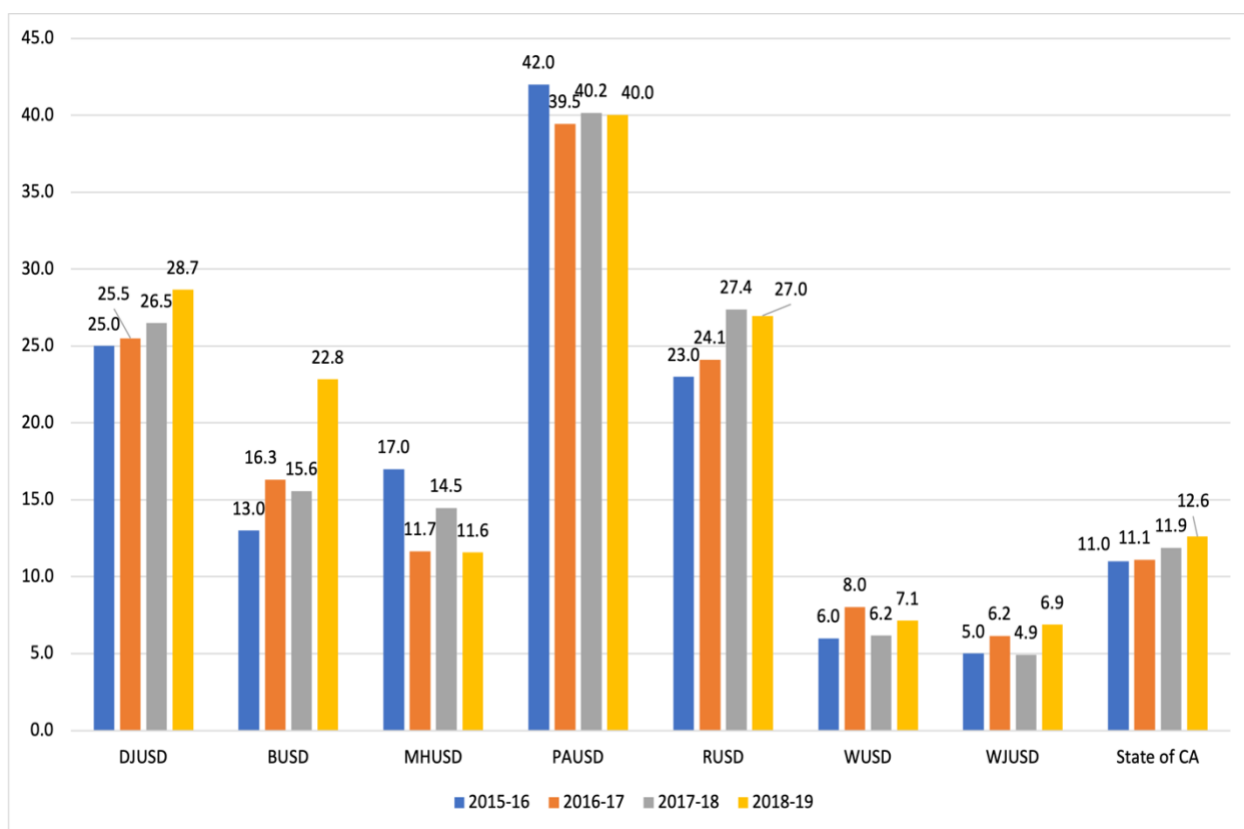
Source: CAASPP Website Data: <https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/Default>

The percent achievement gap data should be lower or decreasing as the DJUSD develops a more robust system of identifying students who are struggling and provides appropriate interventions to accelerate their learning. In addition, providing appropriate accommodations and instruction designed using Universal Design for Learning principles to address the learning needs of students

with diverse needs along with providing appropriate Specialized Academic Instruction and support will improve the results of the students with IEPs in the general education curriculum.

Figure 16 shows data for the percentage of students who met the state standard for Mathematics on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) for FYs 2016-2019. The percent of students with disabilities who met the state standards for DJUSD was well above the state of California average scores and above all of the peer districts with the exception of PAUSD.

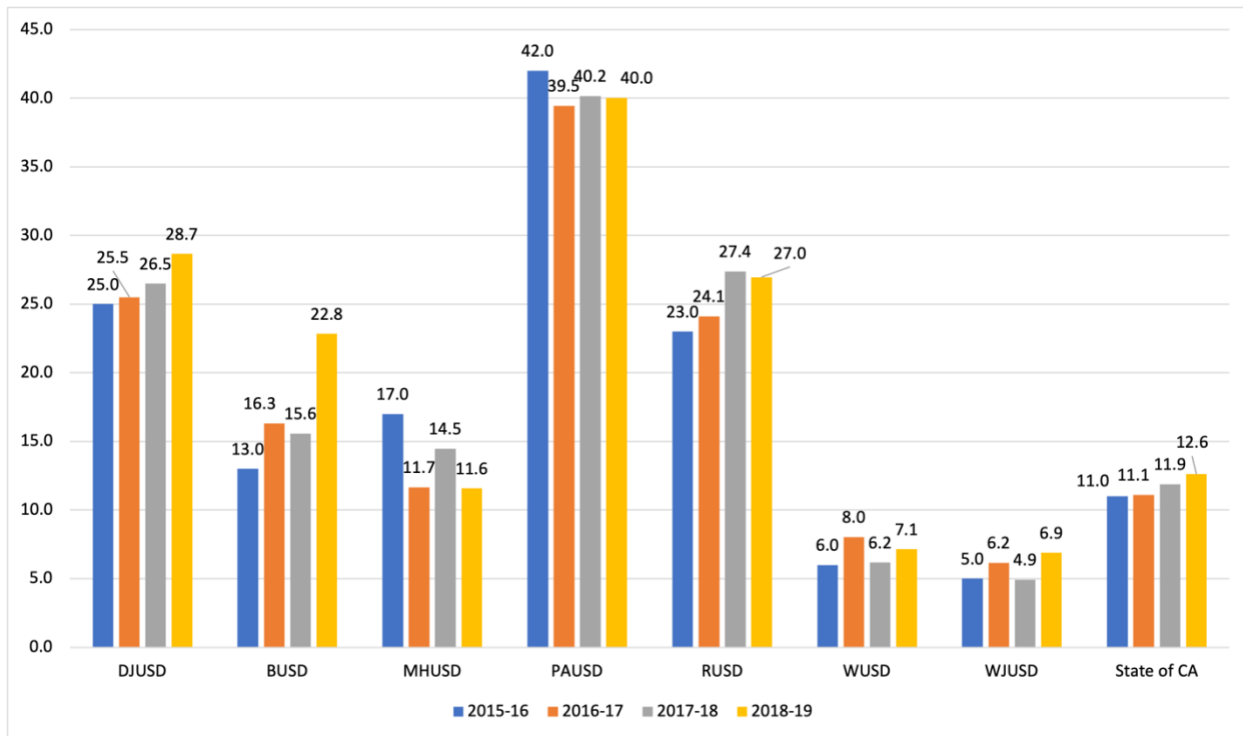
**Figure 16. DJUSD Compared with the Peer Districts and the State for Percent of Students who Met the State Standard on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress for Mathematics for FYs 2016-19**



Source: CAASPP Website Data: <https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/Default>

Figure 17 shows data for the percentage of students who met the state standard for Mathematics on the California Alternate Assessment for FYs 2016-2019. The percent of students with disabilities who met the state standards for DJUSD was well above the state of California average scores and above all of the peer districts with the exception of PAUSD.

**Figure 17. DJUSD Compared with the Peer Districts, and the state of California for Percent of Students who Met the State Standard on the California Alternate Assessment for Mathematics for FY 2016-2019**

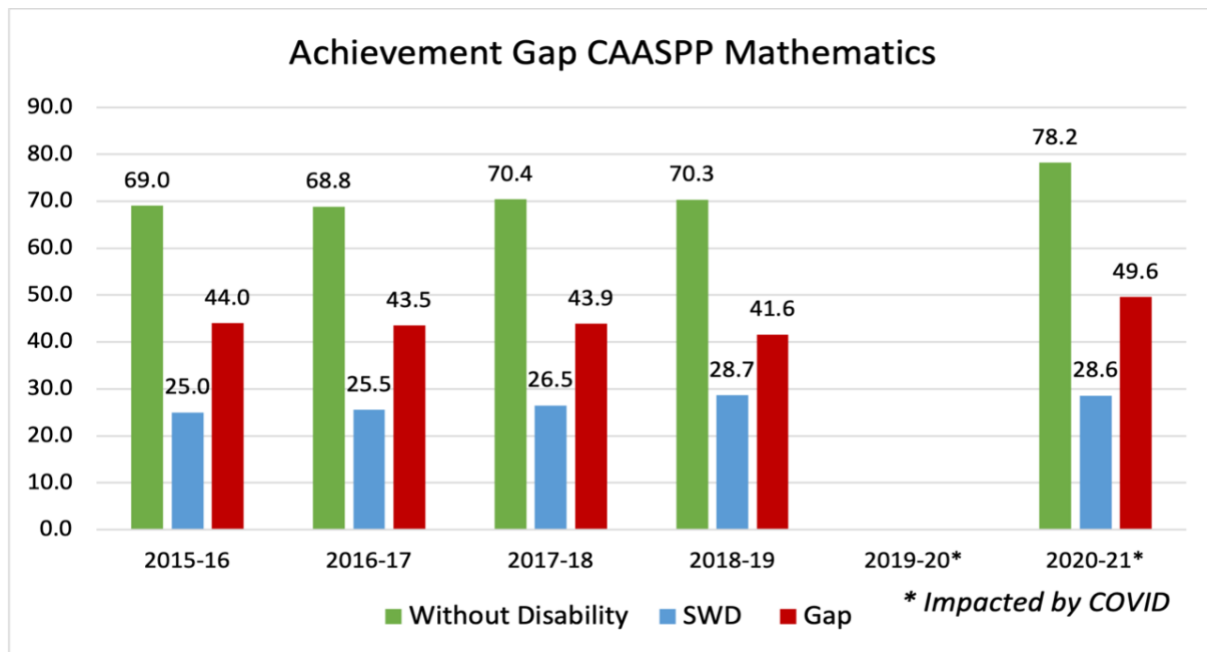


Source: CAASPP Website Data: <https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/Default>

Figure 18 shows California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Mathematics data for DJUSD students with and without disabilities for FYs 2016-2021. The gap between the scores is represented by the red bar for each year. With the exception of FY 2021 which may have been impacted by COVID, the average of the gap across the years was 45%. Compared to the state of California and the peer districts whose average scores for the same period ranged:

- DJUSD – 45%
- BUSD – 47%
- MHUSD – 30%
- PAUSD – 46%
- RUSD – 42%
- WUSD – 26%
- WJUSD – 27%
- CA State – 29%

**Figure 18. DJUSD Achievement Gap between Percent of Students With and Without Disabilities who Met the State Standard for Mathematics on the CAASPP for FYs 2016-21**



Source: CAASPP Website Data: <https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/Default>

The achievement data and graduation rate data for the students with disabilities in DJUSD indicates that overall, the students are achieving better than many students across the state of California. However, the achievement gap data indicates that students with disabilities are not achieving at a rate similar to students without disabilities in the District. Ideally, the systemic



improvements recommended in this report could bring about increased success for the students with disabilities while maintaining and increasing the success and achievement of all of the students.

Monitoring this data will help the District determine the success of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework and the focus on prevention and intervention instead of remediation. Improvements should be seen for all students and the achievement gaps should be decreased due to the systemic improvement made through the design and implementation of:

- Universal Design for Learning in Tier 1 and a focus on best first instruction designed to make lessons accessible to the diverse learners in the general education classroom
- Appropriate strategic interventions and supports in Tier 2
- Intensive interventions and staff supports in Tier 3

### **Additional Data on Access and Inclusivity**

Input on the school programs was gathered from site observations, survey responses, interviews and focus groups with staff and parents.

Historically, limited access and exclusion of students with disabilities from the general education classroom is a practice that increases a learning gap already present. Disability is often viewed through the lens of a medical model, which focuses on a deficit and on what an individual cannot do. In this model, disability is often a diagnosis, something to be fixed. As a whole, districts have responded to this diagnosis by separating students with IEPs rather than presuming their inclusion and membership into general classrooms. However, the expectation for students with disabilities to increase their achievement in academic and social skills cannot be met by limiting their access or excluding them from the general education classroom.

DJUSD has actively embraced “full inclusion” as the vision and culture of the district for students with IEPs since 1989. The District has become known for their inclusive nature and has received accolades from CDE and others over the years as can be seen by the following:

- The majority of the DJUSD’s students with IEPs are in the general education class for most of their day.
- Both general and special education teachers and staff in the District expressed pride and support for the inclusive nature of their district and families have moved to the based on the District’s support for inclusion.
- The overall results for the students with IEPs in DJUSD have been positive.
- The District is achieving beyond the state targets and the data for many of other districts.
- These results speak to the success of the inclusion program over the last 30 years.

To determine the extent that the vision of “full inclusion” was coherent and consistently understood and implemented across the District, questions were designed in the surveys, focus groups, interviews, and school observations. When respondents in focus groups and interviews were asked what the definition of inclusion was in DJUSD, the responses varied.

- Many responded that DJUSD's vision of inclusive education was "full inclusion" for students with moderate to severe needs to be included in a general education class full time with exclusive support from a paraeducator who provided the modifications for the student.
- For students with mild to moderate needs, many respondents indicated that inclusion in general education classes with or without a paraeducator or sharing a paraeducator along with a pullout class with a special education teacher was the norm.
- Other definitions included full time in general education classes for all students with IEPs with support from paraeducators mainly for socialization with limited expectations of achieving to grade level standards.
- It was clear that there is not a clear understanding or definition across the district that represents DJUSD's vision of inclusive education.

Despite the support and belief in the full inclusion model in DJUSD, **the overall expectation of most staff was that the responsibility for the learning and achievement of the students with IEPs lies with the special education staff.** This belief still exists in the minds of many of the staff across the district. While most staff support, welcome, and believe in inclusion, the general feeling expressed most frequently was that the overall responsibility for the outcomes for students with IEPs belongs to the special education department.

It appears that the design of the full inclusion program that was developed in 1989 has remained over the years even though the origin of the design was based on a small number of students with severe needs who were in a self-contained class run by the Yolo County Office of Education.

- This original design was for students to be fully included in general education classes with a paraeducator providing most of the support in the classroom for the student.
- A special education teacher or inclusion specialist oversaw the paraeducators and developed most of the accommodations or modifications for the students who were fully included.
- The inclusion specialist trained and worked with the paraeducator and the general education teachers to ensure that the student needs were being met.

As DJUSD grew and the numbers of students with IEPs grew, the program grew but had difficulty keeping up with the growing demands of the program. When the numbers of students in the full inclusion program were small, training and collaboration between general and special education teachers and paraeducators happened in a more organic process by catching time to work together.

As the numbers of students increased:

- It has become more difficult to hire and train new staff, the numbers of students in some of the general education classes increased, and the staff struggled to maintain the program the way it was originally created and designed to function.
- At the same time, the academic expectations grew for all students as well as an understanding by staff as to best ways to support growth and learning for students with diverse needs became available through new standards, assessment, and research.
- The expectations for students to achieve academically as well as socially grew and the rigor of the instruction in general education increased.

The last two and a half years of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the issues with the special education services.

- As with many districts across the country, staff were stretched and stressed with the issues brought about by the pandemic and many have left.
- Replacing and hiring new staff has been difficult and many positions have gone unfilled.
- A significant amount of the unfilled positions were with paraeducators and particularly those providing individual support or one-on-one support to students in the inclusion classroom model.

In addition, the changes in routine that has come about with the school closures and re-entry to in-person school has been difficult for many of the students who needed a period of adjustment and a gentler re-entry to the changes in their routine.

- This has created challenging behaviors for students who have not understood all of the changes in their routine and in some cases, the individuals providing their support.
  - Some students have experienced distress which has been manifested by extreme or challenging behaviors as they try to communicate their discomfort and lack of understanding of the frequent changes occurring in their lives.
- While the incidences of these extremely challenging behaviors are few, they have occurred on many of the school sites and were frequently mentioned by staff and parents as extremely disruptive and disturbing and have occurred with more frequency since returning to in-person instruction.
- Teachers were stressed and fearful for students who eloped or who acted out against other students or staff.

The District has struggled to staff positions with consistent personnel but with staff leaving and a lack of or limited availability of substitute staff, all personnel have been called into assist with filling open support positions. This has created gaps in other ways as staff are called to support students who are in crisis or in need of immediate attention. Staff cited lack of contingency plans

for dealing with or varying responses when dealing with these extremely challenging behaviors as a frequent concern.

Students with more mild to moderate needs are being included to the greatest extent possible but they often also receive pull out support for interventions or study skills periods. If needed, these students are often provided support in their general education classes by a paraeducator who may support multiple students in the same class.

A frequent comment by parents of students with mild to moderate needs included:

- Concerns due to the lack of strategies and supports for “invisible” disabilities experienced by students with issues of neurodiversity, sensory and/or processing difficulties, attention deficit disorder, autism spectrum disorders, etc.
- Parents expressed frustration that teachers and support staff lacked training and understanding of students with these invisible types of challenges and how to best support their needs.
- Some parents reported that teachers and support staff would report that their child was not paying attention or unable to sit still or complete their work but didn't suggest any strategies or processes to assist the child.
- There didn't seem to be an ability to focus on or integrate executive functioning skills or other strategies related to the needs of individual students.
- In interviews, students and former students expressed hurt and frustration when they tried to advocate for themselves and were told by teachers that they “didn't look like they had a disability” and that they “didn't need accommodations”.

While there were many staff who are committed and very supportive and work very hard to accommodate the needs of their diverse learners, there was also a deep mindset across the District that it was not their responsibility to provide accommodations, differentiation, or supports for students with IEPs. It is often the case that teachers' mindsets and concerns about including students with disabilities reflect their aspirations to run an effective and efficient classroom in which students with disabilities learn from their instruction and engage in positive academic experiences.

However, there is an opportunity for DJUSD to work closely with teachers, administrators, and staff to discuss ways to transform this more traditional notion of viewing students with disabilities in order to better serve all the DJUSD students. Only in growth-reinforcing cultures, in which teachers and administrators are developed and encouraged to safely fulfill their own potential to engage all students, will professionals be able to help their students thrive in bias-free environments. These complex cultures do not develop overnight; they are shaped by the ways

principals, teachers, and other key people reinforce, nurture, or transform underlying norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions.

### **Inclusive Practices and Support.**

Apart from the few examples of co-teaching that are in practice across the District, much of the support for students included in general education classes and environments has been provided by paraeducators. This is problematic in many ways. First, this means that the person with the least amount of training is the person who is most often responsible for providing the accommodations and supporting the student or students. Secondly, this can frequently remove the responsibility and ownership of the learning for the students with IEPs from the general education teacher and can lead to general education teachers viewing inclusion as only being able to occur when there are paraeducators as part of the process.

Teachers frequently mentioned in focus groups and surveys:

- There were not enough paraeducators so that students who needed more support, or needed to go to a different environment where they could get the support they needed as part of a smaller group were not able to do so.
- Special education teachers expressed frustration, particularly at the secondary level, that they were unable to provide push-in support as they had to teach study skills classes or provide pull-out support classes to full classes of students which were often equal in size to the general education classes from which students were being pulled.

These views indicate several issues within the structure and understanding of the goal of inclusive education.

- Culture, mindset, access to the general classroom, environments, and instruction by staff with content expertise who are providing instruction which is differentiated and additional support added when necessary to address the diversity of needs within a classroom are all necessary elements that need to come together to create that optimal educational environment.
- This means that all teachers and staff need to have a deep understanding of the “why” inclusive education is the vision **and** have the skills to more adequately address the diversity of needs that exist within the classroom.

The structure of the system also needs to be designed to allow the staff to be able to fulfill the vision of an inclusive system. This means:

- Building a system that includes regular, ongoing collaborative planning for data-driven instructional design, allocating support to general education classrooms to build the scaffold that plans for and provides differentiated instruction and targeted supports driven by the academic and behavioral needs of the students.

- Building the capacity of all staff to understand and carry out their role in the system through training and coaching to build their capacity
- Designing the overall system of supports to focus more on the prevention and interventions and focus the intensive supports on the small group of students who need them, by clearly understanding the continuum of supports in special education.

### Paraeducators

DJUSD has utilized paraeducators as the primary support in the general education classes for many of the students with IEPs. The district has attempted to provide a more systematic process to defining the need for individual one-on-one support versus classroom or multiple student support, through the use of a checklist that the IEP team or special education teacher would complete when requesting paraeducator support. This was often viewed by staff and parents as a money saving process instead of a thoughtful approach to defining the needs of the individual student.

The understanding of the role and use of paraeducators is critical to the success of the goal of inclusive education. As the district embarks on rethinking and redesigning their inclusive education design, it will be important to consider how to best support the individual student needs to grow and achieve with the highest degree of independence as possible as well as the overall program design to ensure that staff are well prepared to support all of the students in the district. While it is important to ensure that the use of paraeducators is appropriate, some important considerations include:

- Paraeducators should not be used as a replacement for appropriate support and instructional design from general education staff, and special education teachers, but as an important part of the support and success of the effort.
- The role of the paraprofessional needs to be well defined and understood by all staff and parents in order to ensure that the goal of building independence in students with IEPs is a critical factor in determining the need for support.
- Paraeducators should also receive the appropriate training and be part of collaborative planning to allow them to understand their role and how that fits in the needs of the classroom support or individual student support.
- It is important to consider that in some cases, students can become too dependent on the paraeducator and don't develop the independence that is important to becoming a functioning part of society. Paraeducators need to be trained in strategies for fading services and how to provide support in naturally occurring and non-intrusive ways.

An excellent resource on designing paraprofessional support particularly for students with more moderate to severe needs can be found at the TIES Center. Their brief, *Understanding the Role of Paraeducators in Your Child's Education in Inclusive Education*<sup>13</sup> is an excellent resource for staff and parents on building an understanding of the role and how it fits into the design of the inclusive efforts.

### Co-teaching

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<sup>13</sup> Sabia., 2021

The research on the efficacy of the co-teaching model is promising if the model is implemented correctly.<sup>14</sup> The University of Kansas identifies elements for effective implementation of co-teaching:

- Co-teachers should engage in common planning that focuses on creating a lesson for the entire class rather than for individual students and that then incorporates individual students as needed.
- Potential partners should consider disposition prior to starting the co-teaching process. To become an effective team, they should discuss perspectives on issues such as fairness, grading, behavior management, and philosophy.
- Teachers working in a team setting should set aside time for self-evaluation and discuss two critical questions:
  - Is how we are co-teaching meeting the needs of both teachers?
  - Is what we are doing good for all students?

Issues will arise when co-teaching, as relationships between two adults working in a classroom have to be given time and support to develop, but this does not necessarily indicate that co-teaching should not continue. Rather it indicates that accommodations and adjustments should be expected elements of developing and implementing an effective co-teaching process.

DJUSD has engaged in co-teaching at a few of their school sites with some success but it has not been successful district-wide. A one-day training occurred last year but was not sufficient to provide the support needed to launch a more wide-spread implementation. This has created a situation where teachers have to “catch” a time on the fly to plan lessons and does not allow for teachers to develop the relationships and understand the expertise that each partner brings to the table have an equal voice in the planning of the lessons. This can lead to a lack of parity in the teacher roles – sometimes creating the situation where the special education teacher is seen as a “helper” in the class and not an equal partner in leading instruction.

Considerations for effective implementation of co-teaching include:

- A fully developed co-teaching model is essential to a quality full inclusion program in order for all to receive maximum benefit.
- The internal systems such as in depth professional learning, regularly scheduled collaborative co-planning time, and administrative support are critical to building a successful co-teaching system.
- For co-teaching to be a true part of the instructional model for DJUSD, the training, co-planning, and support needs to be part of the overall schedule of the sites.

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<sup>14</sup> Idol, 2006; Mastropiere, 2005

## Preschool

DJUSD provides inclusive preschool offerings with co-located special education and general education programs. The new Early Learning Center at Korematsu Campus was opened in August of 2021 and houses programs and services for typically developing students and students with IEPs.

Parents and staff reported a high level of satisfaction with the preschool special education program overall but also expressed a desire to improve and remedy some of the issues that are currently present. Some of these issues include:

- Alignment and collaboration issues exist between the leadership of the early learning center and the district. There are different regulations and requirements governing the general education preschool than there are for the special education preschool. Regulations on health and safety, credentialing, licensing required for preschools have created issues impacting the access to inclusion.
- It is recommended that a program specialist or coordinator with knowledge of preschool is needed to support the needs specific to the early childhood population.
- High caseloads and intake assessments have tripled in the last few years and have made it difficult for staff to manage. Concern with staff burnout and losing good staff were frequently mentioned. Staff recommended that it would be helpful to have an assessment team who could focus on intake and allow more time for staff to provide the instructional supports to their students and families.
- There is limited time for meeting with staff, particularly paraeducators to collaborate on student needs and there is no time to collaborate with general education staff.
- Staff also reported that it would be helpful to increase access to inclusion by implementing a co-teaching model but would need buy-in and support from preschool and district administration. This requires time to train and collaborate with the general education preschool staff.
- Increase access to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices and materials, both low and high tech is needed. In addition, the overall instructional materials in the classes are in need of upgrading and replacing.

## Instructional Materials Support

Staff stated that curriculum materials used in classes vary from site to site so it is sometimes difficult to share adaptations of materials that staff have created. All of the sites have embraced inclusion but with a variety of processes with some sites working collaboratively to develop lessons and accommodate the needs of students with IEPs and some don't. Autonomy between the sites in a district allows the staff to create an environment that meets the needs of the staff but it can also create inequality and inefficiency across the district. These alignment issues across the district have been discussed in Themes 1 (Vision) and 3 (Policies and Procedures) but are mentioned here as they impact the instructional program of the district and in particular for the students with IEPs.

Staff comments in focus groups and on surveys indicated:



- Many staff reported that they were not provided access to the online materials and often struggled to access curriculum materials to assist in supporting the learning that was occurring in general education and to assist with adaptations of materials.
- In the secondary sites, special education staff reported that many general education teachers use Canvas for posting class materials notes and additional resources and staff reported that they could be using this application to post adaptations to class materials and assignments that staff have created for individual students but could be used by other students with similar needs.

Lack of a co-planning time for general education and special education teachers and paraeducators to collaborate on lessons makes it challenging to provide adapted materials or suggestions for lesson planning in a timely fashion. Suggestions from staff to improve the efficiency of the adapted materials include:

- Creating ways to consistently share adaptations to curriculum materials that could be used more generally by general education teachers and paraeducators would allow for greater access and efficiency to the learning for all students.
  - Being able to share and store these modified lessons with other staff would allow for increased access to lessons with materials that are designed to meet the needs of all students with various learning needs.
- Providing regular access to the curriculum materials and online resources for the special education staff would increase the efficiency of staff who are able to address the accommodation and modification needs of students.
- Providing a collaborative planning time for general and special education teachers to plan lessons to address the diverse needs of all the students in a class.

Staff also commented on the lack of available courses at the high school for students with IEPs. There were frequent comments from both general and special education staff that there were very few options for students other than college prep and high achievers courses and that while the courses for high achievers are often not full, many of the general courses are very full and often end up with a large number of students with IEPs which creates an imbalance in access and support for students.

### **Dually Identified Learners**

Dually identified learners or multilingual learners with disabilities are a growing population for DJUSD. The District does have a very active and engaged EL department who is working to collaborate more with the special education department to coordinate services. Comments in the focus groups, interviews, and surveys indicate:

- While there are resources available through the EL department for students who are multilingual, the EL and special education staff have had trouble finding time to collaborate on these resources.
- The EL department now has three EL Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) who support the multilingual learners. One of the TOSAs is assigned to collaborate with the special education staff.
- The District also has a staff of interpreters available to support families of dually identified students and staff in IEP meetings and other meetings with families.
  - Many of the interpreters have received some training in IEPs but they would like additional training to be more prepared to support the families during IEP meetings.
  - They also indicated that they would like to receive the meeting documents ahead of time so they can become familiar with them prior to the meeting.
- The EL department is also piloting the Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPAC) for CDE and has worked with the special education staff to administer the assessment and will assist when the assessment is launched this fall.
- The district also has a bilingual program at one of the schools and a Spanish immersion program at another.
  - At the bilingual site, special education staff have worked to increase the bilingual professionals on their team. This has been very helpful as they are able to team and co-teach to support the dually identified students.
- Special education teachers reported that they have difficulty accessing translation and interpretation services and that collaboration between EL and special education staff is spotty.

In the IEP reviews, the following issues were found:

- 75% of IEPs reviewed for dually identified students did not have linguistically appropriate goals.
- 100% of IEP reviewed for dually identified students did not have their language development needs described.

It will be important for staff to have an understanding of how to develop IEPs that meet the language needs as well as the special education needs of dually identified students. Special education and EL staff should continue to collaborate and training should be provided on developing IEPs that support EL student's needs and includes goals to meet those needs.

### **In Their Own Voices**

#### **Summary of feedback from focus groups, interviews, and surveys related to Theme 4:**

Summary of feedback from **Administrators:**

### **Strengths:**

- *The community value of inclusion is positive and that is supported in theory by most staff and the Board. There are many resources and program offerings to meet the needs of all of our students.*
- *The inclusive environment that fosters positive relationships between special education staff and students/families.*

### **Challenges**

- *There needs to be meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities. General education staff need to take ownership of teaching all the students in their classes and special education staff need to support the general education staff. Lesson plans designed using Universal Design for Learning and appropriate collaboration/planning time are essential to providing access to all students.*
- *SWD are general education students first and we need the entire staff to see it that way. Special education staff need true partnership with general education staff. We don't have dedicated collaboration time for co-planning and collaboration between general and special educators. This is needed to ensure that planning time for instruction and support is occurring.*
- *Inclusive philosophy without the application of evidence-based practices to support the model is not effective. The District's investment in the model is not consistent or coherent.*

Summary of feedback from **Staff:**

### **Strengths**

- *In general, Davis is a community that values and promotes diversity and inclusiveness. We are a full inclusion district, and I think we all strongly believe that this is the right thing to do for students.*
- *For some students, the inclusion program is a great fit. They are able to access the curriculum and work with other students in a positive manner. I truly support this program when it works for both the student and the classroom.*
- *There is a majority in the District who believes that inclusion is better for students with disabilities and provides no harm to students without disabilities.*

### **Challenges**

- *Full inclusion only works if the supports are there. Co-teaching only works if the supports and staffing are there. Neither of these are currently working due to staff shortages, and the lack of support. We need more options for push-in support.*
- *DJUSD could improve its special education programs and services by expanding its continuum of services for students with disabilities.*
- *Currently, there are very little to no opportunities for general education staff to collaborate with special education staff such as inclusion specialists and resource teachers. As such, there are no opportunities for staff to plan together on strategies, accommodations, resources, modifications to curriculum, etc., in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities.*
- *DJUSD needs to provide a program vision that defines the goal of why we are doing this. We should actively be committing to best practices and improvement based on new research, pedagogy etc.*

### Summary of feedback from **Parents**:

#### **Strengths**

- *Special education staff are excellent, knowledgeable and care deeply for the students.*
- *District has a caring and respectful environment.*

#### **Challenges**

- The program is very dependent on the general education teachers willingness and skill level to support students. The success for students can vary from year to year due to this.
- There isn't enough training for paras and teachers to know how to appropriately accommodate the curriculum and instruction to meet my child's needs.
- Concerns about the secondary model and the limited support that students receive in their classes.

## Why It Matters

### Inclusive Education Research

A 2010 study published in the *International Journal of Special Education* compared achievement scores of students who were fully included in the general education classroom to those of students who were self-contained. The study concluded that the students who were fully included in the general education setting outscored their self-contained counterparts significantly.<sup>15</sup> In addition, a recent study of the outcomes for students with IEPs in California found that for students with an IEP, including students identified in each disability category, greater participation in a general education setting is a strong predictor of academic growth and improved outcomes as measured by statewide assessments.<sup>16</sup> A 2007 meta-analysis of inclusive education research found that 81% of the reported outcomes showed that including students with disabilities resulted in either positive or neutral effects for students without disabilities.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, high-performing schools have cultures characterized by:

- high expectations, organizational intentionality, community engagement, teacher collaboration, and high degrees of practices that promote a “psychology of success.”<sup>18</sup>
- These characteristics combine to form a school culture that is supportive, safe, caring, challenging, and participatory.
- A healthy culture also leads to improved school connectedness, learning engagement, attendance, classroom behavior, academic aspirations, and performance.<sup>19</sup>
- With leadership from teacher leaders, school teams can build an intentionally crafted, safe, positive, supportive, academically focused, and inclusive culture.
- Learning environments that include all students being explicitly taught not only the skills of being a strong student, but also the dispositions, habits, and traits that are possessed by

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<sup>15</sup> Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010

<sup>16</sup> Dautre, 2021

<sup>17</sup> Kalambouka, 2007

<sup>18</sup> Almanzan, 2005

<sup>19</sup> Brand, 2003; Fleming, 2005

highly effective and successful adults facilitate and build student leadership and good decision-making.

In a brief published in March of 2021 and presented to the U.S. Department of Education, nine organizations which support individuals with disabilities published a brief, [9 Recommendations for Inclusive Learning Recovery for Students with Disabilities](#) with recommendations to address learning recovery from issues related to the pandemic for students with disabilities. The recommendations from this brief will be useful in engaging the stakeholders around common themes based on District data and will assist with creating a new definition of the goals of the efforts. The recommendations include:

1. Ensure all students have equal access to all learning recovery programming and are meaningfully included.
2. Ensure all students are educated in the Least Restrictive Environment.
3. Recognize special education services are separate and apart from learning recovery programming.
4. Incorporate inclusive progress monitoring practices within learning recovery programming.
5. Enable meaningful collaboration between professionals.
6. Create opportunities for inclusive and purposeful stakeholder engagement.
7. Provide inclusive and transparent data on learning recovery programming.
8. Align resources equitably and efficiently.
9. Invest in inclusive and actionable research.

These recommendations, which are more fully explained in the full text of the [brief](#), should be useful as the District engages in further definition and updating the goal of inclusive and meaningful access for all students with disabilities.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations address access, instruction, and achievement across DJUSD school sites.

***Recommendation 1: Establish common definitions, values, and goals for building equity and access to inclusive schools by engaging both administrators and teachers in leading groups in a discussion regarding the beliefs of teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders about what it means to be an inclusive district.***

One overriding theme for DJUSD is the need to examine the differences in attitudes toward students with disabilities across school sites in order to address the beliefs that special education is seen as a separate program. Discussion groups should lead to the exploration of attitudes, the development of common definitions and norms for supporting students, and a focus on implementing a bias-free, positive program culture, the outcome of which would be to establish

collective commitments to achieve inclusivity goals. Successful implementation of the goals for inclusivity will require that DJUSD ensures the following:

- Develop a district definition of what it means to be an inclusive district and build this inclusive culture through thoughtful strategic planning, staff and stakeholder collaboration, defining roles and responsibilities of all staff to and professional development.
- Site principal leadership is trained and well-versed in the goals, the mission, vision, values, and goals (Theme 3), and their role as a leader, which is setting a cultural and narrative tone that is less zero-tolerance and more prevention-oriented.
- A growth mindset and inclusive practices are built throughout all of the levels of the district, shifting the focus from compliance to outcomes for students with disabilities.
- Set a standard of shared professional development to support the development of inclusive practices, beginning with Universal Design for Learning, for all instructional staff as a basis for creating access to general education environments for all learners.
- Provide sufficient resources to ensure that special and general educators receive ample learning and collaborative planning opportunities that are targeted toward the discoveries of this report.
- Consider conducting a book study with staff, using the book *Your Students, My Students, Our Students: Rethinking Equitable and Inclusive Classrooms*,<sup>20</sup> to build a new understanding and mindset for staff on building an inclusive culture.

***Recommendation 2: Develop the skills of the general education and special education teachers to support the learning needs of the students currently being served.***

One overarching theme from focus groups and interviews is that staff lack the knowledge to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Staff felt they needed more training and coaching to support the needs of diverse learners.

- All teachers need professional development on inclusive practices, collaboration, Specialized Academic Instruction, differentiation, and Universal Design for Learning. Special educators need more professional development and coaching on Specialized Academic Instruction. General education teachers need professional development on understanding the various types of disabilities and purpose of special education.
- Increase the leadership capacity of school leaders (e.g., principals, assistant principals, etc.) to administer special education and to establish and improve feedback loops among principals, teachers, and district office special education administrators to improve the alignment and ownership of the special education staff and students.

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<sup>20</sup> Jung, 2019

- Provide training in the high-leverage practices in special education to all staff in order to support students with disabilities. High-leverage practices are essential practices that support student learning and are necessary for implementing evidence-based practices effectively. When high-leverage practices are used along with evidence-based practices, they support improved outcomes for students with disabilities.
  - Information about and resources for high-leverage practices can be accessed at [High-Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities](#) and the Brief from the CEDAR Center on High-Leverage Practices and Evidence-Based Practices: A Promising Pair<sup>21</sup>
- Establish, within formal district structures, the infrastructure for increasing ongoing planning time between general education and special education teachers. In conjunction with these infrastructure changes, provide professional learning that equips general education and special education teachers in strategies for working together in ways that cross organizational silos.

***Recommendation 3: Continue to implement, expand, and support co-teaching as a service-delivery model.***

Focus group participants expressed an understanding of co-teaching as special educators in the room who support general educators rather than teachers as equal partners. Co-teaching is a service delivery model in which there is parity through shared instructional responsibility and accountability. While each teacher's level of participation may vary depending on the instructional strategies, there should be shared ownership of the classroom.

Co-planning, which is critical in allowing the teaching pairs to plan lessons outlining the roles, responsibilities, and support that each teacher will provide, is critical to the successful implementation of successful co-teaching. DJUSD should consider redesigning the school schedules so that built-in collaboration time is provided on an ongoing basis, building in time for professional development on building a culture of shared ownership and co-teaching as a service delivery model all staff to understand and support the model, and allow time for teaching pairs to develop their shared collaborative model for working together.

Use the following strategies to implement co-teaching as a service-delivery model:

- Develop schedules to provide services in co-taught classes when ELA and math are taught. When needed for skill development, use a pull-out model to provide direct instruction to groups of students with similar learning needs for short periods of time. Ensure that students with disabilities receive instruction and grade-level content within the general education environment to the maximum extent appropriate.

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<sup>21</sup> McCray, 2017



- When students need both co-teaching support and resource pull-out support, reduce fragmentation of learning by ensuring the pull-out does not occur during core instructional time.

***Recommendation 4: Review the continuum of services for students with IEPs to ensure that the appropriate level of supports are available and based on student needs while still allowing for the maximum amount of time in general education classrooms.***

To ensure the access to inclusive education for all students with IEPs, the district has embraced “full inclusion” for almost all of the students. This is a goal that should continue to be the norm within the district, but more effort and infrastructure should be provided for students with more complex needs to have access to smaller and more structured times for learning foundational skills. The district needs to either incorporate these structures into general education blocks of time by creating/revisiting its “push in” services or invest in pull-out services for students needing these supports to get what they need in smaller and more targeted environments and then transition with these skills back to the general education environment. Strategies might include:

- Whether DJUSD chooses to increase push-out services or to utilize more dynamic push-in models, the goal should always be to provide the greatest amount of access to the general education classroom in ways that ensure students’ are receiving educational benefit from their supports and services.
- Similar to the design of Tier 2 and Tier 3 services within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports model, these smaller environments should not be considered as a static placement but should be developed to be more fluid and allow for changing needs of individual students to be addressed.
- Additionally, educators within DJUSD must constantly evaluate the degree they are adapting the general education environment so that it is inclusive of students with more complex needs.
  - These students’ should be given options in how they engage within the learning environment, options in how content gets represented so they can understand it (or modified versions of it), and options in how students express their understanding.
  - Inclusive learning environments require special education and general education teachers to collaborate regularly to co-construct these new types of learning environments.

***Recommendation 5: Ensure students with disabilities who are multilingual learners have the supports and services they need to meet both their English language needs and their special education needs.***

Focus groups and interviews articulated that the services for dually identified, multilingual learner should be improved. Consider convening a collaborative team of general educators, special educators, and multilingual learner specialists to further develop the framework in order to

provide guidance on meeting the language needs and special education needs of multilingual learners. Elements of this framework should include:

- developing a pre-referral intervention process to support the needs of multilingual learners in the classroom before referring students for evaluation
- providing professional development for all staff on differentiating between language acquisition and a possible disability
- training staff in the collection and analysis of comparative data to identify multilingual learners who are not achieving academically at grade level or are not acquiring English language proficiency at the same rate as their true peers (e.g., comparing the gains and achievements of all grade 3 students with limited English proficiency with the type of ELD services being provided)
- ensuring that goals are linguistically and culturally relevant by establishing policies and procedures for ensuring students with disabilities who are multilingual learners receive both English language support and Specialized Academic Instruction and that there is consideration of the student's progress in their ELD when developing goals
- structuring the IEP team so that it includes individuals with expertise in second language acquisition or ELD in order to address the impact of language on the student's IEP
- including in IEPs whether the student is a multilingual learner and, if so, how the student's language learning needs will be met, and
- ensuring all teachers are trained in strategies for multilingual learners.

## Resources for Theme 4

### Inclusive Practices Resources:

#### a focus on inclusion:

- **Supporting Inclusive Practices (SIP):** <https://www.sipinclusion.org/>
  - Funded by the California Department of Education: Our aim is to provide unparalleled statewide technical assistance to educational communities in their pursuit of inclusive and equitable systems. Together we seek to empower each student to be purposeful and motivated, resourceful and knowledgeable, and strategic and goal directed within an environment of belonging, community and connection.
- **Palo Alto Unified SD:**
  - [Special Education and Inclusion Focus Area](#)
  - [Equity and Excellence Priority Area](#)

- **Berkeley Unified School District**
  - [Inclusion Information](#)
  
- **CHIME Institute:** <https://www.chimeinstitute.org/apps/video/watch.jsp?v=343483>
  - The CHIME Institute, a nonprofit organization established in 1990, is a national leader in the development and implementation of an unique model of inclusive education. The institute began with an early childhood program based at California State University, Northridge. The success of the early childhood program, coupled with the needs of the community and sound research, prompted a group of parents and Cal State Northridge faculty to develop a charter elementary school in 2001 and a charter middle school in 2003. The two schools were merged into kindergarten through 8th grade in 2010 and named the CHIME Institute's Schwarzenegger Community School.
  
- **WISH Community Charter School:**  
[https://www.wishcharter.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC\\_ID=852928&type=d&pREC\\_ID=2095932](https://www.wishcharter.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=852928&type=d&pREC_ID=2095932)
  - The WISH mission is to maximize every scholar's learning potential within an atmosphere of caring and belonging. The WISH instructional philosophy rests upon the concepts of hands-on learning, meaningful instructional activities, systematic instruction, and a collaborative group of professionals working together to make the learning environment exciting for students. Evidence-based teaching strategies are tailored to meet individual development providing both academic and social-emotional support.

#### Other Resources on Inclusive Practices

- Brief published in March of 2021 and presented to the Department of Education, from nine organizations which support individuals with disabilities: [9 Recommendations for Inclusive Learning Recovery for Students with Disabilities](#) with recommendations to address learning recovery from issues related to the pandemic for students with disabilities.
  
- Book study recommendation for building an inclusive culture: Jung, L. A., Frey, N., Fisher, D., & Kroener, J. (2019). *Your student, my students, our students: Rethinking equitable and inclusive classrooms*. ASCD.
  
- [TIES Center](#) is the national technical assistance center focused on inclusive practices and policies. It works with states, districts, and schools to support the movement of students with disabilities from less inclusive to more inclusive environments. Materials, tools, and resources for supporting all students to be involved in more inclusive environments.
  
- CEEDAR Center Brief: [High-Leverage Practices and Evidence-Based Practices: A Promising Pair](#)

- More information and resources on High-Leverage Practices (HLP):  
<https://highleveragepractices.org/>
  - High-Leverage Practices Self-Assessment: <https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/HLP-Self-Assessment-508.pdf>

## Curriculum and Resource Recommendations for Secondary Environments:

### Self-Determination Resources.

- <https://imdetermined.org/> This website has a variety of tools and recommendations for building a beneficial self-determination program in a secondary setting. The one pager and the "my good day plan" are particularly beneficial.
- <https://selfdetermination.ku.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Teachers-Guide-2019-Updated-Logos.pdf>. This link provides a pdf of the Teacher's Guide for the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction. This is a framework that is beneficial for embedding self-determination, problem solving, decision making, and so forth into every conversation, coaching, and facilitation a teacher does with a student.

### Social Emotional Learning Resources

- <https://school-connect.net/> School Connect is a Social Emotional Learning curriculum resource that is built primarily for high school students. It embeds SEL competencies into career development, post-secondary preparation, communication, and goal setting. This is a Tier 1 SEL resource, so it is recommended to be used with all students. However, it can be scaffolded and differentiated for a special education setting.
- <https://www.cccframework.org/resources/> The College and Career Competency Framework is also a Tier 1 framework focused on building social emotional learning competencies from a college and career preparation standpoint. It has a wide array of resources on each competency. These resources tend to work best when a team is involved in implementing it, such as a PLC.

### Academic Support Resources

- Academic Seminar Handbook: <https://www.pbis.org/resource/the-high-school-behavior-education-program-2nd-edition> This handbook gives a very detailed setup with lessons and a scope and sequence for implementing an academic seminar in secondary settings. The focus of this resource is on learning organizational skills, social skills, and self-advocacy during a seminar time period. Many high schools have used this as a Tier 3 intervention.

### Career and Technical Education Resources

- Access and Equity Webinar Series: <https://sckesc.wixsite.com/accessandequity/v2>. The Kansas State Education Department developed a webinar series on access and equity within CTE with a focus on equitable access and participation for students with disabilities. This website sends you to all the modules and webinars on this. Accessing the v2 webpage focused on a Deeper Dive and CTE and IPS would be the best recommendation as these modules focus on students with disabilities.

#### **Secondary Transition Resources as a Whole:**

- <https://transitioncoalition.org/> The Transition Coalition website provides a wide array of resources, everything from modules for professional development on transition topics (i.e. self-determination) to reviews and use of various different transition assessments.

## Theme 5: CULTURE

### *Improving Equity, Climate, And Capacity*

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**There is a continued need to provide school staff and administrators with collaborative, high-quality, system-wide professional development focused on optimizing the access and engagement that students with disabilities have to general education, through differentiating and accommodating instruction, and improving equity, behavioral, and social-emotional systematic instruction, and intervention.**

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#### Strengths

- 49% of comments in the staff surveys indicated there are caring and committed staff in DJUSD who support each other and care deeply for the students and families they serve.
- DJUSD has an Office of School Climate which works to improve the educational experience of all students in the District.
  - Staff have collected and monitored data on DJUSD's climate over the years using the national Youth Truth Survey and the state of California's Healthy Kids Survey.
- Mental and behavioral health staff were frequently mentioned as critical support for students.

#### Key Discoveries

##### Climate and Culture

Comments in staff surveys, focus groups, and interviews indicated:

- Many staff were feeling overwhelmed and burned out after the last two years of pandemic challenges with limited support from the district for their own mental health.
- Insufficient staffing and turnover rates were consistently reported to be of concern by both parents and staff.

- There is not enough staff and substitutes to address the increased needs of students which has left staff having to scramble for coverage for unfilled positions.
- Infrequent communication from the district office as to assistance or solutions to the issues has created a void that has led to increased anxiety.

### **Behavior, Discipline, and Disproportionality**

- Of the 32 classes that were observed, the following behavioral expectations and supports were noted:
  - 44% had evidence of clear classroom management policies and procedures
  - 61% showed evidence of transitions and routines
  - 44% showed evidence of students positively reinforced for expected behavior.
- 39% of survey responses from staff indicated that appropriate discipline policies and procedures were **not** in place across the district.
- Staff frequently mentioned concerns related to the extremely challenging behavior of some of the students following the return to in-person instruction.
  - Many of the comments indicated feeling like there was a lack of appropriate support personnel, behavior interventions, training and strategies for responding to the behaviors, and consistent discipline policies and procedures.
  - These behaviors have led to disruptions in the learning environment for other students and has caused fear and resentment on the part of some staff and students.

### **Equity**

- In 2021, DJUSD's percentage of total enrollment in each ethnic group compared to the percentage of students with disabilities in each ethnic group shows a few groups with statistically significant differences.
  - The exceptions include Asian where the total student enrollment is higher by 10.9% than the students with disabilities and Hispanic where the students with disabilities group is higher than the total student enrollment group by 10.5%. There is also a slightly higher representation of Black and Hispanic/Latino

enrollment for students with disabilities than the total student enrollment. (Figure 19).

- DJUSD does **not** have disproportionate representation in special education overall nor within a specific disability category for any racial and ethnic groups as result of inappropriate identification.
- Figure 20 shows the risk ratio calculation for DJUSD for FY 2020 (most recent year of data). DJUSD does not have any ethnic groups identified as students with disabilities significant to their total enrollment and are not identified as disproportionate by CDE. However, this data indicates that:
  - African American students are the most likely to be identified as a student with a disability with a risk ratio of 1.9, followed by Hispanic students at 1.6.
  - White students (1.0), Multiple race students (0.8), Asian students (0.3) are the least likely to be identified as a student with a disability.
- This data should be monitored and deeper inquiry into the reasons behind over enrollment for the students in the ethnic groups that score a risk ratio greater than 1.0 should be undertaken. For DJUSD, this deeper inquiry should occur for the students who are African American and Hispanic students.
- While general education teachers are welcoming of students with disabilities in their classrooms, they sometimes lack the skills and resources to work with these students effectively.
- Survey and focus group responses indicated that general education staff often have the mindset that special education students are the responsibility of special educators and that general education staff do not have the knowledge or skills nor the time to support special education students in their classrooms.
- Parents expressed concerns regarding the quality of services for students with disabilities and the equity of access to the general education curriculum both before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Professional development**

- The need for training was frequently mentioned in focus groups and on the surveys as a substantially key need. Much of the training has been put on hold since the pandemic due to lack of substitutes and staffing issues.



- Overall, there was a high percentage of staff respondents on the surveys who indicated with the following statements about professional development opportunities to learn about the needs of the students with IEPs:
  - 56% indicated that opportunities for administrative staff were lacking.
  - 68% indicated that opportunities for general education staff to learn about academic needs were lacking.
  - 71% indicated that opportunities for general education staff to learn about behavioral needs were lacking.
  - 64% indicated that opportunities for special education staff to learn about general education curriculum were lacking.
  - 63% indicated that opportunities for administrative staff to learn about cultural and linguistic needs of students with IEPs were lacking.
  - 76% indicated that opportunities for all staff to learn about cultural and linguistic needs of students with IEPs were lacking.

## Data Review and Analysis

### *Climate and Culture*

The climate and culture of a district has an impact on everyone and everything that is a part of the district, from the staff to the students, to the families, and the community. Over the last two years of the pandemic both of these have been deeply impacted in DJUSD as in all schools across the country. Overall, the climate across the District has suffered over the course of the last two years of the pandemic. While staff, students, and families were extremely grateful to be back in person and getting “back to normal” the process has been anything but smooth. Some of the issues include:

- Due to staffing shortages with one-to-one support for paraeducators who students with behavior challenges, Behavioral Intervention Specialists have been called upon to provide this support, thus removing them from their other duties.
- Frequently changing mandates, precautions, and uncertainty about health and safety of all involved has created stress and anxiety in staff, families, and students - the impacts of which are still being realized
- Staff have experienced students' challenging and disruptive behavior at a level that has not been seen previously.
- This has caused challenges for all in how to help students re-engage successfully in the school setting again.

Staffing issues have also been high with staff leaving or not returning to schools, creating shortages that have caused emotional and mental health issues for many staff. Staff overwhelmingly express concern about burnout, feeling overwhelmed, and emotionally and physically drained, which has them in survival mode.

The culture, or the systems of how things are done in the district has also suffered. Staff expressed that they feel like they are in crisis management mode all the time. Yet among all of this, the staff have continued to work to engage and re-engage in the District's long term goal of developing an equitable and inclusive culture and environment where all students are supported and engaged.

A review of the systems and supports available in DJUSD shows that there is an Office of School Climate which works to improve the educational experience of all students in the District. Staff have been collecting and monitoring data on climate over the years using the national Youth Truth Survey and the California Healthy Kids Survey. The Office of School Climate analyzes and provides data disaggregated by subgroups and compared with district, state, and national data and works with various teams and departments for improvement efforts.

Data from the staff and parent surveys, interviews, and focus groups

- continued to support and embrace this overall goal of the district but also continued to point to areas where growth is needed.
- While there were frequent positive comments about the caring supportive staff across the district, responses, there also issues of ownership and belonging for students with IEPs still exist.
  - Such attitudes often are expressions of being overwhelmed with their role and responsibilities or feeling like they may not have the knowledge or skills to provide the necessary supports.
  - These attitudes can also come from fear of failing or being asked to do more when their plates are already very full.
  - All staff need to be able to access learning in a way that helps to accommodate their understanding of the differences that exist across the range of disabilities in DJUSD.
  - Gaining an understanding of the wide variety of abilities and challenges that exist can be helpful to understanding that students can and do learn in different ways given the opportunity to accommodate their needs.

As stated in Themes 1 and 4, this is an opportunity to engage staff and stakeholders in the vision and mission of the district and help to reignite the passion and growth mindset necessary for achieving the goal of an equitable and inclusive district. Collaborating with the Office of School Climate, Multi-Tiered System of Supports leadership team, and the district leadership team, should be able to target and prioritize where to begin to address the challenges across the various areas of need. Identifying specific needs in each area through the utilization of tools such as the resources from the [National Center on Safe, Supportive Learning Environments](#) and their

[Self-Assessment and Action Planner](#) provides data to assist leaders in knowing where to start building a positive school climate. The [Quick Guide on Making School Climate Improvements](#) contains activities and resources for developing a plan for addressing the high-need areas identified in the self-assessment.

### **Disproportionality**

Disproportionate representation is an indicator that is monitored for each district by the state education agency (SEA) and the states are monitored by OSEP to ensure that the SEA is monitoring and providing technical assistance to districts who exceed the targets in these measures. The data for disproportionate representations is measured using a risk ratio.

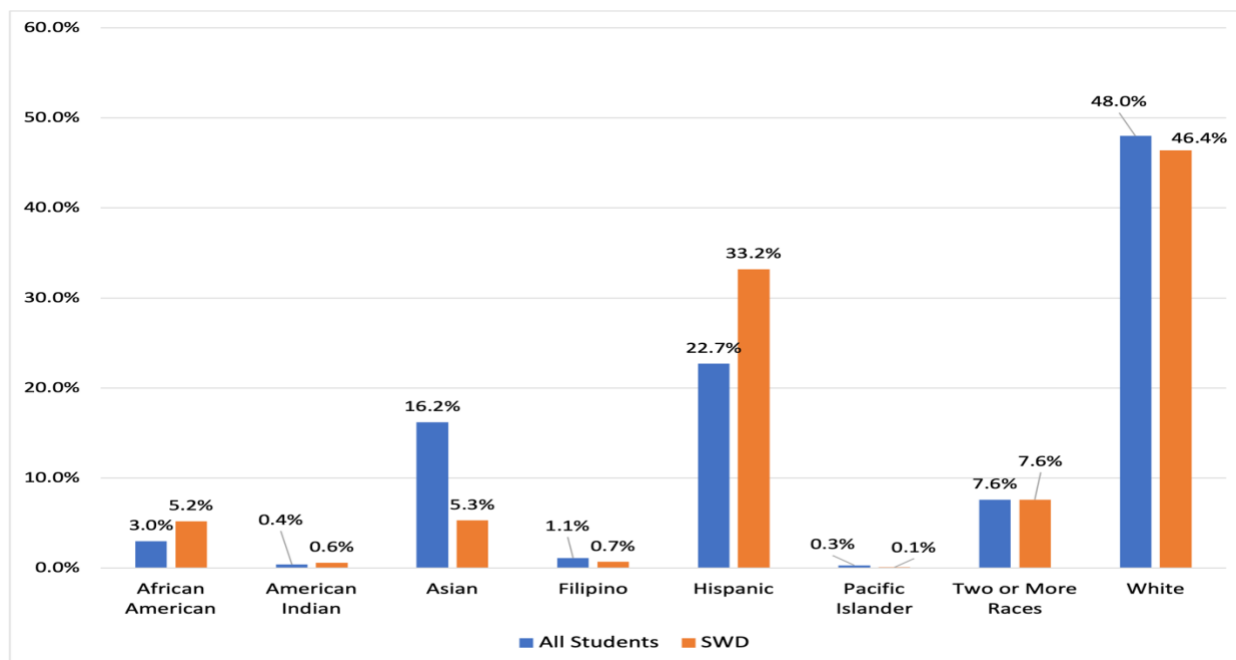
The risk ratio is a measure of the risk that a student from a specific racial/ethnic group will be served in special education or a specific disability category compared to the risk of all other students being served in that category.

- A risk ratio of 1.00 means that students from that group are as likely to be served in the category as all other students.
- A risk ratio greater than 1.00 indicates the degree to which students in that racial/ethnic group are over-represented.
- Risk ratios for being identified with a disability by ethnicity are calculated by dividing the number of students with disabilities of a specific ethnicity by the total number of students enrolled in DJUSD from that ethnic group.
- A risk ratio of 3.0 or higher is considered to be significant and a result of inappropriate identification and the district will be identified as needing intensive support to improve their identification processes.

Figure 19 represents the percentage of students with disabilities and the total student enrollment by ethnicity. When comparing the percentage of total enrollment of each ethnic group to the percentage of students with disabilities in each ethnic group, there are a few with statistically significant differences.

- The Asian group has a total student enrollment which is higher by 10.9% than the students with disabilities enrollment.
- The Hispanic group is higher for the students with disabilities than the total student enrollment group by 10.5%.
- There is also a slightly higher representation of Black and Hispanic/Latino students for students with disabilities than the total student enrollment.

**Figure 19. DJUSD Percentage of Students with Disabilities and Total Student Enrollment by Ethnicity FY 2021**

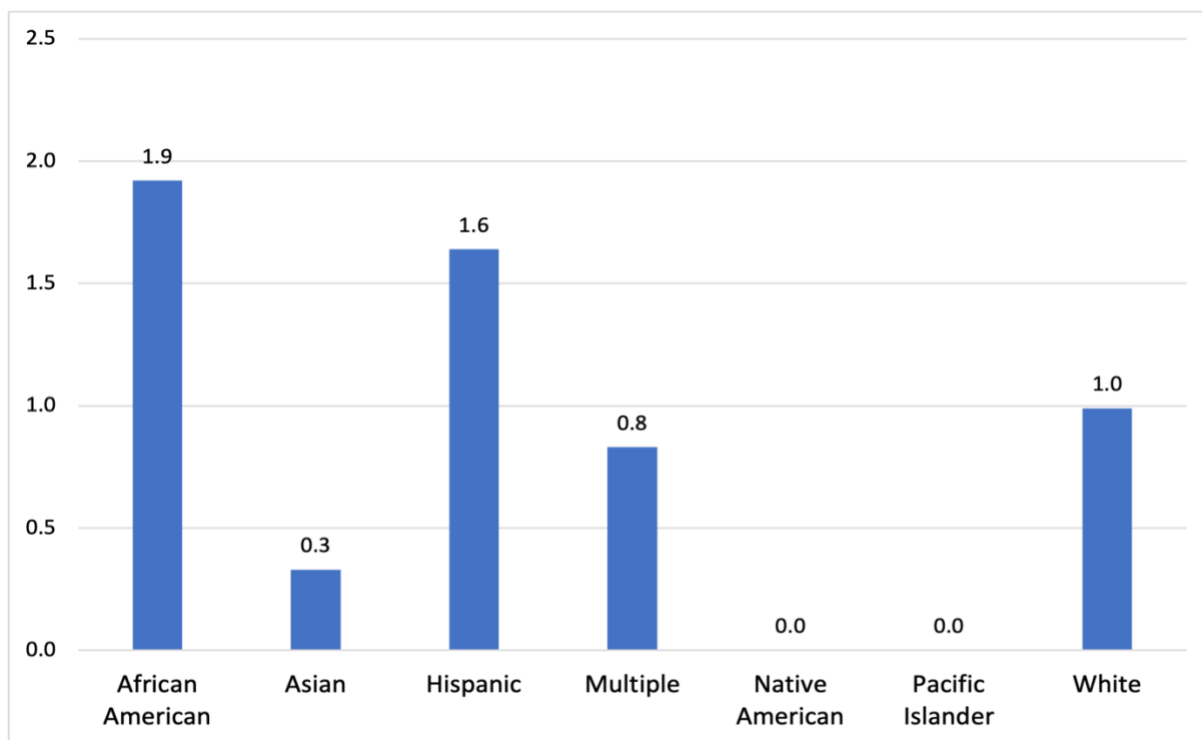


Source: California Department of Education DataQuest 2021: <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

Figure 20 shows the risk ratio calculation for DJUSD for FY 2020 (most recent year of data). DJUSD does not have any ethnic groups identified as students with disabilities significant to their total enrollment and are not identified as disproportionate by CDE. However, this data indicates that:

- African American students are the most likely to be identified as a student with a disability with a risk ratio of 1.9, followed by Hispanic students (1.6),
- White students (1.0), Multiple race students (0.8), Asian students (0.3) with Native American and Pacific Islander students (under the minimum number for privacy concerns) are the least likely to be identified as a student with a disability.
- **This data should be monitored and deeper inquiry into the reasons behind over enrollment for the students in the ethnic groups that score a risk ratio greater than 1.0 should be undertaken. For DJUSD, this deeper inquiry should occur for the students who are African American and Hispanic students.**

**Figure 20: DJUSD Disproportionate Representation in Special Education Risk Ratio by Ethnicity FY 2020**



Source: CA System Improvement Leads Data tools: <https://aprinicators.systemimprovement.org/>

Disproportionate representation is an indicator of the existence of issues of equity within the system. Taking action to determine the root cause of the issue(s) early will help to identify strategies and develop a plan of action to implement solutions to begin to remediate the issue(s). **Even though DJUSD has not been identified as disproportionate, the data does indicate that African American and Hispanic students are being identified at a higher rate than is expected and it is important that the District identify the reasons why this is occurring.**

A resource that districts have found useful for examining issues of disproportionality is from the IDEA Data Center (IDC) which is a federally funded project that assists state education agencies to monitor and support improvement in their special education data from their local districts. IDC has created the [Success Gap Toolkit](#) which has tools, processes, and resources to assist districts and schools to identify the root causes of the “success gap” and develop plans to remedy the issues.

### **Behavior Support**

DJUSD has several resources and options available for behavior support for students with IEPs. Behavioral Intervention Specialists (BIS) are assigned across the district to provide mainly Tier 3 supports but can also assist with Tier 2 consultation. Educationally-Related Mental Health Services (ERMHS) are defined as specific mental health services provided to students who qualify for special education services, present with social-emotional needs that have not responded to lower levels of intervention and impact their ability to learn or benefit from their special education program.

There are currently four Behavioral Intervention Specialists and a lead Behavioral Intervention Specialist to support all of the sites. They provide consultation support to staff and IEP teams to develop and implement Behavior Support Plans for individual students as well as support to classes.

#### Challenges:

- Disconnect and lack of cohesion between special education services and general education support. One of the Behavioral Intervention Specialists was assigned to support Tier 2 in general education but there have not been any requests for these supports.
- Multi-Tiered System of Supports implementation has been slow and lacks a systemic approach. PBIS has been implemented as a part of Multi-Tiered System
- The need for training was frequently mentioned in focus groups and on the surveys as a substantial need. Much of the training has been put on hold since the pandemic due to lack of substitutes and staffing issues.
- There are some examples of Tier 1 academic interventions in several sites but there were few examples of Tier 2 or 3 academic interventions. There is an overall lack of Tier 1 and 2 behavior supports.
- Behavioral Intervention Specialists do not have a caseload cap so they are spread thin. There is no consistent process or protocol for accessing the BIS support.
- Prior to the pandemic, there was a referral process in place but it has not been in use since the return to in-person instruction.

- Due to staffing shortages with one-to-one support for paraeducators who students with behavior challenges, Behavioral Intervention Specialists have been called upon to provide this support, thus removing them from their other duties.

Educationally-Related Mental Health Services support is provided by the district for students in special education and in need of specific mental health supports. Educationally-Related Mental Health Services staff work with school psychologists and BIS staff to coordinate their supports and services as well as other special education staff to ensure that students are receiving the appropriate supports and interventions.

There are currently four Educationally-Related Mental Health Services providers, two full time and two part time. They do have a job description but there is no defined cap for their caseloads. The Yolo County Office of Education has a caseload cap for their Educationally-Related Mental Health Services providers of 25 but the DJUSD providers are currently carrying caseloads in excess of that. A process and criteria for assessing and developing an intervention plan.

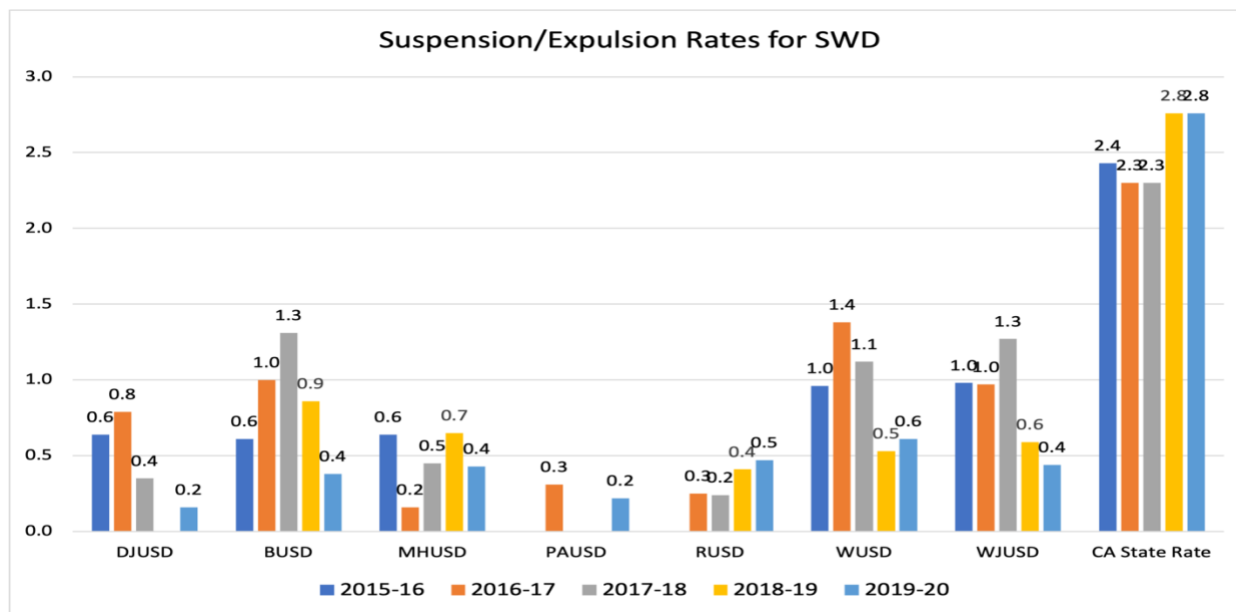
#### Challenges:

- Caseloads are currently very high causing issues of adequate coverage.
- The district is lacking Tier 2 services and other mental health supports such as counselors or psychologists who could provide mental health supports for students whose needs are not as severe or who could provide step-down services when students have made progress with the Educationally-Related Mental Health Services support and are ready for less intensive supports.
- There is a lack of consistency across the district as to the expectations about who should provide services. Tier 2 services need to be defined and developed to allow for less intensive support for some students.
- Previously a Behavior Intervention Class was available for students who needed a smaller environment but the class was not in operation this year and the intensive supports that were in place for those students is no longer available.

Behavioral support needs were a frequent comment from staff and parents in the surveys, interviews, and focus groups. As has been stated previously, extremely challenging behavior related to the turmoil of the pandemic has taken a toll on existing services and supports which has left staff and students feeling stressed and overwhelmed.

Figure 21 shows the data for suspensions/expulsions for students with disabilities compared with the peer districts and the statewide average for the FY 2016-2020. DJUSD is well below the state average for the number of suspensions/expulsions (in which we want to see a low number for the data) and below three of the seven peer districts.

**Figure 21. DJUSD percent students with disabilities with suspensions/expulsions compared with the state rates and comparison districts FYs 2016-2020**



Source: CA System Improvement Leads Data tools: <https://aprindicators.systemimprovement.org/>

While this data indicates that the District is not overly suspending or expelling students with disabilities, considerations for recommendations in this area include:

- It is important to monitor this data at least annually to see if there are any increases.
- Students with challenging behavior are frequently removed from the general education classroom to walk around the campus or go to a quiet space when their behavior is disruptive.
- This is done in an effort to provide a time and space for “cooling down” but it also removes the student from instruction that is occurring in the classroom and has the same effect as a removal for any reason.
- Due to staffing issues, consistent support for students with challenging behavior was frequently provided by staff who were not trained and quiet rooms were often not available.
- Teachers and paraeducators indicated that these removals were often not noted so it is difficult to track how often this is happening.
- It will be important to determine the reasons for the need for these types of removals and work to develop alternative methods to assist students to be comfortable in their learning environments.

**Professional Development**

Professional development needs were frequently mentioned in responses to surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Comments from staff and parents highlighted some of the issues and needs for professional develop:



- Most training has stopped since the pandemic due to staffing issues and lack of substitutes.
- One of the key issues that arose was that all training is voluntary and staff are not required to participate if they don't want to. Many staff felt that some of the professional development should be required.
- Training for paraeducators is minimal and planning time with the special education and general education teachers on individual students is often on the fly or non-existent.
- Training and onboarding for new teachers and new paraeducators is minimal or non-existent.
- Looking for ways to embed more training and coaching into the existing day would help with implementation of Universal Design for Learning and modifying curriculum.
- Training on Universal Design for Learning, accommodating, and modifying curriculum and lessons as well as time to collaborate is critical to support the needs of students with diverse needs in the general education classroom.

In the survey, staff were asked to identify their top priorities for professional development. The top responses include:

- Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports
- Supporting and accommodating students with disabilities
- Collaborative planning
- Universal Design for Learning
- Co-teaching
- Partnering with families

## In Their Own Voices

### Summary of feedback from focus groups, interviews, and surveys related to Theme 5:

Summary of feedback from **Administrators**:

#### Strengths:

- *Staff are caring and responsive to students and parents.*
- *Some sites are implementing PBIS with success.*

#### Challenges

- *Not all staff have a growth mindset or an understanding of inclusion and responsibility for all students.*
- *Student behavior has been a challenge this year.*

Summary of feedback from **Staff**:

#### Strengths

- *Many general education staff are welcoming and supportive of the move toward increased inclusion.*
- *Staff have worked hard to support students and each other during this challenging year.*

### Challenges

- *Issues of the increase in extreme and challenging behavior by some students was frequently mentioned as a concern by staff and administrators.*
- *Staff expressed that behavior and mental health supports were not sufficient to deal with the many issues and concerns that arose this year.*
- *Staff also expressed concerns about staff who do not have a growth mindset or equity focus.*

### Summary of feedback from **Parents**:

#### Strengths

- *Communication with teachers was frequently cited as positive by parents.*
- *Children feel safe and supported by staff.*

#### Challenges

- *Some parents do not feel that the District's equity focus includes students with differing abilities.*
- *Some parents feel that teachers need more training on supporting students in general education especially with social skill development.*

## Why It Matters

**Climate and culture.** Climate is the feel or the heart and soul of the school, attitudes, behaviors, points of view whereas culture is how things are done, values, beliefs, norms, and traditions. Research shows that when schools and districts effectively focus on improving school climate, students are more likely to engage in the curriculum, achieve academically, and develop positive relationships; students are less likely to

#### **In Their Own Voices**

***"It is better for ALL students to learn with ALL their classmates."***

**Parent**

exhibit problem behaviors; and teacher turnover is lower and teacher satisfaction is higher.<sup>22</sup>

Best practice for developing inclusive schools includes aligning support systems, collaboration, and ongoing professional development, which combines training and coaching, is embedded in the daily work of teaching and learning, and is cultivated by a community that includes teachers, school staff, mentors, colleagues, coaches, and administration.<sup>23</sup> Aligning the various support systems and processes under the framework of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (see Theme 1) allows a district to create a more seamless process whereby students' needs can be identified early and supports provided to address their needs in a fluid fashion.

**Building a collaborative and inclusive culture.** DJUSD stands amidst a unique convergence of identified need, staff desire, and a district vision to build a collaborative approach to serving the educational needs of all students.

The intricacy of providing quality special education services that are both legally compliant and educationally beneficial requires the special education department to provide leadership, support, and oversight from qualified, experienced, and knowledgeable individuals and to collaborate with other departments and leadership to align these under the common goal of success for all students.

Providing staff with joint professional learning opportunities reinforces the District's vision of and belief in a unified special education/general education system and contributes to high-quality teaching which is designed to address the needs of diverse learners, that leads to improved results for all students. Implementation should include:

- Begin by building a unified definition and model of inclusive services in DJUSD, to create common understanding as to the goal of inclusion and equity for all students.
- Once there is a common understanding of the goal it will be important to collaboratively work to identify roles and responsibilities of staff and build their capacity to design and provide lessons that are accessible by all diverse needs.
- Then examine staffing and service delivery data to determine where additional support might be necessary to address the needs of students with IEPs.
  - This may require the development of more ways for push-in and co-teaching support by special education teachers to provide the direct supports and curriculum adaptations needed and to collaborate with general educators on making lessons more accessible.

To address staff recruitment and retention challenges, it is highly recommended that DJUSD refine its professional development planning and programming to address the reported needs and to build capacity within its organization for sustained support of high-quality staffing. This includes

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<sup>22</sup> Osher, 2008

<sup>23</sup> Jorgensen, 2012

improving the support for new and inexperienced teachers as well as building the capacity of all of the educators to support the diverse needs of all students to the greatest extent possible within the general education classroom.

**Behavioral Interventions and Supports.** As has been described in each of the themes, behavior challenges have increased greatly since returning to in-person instruction following the pandemic closures. School staff and parents alike have stated that students have been deeply affected by the issues that the school closures and disruption to the everyday routines that all of us have experienced. Students' reactions to the disruptions and challenges brought about by the pandemic range from socialization to emotional to mental health challenges or a combination of any and all of these.

Many school districts have chosen to engage extra supports including counselors, social workers, behavioral support personnel, or purchased social/emotional curriculum materials and resources with the additional funding provided to ease the effects of the pandemic. While these resources may provide some assistance, they may in fact be short lived when the funding runs out.

A more thoughtful and planful approach is recommended as the District is designing the supports and services within the Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework. These supports should:

- align with the systematic plan that the District has for building the system of supports that are designed to address the diverse needs of the students within the district.
- Engaging the District's staff and stakeholders to identify and address the specific needs of the students, families, and staff and develop a plan to address the staffing and support needs through short- and long-term systemic *planning* is strongly recommended.
- By identifying the needs of the students and developing a model which will begin with an emphasis on **prevention** along with determining where the needs for more intensive supports are, the district will be able to focus on developing a system designed to help students before they experience failure or exhibit behaviors that escalate to the point of crisis.
- Pairing and aligning these models of support with the work that has already begun within the district with the implementation of school-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), will create a system of supports which include a common understanding of the classroom management processes and consistent behavioral expectations and processes that creates an effective structure where staff and students know what is acceptable and what is not.

**Professional development.** Educators are consistently on the lookout for strategies and skill development to better refine their pedagogical approach to teaching. Addressing the needs of an ever-widening diversity of students in their classrooms requires mastery of content, effective teaching practices, and solid belief in the potential of students to learn at high levels of rigor with

supported access to general education classrooms in which high levels of learning with age-appropriate peers takes place.

“High-quality professional development leads teachers to gain and refine knowledge of both content and pedagogy; reflects best practices in teaching and learning, helping adults with varied interests, learning profiles, and readiness to learn to work together and feel part of a community of learners; and has a positive impact on the classroom in terms of both teacher effectiveness and student learning.”<sup>24</sup>

Providing school leaders and classroom teachers with high-quality professional development opportunities is a core responsibility of school districts. Although not all workshops or training lead to powerful changes in classroom practice, when professional development systems are tied to staff needs and ongoing support systems, there is great potential for improvement. Professional development is effective when leaders ensure that it is coordinated, that capacity building is continuous, and that staff are making progress toward a shared goal.<sup>25</sup>

## Recommendations

***Recommendation 1: Intentionally focus on improving the climate and culture across the district by specifically developing supports for staff, students, and parents to support the development of a supportive and inclusive culture across the district.***

Under the direction of the School Climate Office and the Multi-Tiered System of Supports Leadership team, collect and review data and develop prioritized processes to address the development of an inclusive culture and to provide the social/emotional, and mental health supports and resources to assist all in creating the safe supportive learning environment. Establish a work group to identify the tools and processes that will assist the development of these supports. Some of these recommended resources include:

- The tools such as the resources from the [National Center on Safe, Supportive Learning Environments](#) and their resources.
- [Self-Assessment and Action Planner](#) provides data to assist leaders in knowing where to start building a positive school climate.
- [Quick Guide on Making School Climate Improvements](#) contains activities and resources for developing a plan for addressing the high-need areas identified in the self-assessment.
- [Leveraging Reset Opportunities to Help Students and Staff Thrive](#), which is a tool which identifies practices for school administrators and classroom teachers and others who provide direct support to students to assist with building individual capacity and building a supportive environment.

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<sup>24</sup> Strickland, 2009

<sup>25</sup> Fullan, 2004

**Recommendation 2: Examine the behavior supports and district-wide processes for behavioral supports and develop consistent strategies and interventions across all of the Tiers in the system of supports.**

Re-examine behavioral and social emotional supports to address and mitigate the challenges brought about by the pandemic. Utilizing a school-wide, district-wide [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support \(PBIS\)](#), [Restorative Practices](#), crisis prevention, equity, social skills, curriculum as well as the behavior support staff.

**Recommendation 3: Provide intentional and specific professional development on content and topics related to supporting students with disabilities in the classroom, and provide real-time, ongoing opportunities for practice so that teachers can build both their understanding and frame of reference for what an inclusive classroom means.**

Building an understanding of Universal Design for Learning principles will assist teachers and staff in building their lessons with all learners in mind. Professional development and coaching in Universal Design for Learning will gradually replace the one-size-fits-all lessons that have traditionally been used with lessons that allow for options in how students learn and show what they have learned. A good resource for Universal Design for Learning is the [Center for Applied Special Technology](#) (CAST), which has excellent materials to help staff build their capacity in universal design principles.

Teachers who do not practice and build successful experiences in the classroom will not have the opportunity to shift their mindsets and beliefs. We believe that implementing a culture change so that all staff are responsible for all students is critical to teachers feeling accountable for student learning. Newly acquired belief systems can lead to the development of a community of responsibility among special and general education teachers, and we have found that the one critical element that influences teachers' beliefs about inclusion is not research or regulations but their direct (positive) experiences with inclusion.

**Recommendation 5: Ensure the successful development of new special education teachers by providing mentorship and coaching for the first two years of their tenure**

Develop a more comprehensive and engaged support system for new special education teachers that includes coaching and mentors to provide ongoing support, written policies and procedures to identify what and how to do their job, and caseloads that are reasonable to allow for success as they build and grow their skills as a teacher. (See Theme 1, Recommendation 6 for additional resources)

## **Resources for Theme 5**

### **School Climate and Culture Resources:**

- The [National Center on Safe, Supportive Learning Environments](#) and their [Self-Assessment and Action Planner](#) provides data to assist leaders in knowing where to start building a positive school climate.
- The [Quick Guide on Making School Climate Improvements](#) brief.

#### **Disproportionality Resources:**

- [Success Gaps Toolkit: Addressing Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunity](#) from the IDEA Data Center (IDC) which is a federally funded technical assistance center focused on improving the quality of IDEA Data.
- [Preventing Disproportionality by Strengthening District Policies and Procedures](#) from the former National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems.

#### **Professional Development and New Special Education Teacher Support Resources:**

- [National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development](#) was funded by OSEP to improve teacher quality and increase commitment to teaching students with disabilities. Resources that can be found on this site include:
  - Sample District Induction Manual for supporting beginning special educators.
  - Mentor Handbook
- IRIS Center module on: [Teacher Induction: Providing Comprehensive Training for New Special Educators](#).
- Job-Embedded Professional Development Quick Guide on Making School Climate Improvements

# Conclusion

According to Darling-Hammond et al., “Schools that are strategic in creating time and productive working relationships within academic departments or grade levels, across them, or among teachers schoolwide — the benefits can include greater consistency in instruction, more willingness to share practices and try new ways of teaching, and more success in solving problems of practice.”<sup>26</sup> This report contains many recommendations, and it is certainly not possible to implement all of them within a short period of time. Instead, DJUSD staff should identify those recommendations that are seen to yield the greatest benefit and then prioritize them, specifying who is responsible for implementing each item and the timeline for implementation, including periodic review to ensure that progress is being made.

Some of the recommendations in this report will be relatively easy to implement, such as providing focused professional development by content and providing technical experts throughout the district. Other recommendations, such as developing and implementing an Multi-Tiered System of Supports model, require significant planning efforts between school sites and the DJUSD district office. We recommend that DJUSD start by piloting new, but smaller, strategies and approaches to test the impact the change will really have.

**For an overall implementation process, see Appendix A.**

**For an Universal Design for Learning implementation plan, see Appendix B.**

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<sup>26</sup> Wei, 2009



# Appendix A: Suggestion for Implementing Recommendations

To execute the recommendations in this report, WestEd suggests DJUSD utilize a three-stage phase-in.

- **Stage I: Preparation and exploration.** This stage is designed for the district to spend time thoughtfully planning and preparing for the implementation of what it views as priorities through a well-designed action plan. In addition, the district should spend time building a foundation of relationships and transparency with stakeholders during this stage.
- **Stage II: Installation.** In this stage, the district works to solidify policies, procedures, dissemination methods, and the rollout of district wide initiatives.
- **Stage III: Implementation.** Finally, the district implements the action plan it has prepared. It is vital that the district collect data from the onset of new initiatives in order to facilitate continuous improvement and sustainability of initiatives and to positively impact culture and climate.

Key to the overall success of implementing recommendations is a focus on the effectiveness of two-way communication processes, the level of support from district to site, relationship-building based on trust, and visible adjustments based on data collection and the communication of needs.

The following table outlines a suggested implementation plan for planning, implementing, and sustaining the recommended changes to the overall program.

<p><b>Stage I Preparation and Exploration</b></p>	<p><b>Special education finance and resource planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine funding priorities through stakeholder input.</li> <li>• Develop a separate special education budget to determine exact amounts going to different sources.</li> <li>• Develop a system for comparing resources to numbers and needs of students with disabilities by site.</li> <li>• Create a system for transparency of resource planning.</li> </ul> <p><b>District UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING leadership team</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine stakeholders to be included on the Multi-Tiered System of leadership team.</li> </ul>
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- Complete a Multi-Tiered System of foundational assessment.
- Develop purposes, roles, and responsibilities.
- Identify a structure, a process, materials, and accountability tools.
- Define outcomes, a communication strategy, and a data collection process (e.g., what and how academic, behavioral, and discipline data is collected).
- Define timelines and actions.

#### **Special education district improvement team**

- Determine stakeholders to be included on the team.
- Develop mission, vision, values, and goals for special education.
- Disproportionality data analysis and Success Gap toolkit implementation.

#### *Handbook development*

- Collect information on the current status of policies and procedures for the development of a handbook.
- Review and analyze the handbook for completeness and identify outdated topics and new topics to be included.
- Gather examples of policies and procedures from other districts.
- Determine a communication path and a plan for keeping the handbook updated.
- Develop a release timeline.

#### *Inclusive practices*

- Investigate inclusive practices through training.
- Identify current practices and their alignment with inclusive practices.
- Conduct focus walks/talks with districts that have experienced success with inclusive practices.
- Design a plan of action that includes outcomes, communication, training, and data collection.

- Develop timelines.

### **Communication**

- Identify ways (e.g., in person, electronically, via hard copy, via site visits) in which the district office currently communicates with sites, parents, and stakeholders (consider both one-way and two-way communication.)
- Identify ways in which sites communicate with staff, parents, and stakeholders.
- Identify ways in which staff communicate with parents and stakeholders.
- Determine areas in which communication can be aligned and in which opportunities can be created to increase communication at all levels of the organization.
- Determine areas of communication in need of improvements, such as timeliness, content, and mode.
- Ensure all staff have access to electronic communication (e.g., computer, email accounts) and understand expectations for checking and responding to communication.
- Explore possible causes for lack of timely communication and plan for retraining as needed.

### **Professional development**

- Review district wide professional development for all personnel, including administrators, teachers, instructional aides, bus drivers, yard duty workers, new staff, and parents.
- Identify common professional development themes as well as gaps in professional development opportunities provided.
- Identify topics specific to staff and parents.
- Identify topics all stakeholders need training on.
- Align training topics to the district's mission and to a strategic plan that includes all student populations.
- Design stakeholder survey in order to determine priority areas for professional development.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify various forms of available professional development (e.g., webinars, conferences), including organizations that may support DJUSD’s professional development plan.</li> <li>• Communicate and advertise professional development opportunities across stakeholder groups.</li> </ul> <p><b>Multilingual learner instruction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify current policies and procedures for identifying multilingual learners suspected of having a disability.</li> <li>• Establish policies and procedures for determining language acquisition versus disabilities.</li> <li>• Identify staff needs in developing IEPs for multilingual learners.</li> <li>• Design targeted professional development that differentiates English language acquisition and disability.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage II Installation</b></p>	<p><b>District Multi-Tiered System of teams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan and designate dates for a district wide Multi-Tiered System of institute in which district and site staff can analyze data and determine priorities. Much of the information collected in this process may be used to refine and inform the district wide professional development plan.</li> </ul> <p><b>District wide policies and procedures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select the individuals who will support the development of updated policies and procedures by determining the amount of time needed and dates to meet and by providing updates and outcomes (e.g., communication, number of staff per school site, professional development).</li> </ul> <p><b>Communication and collaboration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine ways in which communication expectations will be disseminated to stakeholders (i.e., what will be communicated, how will it be communicated, and by when it will be communicated), and determine accountability measures.</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Professional development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboratively schedule professional development that involves the elementary, secondary, curriculum and instruction, multilingual learner instruction, and special education departments.</li> <li>• Determine an information dissemination process.</li> <li>• Ensure professional development is inclusive and comprehensive and includes not only teachers but also bus drivers, yard supervisors, new staff, instructional aides, and so on.</li> <li>• Develop a district wide professional development evaluation form to determine the effectiveness of training for participants <i>and</i> facilitators.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage III Implementation</b></p>	<p><b>District Multi-Tiered System of</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate a district wide Multi-Tiered System of Supports institute with representative district and site staff and relevant stakeholders.</li> <li>• Determine district Multi-Tiered System of Supports leadership meeting dates and a process for analyzing information collected during the Multi-Tiered System of Supports institute.</li> <li>• Plan for the analysis and release of aligned next steps and an action plan to district stakeholders.</li> </ul> <p><b>District wide policies and procedures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete and disseminate policies and procedures.</li> <li>• Ensure training for staff is included in a professional development plan.</li> <li>• Determine which learning components are relevant to staff beyond special education.</li> </ul> <p><b>Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disseminate a communication plan and expectations.</li> <li>• Assist staff in understanding the importance of timely and effective communication/collaboration, which may be a</li> </ul>

component of the district wide professional development plan.

**Professional development**

- Disseminate an aligned, inclusive, and comprehensive professional development plan that includes topics, speakers, participants, dates, registration steps, and compensation (e.g., hours, mileage).
- Use evaluation data to review, adjust, and plan future training and professional development.

# Appendix B: Multi-Tiered System of Supports Implementation Plan

## Recommendations for Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support

The district's goal for this study is to understand how to best improve overall organizational and programmatic capacity in order to support the progress of students with disabilities efficiently and effectively. WestEd's approach to reviewing the special education program is drawn from research on systems thinking, organizational development, transformational leadership and instructional practices, and school system structures designed to support all learners.

## Understanding the Foundation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports and the Intersection of Special Education

Prior to implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports, the district must first understand the Multi-Tiered System of Supports and the intersection of special education based on the local context of the district. An essential component of developing the system is to understand the capacity and experience of all staff in being able to successfully implement the process. It is essential that as the district initiates an Multi-Tiered System of Supports, all staff play pivotal roles in all aspects. Several resources exist that support the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports. The following is a compilation of those resources to guide the district through the process.

### **1. Preparation and Exploration Stage:** Immediate and initial actions to begin the process of implementation

#### **1.1 District Multi-Tiered System of Supports implementation leadership team**

- 1.1.1** Determine stakeholders to be included on the Multi-Tiered System of Supports implementation leadership team.
- 1.1.2** Develop purpose, roles, and responsibilities aligned to the district's vision, strategic plan, and district and school improvement plans.
- 1.1.3** Identify structure, process, materials, and accountability tools.
- 1.1.4** Define outcomes, a communication strategy, and a data collection process (e.g., what, and how academic, behavioral, and discipline data is collected).
- 1.1.5** Define a district wide system for academic, social-emotional, and behavioral interventions and supports for all struggling learners.

- 1.1.6 Conduct the Multi-Tiered System of Supports needs assessment to identify specific areas of need and linkages to key district initiatives.
- 1.1.7 Define timelines and actions.

## **1.2 Refinement of district wide policies and procedures**

- 1.2.1 Identify district and special education staff who will assist with the development of updated policies and procedures.
- 1.2.2 Collect information on the current status of policies and procedures.
- 1.2.3 Review and analyze current policies and procedures for completeness and identify outdated topics and new topics to be included.
- 1.2.4 Gather examples of policies and procedures from other districts for comparison.
- 1.2.5 Determine a process for feedback on needed changes.
- 1.2.6 Determine how training will take place and determine a process for communication and monitoring of appropriate use.
- 1.2.7 Develop key messages and expectations regarding staff knowledge and the use of updated policies and procedures.
- 1.2.8 Establish a process for updating and maintaining.

## **1.3 Communication**

- 1.3.1 Identify ways (e.g., in person, electronically, via hard copy, via site visits) in which the district office currently communicates with sites, parents, and stakeholders (consider both one-way and two-way communication).
- 1.3.2 Identify ways in which sites communicate with staff, parents, and stakeholders.
- 1.3.3 Identify ways in which staff communicate with parents and stakeholders.
- 1.3.4 Determine areas in which communication can be aligned and in which opportunities can be created to increase communication at all levels of the organization.
- 1.3.5 Explore possible causes for lack of timely communication.
- 1.3.6 Determine areas of communication in need of improvement, such as timeliness, content, and mode.
- 1.3.7 Ensure all staff have access to electronic communication (e.g., computer, email accounts) and understand expectations for checking and responding to communication.



- 1.3.8 Develop ongoing processes for communication, feedback, and alignment with general education processes.

#### **1.4 Professional development**

- 1.4.1 Review district wide professional development for all personnel, including administrators, teachers, instructional aides, bus drivers, yard duty workers, new staff, and parents.
- 1.4.2 Identify common professional development themes as well as gaps in professional development opportunities provided.
- 1.4.3 Identify topics specific to staff and parents.
- 1.4.4 Identify topics all stakeholders need training on.
- 1.4.5 Align training topics to the district's mission and to a strategic plan that includes all student populations.
- 1.4.6 Design a stakeholder survey in order to determine priority areas for professional development.
- 1.4.7 Identify various forms of available professional development (e.g., webinars, conferences), including organizations that may support DJUSD's professional development plan.
- 1.4.8 Communicate and advertise professional development opportunities across stakeholder groups.

- 2. **Initial Implementation Stage:** Planning stage for the development of site teams and alignment of the site planning process to district plan

#### **2.1 District Multi-Tiered System of Supports teams**

- 2.1.1 Plan and designate dates for a district wide Multi-Tiered System of Supports institute in which district and site staff can analyze data and determine priorities by using the Multi-Tiered System of Supports needs assessment. Much of the information collected in this process may be used to refine and inform the district wide professional development plan.

#### **2.2 Refinement of district wide policies and procedures**

- 2.2.1 Select the individuals who will support the development of updated policies and procedures by determining the amount of time needed and dates to meet and by providing updates and outcomes (e.g., communication, number of staff per school site, professional development).

### **2.3 Communication and collaboration**

- 2.3.1** Determine ways in which communication expectations will be disseminated to stakeholders (i.e., what will be communicated, how will it be communicated, and by when will it be communicated), and determine accountability measures.

### **2.4 Professional development**

- 2.4.1** Collaboratively schedule professional development that involves the elementary, secondary, curriculum and instruction, and special education departments.
- 2.4.2** Determine an information dissemination process.
- 2.4.3** Ensure professional development is inclusive and comprehensive and includes not only teachers but also bus drivers, yard supervisors, new staff, instructional aides, and so on.
- 2.4.4** Develop a district wide professional development evaluation form to determine the effectiveness of training for participants *and* facilitators.
- 2.4.5** Define a cancellation policy and an efficient method for collecting data about training including the number of canceled trainings, the effectiveness of training, accountability measures, and expectations regarding data use for planning future training.

## **3. Full Implementation Stage:** Implementation of action plans and development of feedback cycles to review data and make adjustments

### **3.1 District Multi-Tiered System of Supports**

- 3.1.1** Facilitate the district wide Multi-Tiered System of Supports institute with representative district and site staff and relevant stakeholders.
- 3.1.2** Determine district Multi-Tiered System of Supports leadership meeting dates and a process for analyzing information collected during the Multi-Tiered System of Supports institute.
- 3.1.3** Plan for the analysis and release of aligned next steps and an action plan to district stakeholders.

### **3.2 District wide policies and procedures**

- 3.2.1** Complete and disseminate policies and procedures.
- 3.2.2** Ensure training for staff is included in the professional development plan.
- 3.2.3** Determine which learning components are relevant to staff beyond special education (e.g., RtI2, or response to instruction and intervention).

### **3.3 Communication**

- 3.3.1** Disseminate a communication plan and expectations.
- 3.3.2** Assist staff in understanding the importance of timely and effective communication/collaboration, which may be a component of the district wide professional development plan.

### **3.4 Professional development**

- 3.4.1** Disseminate an aligned, inclusive, and comprehensive professional development plan that includes topics, speakers, participants, dates, registration steps, and compensation (e.g., hours, mileage).
- 3.4.2** Use evaluation data to review, adjust, and plan future training and professional development.

For each area of this Multi-Tiered System of Supports implementation plan, data collection must be addressed from the onset to maintain, continuously improve, and sustain initiatives and to positively impact culture and climate. Additionally, a focus on the effectiveness of two-way communication processes, the level of support from district to site, relationship-building based on trust, and visible adjustments based on the communication of needs and data collection is necessary.

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