

**Improving Special Education Services in the
AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**Report of the Strategic Support Team
OF THE
COUNCIL OF THE GREAT CITY SCHOOLS**

**Submitted to the
Austin Independent School District**



Summer 2010

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Council of the Great City Schools thanks the many individuals who contributed to this review of the special education programs in the Austin Independent School District (AISD). Their efforts were critical to our ability to present the district with the best possible proposals for improving special education and related services in the school system.

First, we thank Superintendent Meria Carstarphen. It is not easy to ask one's colleagues for the kind of review conducted by our team. It takes courage and openness, and a real desire for change and improvement.

Second, we thank the school board of the AISD, who approved the school system's conduct of this review. We hope that this report meets your expectations and can serve as a tool for improving services across the system.

Third, we thank the members of the school district staff, especially Janna Lilly, Director of Special Education and her excellent staff, who organized the team's interviews, school visits, and all the documents and data that we needed to do our work. These individuals spent many hours coordinating focus groups, submitting documents, and attending to the many details involved in putting together this assessment.

Fourth, the Council thanks the parents, professionals, and advocates with whom we met. They work passionately to support children and see that the district serves students with disabilities in the best possible manner.

Fifth, the Council thanks the Houston and Miami-Dade County school districts for contributing staff members to this effort. The enthusiasm and generosity of these districts serve as further examples of how the nation's urban public school systems are banding together to help each other improve performance for all students.

Finally, I appreciate the work of Julie Wright Halbert, legislative counsel for the Council of the Great City Schools, who facilitated the work of the team, and Sue Gamm, a nationally known expert in special education, who worked diligently with Ms. Halbert to prepare the final report. Their work was outstanding, as always, and critical to the success of this effort. Thank you.

Michael Casserly
Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

CHAPTER 1. OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Dr. Meria Carstarphen, the Austin schools superintendent, is leading the Austin Independent School District (AISD) to become more open, engaging, and transparent for all students, their families, and the greater Austin community. She and her administration believe in the “Power of Us” and the ability of the community and the schools to make the AISD one of the leading urban school districts in the nation.

The Austin Independent School District enrolls 84,676 students. Some 8,062 of these are students with disabilities—or about 9.7 percent, compared with a rate of 10.1 percent statewide and a rate of 13.6 percent nationwide. In general, the school district has an enrollment that is about 13 percent African American, 55 percent Hispanic, and 28 percent white. Some 46 percent of the district’s students are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch, and about 24 percent are English language learners.

The district operates 124 schools, which includes special centers (Clifton Career Development School) and educational programs in non-district facilities (Austin State Hospital, Travis County Juvenile Detention Center, Travis County Day School, Leadership Academy, Phoenix Academy, and JJAEP). The district also employs about 5,600 teachers, and has a general operating budget of approximately \$972 million in 2009-10. A nine-member elected board of education governs the school district and hires and evaluates the superintendent of schools. The board meets three times a month to consider district business.

The Austin Independent School District is also one of the nation’s highest performing big-city school districts, according to reports published by the Council of the Great City Schools on state test scores and scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). In fact, the performance of Austin students on the NAEP is similar to students nationally, even though the poverty rate for students in the Austin school district is substantially higher than nationwide rates.

Some 32 percent of Austin’s fourth-graders, for example, scored at or above proficiency levels on the NAEP reading test in 2009, compared with 31 percent of students across the country and 23 percent in the average big-city school district. About 30 percent of Austin’s eighth-graders scored at this level in reading that year, the same as the national rate. And students in the district scored at or above national levels in math. Finally, the NAEP data show that the district’s Hispanic and African American students do as well as or better than do their same-race peers elsewhere in the country.

The AISD could point to another measure of its success in early June when *Newsweek* magazine published its list of “Best High Schools in the Country.” Six of the district’s schools made the list.

This success and the progress behind it was built in part through the lengthy and strong tenure of Pat Forgione, the previous superintendent, and accelerated by Dr. Carstarphen. The new superintendent launched a number of important initiatives to support the new five-year strategic plan that she created with members of an expanded cabinet, which included all campus principals and a number of district administrators, and took to the AISD community in January

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2010. The plan includes the district's overarching philosophy, goals for student achievement, fiscal trends, and operations from 2010-2015.

The district's explicit goals are to: 1) have all students perform at or above grade level; 2) eliminate achievement gaps among all student groups; 3) have all students graduate ready for college, career, and life in a globally competitive economy; and 4) ensure that all schools will meet or exceed state accountability standards, and the district will meet federal standards and exceed state standards.

Strategies in the plan for accomplishing these goals include—

- Provide a high-quality, well-rounded educational experience to all students that is rigorous, culturally relevant, healthful, and engaging
- Build strong relationships with students, families, and the community to increase trust and shared responsibility
- Ensure that every classroom has a high-quality, effective educator, supported by high-quality, effective administrators and support staff
- Align resources to accomplish priorities within a balanced budget.

The plan also sets a series of goals that include having 98 percent of the district's special education students pass the state reading test by 2015.

The district has an extensive array of programs to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The school system's leadership also devoted a substantial amount from the recent stimulus package to bolstering special education capacity. Specifically, the district channeled some \$17.3 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds into approximately 25 special education projects that were targeted at eliminating the student achievement gap; reducing disproportional representation of minority students in special education; improving special education processes; reducing student dropout rates and increasing graduation rates; improving teacher quality; and evaluating programs. Many of these priorities speak to some of the same issues that the Council of the Great City Schools raises in this report.

New data released by the school district indicated that 109 of the school system's 115 schools met their federally required Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets, but the data also showed that the district itself did not meet its broader systemwide targets. A June 29, 2010, article in the *American-Statesman* reported, however, that the AISD was unlikely—based on preliminary data—to meet federal academic improvement standards for a second year because of weak performance on statewide assessments in the area of special education. This report addresses this issue by looking at both state and federal data on the performance of students with disabilities.

The AISD's superintendent, Meria Carstarphen, requested this review of the district's special education programs to see what was working well and what needed to be improved. She

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specifically asked the Council of the Great City Schools to make recommendations to improve special education service delivery. This report will show that the Austin Independent School District has much to be proud of. Students with disabilities have relatively high academic achievement, particularly compared with other major urban school systems across the country. The district, of course, needs to improve performance to meet statewide Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets and reduce achievement gaps with the district's non-disabled students, but the school system has a solid foundation on which to do so. The recommendations provided in this report are designed to help AISD organize itself more effectively and to utilize its resources more strategically to accelerate its improvement.

CHAPTER 2. PURPOSE AND ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

As noted, Austin Schools Superintendent Meria Carstarphen asked the Council of the Great City Schools to review the district's services for students with disabilities and make recommendations for improvement. The goals of this review were to—

- Examine the accountability of schools and principals for serving students with disabilities and make recommendations to narrow the achievement gap between students with disabilities and others districtwide, including an examination of—
 - Individualized education program (IEP) development and the delivery of rigorous grade-level instruction aligned with state standards (Texas Assessment of Knowledge & Skills or TAKS) in all special education settings;
 - The district's focus on timely and effective child find, inclusive practices, documentation of IEP progress, and equitable delivery of special education programs and services;
 - School district deployment of staffing and resources compared with other urban school districts, and district academic performance among students with disabilities compared with students in other cities; and
 - Strategies to address the disproportionate placement of minority students with disabilities in special education programs and disciplinary settings.
- Examine the overall effectiveness of the central office's special education organizational structure with particular attention to the office's sense of joint accountability for results with the schools and other staff members in the central office.
- Recommend strategies to increase the partnership of parents, especially minority parents, in the delivery of effective special education services.
- Suggest ways to increase the availability of vocational programming for students with disabilities.
- Review the school district's professional development and behavior management programs to determine how they should be improved to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

The Work of the Strategic Support Team

The Council assembled a team of experts, who have been successful in administering special education programs and services in other urban school districts around the country. These individuals also had firsthand expertise with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and were well versed in federal law and best practices. The team visited the district on April 13-16, 2010, and analyzed the district's organizational structure, accountability systems, curriculum and instructional strategies, individualized education program (IEP) implementation, and other features of the district's services for students with disabilities.

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The team briefed the superintendent at the end of its visit and presented preliminary findings and proposals.

The Strategic Support Team carried out its charge by conducting interviews and focus groups with district staff members, reviewing numerous documents and reports, analyzing data, and developing initial recommendations and proposals before finalizing this report. This approach to providing technical assistance to urban school districts by using small Strategic Support Teams of senior managers from other urban school systems across the nation is unique to the Council and its members. The organization finds this approach to be effective for a number of reasons.

First, it allows the superintendent and members of her staff to work with a diverse set of talented, successful practitioners from around the country. The teams comprise a pool of expertise that superintendents may call upon for advice or help in implementing the recommendations, meeting new challenges, and developing alternate solutions.

Second, the recommendations from urban school peers have power because the individuals who developed them have faced many of the same challenges encountered by the district requesting the review. No one can say that these individuals do not know what working in an urban school system is like or that their proposals have not been tested under the most rigorous conditions.

Third, using senior urban school managers from other urban school communities is faster and less expensive than retaining large management-consulting firms that may have little to no programmatic experience. The learning curve is rapid, and it would be difficult for any school system to buy the level of expertise offered by these teams on the open market.

Members of the Strategic Support Team for this project included the following individuals –

SUE GAMM, ESQ. Former Chief of Specialized Services Chicago Public Schools	WILL GORDILLO Administrative Director Division of Special Education Miami-Dade County Public Schools
CAROLYN GUESS Assistant Superintendent Special Education Services Houston Independent School District	JULIE WRIGHT HALBERT, ESQ. Legislative Counsel COUNCIL OF THE GREAT CITY SCHOOLS

Contents of This Report

The Strategic Support Team of the Council of the Great City Schools spent many hours interviewing parents, advocates, related-services personnel, special education teachers, principals, Texas Education Agency (TEA) staff members, and central-office administrative leaders with responsibility for both special and general education. The team also reviewed studies, data, and other special education reports on the AISD.

Chapter 1 of this report presents a brief overview of the AISD. Chapter 2 describes the purposes and origins of this project. Chapter 3 presents the findings and recommendations of the

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Strategic Support Team. These observations and proposals are divided into four broad areas, including—

A. Identification of Students Receiving Special Education Services

- Prevalence or rates
- Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality
- Multi-Tiered System of Academic and Behavioral Intervention

B. Instruction and Performance of Students Receiving Special Education Services

- Graduation and Dropout Rates
- Academic Performance
- Inclusive Instruction
- Behavior Support
- Instruction for Students who are English Language Learners and Receiving Special Education Services
- Instruction for Students with Autism
- Transition Services

C. Organizational Structure and Staff Resources Supporting Special Education Services

D. Accountability for Expected Practices and Results

Each section includes the Strategic Support Team’s positive observations, areas of concerns and recommendations. Chapter 4 summarizes all recommendations in the report. And Chapter 5 presents a brief synopsis of the report and discusses the team’s overarching impressions.

Appendix A provides organizational charts for the AISD and the Special Education Department, as well as a proposed structure for a new division of Students with Exceptionalities. Appendix B compares incidence rates and staffing ratios in various city school systems across the country. Appendix C lists individuals whom the team interviewed individually or in groups. Appendix D identifies documents reviewed by the team. Appendix E shows the team’s working agenda. Appendix F presents brief biographical sketches of team members. Appendix G presents a brief description of the Council of the Great City Schools and a list of the Strategic Support Teams that the Council has fielded over the last ten years.

CHAPTER 3. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the overall findings—positive and negative—of the Council of the Great City Schools’ Strategic Support Team and its recommendations for improving special education services districtwide in Austin. The findings and recommendations are divided into four broad categories: identification of students, instruction and performance of students with disabilities, organizational structure and staffing, and accountability for results.

A. Identification of Students Receiving Special Education Services

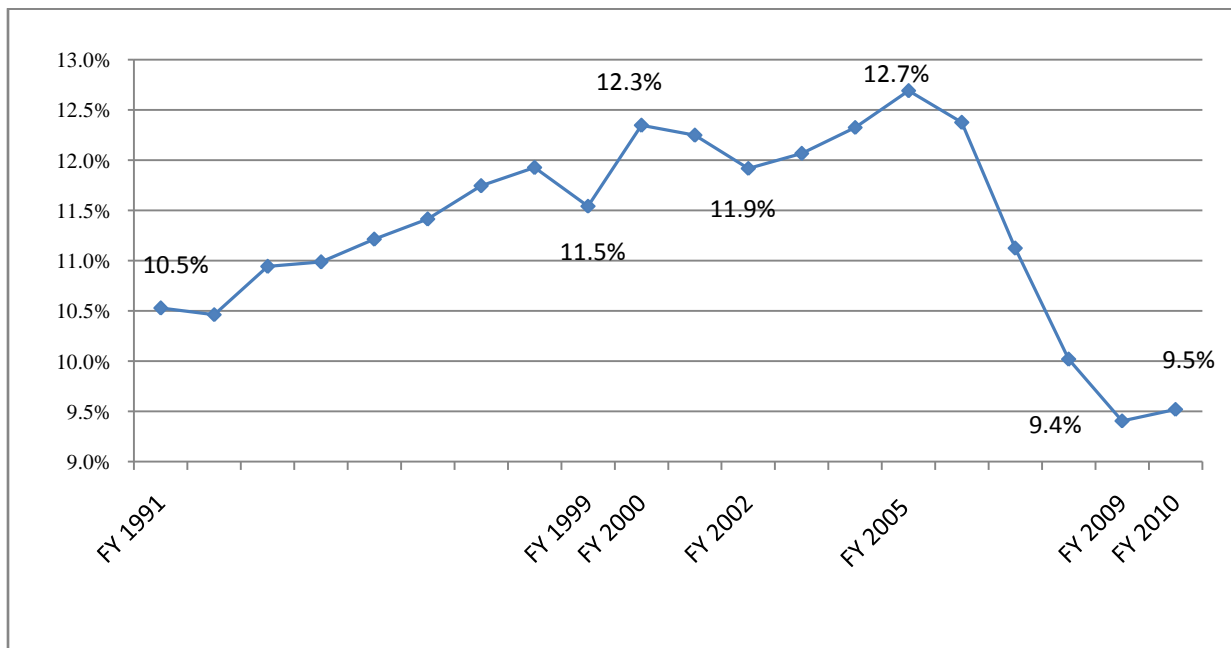
This section addresses prevalence rates, disproportional placement of racial and ethnic groups into special education, and the use of multi-tiered academic and behavioral interventions for students who are slipping behind.

Prevalence or Rates

• *Demographic Background*

Over a 19-year period (FY 1991 to 2010), the percentage of students receiving special education services from the AISD alternately increased and decreased. Beginning at 10.5 percent in FY 1991, the proportion steadily increased¹ to a high of 12.7 percent in FY 2005 before steadily decreasing over the next five years to 9.5 percent in FY 2010 (up from 9.4 percent in FY 2009).

Exhibit 1. Percentage of AISD Students Receiving Special Education Services over Time



¹ The district saw a one-year 0.5 percentage-point drop in its special education rate in FY 1999, and swings up and down between FY 2000 and FY 2005. All AISD data, unless noted otherwise, were provided by the district to the Council of Great City Schools as part of this review.

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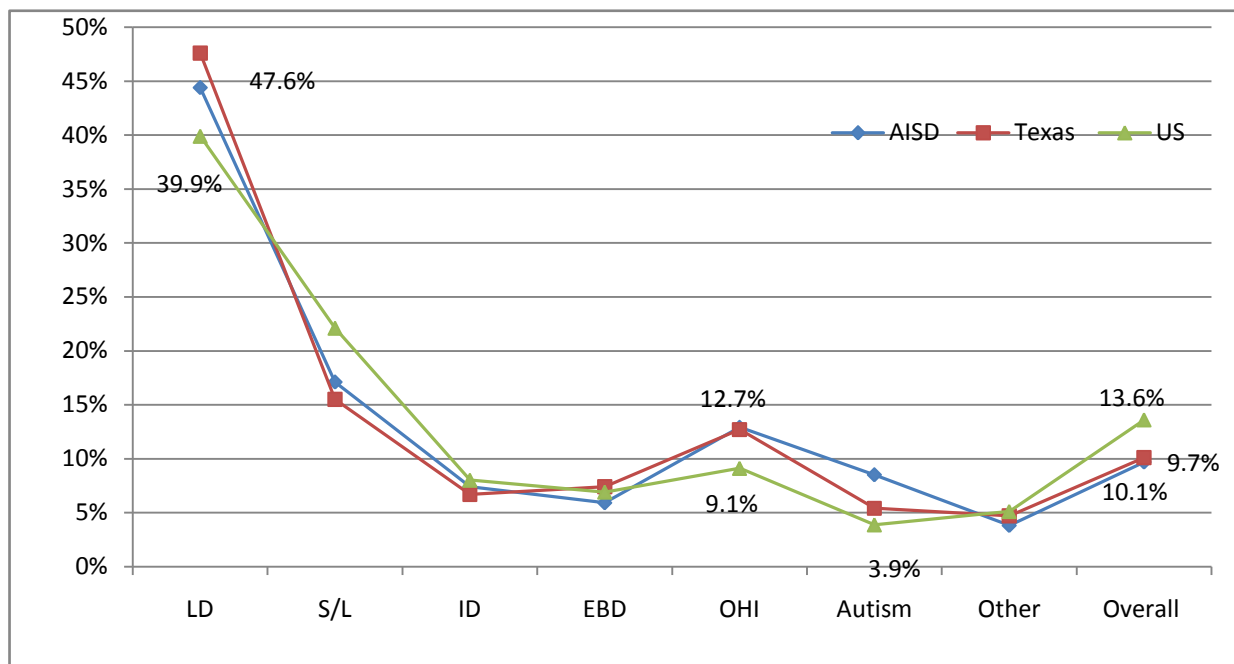
- **Prevalence by Disability Area**

In general, the percentage of AISD students by disability area is comparable to those in Texas and nationwide. The percentages are different, however, in several notable areas.

In the area of learning disabilities (LD), which is the most common disability area, 44.4 percent of AISD students receiving special education services are eligible, compared with 39.9 percent nationwide and 47.6 percent in Texas. In the area of other health impairment (OHI), 12.9 percent of AISD students with disabilities are eligible, compared with 9.1 percent nationwide and 12.7 percent in Texas; and in the area of autism, the district's 8.5 percent rate is far higher than the national rate of 3.9 percent and the Texas statewide rate of 5.4 percent.

Overall, 9.7 percent of AISD students receive special education services, compared with 10.1 percent of all students in Texas and 13.6 percent of all students nationwide.

Exhibit 2. Prevalence by Disability Area (AISD, Texas, and U.S.)^{2,3}



Under its Performance-Based Management Analysis System (PBMAS), the Texas Education Agency (TEA) analyzes school districts in a number of different areas, including special education. Based on the degree of deviation, the TEA assigns a performance level ranging from 0 to 3 to each district, with 0 being closest to the PBMAS standard.

² Texas data source:

<http://tuna.tea.state.tx.us/Tea.DataBook.Web/Forms/Default.aspx?package=spears%20speced%20enrollment%20cu&report=DemogDisability>; http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_052.asp

US data source: <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=64>

³ Acronyms in the chart include: LD (learning disability); S/L (speech/language impairment); ID (intellectual disability); EBD (emotional/behavior disability); and OHI (other health impairment).

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One of the special education indicators addresses each district's percentage of students receiving special education services by comparing it to the state's rate of 8.5 percent. The 2009 report for this indicator reported the AISD as having a performance level of "1."⁴ Of the five other large Texas school districts, Dallas, El Paso, Houston, and Ft. Worth met the required standard with "0"; and Northside Independent School District (San Antonio) had a "2." The data below shows changes in rates over time and by grade level.

- ***Prevalence by Disability Area Over Time***

Currently, the percentage of students with learning disabilities (LD) is 44.3 percent, about the same as it was in FY 1991 (43.2 percent). However, during the intervening 19 years, the percentage increased to a high of 51.7 percent in FY 2005 before decreasing steadily to its current rate of 44.3.

Exhibit 3. Percentage of Students with Disabilities in the Area of LD

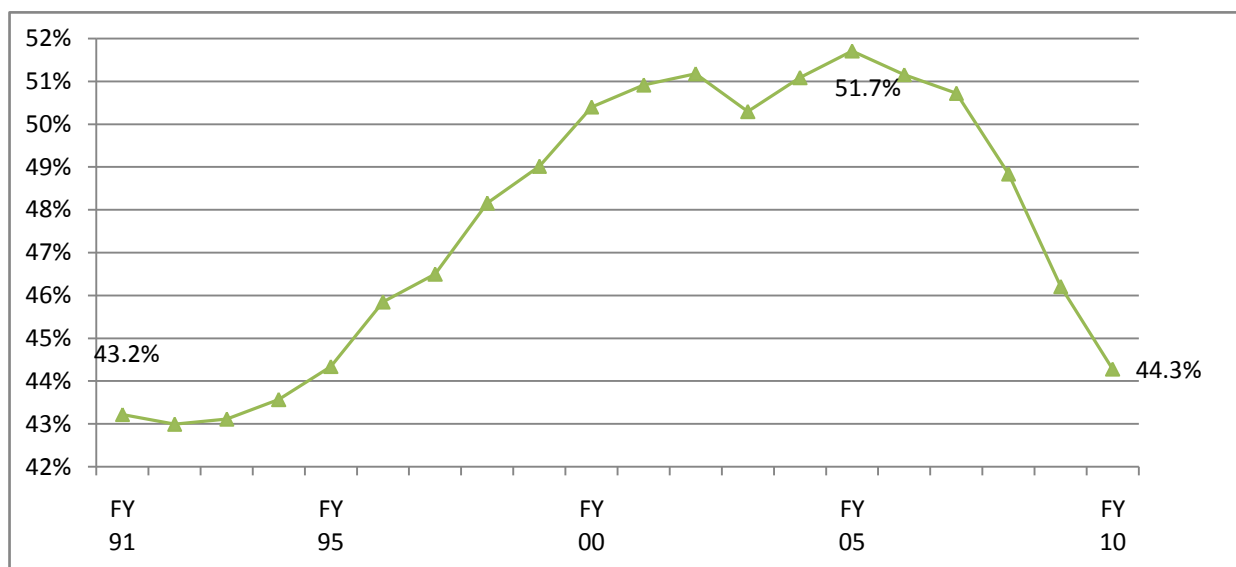


Exhibit 4 shows prevalence in the areas of autism, OHI, and speech/language (S/L) disabilities. Students eligible for special education services in the area of autism is the fastest-growing area since it was first added as a disability area under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997.

In the area of OHI, the prevalence began to grow at the time when the U.S. Department of Education incorporated "inattention," a primary characteristic of attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), into its definition of OHI. The district's rate of OHI has been at 12.9 percent for the last few years.

Finally, the percentage of students identified as having the primary disability of S/L was at 17.4 percent in FY 2010, less than it was in FY 1991 (21.4 percent). The rate steadily

⁴ Subsequent areas of this report reflect the AISD's performance on the other 17 PBMAS special education indicators.

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decreased between FY 2003 and FY 2008 before rising again in the last two years to its current rate.

Exhibit 4. Percentage of Students with Disabilities in the Areas of Autism, OHI, and S/L

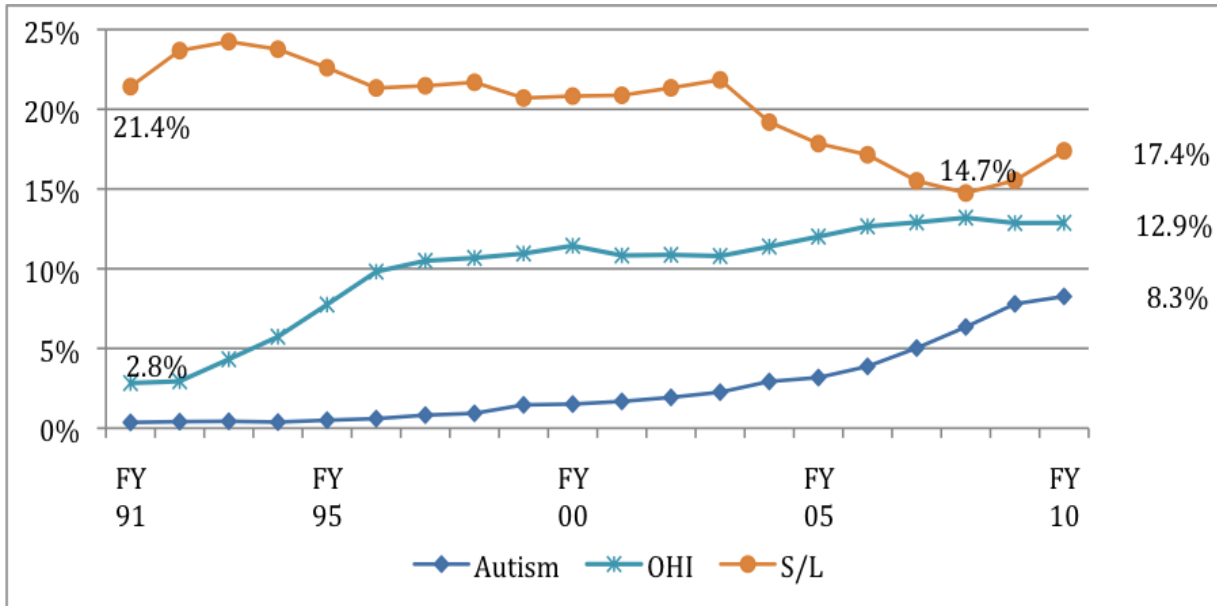
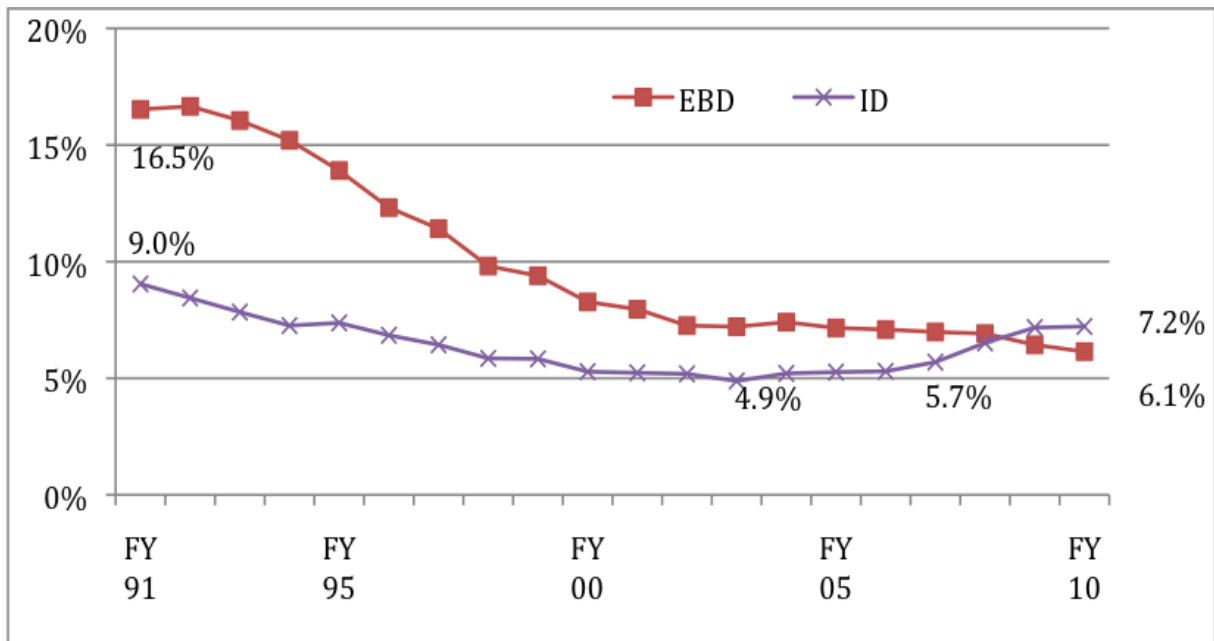


Exhibit 5 shows two different trends for students identified as having an emotional/behavior disability (EBD) and those with an intellectual disability (ID). The percentage of those with EBD decreased steadily from a high of 16.5 percent in FY 1991 to 6.1 percent in FY 2010. Students with ID decreased from a high of 9 percent in FY 1991, but began to increase in FY 2003 from a low of 4.9 percent to its current level of 7.2 percent.

Exhibit 5. Percentage of Students with EBD and ID

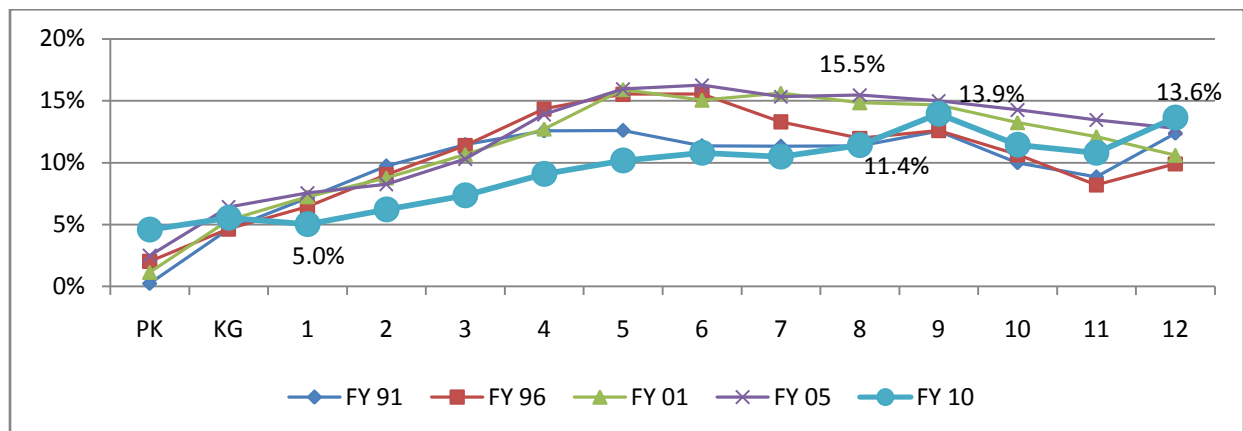


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- **Disability by Grade Over Time**

The exhibit below (Exhibit 6) shows changes in disability rates by grade and over time. The percentage of students with disabilities has grown steadily with the highest levels seen in FY 2010 in ninth and 12th grades (13.9 percent and 13.6 percent, respectively). This trend is comparable to other urban districts where students remain in ninth grade until they have sufficient credits to move to the next grade. The percentage then falls because students drop out and increases again in 12th grade where students may remain for several years until they graduate or age-out. The growth during grades 1 through 8 slowed in FY 2010 (5.0 percent to 11.4 percent), compared with FY 2005 when the rate climbed to 15.5 percent in eighth grade.

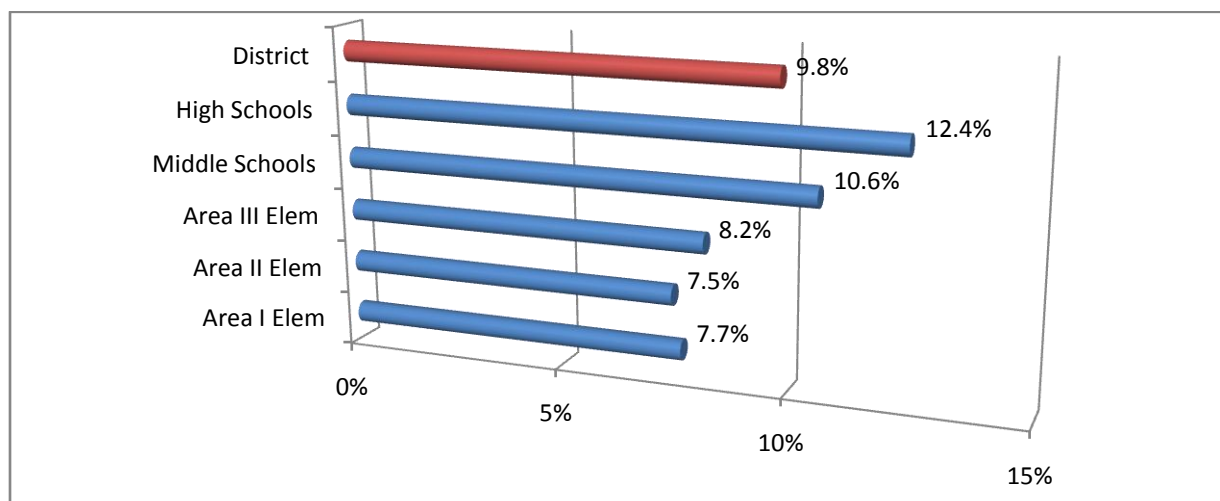
Exhibit 6. Prevalence by Grade Over Time



- **Prevalence Compared by Grade Bands**

The exhibit below (Exhibit 7) shows the variance in disability rates by elementary, middle, and high school grade bands—by district area for the elementary grades. Area III in the district had more students identified as needing special education services—8.2 percent—than the other two areas (7.7 percent in Area I and 7.5 percent in Area II). The prevalence increases at the middle school level (10.6 percent) and then again at the high school level (12.4 percent).

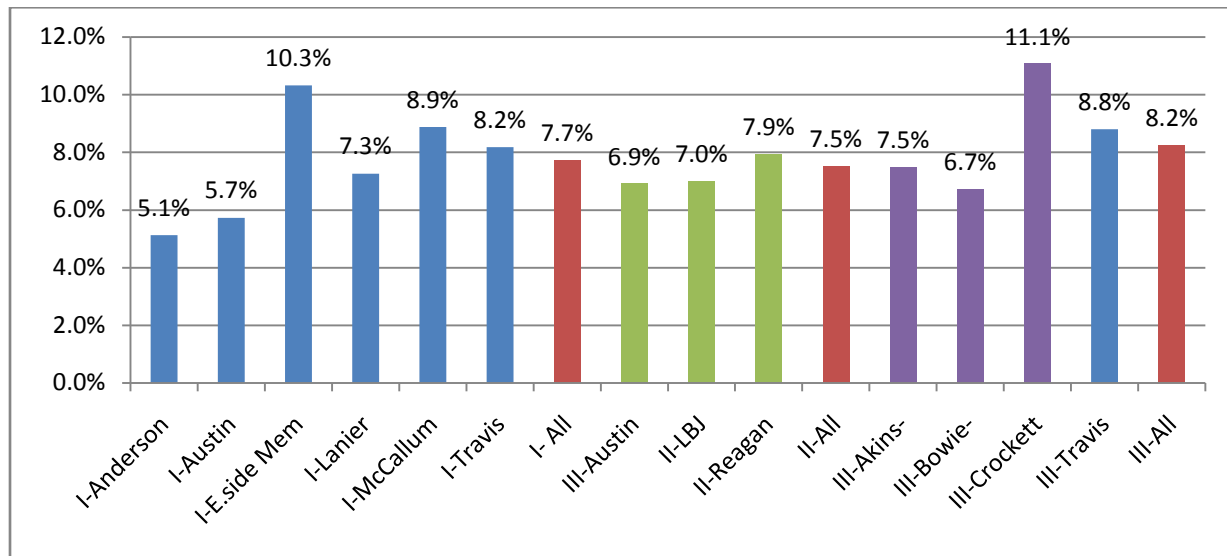
Exhibit 7. Special Education Prevalence by Area and Middle and High School Bands



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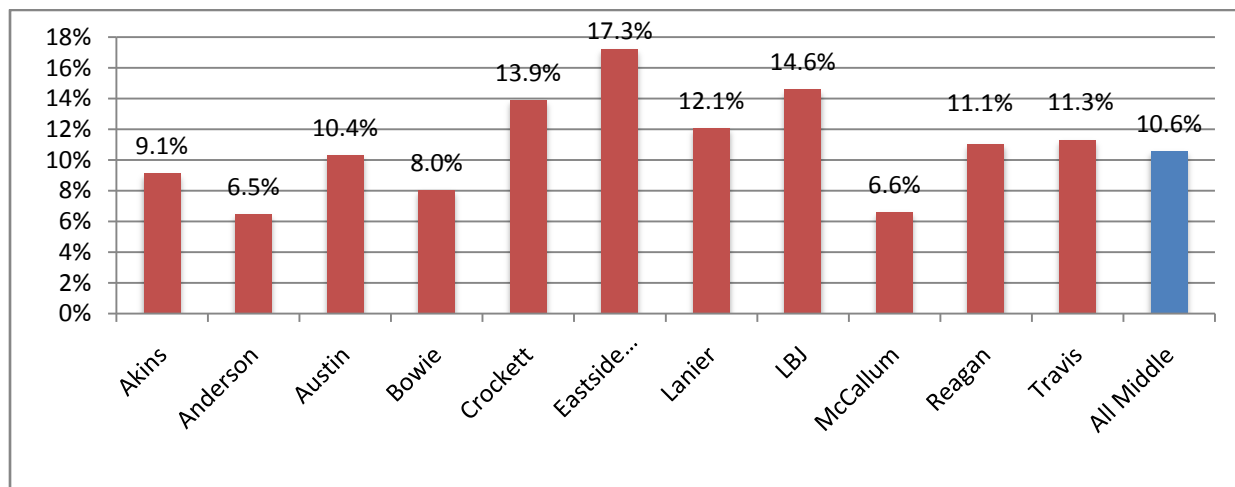
The exhibit below shows the variation in elementary special education prevalence by vertical team. The Eastside Memorial and Crockett vertical teams have the highest rates (10.3 and 11.1 percent, respectively) and Anderson and Austin (Area I) have the lowest rates at 5.1 and 5.7 percent. The higher than average rate at Crockett contributes to the higher Area III rate of 8.8 percent; the lower than average rates at Anderson and Austin (Area I) offset the higher than average rate of Eastside Memorial, making Area I's rate not very high.

Exhibit 8. Elementary Special Education Prevalence by Vertical Team and Area



The vertical school teams associated with Eastside Memorial at the middle school level has the highest percentage of students receiving special education services (17.3 percent); and Anderson and McCallum have the lowest (6.5 and 6.6 percent, respectively). These schools vary by as many as 10.8 percentage points. Three areas (Eastside Memorial, LBJ, and Crockett) have prevalence rates that are more than two times the rates of Anderson and McCallum.

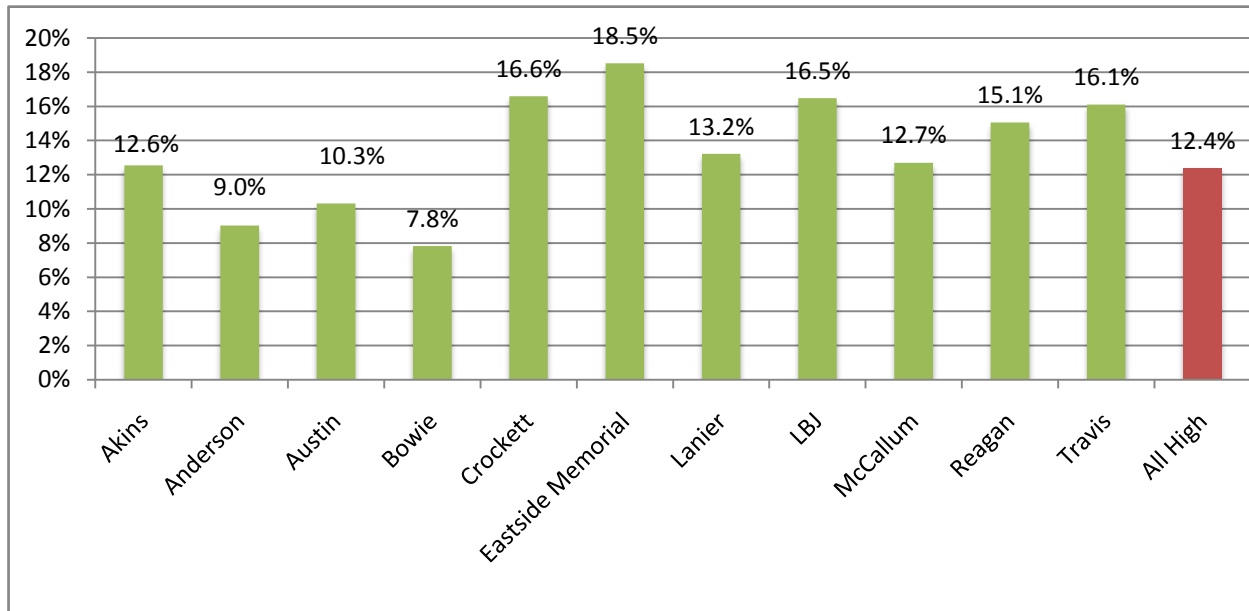
Exhibit 9. Middle School Special Education Prevalence by Vertical Team



At the high school level, Eastside Memorial has the highest prevalence rate (18.5 percent); Bowie has the lowest (7.8 percent), reflecting a spread of 10.7 percentage points.

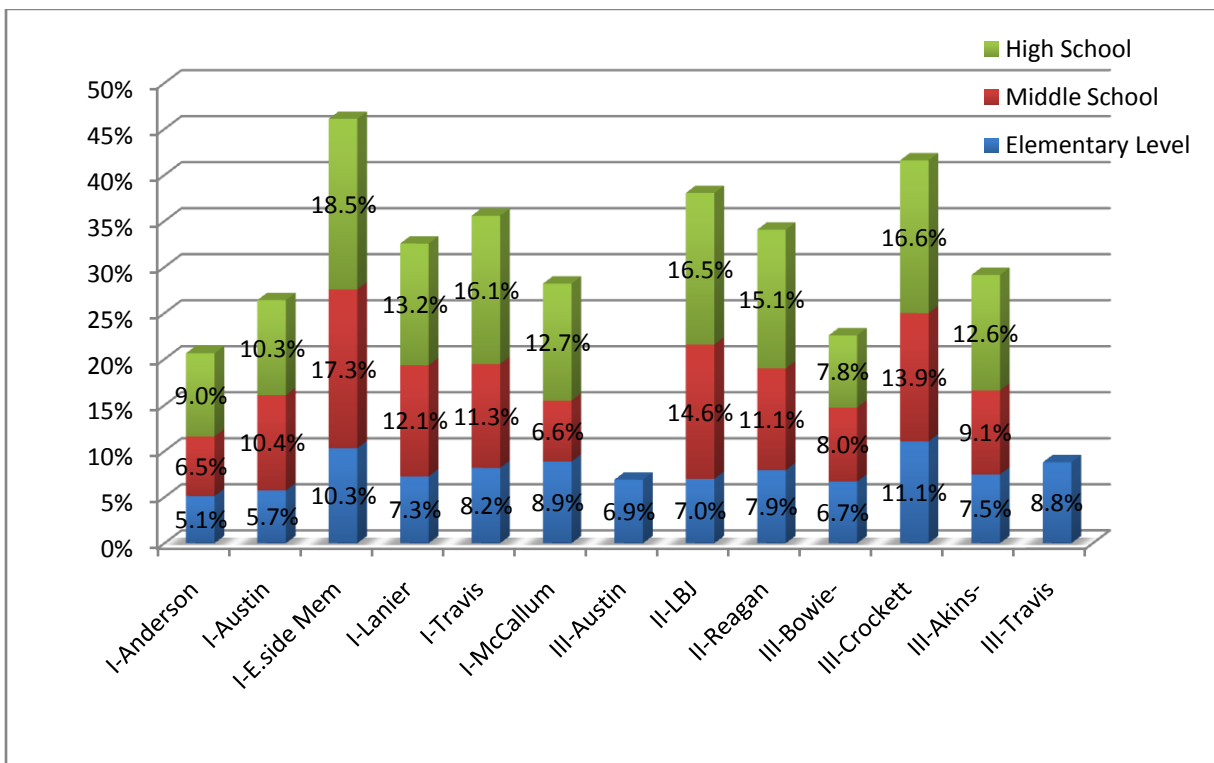
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Exhibit 10. Special Education Prevalence by High School Vertical Teams



The relative differences between the grade bands are illustrated in the exhibit below. Of special concern are the discrepancies in special education prevalence rates at the elementary, middle, and high school levels between Eastside Memorial, Crockett, LBJ, Reagan, and Travis (on the high side) and Anderson/Bowie (on the low side).

Exhibit 11. Special Education Prevalence by Grade Band



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Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality

The Strategic Support Team also analyzed the likelihood of students of differing races to be placed in special education. Based on FY 2010 data, the district's African American students are 3.86 times more likely than their peers to be identified as having an emotional/behavior disability (EBD) and 2.24 times more likely to have an intellectual disability. This disparity is greater than it was in FY 1991 when the risk for African American students was 2.10 in the area of EBD and 1.58 for ID. (See Exhibit 12.)

Exhibit 12. Race/Ethnic Risk Ratio for ID and EBD

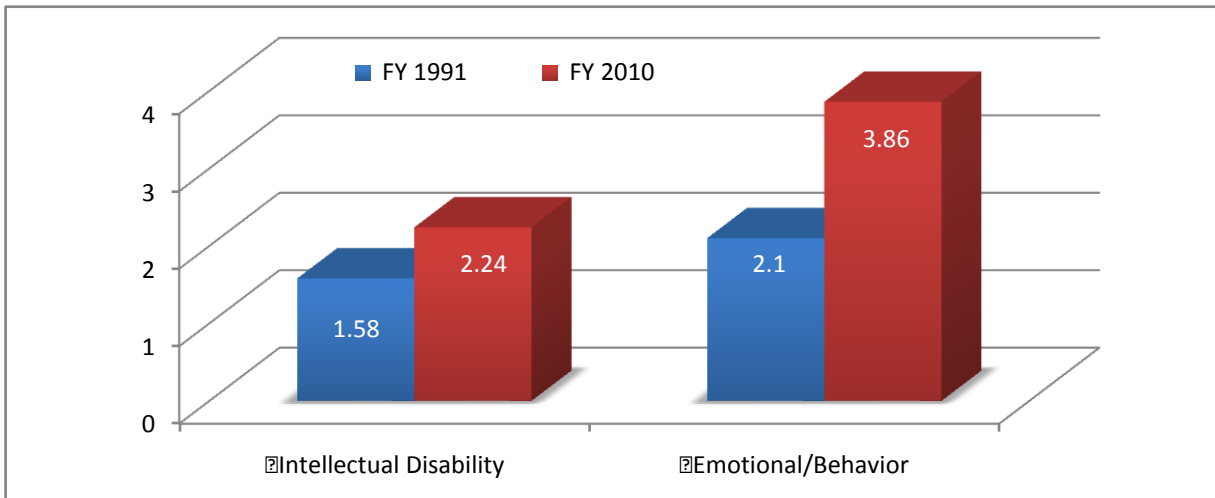
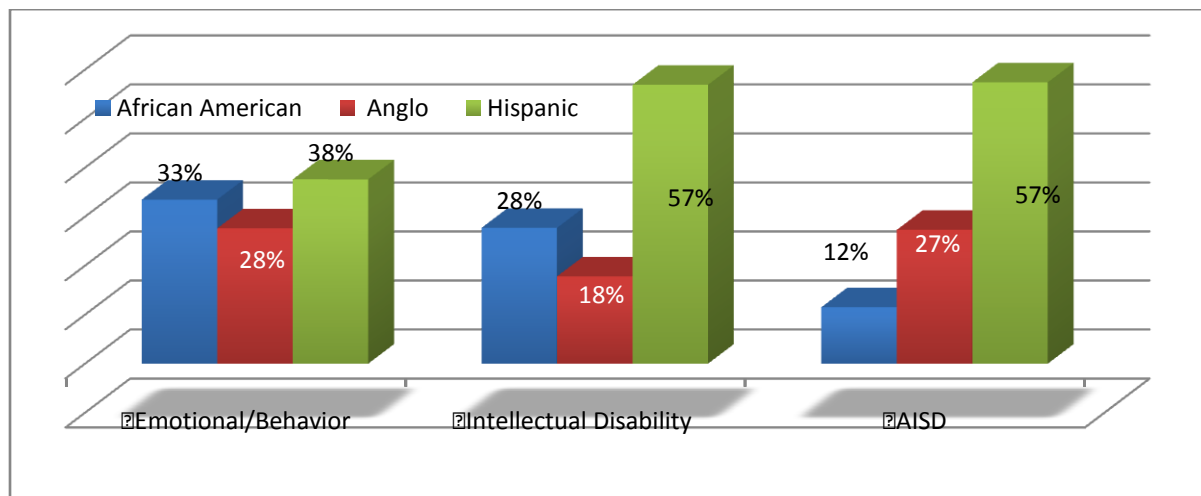


Exhibit 13 below shows the district's EBD and ID rates by racial/ethnicity in FY 2010, compared with each group's share of total AISD enrollment. African American students comprise 33 percent of all students identified as EBD and 28 percent of those identified as ID, compared with their being only 12 percent of the school system's enrollment.

Exhibit 13. Comparison of Racial/Ethnic Composition of EBD and ID to AISD

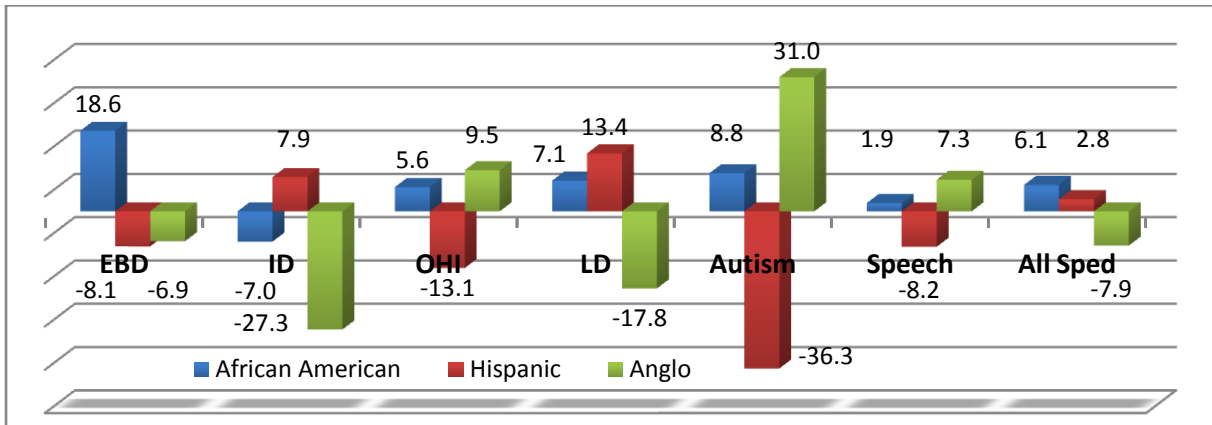


Another way of looking at racial/ethnic disproportionality is by examining the difference between the makeup of disability areas for African American, Hispanic, and white students in

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relationship to their relative enrollment in the AISD. Exhibit 14 below illustrates this comparison in the areas of ED, ID, OHI, LD, and autism for FY 2010. In addition to discrepant rates in the areas of EBD and ID among African American students, there is a difference of 21.3 percentage points between the makeup of white students with autism and their district enrollment.

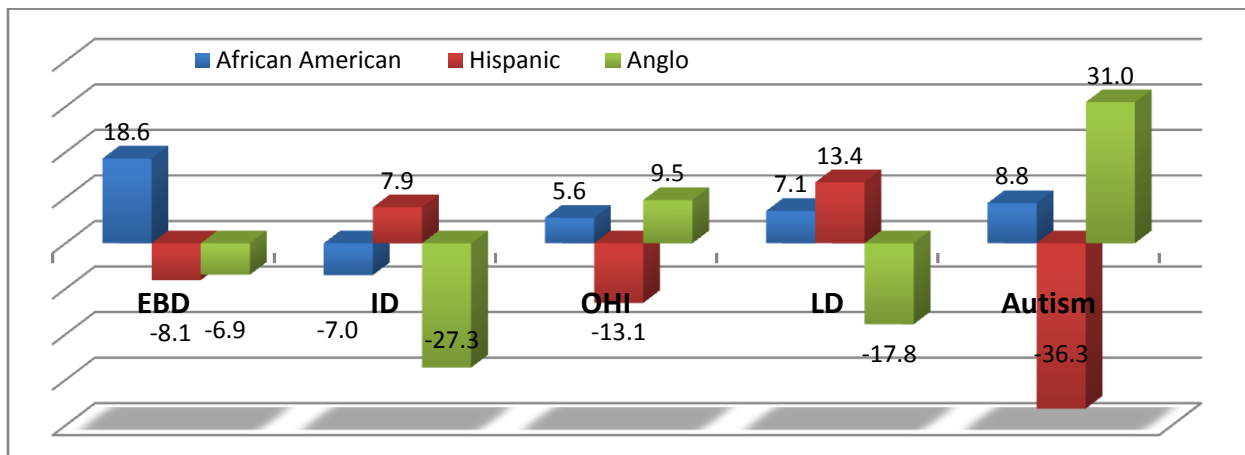
Exhibit 14. Difference Between Racial/Ethnic Compositions in Six Disability Areas & AISD



When looking solely at students found eligible for special education services for the first time in FY 2009⁵ in the areas of highest disparity, the representation of African American students in the areas of EBD and ID significantly decreased with a difference of 18.6 percentage points for EBD (compared with 22 percentage points in the exhibit above) and -7.0 percentage points for ID (compared with 16.2 points above).

However, the underrepresentation of Hispanic and white students significantly increased for new FY 2009 eligibility decisions: there was a 36.3 percentage-point difference for Hispanic students with autism; and 27.3 percentage-point difference for white students with ID (no white students were eligible). Further, the percentage of white students (58.3) eligible in the area of autism was 31 points higher than their AISD enrollment rate, up from the 21.3 points shown in the exhibit above.

Exhibit 15. Difference Between Racial/Ethnic Compositions for New Eligibility Decisions



⁵ FY 2009 referral data was the most current year referral data provided to the CGCS team.

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- ***Eligibility Determination Process***

Pursuant to Texas' most recent State Performance Plan (SPP) report (2009) on the Austin Independent School District using FY 2008 data, the district had an 83 percent rate for completing initial special education evaluations in a timely manner. The rate for completing and implementing IEPs for students transitioning from Part C to district services by students' third birthdays was 56 percent. According to a very recent oral report from the Texas Education Agency to the AISD, the district has made significant progress in these areas and it fulfilled the requirements of the AISD corrective action plan.

Some concern was expressed by staff interviewed that the number of assessment personnel is insufficient to provide timely evaluations. (This issue is addressed in more detail in Section D, Organizational Structure, Staffing and Resources to Support Special Education Services.) However, we note that a sample reevaluation for a fifth-grade student eligible in the areas of LD and OHI provided for the team's review was very comprehensive, but was 20 pages long, which may be excessive and, if typical, could be contributing to reevaluation delays.

Focus group comments reflected concerns about the quality and quantity of data available to the Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee regarding prior use and success of general education interventions and the availability of general education teachers to provide feedback about student performance. Also, interview comments suggested inconsistent referral and ARD practices among students with similar learning characteristics, resulting in some students having IEPs or Section 504 plans and others not.

Concerns were expressed by interviewees about the district's IMPACT electronic data processing system, describing it as cumbersome and time-consuming. In addition, some interviewees expressed specific concerns about the length of time it takes to bring a child through the documentation and referral process. Finally, parents and community members expressed concern that they are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the ARD process and their understanding is not improved with meetings and communications with AISD staff.

In the area of LD, AISD allows schools to use either traditional significant discrepancy eligibility criteria or Response to Intervention (RTI)—as permitted by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Texas Education Agency—to determine whether a student has a learning disability. Further, it does not appear that the district has provided guidance about the merits of these two processes and standards for determining which to use.

Multi-Tiered System of Academic and Behavioral Interventions

During the last decade, there has been considerable research supporting the use of a multi-tiered system of interventions, universal screenings, progress monitoring and data-based decision making for students with reading and behavioral challenges to avoid unnecessary reliance on special education services and to reduce disproportionate placement of students by race/ethnicity.⁶ This process is commonly referred to as RTI. The AISD uses the IMPACT process systemwide to review student performance on academic, behavioral, and attendance

⁶ National Center for RTI at www.rti4success.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1; Minority Students in Special and Gifted Education 2001 at http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=10128.

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measures and to provide and monitor interventions requiring assistance beyond the standard classroom.

In addition to the IMPACT process, which is managed by the Division of Learning Support, the AISD initiated RTI and Early Intervening Services (EIS), based on an RTI model. The Department of Dropout Prevention initiated RTI in 2007-2008; and the Department of Special Education initiated EIS in August 2009 with ARRA funds. Ten schools have both initiatives and 11 other schools have EIS or RTI. Documents pertaining to both initiatives identified Responsive Reading and Reading Readiness as Tier II interventions, but no interventions were identified for Tier III. The district's Austin Instructional Management System (AIMS), which houses primary reading assessments and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) benchmark and progress monitoring data, is used to support both RTI and EIS.

Finally, the AISD has been implementing its Positive Behavior Support (PBS) system since the 2003–2004 school year. The framework is based on national models that support positive behavior at universal, targeted, and intensive levels of intervention to promote positive social behaviors and reduce chronic disruptive and destructive behaviors. PBS is coordinated through the Division of Learning Support and is facilitated through a team of behavior specialists. In addition, the Special Education Department has its own set of behavior specialists. The Council's team reviewed information in these areas to assess the extent to which the AISD has developed and implemented with fidelity a coordinated and comprehensive system of multi-tiered academic and behavioral interventions for struggling students.

- ***IMPACT Process***

In the AISD, all campuses are expected to have an operational IMPACT team led by an assistant principal or principal to initiate student support services. The district expects this process to be used prior to a student's referral for a special education evaluation. Through this process, teams discuss student strengths and concerns, and develop an action plan.⁷

Action plans include: specific, measurable goals or targets for improvement; specific strategies to meet those goals; persons who will provide the interventions, including the duration, frequency, and grouping of the interventions; and a description of how progress will be monitored by the team at least weekly to determine needed adjustments. Over the course of six to nine weeks, the designated staff member(s) record the student's progress and, based on the results, the team: discontinues the plan because of student success; modifies and/or continues the plan for an additional six to nine weeks; and consults with a specialist and/or gathers additional information. Information must be documented in the districts e-IMPACT data system. No specific time frame or guidance is provided about the number of times the period of interventions may be extended, the length of time in which progress is expected, or the amount of progress to be expected. If the IMPACT team decides to pursue a special education evaluation for a student, the referral pack must be complete or it will be returned to the IMPACT/Learning Support Coordinator.

⁷ Department of Special Education Operating Guidelines, March 2010

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– *Use of Interventions*

Although the IMPACT process describes the use of research-based academic interventions, its pre-referral checklist includes activities that tend to be low-intensity Tier I educational strategies, such as preferred seating near instructor; alerting cues; extended time to complete tasks; peer tutoring; shortened assignments; praise and reward, etc. Also, some focus group participants seemed to perceive strategies, such as small-group size, summer/after school services, or tutoring to be a research-based intervention without regard to the content provided with these strategies.

– *IMPACT Effectiveness*

Focus group participants voiced concern about the effective use of IMPACT. As typical with other school districts, some staff members view the process as a “hoop” to jump through in order to facilitate a student’s referral for a special education evaluation. Others view the process as one that “keeps students out of special education.” Further, some staff shared concerns that once a student is identified as needing special education services, the IMPACT process is no longer used to solve problems or initiate educational strategies, such as tutoring, because special education is viewed as the intervention. Other issues included the lack of written action plans, which result in incessant conversation; lack of available research-based interventions; a perceived or real limit on the number of students that the IMPACT teams can address at one time, e.g. “we can only have four meetings this month.” A significant concern also included the manner in which kindergarteners were addressed through IMPACT. Participants explained that these children typically were rejected from the process based on over-generalized perceptions of such issues as child maturity. As a result, many staff members believe that instruction is not proactive, that it becomes reactive as the student’s performance gap widens in later grades.

– *Data Entry*

Another concern expressed by focus group participants related to the IMPACT data-entry process, which staff members perceived as cumbersome, complicated, and very difficult for first-year teachers. Apparently, one learns the amount of detail required by the system only through trial and error, which leads some teachers to avoid using it.

• *Early Intervention Services (EIS)*

Interventions referred to as EIS are those funded through use of up to 15 percent of IDEA funds for students who do not receive special education services. The approach is modeled after RTI. Of the district’s 18 EIS teachers, four serve two campuses part time, which makes it more difficult to plan, prepare, and collaborate with classroom teachers, according to district reports. The Council team learned that due to limited space, some EIS teachers provide interventions in the regular class, which appears to present its own problems—

The classroom teachers have actually played an audiotape (loudly) while the EIS teacher is working with his/her group. The classroom teachers do NOT pay attention to what the EIS teachers are doing, and often have disruptive activities going on while the EIS teacher is in the back of the room trying to teach over the noise.

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It was reported to the team that seven of the 552 students receiving EIS have been referred for a special education process; one was not eligible and two were; four are still in the evaluation process.

- ***Positive Behavior Support (PBS)***

During the last six years, PBS efforts in the district expanded steadily. In 2009-2010, 82 campuses implemented the framework with the assistance of 15 PBS specialists and a coordinator. About three PBS specialists work in each of AISD's five areas or zones (three elementary, middle, and high school). The specialists provide direct intensive-level services (Tier III) and technical assistance to 15-17 schools in each area based on data-based needs. In addition, the specialists provide professional development at the Professional Development Center with some sessions open to any AISD employee. A *Behavior Strategies and Interventions* form is used to document Tiers I, II, and III activities used for a student and requires tracking usage over time.

- ***PBS Implementation Challenges***

AISD staff members reported to the team that PBS implementation is hampered by insufficient time and training to put the programming in place with fidelity. In addition, the district lacks a uniform social skills curriculum. According to the special education director, a recommendation was made in the spring of 2009 to identify the curricula used at each grade level and on each campus to identify curricular gaps and needs, but she does not know if the recommendation was ever implemented.

In December 2009, the AISD's Department of Program Evaluation published its evaluation of PBS activities from the previous school year. The following are key findings from the report—

- Implementation ranged from beginning to intermediate levels in elementary and then middle schools and was most successful. Implementation in the high schools was least successful. Only one school (Reagan) of the three (Travis and Crockett) implementing high schools showed evidence of implementation.
- Successful PBS implementation was associated with certain school characteristics (e.g., readiness to implement PBS and administrative support for PBS).
- Schools implementing PBS indicated a greater improvement in discipline outcomes than did AISD schools that did not. Fidelity of PBS implementation was related to improved discipline outcomes such as a decrease in the number of students with multiple referrals and the percentage of students suspended.

Positive Findings

- ***Strategies to Improve Eligibility Determination.*** The Special Education Department has utilized a number of proactive strategies to address special education eligibility issues. For example, it has developed a protocol for initial learning disability evaluations, including a checklist for required components and review of lengthy evaluation documents; used a peer review system to support learning and academic improvement; put into place an evaluation plan/report for the district's electronic data management system; and developed quality

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assurance teams that meet monthly to address questions and concerns related to evaluation, interpretation, and report writing.

- ***Early Intervention Services.*** The AISD utilized American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds to support early intervention services for 552 kindergarten- through second-grade students having the lowest 20 percent reading scores at each grade level. The students attend one of 21 elementary schools in the LBJ, Reagan and Eastside Memorial area, and were selected based on over identification data and previous year's Texas Assessment of Knowledge & Skills (TAKS) reading scores. Nine of the 18 teachers hired for the program are bilingual (English and Spanish). The teachers received professional development in reading, Positive Behavior Support (PBS), and progress monitoring. To date, of the seven special education evaluations initiated, two resulted in eligibility, one did not, and four have not yet been completed.
- ***Review of Records for African American Students for Possible Special Education Dismissal.*** Staff initiated record reviews for each African American student (400) with an instructional arrangement of "40" (special education mainstream) to determine whether any of the students no longer required special education services. As a result, nine students were dismissed.
- ***Courageous Conversations About Race.*** The Special Education Department, in collaboration with the Office of Educator Quality, is initiating a yearlong book study of *Courageous Conversations About Race*, by Glenn E. Singleton and Curtis Linton. The study is designed to educate, challenge, and empower individuals to discuss the issue of race.
- ***Increased Percentage of Appropriate Special Education Evaluation Referral.*** At the elementary level, the percentage of students evaluated and later found eligible for special education services increased from a prior rate of 86.3 percent to 92.7 percent this year, reflecting better initial screening and case management.
- ***Foundation for RTI.*** Through the widespread use of IMPACT and professional development, AISD staff exhibited a strong awareness of multi-tiered academic and behavioral interventions and the importance of progress monitoring. Pilot intervention programs (EIS and RTI) that have been initiated in 21 schools are showing promising outcomes. In addition, speech/language pathologists have developed promising general education interventions for articulation, expressive language, fluency, receptive language, and social language. During the last six years, PBS implementation expanded to 82 campuses. Implementation was most successful at the elementary and then the middle school level, as noted earlier. Data systems and analysis support these initiatives.

In addition, on January 10, 2010, the Special Education Department developed a plan to address the overrepresentation of African American students based on the National Alliance of Black School Educations' *Addressing Overrepresentation of African American Students in Special Education*. The plan includes: 1) using a three-tiered intervention model for African American students at risk; 2) reviewing the records mentioned above; 3) addressing school culture; and 4) involving families.

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Most promising, Superintendent Carstarphen recently appointed a chief academic officer (CAO) who has an extensive knowledge of RTI and is able to articulate the various levels of leadership and coordination required to implement activities effectively. To address the fragmentation of prior initiatives, the superintendent has authorized the CAO to hire a supervisor for RTI to lead the development and implementation of a systemwide framework for multi-tiered academic and behavior interventions.

Areas of Concern

Disability Prevalence

District strategies have reduced the percentage (12.7) of AISD students receiving special education services in FY 2005 to 9.7 percent in FY 2010. Although this percentage is much smaller than the nation's 13.6 percent, it is higher than the state's 8.5 percent and triggered a state Performance-Based Management Analysis System performance level score of "1." Of the students receiving special education services, the AISD has a higher incidence rate than the nation in the area of LD (44.4, compared with 39.9 percent), OHI (12.9, compared with 9.1 percent), and autism (8.5 compared with 3.9 percent). In addition, the percent of students receiving special education services by grade grew steadily from first to eighth grade.

The prevalence rates vary considerably by school at the elementary, middle, and high school grade bands. At the elementary level, the Eastside Memorial and Crockett vertical teams have the highest rates (10.3 and 11.1 percent respectively) and Anderson and Austin vertical teams (Area I) have the lowest rates at 5.2 and 5.7 percent, a spread of 5.1 percentage points. The spread between elementary schools increases at the upper grades. At the middle school level, the Eastside Memorial vertical team has the highest percentage (17.3 percent); and Anderson and McCallum vertical teams have the lowest (6.5 and 6.6 percent, respectively)—a spread of 10.8 percentage-points. At the high school level, the Eastside Memorial vertical team again has the highest prevalence rate (18.5 percent) and Bowie has the lowest (7.8 percent)—a spread of 10.7 percentage points. It also appears that some campus staff members do not understand the district's need to intervene in schools having prevalence rates that would bring AISD above the state's accountability target, or why the process has any validity.

Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality

The risk of African American students being identified as ED and ID has increased since FY 1991. In FY 2010 these students are 3.86 times more likely than their peers to be identified as EBD (compared with 2.10 in FY 1991). In the area of ID, African American students' risk of identification is 2.24 (compared with 1.58 in FY 1991). With a difference of 7.2 between the percentage of African American students receiving special education services and the percentage of African Americans in the district's enrollment, AISD's performance level is "2" on this indicator. The Texas Education Agency found no disproportionality issues among other racial/ethnic groups. Note that the state has not cited the district for inappropriate identification policies, procedures, or practices related to disproportionate placement of students by race/ethnicity. Although the Special Education Department developed a plan to address the over identification of African American students receiving special education, the plan was not targeted specifically to address the areas of intellectual disabilities and emotional/behavioral disturbance, which are the most disproportionate areas. Also, this plan was not mentioned by any

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focus group participant, which raises a concern about the extent to which other administrators and campus-based staff are aware of and involved in this issue and its resolution. The plan provided to the Council's team did not include responsible persons, time frames for implementation, or any accountability measures.

Policies, Procedures and Practices

Many staff members perceive that eligibility for special education services is not consistently applied and that students with similar characteristics may or may not have an IEP or Section 504 plan. This lack of consistency appears to be related to irregular implementation of eligibility criteria, including the extent to which Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) committees consider a student's receipt of appropriate research-based interventions and their results. As expanded upon below, RTI is not practiced consistently across the district and the IMPACT system is perceived as difficult to maneuver, leading to staff frustration. In addition, Special Education Department staff members see the lack of consistently implemented interventions as a factor in the district's low special education dismissal rate, because students have not made sufficient academic and/or behavioral progress.

System of Multi-Tiered Academic and Behavior Intervention

Fragmented Framework

The AISD has a vision for how it will handle students who are struggling and has implemented and piloted various multi-tiered academic and behavior interventions, along with progress monitoring. However, varying activities have been implemented under separate program initiatives (IMPACT, EIS, RTI, and PBS), which have all been administered by four separate administrative offices. In this respect, there was no evidence of any comprehensive or cross-cutting plan for identification and use of research-based interventions and progress monitoring tools. In addition, the district has two sets of behavior specialists that are based in two separate offices. As a result, the district does not have a cohesive framework for its processes that utilizes and reinforces a common language, framework, and expectations.

Although there appears to be a framework for targeted Tier II interventions, none appear to be available for intensive Tier III interventions. Further, in spite of research citing the importance of early intervention, there appears to be more support available for students in grades linked to TAKS accountability. Finally, focus group participants referred to the IMPACT data-entry process as extremely complex and expressed concern that sufficient training is not available for new teachers.

Policies and Procedures

The district has not developed written guidance for schools regarding safeguards for students involved in the intervention process when they do not show any appreciable academic performance or positive behavior gains. In this regard, no process exists to ensure that the interventions are implemented with fidelity; nor have time frames been established for considering a referral for a special education evaluation. In addition, a few interviewees reported that at some campuses, students with disabilities have been excluded from receiving interventions, because staff considered "special education" to be the "intervention" even if a research-based program was not available through special education.

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Implementation Challenges

Inconsistent campus-administrative oversight, sufficient training opportunities, and irregular implementation of multi-tiered interventions have affected student academic improvement and positive behavior. Faithful implementation of interventions, however, was related to such improved discipline outcomes as decreased numbers of students with multiple referrals and lower percentages of suspensions. In addition, the district does not have a uniform curriculum for social-skills instruction.

Recommendations

A. Identification of Students Receiving Special Education Services

1. *Ensure that the AISD utilizes a comprehensive system of multi-tiered academic and behavior interventions with progress monitoring to support continued and enhanced student outcomes.* With active support from its superintendent and CAO, and experience with IMPACT, EIS, RTI and PBS, the district has a solid foundation for developing and implementing a comprehensive and districtwide framework for a system of multi-tiered academic and behavior interventions to improve the performance of students within general education, as well as those receiving special education and who are English language Learners (ELLs). This foundation should be used to ensure that special education eligibility decisions are not the result of a student's lack of access to appropriate research-based instructional practices or are not based on racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural differences. This initiative should include the following components:

a. *Policies and Procedures.* Gather all written policies and procedures that have been developed to implement multi-tiered academic and behavior interventions from the district's various administrative offices and review them in order to develop a single document for the AISD that addresses universal screening, increasingly intensive levels of intervention, progress monitoring, data collection, and the use of data to review and modify instruction. Ensure that the policies and procedures address the following:

- 1) Use of universal language to bridge IMPACT, PBS, RTI, and EIS activities and that would be based on *one* system incorporating various funding streams to address academic and behavioral challenges;
- 2) Access to services by children beginning in kindergarten (preschool if possible);
- 3) Access to services by students who are ELLs and receive special education services;
- 4) Uniform criteria and supporting forms for the review of appropriate research-based interventions that are implemented when considering the extent to which a student's poor performance in reading or in math may be related to the lack of access to appropriate instruction;
- 5) Guidance for determining how much progress a student should be expected to make when provided with appropriate research-based interventions that are implemented with fidelity, and for initiating a referral for special education services when sufficient progress is not made;

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- 6) Additional guidance in interpreting state eligibility criteria for the areas of emotional/behavior disabilities, other health impairment (OHI) due to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and intellectual disability. (Note: consider establishing a separate data element under OHI to identify students with ADHD.)
- 7) Consideration of whether the district will continue to rely on a “significant discrepancy” standard for determining the existence of a learning disability. If the district decides to convert to an eligibility standard utilizing RTI, then determine the time frame and process for conversion, e.g., certification that a campus is prepared to implement this change.

Utilize a cross-section of individuals from various departments and campuses to provide input and feedback into the first draft of policies and procedures.

- b. Mapping and Planning Allocation of Resources.* Map the resources and material available at all campuses for universal screening, tiered interventions, and progress monitoring. Based on this information, identify those resources and materials having a research base, and the grade levels and instructional/behavior areas each addresses. Identify gaps and develop a phase-in plan for obtaining additional resources for each campus, so that each school has what it needs to meet student needs in the areas of reading, math, and social/emotional behavior.
- c. Data Collection and User-Friendly Reports.* Utilize a knowledgeable and diverse group of individuals representing campuses and administrators to evaluate the IMPACT data collection system in order to ensure that it incorporates critical elements that can be streamlined to the maximum extent feasible for easier use. Review the type of reports currently produced by the system, and ensure that they contain necessary information and do so in a user-friendly format that facilitates review and analysis.
- d. Professional Development.* To support the implementation of the district’s policies, procedures, and data system, develop professional development materials that are available in multiple formats (e.g., video, Webinar, PowerPoint, narrative text) and presentation models (e.g., campus-based, small groups). Provide primary training to the broadest spectrum of administrative and other individuals, so they can provide direct support, mentoring, coaching, and technical assistance to principals and teachers. Implement professional development in a manner that will ensure all staff members needing this training receive it and are able to demonstrate its use. Consider mandated training and a certificate of demonstrated performance.
- e. Phasing in Implementation.* Based on available resources, identify schools that will implement the new policies and procedures first. Then, identify and phase in universal screening, a three-tiered intervention system of increasing intensity, progress monitoring tools, frequent collection and review of data, and the monitoring of practices and effects.

For additional recommendations, see Section C (Organizational Structure and Staffing/Resources Supporting Special Education Services) pertaining to organizing effectively to support a system of multi-tiered academic and behavior interventions; and

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Section D, Recommendations 14.a.4) and 14.b.7) pertaining to joint accountability and progress monitoring.

2. ***Review and improve the special education assessment and eligibility process to incorporate fidelity-based RTI considerations.***
 - a. ***Consideration of Interventions Implemented with Fidelity.*** Establish written procedures directing ARD committees to review the provision of academic and positive support interventions to ensure they are research-based, appropriate for each student's area of need, and implemented with fidelity. Pay special attention to interventions designed for students with intellectual or emotional/behavioral disabilities. Provide intervention models, professional development for staff, and written materials and training for parents.
 - b. ***Eligibility Reports.*** Review initial evaluations and reevaluations, and develop standards for what information should be included in each, with exemplars illustrating how eligibility for various disability areas (especially EBD and ID) is determined. Develop IEPs that include information on how each student is to be involved and what progress in the general education curriculum is expected. Once this is completed, provide professional development to relevant staff, and periodically review a sample of assessments for quality assurance and to guide future training needs.
 - c. ***Plan to Address Special Education Disproportionality for African American Students.*** Representatives from the Special Education Department and all other divisions with responsibility for instruction and social/emotional development should review the department's plan for addressing the disproportionality of African American students and other student groups referenced in the exhibits above. The plan should incorporate important elements related to RTI and cultural/linguistic issues. This process should also include input and feedback from internal and external stakeholders, including students with disabilities and their parents. The plan should include general education administrators, as well as those responsible for special education and ELL services to build responsibility for identified activities. In addition, the plan should include relevant time frames for implementation and accountability measures. Once finalized, the plan should be communicated widely through a variety of mechanisms.
 - d. ***Dismissal Consideration.*** Establish procedures for and train case managers on collecting and reviewing student data with relevant general education teachers prior to annual ARDs. If data supports consideration of dismissal, evaluation staff could be invited to the ARD meetings to complete a reevaluation plan. Often discussion of dismissal does not occur until it is time for the triennial reevaluation. Formulate guidelines and provide training for campus administrators and staff members to assist them in making dismissal decisions.
 - e. ***Regular Monitoring Samples of Files.*** Develop a process that is designed to maximize consistency in systemwide special education eligibility determinations, especially in the areas of learning disabilities, emotional/behavior disability, autism, and speech/language.

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- f. *Protocol for Review.* One strategy would be to develop a review protocol by which a sample of files is reviewed periodically and patterns of concern are used to change procedures as appropriate or to identify staff development needs.

B. Instruction and Performance of Students Receiving Special Education Services

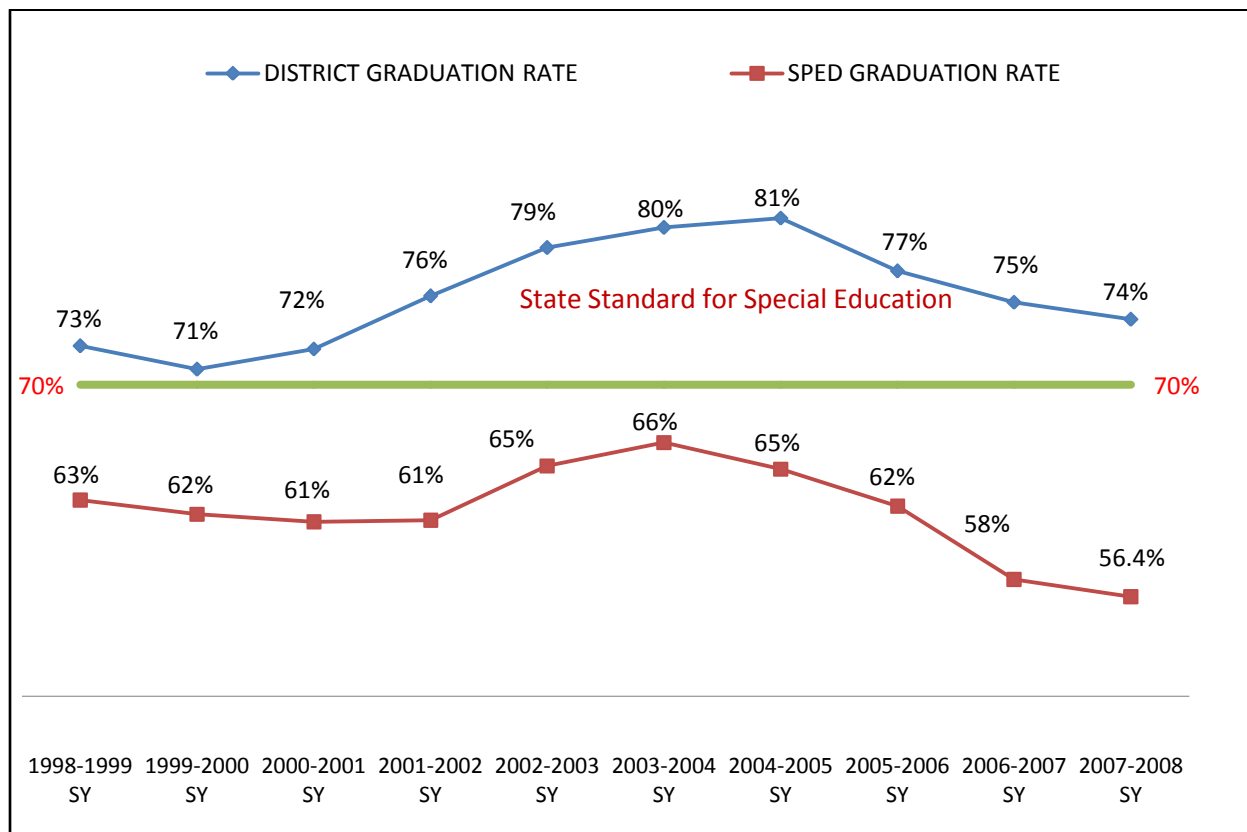
This section addresses graduation and dropout rates; academic performance; inclusive instruction; support for positive behavior; instruction for students who are English language learners and receiving special education services; instruction for students with autism; and transition services.

Graduation and Dropout Rates

- *Graduation Rate*

As illustrated in Exhibit 16 below, AISD graduation rates for all students and for those receiving special education have similar patterns, but the percentage-point gap between the two groups has widened between FY 1999 (10 percent) and 2008 (18 percent). Further, the gap between the AISD graduation rate and the Texas Education Agency's 70 percent standard for special education has increased. Over this 11-year period, the smallest gap was four percentage points in FY 2004; while the largest gap was in FY 2008 (14 percentage points).

Exhibit 16. Four-Year Graduation Rate (Special Education and AISD)



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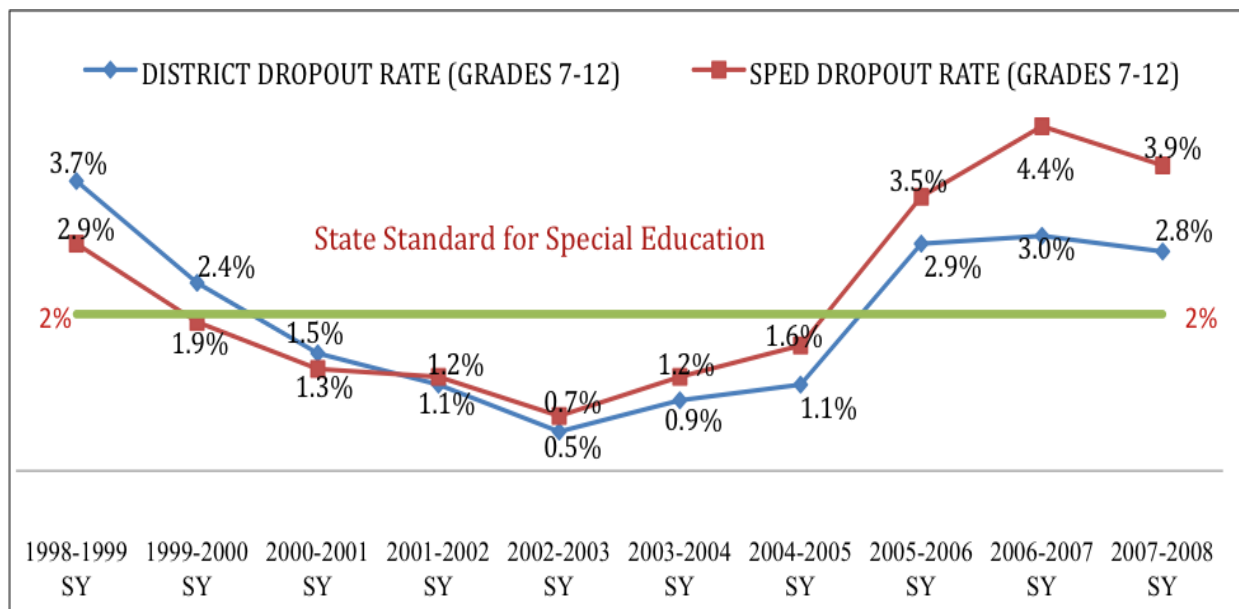
In FY 2009, the AISD's special education graduation rate increased slightly from 56.4 to 56.5 percent, earning a performance level of "2" on the state's PBMAS Indicator #11. Of the six other large Texas districts, all but two earned a "2" and one earned a "1." Similarly, the AISD did not meet the State Performance Plan (SPP) graduation-rate criteria.

AISD staff members gave the Council team data showing the number of graduating students receiving special education from FY 2001 through FY 2008 by age, disability, race/ethnicity, but these data were not provided in a way that enabled the team to determine risk ratios or to conduct other analysis.

- **Dropout Rate**

As shown in Exhibit 17, the number of students receiving special education services who dropped out of school (grades 7 through 12) between FY 1999 and FY 2008 changed dramatically. From the late 1990s through FY 2002, students with disabilities dropped out of school at lower rates than did AISD students generally. The rates were very similar in FY 2002, but since then students with disabilities have dropped out at higher rates than AISD students generally. In FY 2008, the annual special education rate was 3.9 percent, compared with 2.8 percent for the AISD overall.

Exhibit 17. Annual Dropout Rate for Grades 7-12 (Special Education and AISD)



In FY 2009, the AISD's annual dropout rate remained at 3.9 percent, earning the district a Performance-Based Management Analysis System (PBMAS) performance level of "1." By comparison, six other large Texas districts earned a "1," one earned a "2," and one earned a "0." Similarly, the AISD did not meet the state's SPP dropout rate criteria in FY 2008. As with the district's graduation data, the AISD's dropout data was not provided to the Council's team in a way that made further analysis possible.

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Based on significant input from community partners, schools, parents, and nonprofit organizations in Central Texas, the Special Education Department initiated 25 projects funded with \$17.3 million in ARRA IDEA funds to address these issues. Two of these initiatives directly supported dropout prevention:

- ***Dropout/At-Risk Recovery Team.*** Expands dropout recovery programs at targeted campuses and collaborates with existing programs to seek out students with disabilities who have dropped out; and
- ***Computer-Based Prescriptive Instruction.*** Targets credit recovery, course completion, and academic deficits for more than 1,000 students with disabilities most at risk of dropping out of school.

Academic Performance

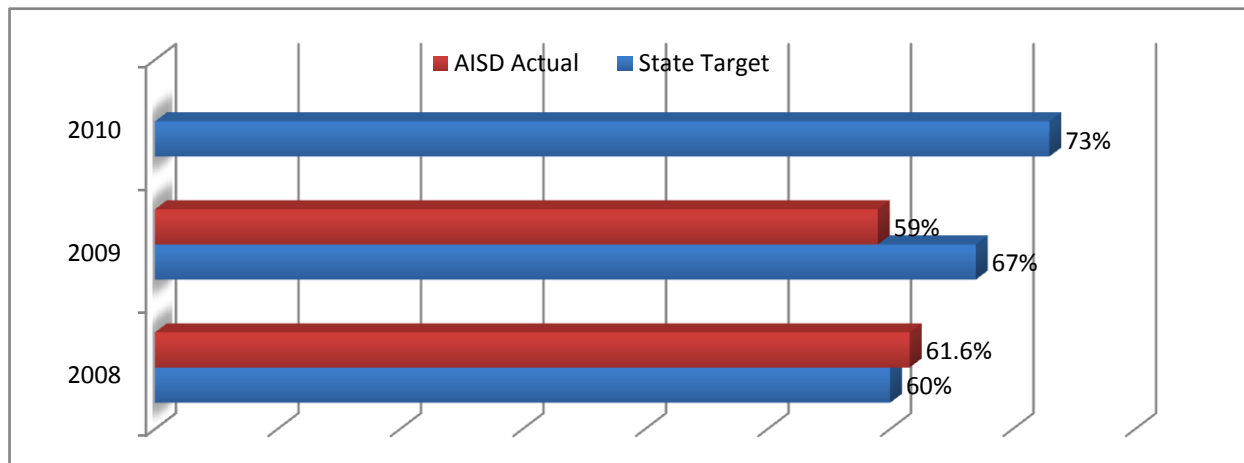
The information below summarizes data related to state and national student academic performance data and relevant information from interviews, focus groups, and district documents.

Reading Performance on State Assessments and the NAEP

- ***AYP Targets***

In FY 2008, the AISD met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets for all student groups and was the only large urban district in Texas to do so. In FY 2009, the state target for reading increased from 60 to 67 percent, which the special education subgroup narrowly missed with a passing rate of 64 percent. This fiscal year, the state target increases again to 73 percent. These scores are based on Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)/Accommodated scores and not on alternate or modified assessments.

Exhibit 18. Target and Actual Pass Rates in Reading



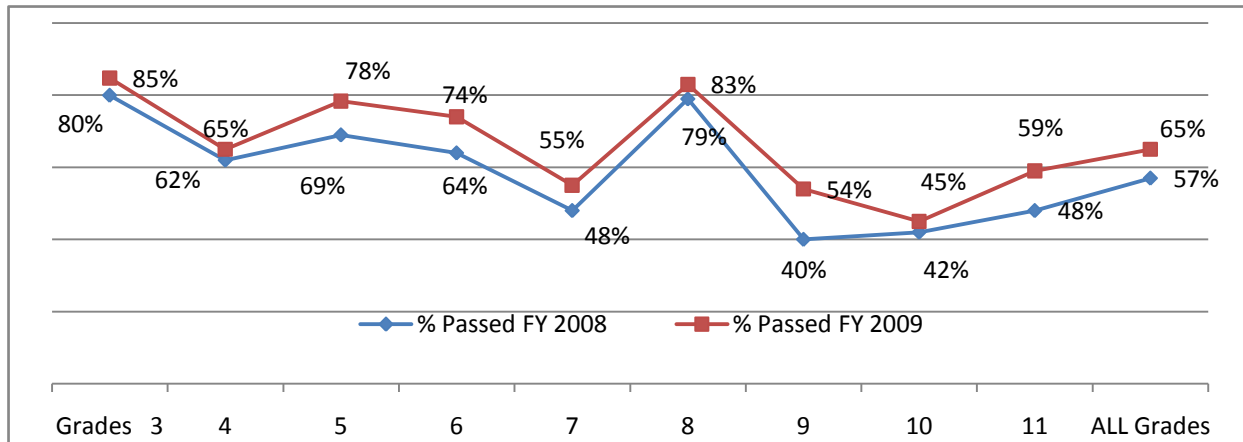
- ***Performance on Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) by Grade***

More students in the special education subgroup in all grades passed the TAKS in FY 2009 than in FY 2008. Overall, 65 percent passed in FY 2009, compared with 57 percent in the

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prior year, an increase of 8 percentage points. The average passing rate for students in grades nine and 11 increased the most, jumping from 40 to 54 percent (14 percentage points) in ninth grade and from 48 to 59 percent (11 percentage points) in 11th grade. Tenth-grade students continue to score very poorly, but their passing rate increased from 42 to 45 percent in FY 2009.

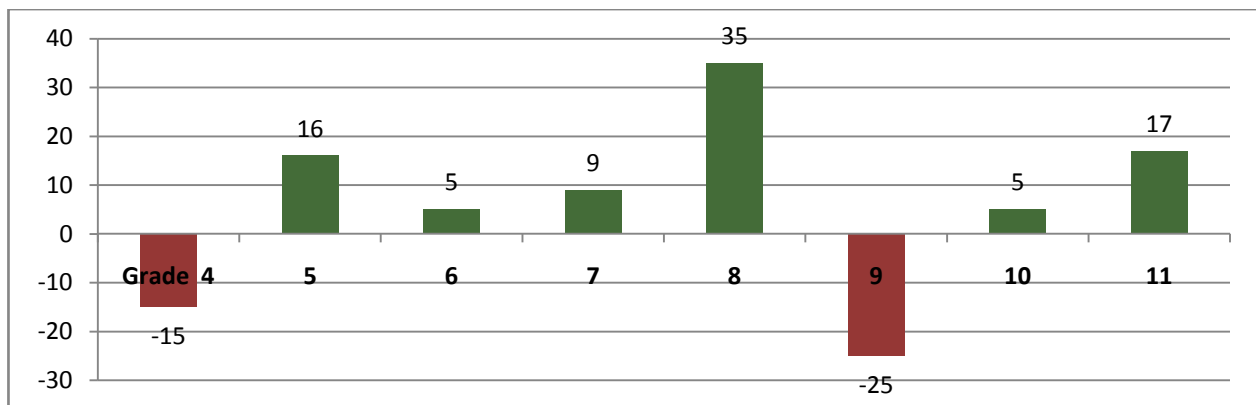
Exhibit 19. Special Education TAKS (Reading)⁸



- Comparing Students Passing TAKS from One Grade in FY 2008 to Next Grade in FY 2009**

More students receiving special education services passed the TAKS in reading at five grades, comparing rates in FY 2008 to those in next grade in FY 2009. (See Exhibit 20 below.) Eighth-grade scores increased the most, gaining **35 percentage points** to reach an 83 percent passing rate in FY 2009. Other large gains were made in the fifth grade where scores increased by 16 percentage points (62 to 78 percent) and 11th grade where scores increased by 17 percentage points (48 to 59 percent). However, ninth-grade scores fell 25 percentage points to 54 percent in FY 2009; and fourth grade scores fell by 15 percentage points to a passing rate of 65 percent.

Exhibit 20. Special Education Subgroup: FY 2008 Pass Rates, Compared with Next Grade in FY 2009⁹



⁸ All TAKS and with accommodations (not just accountability subset); does not include TAKS Modified/ Alternate.

⁹ All TAKS and TAKS with accommodations (not just accountability subset); does not include Modified or Alternate TAKS.

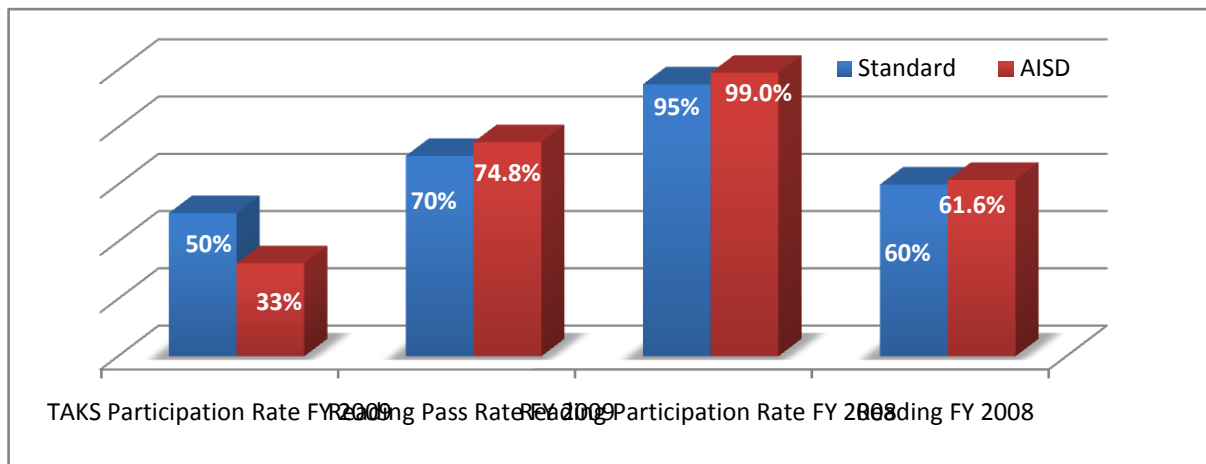
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- ***PBMAS and SPP Accountability***

Exhibit 21 shows the participation rates and performance of students receiving special education who took the TAKS. The figures do not include students taking the modified or alternate versions. For these students, 33 percent of AISD students receiving special education in FY 2009 took the referenced TAKS assessment, which did not meet the 50 percent standard set by the state. That year, 74.8 percent of these students passed the TAKS or alternate achievement standards at grade level, exceeding the 70 percent PBMAS target. Note, however, that this was based on 33 percent of assessed participants rather than the 50 percent expected by the state.

For FY 2008, the AISD met the State Performance Plan (SPP) requirements with 99 percent of students in the special education subgroup participating in one of the statewide assessments (exceeding the 95 percent requirement) and 61.6 percent passing (exceeding the 60 percent target). Note that the *No Child Left Behind* law proficiency caps on alternate and modified assessments do not apply to the state's accountability system.

Exhibit 21. AISD and Texas Standard for SPP and PBMAS Accountability

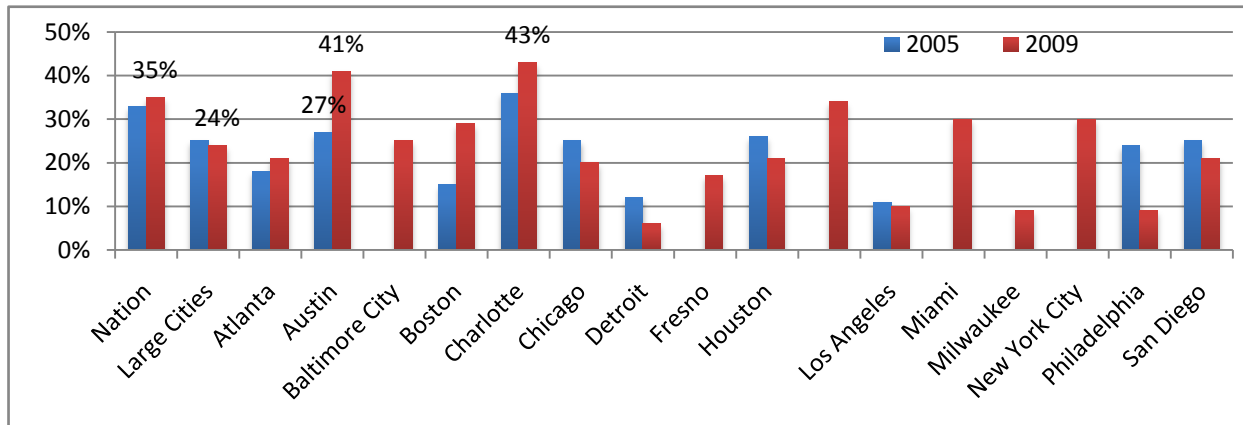


- ***National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)***

In 2009, fourth-grade AISD students with disabilities scored 41 percent at/above basic in reading on the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) of the NAEP, the second highest rate among the participating districts and exceeding the national rate of 35 percent and the large-city rate of 24 percent. The AISD also scored significantly higher than large city averages among eighth-grade students with disabilities and about the same as national averages. The district was one of only four urban districts showing gains among students with disabilities between 2005 and 2009. (The Charlotte school district increased the most, 14 percentage points).

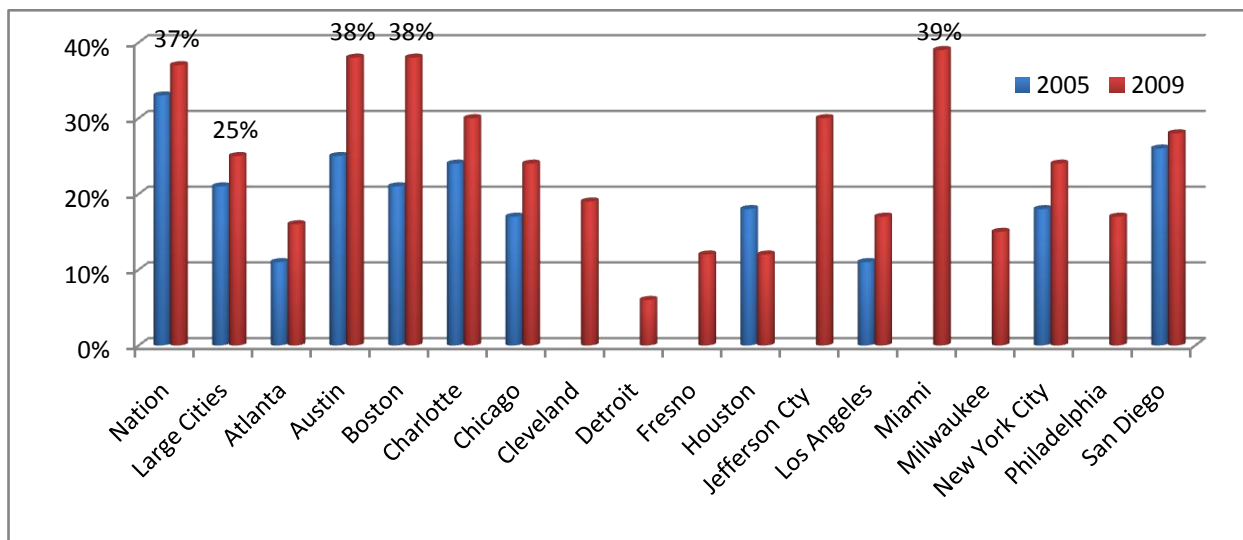
Unfortunately, sample sizes in reading among fourth-grade African American, Hispanic, and/or poor students were not large enough to yield NAEP scores for these particular groups. At the eighth-grade level, Austin' poor students with disabilities read at about the same level as their same-group peers nationally, but better than their same-group urban peers.

Exhibit 22. NAEP Reading Basic and Above in Grade 4¹⁰



In 2009, AISD eighth-graders in the special education subgroup scored 38 percent at or above basic levels in reading on the NAEP, just behind the Miami school system’s high score of 39 percent, and exceeding the national rate of 37 percent and the large city rate of 25 percent. The district’s gain of 13 percentage points between 2005 and 2009 was the second highest increase among TUDA districts.

Exhibit 23. NAEP Reading Basic and Above in Grade 8



Math Performance on State Assessments and the NAEP

- AYP Targets in Math**

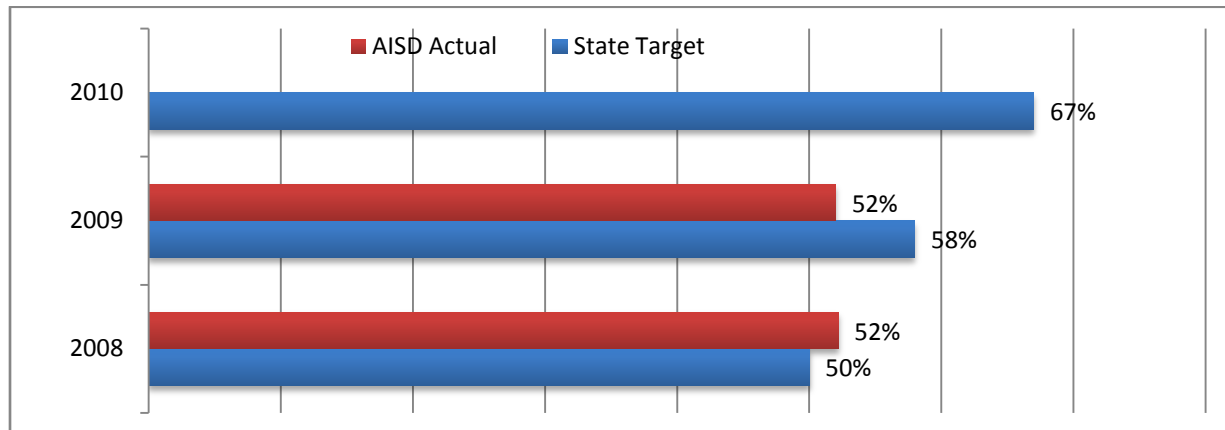
In FY 2008, the AISD was the only large urban school district in Texas to meet AYP targets for all subgroups in reading and in math. In FY 2009, the state’s target increased from 50 to 58 percent, and the special education subgroup scored 52 percent, six points below the target.

¹⁰ The Austin school district excluded from 2009 NAEP reading testing about 9 percent of students with disabilities at the fourth-grade level and about 7 percent at the eighth-grade level, compared with about 4 percent excluded nationally.

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Note that these scores are based only on TAKS/A, and do not include results for students taking alternate and modified assessments.

Exhibit 24. Target and Actual Pass Rates in Math

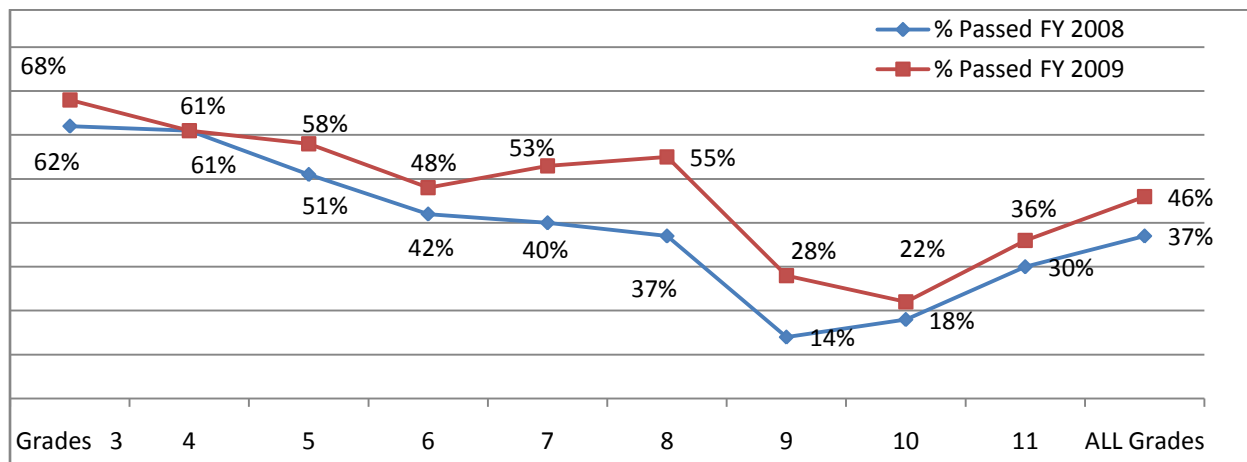


- Performance on TAKS by Grade**

As seen in Exhibit 25 below, more students in the special education subgroup at all grade levels passed the TAKS in FY 2009 than in FY 2008, except in the fourth grade where they remained the same at 61 percent over the period. Overall, 46 percent (compared with 65 percent in reading) passed the TAKS in math in FY 2009, compared with 37 percent the prior year, an increase of 9 points.

The average pass rate of students in the eighth grade increased the most, jumping from 37 to 55 percent (18 points), but scores in the seventh grade increased by 13 points (40 to 53 percent) and in the ninth grade by 14 points (14 percent to 28 percent). As with reading, 10th-grade students continue to score poorly, but the percentage of these students passing the TAKS increased from 18 to 22 percent over the period.

Exhibit 25. Special Education TAKS (Math)¹¹



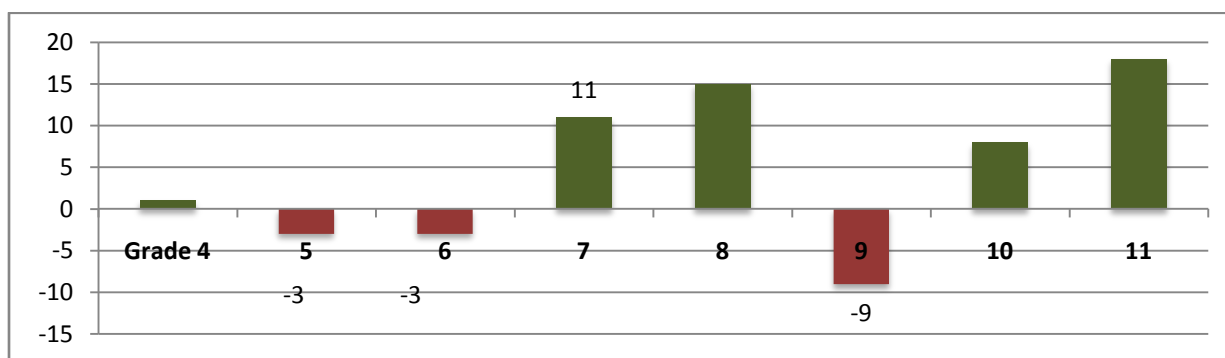
¹¹ Includes all TAKS scores and TAKS with accommodations (not just accountability subset); scores do not include Modified or Alternate TAKS.

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- **Comparing Students Passing TAKS in One Grade in FY 2008 to Next Grade in FY 2009**

More students receiving special education services passed the TAKS in math in five grade levels when comparing FY 2008 results to results in the next grade in FY 2009. (See Exhibit 26.) Similar to reading scores, the largest math gains were in the 11th grade where the average pass score jumped 18 percentage points to 36 percent. In the eighth grade, scores jumped 15 percentage points to 55 percent, and other large gains were made in the seventh grade where scores increased by 11 percentage points to 53 percent. On the other hand, the pass rate in the ninth grade dropped by 9 percentage points to 28 percent. And fifth- and sixth-grade scores fell by three points to 58 and 48 percent, respectively.

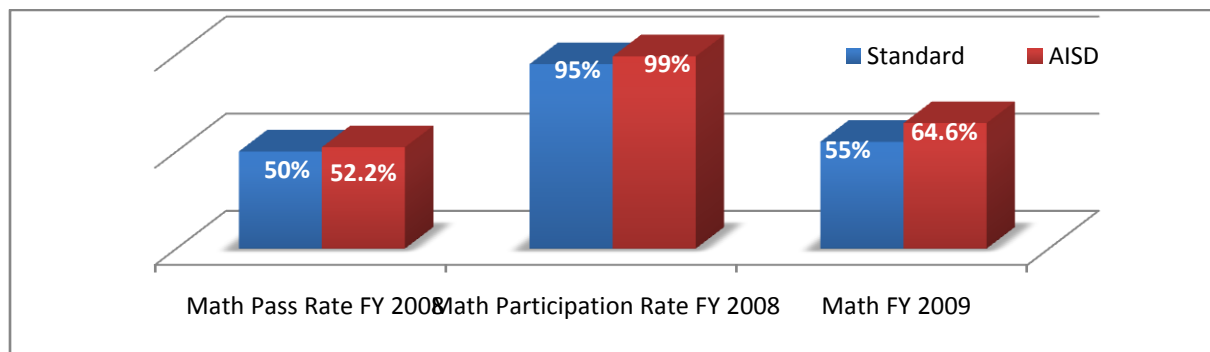
Exhibit 26. Special Education Subgroup: FY 2008 Pass Rates, Compared with Next Grade in FY 2009¹²



- **PBMAS and SPP Accountability**

Exhibit 27 below shows AISD math performance for students with disabilities on the SPP indicator measuring TAKS participation and performance in FY 2008. The exhibit also shows the PBMAS indicator based on FY 2009 TAKS results. In FY 2008, the AISD met SPP requirements: 99 percent of AISD students in the special education subgroup participated in a TAKS assessment (exceeding the 95 percent requirement) and 52.2 percent passed (exceeding the 50 percent target). In FY 2009, 64.6 percent of students passed TAKS at grade level or met alternate achievement standards, exceeding the 55 percent target.

Exhibit 27. AISD and Texas Standard for SPP and PBMAS Accountability



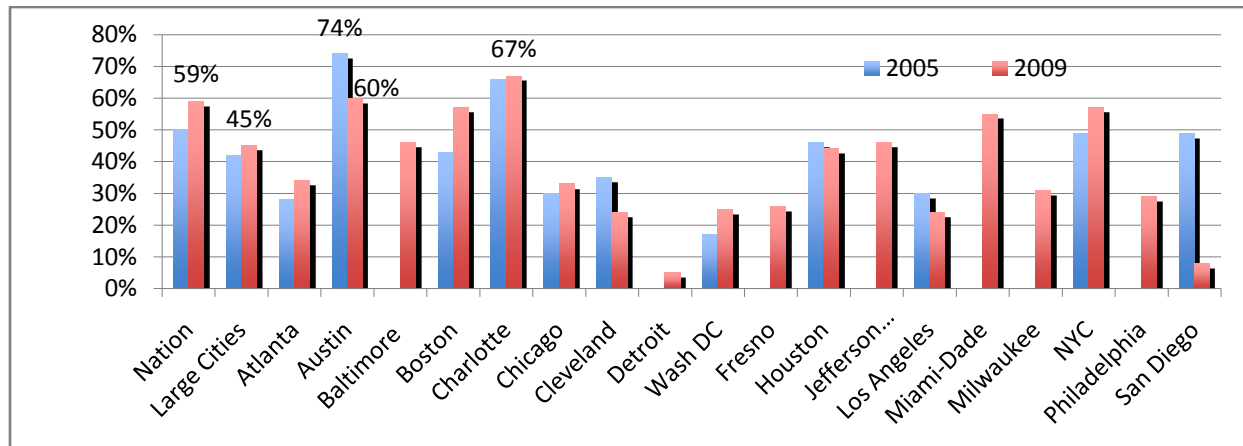
¹² Includes all TAKS scores and TAKS with accommodations (not just accountability subset); scores do not include Modified or Alternate TAKS.

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- *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)*

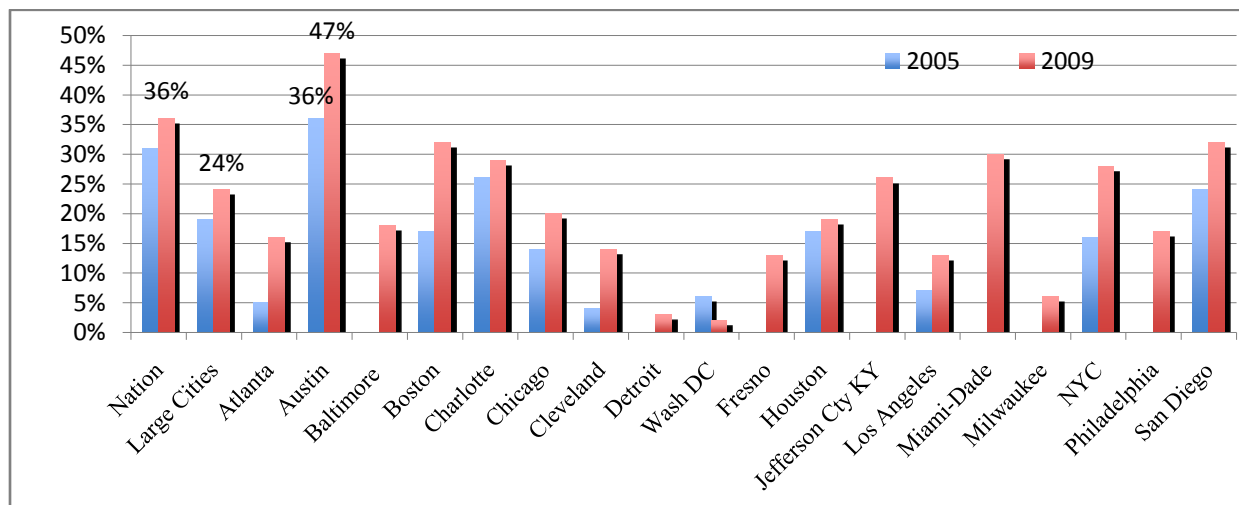
In 2009, fourth-grade AISD students receiving special education services scored 60 percent at or above basic levels of attainment in math on the NAEP, the second highest score among urban school districts participating in the TUDA. (The Charlotte school district scored 67 percent). The district averaged slightly better than the nation (59 percent) and significantly better than other large city school districts (45 percent). The district's percentage, however, fell from 2005's high of 74 percent to 60 percent in 2009.

Exhibit 28. NAEP Math Basic and Above in Grade 4



In the eighth grade, AISD students receiving special education services scored 47 percent at or above basic levels in 2009, outscoring all other TUDA districts. The district was also identical to the national average of 36 percent and the large city school average of 24 percent. The Austin district's gain of 11 percentage points, moreover, reflected the second highest increase among TUDA districts.

Exhibit 29. NAEP Math Basic and Above in Grade 8¹³



¹³ Austin excluded from the 2009 NAEP math testing about 4 percent of students with disabilities at the fourth-grade level and about 6 percent at the eighth-grade level, compared with about 2 percent excluded nationally at the fourth-grade level and 3 percent excluded at the eighth-grade level.

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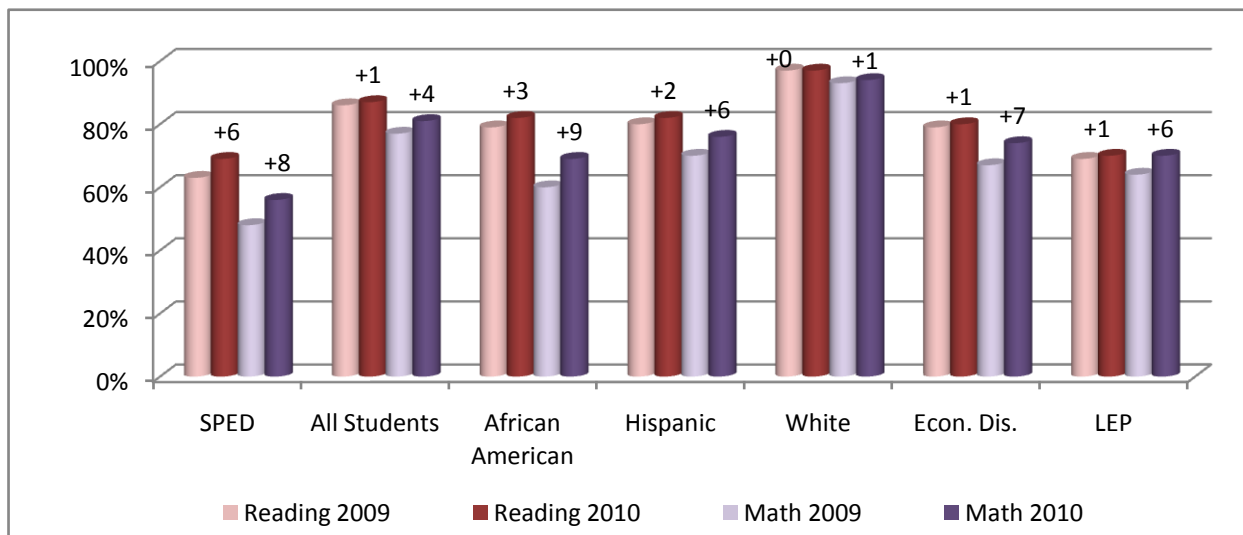
Unlike the case with reading, sample sizes in math among student groups was large enough to yield some results. The data did show that poor students with disabilities in the fourth grade in Austin scored at or above their same-group peers in math, compared with large-city and national averages. Hispanic fourth-grade students with disabilities scored above their same-group peers nationally. The same patterns held among eighth-grade students with disabilities who were also poor or Hispanic. The NAEP sample size of African American scores was not large enough to analyze.

Preliminary TAKS Results for FY 2010

The preliminary 2010 results on the state's TAKS/TAKS-A assessment, which were released on June 3, show increased performance among special education students in all tested areas. As seen in Exhibit 30, 69 percent of students in special education passed the reading assessment with an average increase of 6 percentage points. The gains represented the largest percentage-point increase among all district subgroups.

In math, 56 percent of special education students passed with an average 8-percentage point increase. These gains were the second highest increase among all subgroups. (These scores compare the same group of students as tested in 2009, including TAKS-Accommodated students.)

Exhibit 30. Preliminary May 2010 Summary TAKS/TAKS-A Results in Reading/Math¹⁴



- **Test Scoring Changes**

The scoring process changed this year on the state's estimated accountability subset (EAS), which included selected TAKS-A in 2009 and all of TAKS in 2010 for reading, writing,

¹⁴ The results reflect combined results for English and Spanish and include first and second administrations of reading and math tests at SSI Grades (5 and 8). In 2009, there was a second administration of math and reading tests at Grade 3, but those results are not included. The 2010 results reflect some adjustments to the passing standards for reading and math.

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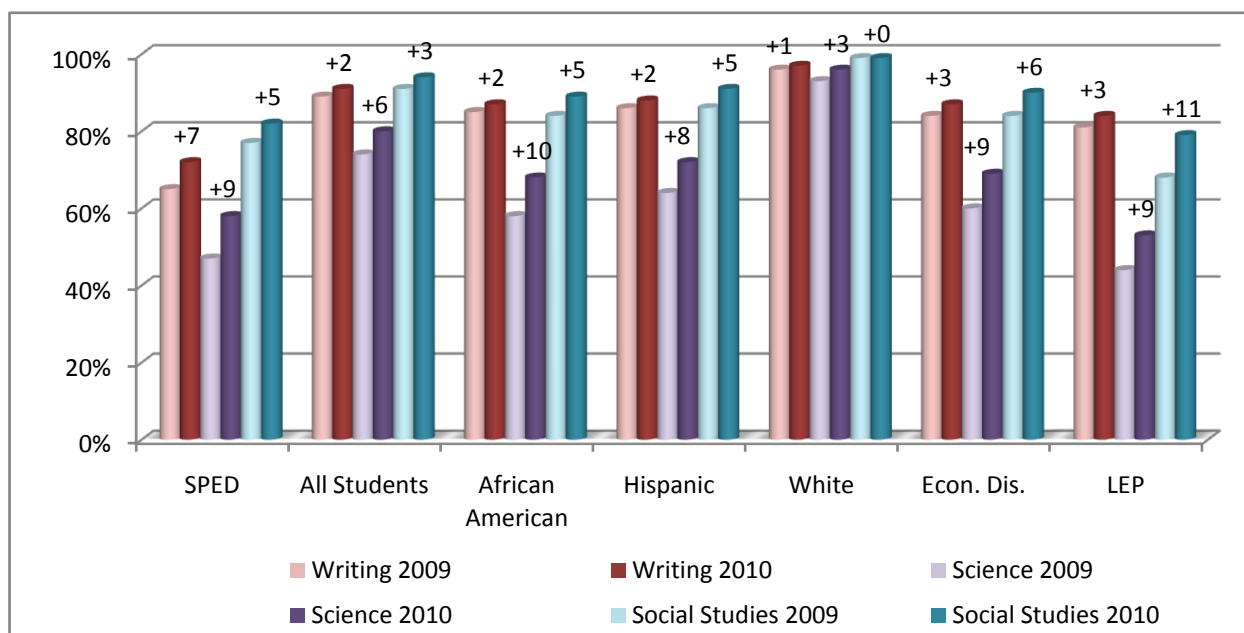
and math. Because TAKS-A scores are significantly lower than the other three assessments (TAKS, TAKS-Alt, and TAKS-M) and about one-fourth of the special education subgroup takes the TAKS-A, the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) score for this population is affected. Also, this year's the Texas Education Agency's passing score in reading increased for grades 6 and 8. As a result, the district's projected AEIS passing rate fell from 71 percent in 2009 to 69 percent in 2010; and the math passing rate fell from 79 to 74 percent. The *American-Statesman* reported on June 29, 2010, that the AISD is unlikely to meet federal academic improvement standards for a second year because of preliminary unsatisfactory performance on statewide assessments among special education students.

- **Writing and Science**

As shown in Exhibit 31, 72 percent of students receiving special education services passed state writing exams with an average 7 percentage-point increase over the previous year, the largest increase among all subgroups. As indicated in the previous discussion, this comparison is based on the same group of TAKS-A students in FY 2009 as in 2010. Based on the AEIS standard that includes *all* TAKS-A students, the passing rate fell from 79 to 74 percent between 2009 and 2010.

In science, 58 percent of special education students passed with an average 9 percentage-point increase over 2009, the second highest among all subgroups. And in social studies, 82 percent passed with an average 5 percentage-point increase.

Exhibit 31. Preliminary May 2010 TAKS/TAKS-A in Writing, Science, and Social Studies



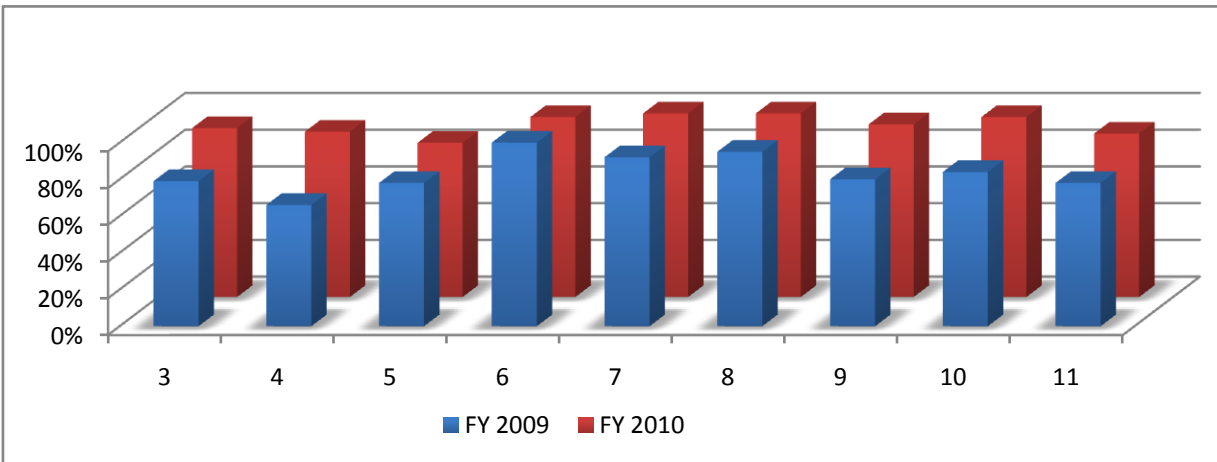
Although results for the TAKS-M test are not yet available, there is some concern that fewer students receiving special education services took the TAKS/TAKS-Accommodated test in FY 2010 and more took the TAKS-M test, which may affect the district's overall AYP results among special education students.

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- **TAKS-Alt Performance**

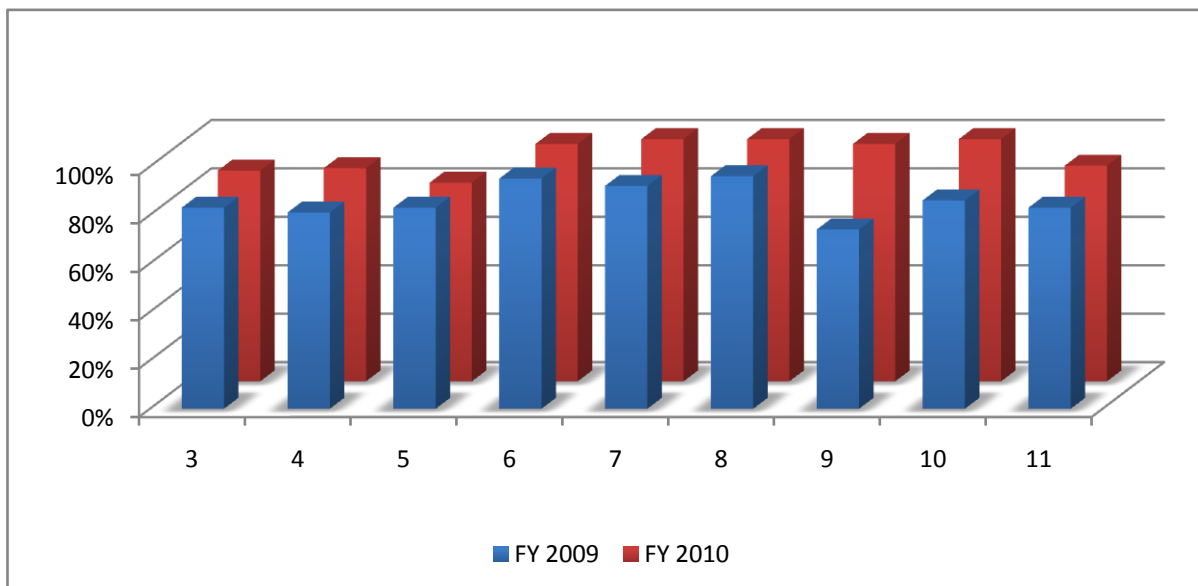
AISD students taking the TAKS-Alt test passed the exam at much higher rates in FY 2010 than in 2009. As shown in Exhibit 32 below, students at every grade level scored at higher rates this fiscal year, compared with last, and 100 percent of students passed in grades 7, 8, and 10. Most notably, there was a 24 percentage-point increase in passing among fourth-grade students.

Exhibit 32. Percentage of Students Passing TAKS-Alt in Reading (FY 2009-2010)



In math, students taking the TAKS-Alt test and students in all grades except the fifth- (1 percentage point drop) scored higher in FY 2010 than in the prior year. All students in seventh and eighth grades passed. Most notably, there was a 25 percentage-point increase in passing rates in the ninth grade.

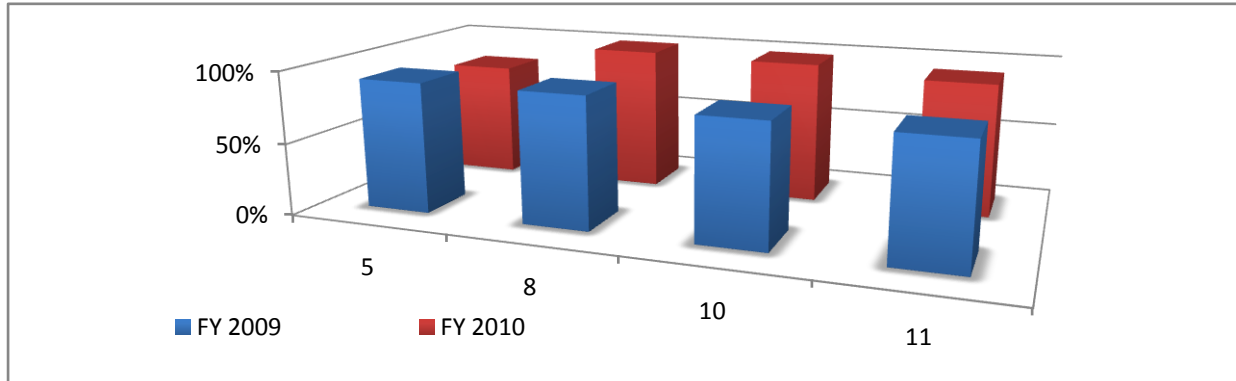
Exhibit 33. Percentage of Students Passing TAKS-Alt in Math (FY 2009-2010)



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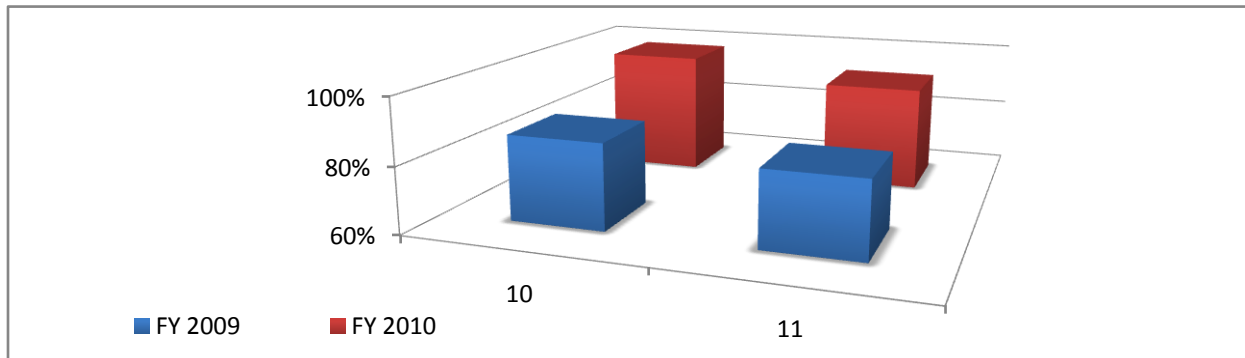
In the area of science, students in all tested grades improved their passing rates except those in the fifth grade whose scores dropped 10 percentage points. All eighth-grade students passed. (See Exhibit 34.)

Exhibit 34. Science TAKS-ALT Results



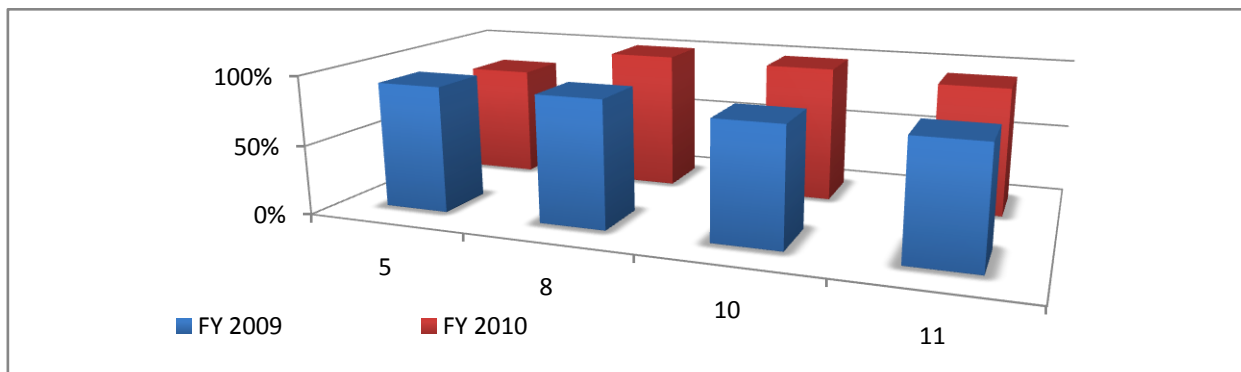
In the area of social studies, the passing rates for students in all grades tested increased, and all 10th-graders passed. (See Exhibit 35.)

Exhibit 35. Social Studies TAKS-ALT



Finally, in writing, the passing rates increased between 2009 and 2010 in all grades tested. Some 98 percent of all seventh- and eighth-graders passed as well.

Exhibit 36. Writing TAKS-ALT



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The AISD'S special education director reported to the team that the percent of students taking the TAKS-Alt did not exceed the maximum 1 percent of all students taking TAKS, so all students who passed will be "counted." She and her staff are attributing preliminary results to implementation of the ARRA-funded Unique Learning System¹⁵ and the Literacy Leaders program because they improved access to curriculum and materials; teacher familiarity with the assessment; and significant training for life-skills specialists that was aimed at improving their understanding of the assessment process.

Information from Interviews, Focus Groups and Documents

Prior to FY 2008, Texas permitted students with disabilities to take off-grade-level [i.e., below grade-level] assessments pursuant to ARD/IEP committee judgment. Since FY 2008, however, all students must take the TAKS, either with accommodations, or take an alternate (TAKS-Alt) or modified (TAKS-M) assessment. According to district staff, this change created a cultural shift within the AISD that moved administrators from discussions about whether students with disabilities would be able to understand grade-level curriculum to conversations about *how* to effectively provide instruction that would improve student attainment on that curriculum.

- ***Modified and Alternate Assessments***

Improving passing rates among students taking modified or alternate assessments, however, will not enable the AISD to meet AYP. Although *No Child Left Behind* does not cap the number of students who may take TAKS-Alt or TAKS-M, it caps TAKS-Alt proficient scores at 1 percent of all students taking the statewide assessment and caps TAKS-M proficient scores at 2 percent of such students. Last school year, AISD exceeded the NCLB TAKS-M cap.

In 2009, 85 percent of students (1,714 students) taking the TAKS-M test in reading were proficient, but only 945 students could be counted proficient. Consequently, the TAKS-M proficiency rate fell to 47 percent.¹⁶ This cap and its consequences are not applied at the campus level for AYP purposes, but they do apply at the district level. In FY 2011, the TAKS-M/Alt tests will be included for the first time in the Texas accountability system's academic excellence indicator system (AEIS). The AEIS does not incorporate *No Child Left Behind* consequences for scores that exceed the established cap. Therefore, the relatively high passing rate on the TAKS-M (reading at 85 percent and math at 74 percent) and TAKS-Alt (reading at 83 percent and math at 87 percent) will benefit most schools. It was reported to the team that it is relatively easy for students to score at/above proficient on the TAKS-M. Teachers create instructional activities for students and they may reassess students multiple times. Nevertheless, more students must pass TAKS (with or without accommodations) in order for the AISD to meet its AYP targets.

- ***Interaction between State and Federal Performance Accountability Systems***

In October 2009 staff members from the Special Education Department met with more than 100 campus teams and asked them to identify students who were likely to score at or below passing levels on the TAKS (including accommodations) and who scored high (commended) on

¹⁵ A comprehensive, standardized and content-focused TEKS aligned curriculum and materials for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

¹⁶ Data was not provided for math.

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the TAKS-M. These identified students were provided with targeted interventions. ARRA funding was used to purchase intervention materials, provide professional development, and support tutoring and progress monitoring. In February 2010, 22 campuses used ARRA funds to increase the district's tutoring efforts. Also, administrators in the Special Education Department requested each principal and relevant staff members to designate personnel to review statewide assessments selected for students receiving special education services. The administrators distributed to each campus detailed reports showing each student's prior year TAKS performance levels, middle-of-the-year results, and projected TAKS scores based on current admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) information. These reports were updated every two weeks. During this process, the Special Education Department stressed the importance of assessing each student using the most rigorous and appropriate assessment tool and to avoid offering a student an assessment on which he or she had little chance of success.

- ***American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)-IDEA-Funded Supports***

The Special Education Departments ARRA/IDEA-funded initiatives included the following six activities designed specifically to support improved academic performance and positive behavior for students receiving special education. These initiatives included—

- ***Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities.*** Language/pre-literacy in-home skill development programs to provide training to parents on how to use effective communication skills with three- to five-year-olds to facilitate language acquisition (22 elementary schools; 220 students)
- ***After-School and Saturday School Instructional Support.*** Extended learning opportunities provided for all students receiving special education services to improve TAKS results and improve academic achievement.
- ***TEKS-Aligned Curriculum for Students with Significant Disabilities.*** Designed to increase the number of students meeting the TAKS-Alt assessment requirements by stressing curriculum design, Web-based video training, instructional specialists to help teachers with program implementation, and professional development to help elementary and secondary teachers to serve as literacy leaders.
- ***Professional Development for Effective Practices.*** Training and materials to support the AISD's development of an intelligence/growth model to spur and measure improvement.
- ***Performance-Related IEP Measureable Goals and TAKS-M Benchmarks.*** Designed to improve use of measureable goals for improvement through professional development and stipends to write TAKS-M benchmarks.
- ***Web-Based IEP Monitoring System for Academic and Behavioral Goals.*** Development of an individualized education program (IEP) and behavior intervention plan (BIP) progress-monitoring system to interface with the AISD's current data system in order to better communicate academic and behavioral progress to parents and staff, and to guide instructional and behavioral interventions.

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- ***Challenges to the Provision of Effective Instruction***

Focus group participants raised the following challenges with the team that stall efforts to provide effective instruction to the district's students with disabilities.

- ***Individual Planning Guide.*** Focus group members expressed concern that the AISD's Individual Planning Guides were not differentiated sufficiently for struggling students. Numerous AISD administrators recognized this issue and the need to produce a better resource for teachers.
- ***Impact of Providing TAKS Accommodations.*** Whenever students were given practice, preparation, or actual TAKS assessment items, special educators were required to provide IEP-mandated accommodations to the general assessment or to tailor instruction to the TAKS-M/Alt. During this time, special educators were unable to provide IEP services to some students while attending these statewide assessment activities. Special educators estimated that this task takes about 25 percent of their time. Although interviewees indicated that some schools cover classes with substitute teachers, this practice was not universal.
- ***Curriculum based on Modified Alternative Academic Achievement Standards.*** The AISD has not developed a uniform curriculum based on alternative academic achievement standards for students taking the TAKS-M. Reportedly, each teacher individualizes his or her own modifications. Individual Planning Guides do not address this issue.
- ***IEP Availability at Beginning of School Year.*** Concern was expressed to the team about the unavailability of student IEPs at the beginning of the school year.
- ***Scheduling High School Classes.*** Consistent with challenges facing other urban school districts, Austin focus-group participants expressed concern to the team about scheduling classes for students receiving special education at the high school level. A “best practice” model is not available for ensuring that schedules are appropriate and meet student needs.
- ***Transition Support.*** Another challenge shared by focus group members was the lack of support for students transitioning from elementary to middle to high school. (The team has encountered this problem in other big-city school districts as well.) As a result, some students with disabilities have a difficult time moving from school to school.

Inclusive Instruction

Data Analysis

Three different measures are used by Texas to analyze the extent to which students receiving special education services are educated in general education classes and separate schools: the federal State Performance Plan (SPP) targets that measure percentage of time students spend in various instructional settings; the Performance-Based Management Analysis System (PBMAS) that is based on percentages in other settings; and a 125 percent deviation from the state's “least restrictive environment” (LRE) ratio. These measures and the AISD's performance on them are discussed below.

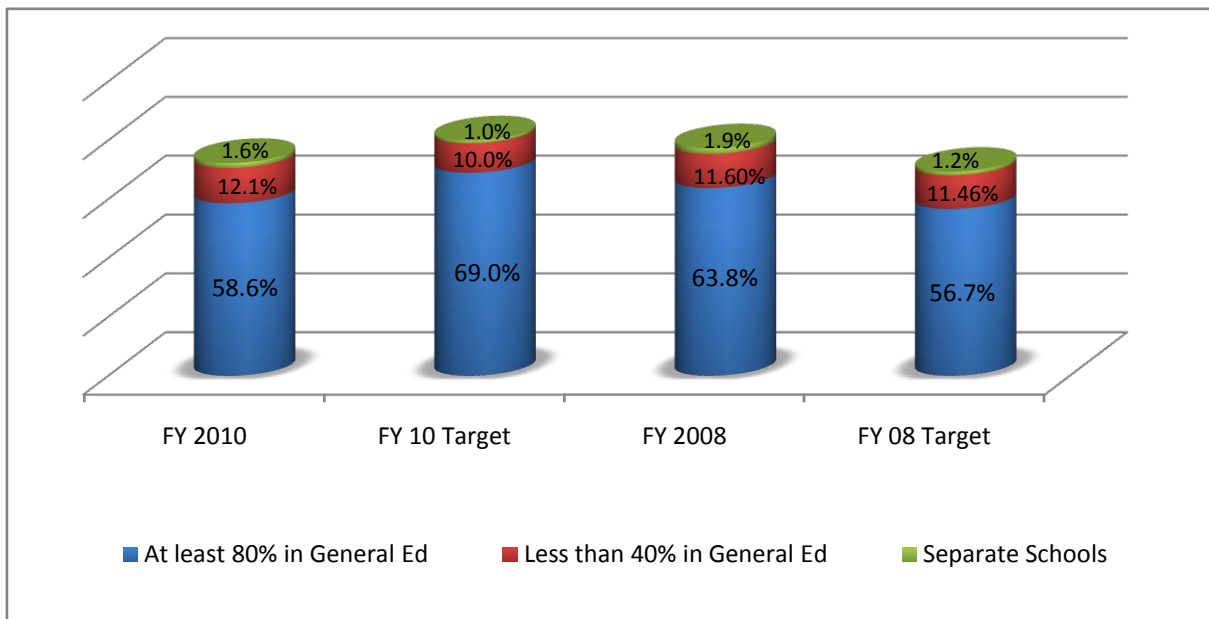
State Performance Plan Indicators

- **Overall AISD Rates Compared with State Targets**

Three SPP standards and indicators assess the percentage of time students with disabilities are educated in the following kinds of settings: at least 80 percent of time in general education settings; less than 40 percent of time in general education settings; and time spent in separate schools. As shown in Exhibit 32 below, the overall percentage of AISD students educated “at least 80 percent of the time in general education” decreased from 63.8 percent in FY 2008 to 58.6 percent in FY 2010, while the state target jumped from 56.7 percent to 69 percent (10 percentage points above the AISD’s rate).

For students educated in general education “less than 40 percent of the time,” the AISD rate increased from 11.6 to 12.1 percent, while the state target dropped from 11.46 to 10 percent (2 percentage points above the AISD’s rate). In the “separate-school” category, the AISD rate decreased from 1.9 percent to 1.6 percent, while the state target decreased from 1.2 percent to 1.0 percent (.6 percentage points below the AISD’s rate). It is not likely that the AISD will meet its SPP targets when the state issues its report about this fiscal year.

Exhibit 37. Comparison of AISD Educational Setting Rates to State Targets

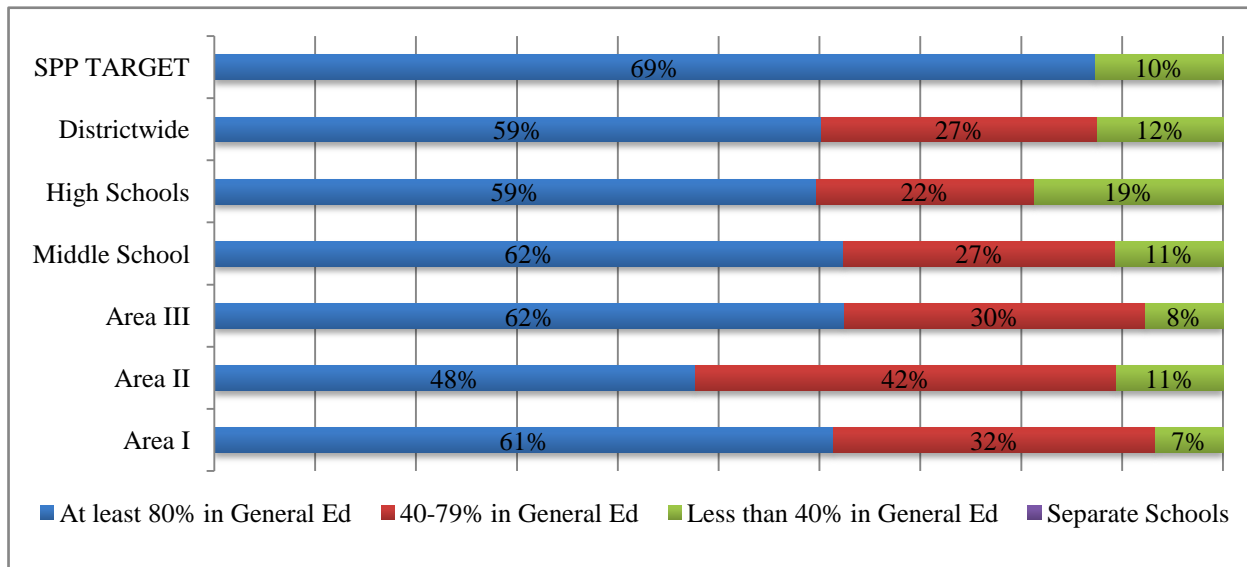


- **Comparisons by Grade Spans and Areas**

Exhibit 38 below compares the SPP targets in various grade bands and district regions. The data show that Area II elementary schools have the lowest rate (48 percent) of students placed in general education settings for at least 80 percent of the time, compared with other areas. None of the grade bands have rates that are near the 69 percent target. For students in the “less than 40 percent in general education category,” Areas I (7 percent) and III (8 percent) did not meet the 10 percent target. (Note that the SPP does not have a target for the 40-79 percent in general education category.)

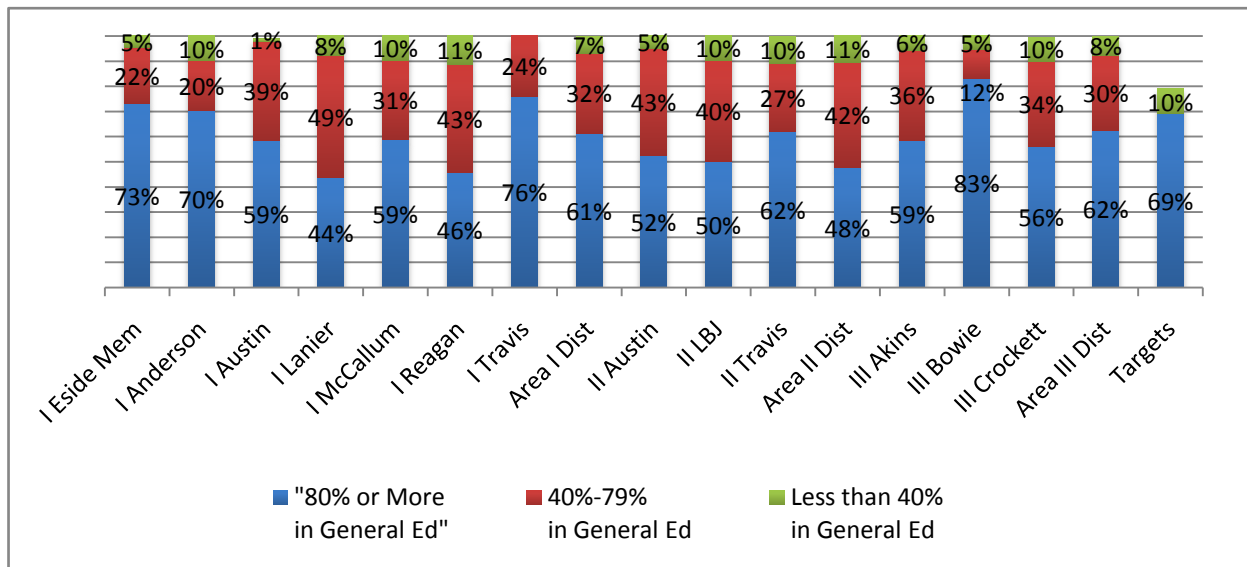
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Exhibit 38. Comparison of Education Setting Rates to State Targets by Virtual Teams



Elementary Schools. Elementary school-level rates are presented in Exhibit 34. The data show four schools exceeding the 69 percent target in the “at least 80 percent in general education category.” They were Bowie (83 percent), Travis I (76 percent), Eastside Memorial (73 percent), and Anderson (70 percent). For the “more than 40 percent category,” 12 schools met or exceeded the 10 percent target.

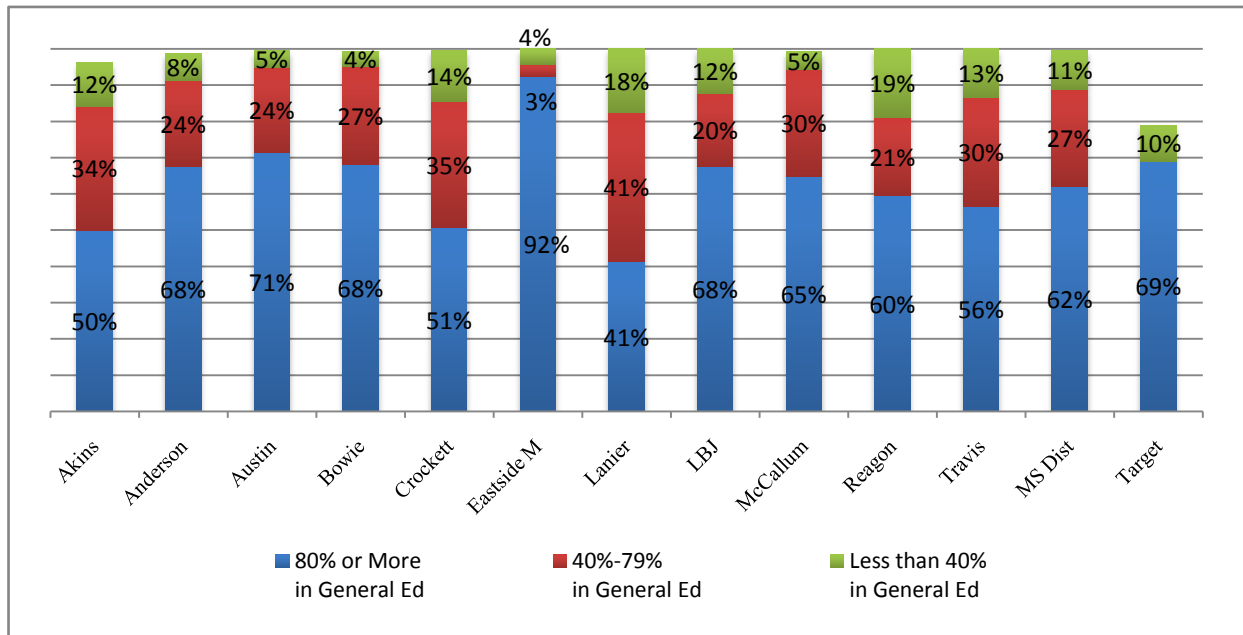
Exhibit 39. Comparison of Educational Setting Rates by Elementary School



Middle Schools. Exhibit 40 below shows two schools exceeding the 69 percent SPP target for students in the “80 percent or more general education category.” These were Eastside Memorial with almost all students in this category (92 percent) and Austin (71 percent). Lanier (41 percent), Akins (50 percent) and Crockett (51 percent) had the lowest rates; and Anderson/Bowie/LBJ (68 percent), and McCallum (65 percent) were similar.

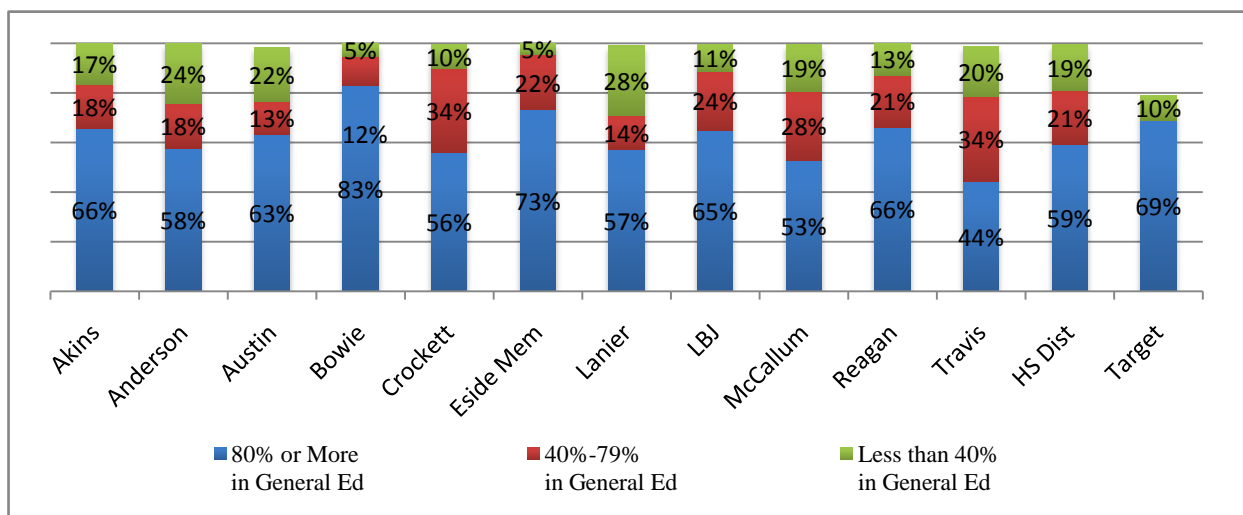
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Exhibit 40. Comparison of Educational Setting Rates by Middle School



High Schools. As shown in Exhibit 41 below, two schools exceeded the 69 percent target for “the 80 percent or more general education category.” They were Bowie (83 percent) and Eastside Memorial (73 percent). Three schools had rates near the target: Reagan/Akins (66 percent) and LBJ (65 percent). Five schools had rates that were more than 10 points below the target: Travis (44 percent), McCallum (53 percent), Crockett (56 percent), Lanier (57 percent), and Anderson (58 percent).

Exhibit 41. Comparison of Educational Setting Rates by High School



PBMAS Indicators

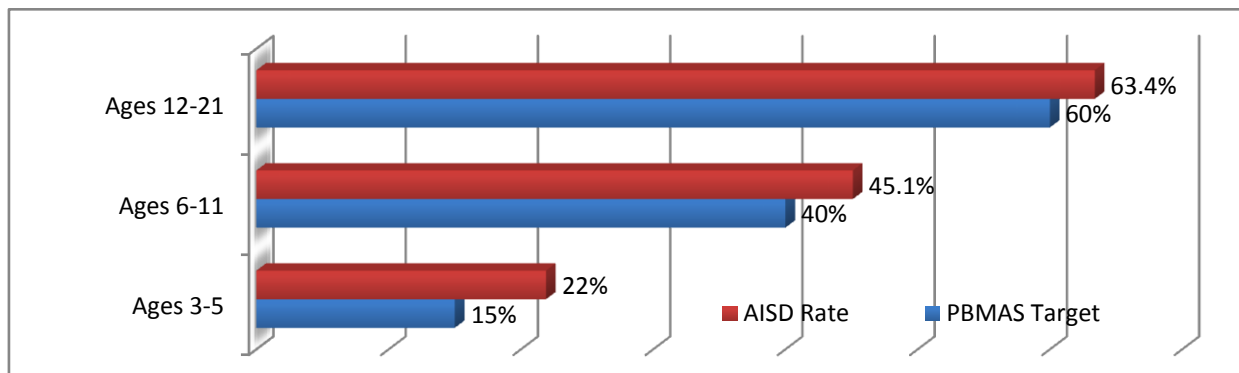
Texas’ Performance-Based Management Analysis System (PBMAS) monitors the rate of students receiving special education services who are placed in less restrictive environments

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(LRE), i.e., mainstream and resource room services less than 21 percent of the day. Students who are in hospital classes, residential care, schools for students with cognitive disabilities, and regional day-programs are excluded from the analysis.

Exhibit 42 shows FY 2009 data on students in the following three age groups: 3-5, 6-11, and 12-21. These data show that the rate of students receiving special education placed in less restrictive settings exceeds the targets for all three age-range groups. At the preschool age level, 22 percent of AISD students were placed in the LRE, compared with the 15 percent target; the district's 6-11-year-olds' 45.1 percent rate exceeded the 40 percent target; and for those between the ages of 12 and 21, the AISD's 63.4 percent rate exceeded the 60 percent target.

Exhibit 42. Comparison of PBMAS Target and AISD Rate for Students in LRE



Ratio of Students in Segregated Settings 25 Percent Higher Than Texas' Rate

Pursuant to state law, the Texas Education Agency monitors school districts with a ratio of students with disabilities in segregated settings that are 25 percent higher than statewide average ratios. According to the AISD, the ratio is determined as the percent of students placed more than 50 percent of the time out of a general education setting.

Between FY 1997 and FY 2005, the AISD's rate was significantly above the state's 125 percent target. This situation changed as a result of a district initiative beginning in FY 2007. At that point, the AISD rate fell below the state's threshold. The district's Special Education Department provides six-week campus-specific reports that identify each school's rate of inclusion using the state's methodology. Special education instructional coordinators routinely review these reports with campus leadership and develop plans to improve inclusion. According to AISD data, it is projected that in FY 2009 125 percent of the Texas LRE ratio will be 0.19 and AISD's projected rate of 0.13 will meet this target. Note, however, that the district's 125 percent LRE ratio rate is projected to be higher this year than in FY 2008.

Information from Interviews, Focus Groups and Documents

The AISD has taken a number of steps to support more inclusive instructional practices. It commissioned two external reports that provided comprehensive findings and recommendations: 1) Dr. Denise Collier's December 1, 2009, report, *Austin ISD: Improving Student Achievement Analysis of Curricular and Instructional Programs and Recommendations for Improving Instructional Programs and Support Systems*; and 2) the Stetson & Associates, Inc., July 2009 report, *A Review of Staffing Practices for Students with Disabilities*.

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The Special Education Department also convened a 20-member task force that issued a report on February 1, 2009, that summarized its analysis and offered recommendations on the decentralization of services for AISD students with disabilities to schools located closer to their homes and in fewer clustered special education settings. The task force represented central-office directors, assistant directors, elementary principals and assistant principals, special education coordinators and supervisors, parents, and a representative from the Special Education Community Advisory Committee (SECAC). In addition, this school year the “inclusion” team produced recommendations for principals to consider as they reviewed their first-semester LRE data.

Various focus group participants meeting with the Council’s team raised concerns about the findings from these reports as they related to special education student access to general education classes and to the effectiveness of the district’s inclusive practices. The most frequently mentioned issues shared are discussed below.

- ***Vision and Leadership.*** There does not appear to be a widespread appreciation for the value of inclusive education and its importance to student performance. There continues to be strong reaction to the system’s push for inclusivity. This may be due to the lack of systemic, comprehensive, and sustained professional development, and to the perception that there is insufficient staff to support the approach. Focus group members agreed uniformly that inclusive strategies were implemented most effectively when the principal leads the effort and cultivates a culture that values this approach to instruction.
- ***Inclusive Practices Framework.*** The district does not appear to have a comprehensive and systemic model for supporting students with disabilities in general education classes. It also appears to lack a way of systematically providing intensive interventions and flexible grouping for students with similar problems in reading, math, and positive behavior.
- ***Professional Development.*** Inclusive practices typically include the use of co-teaching, collaboration, and the informal use of peers. But there was a concern among focus group members that teaching was not truly collaborative and did not regularly use research-based practices that would ensure that learning activities were clearly aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Although many teachers felt that they had a good working knowledge of differentiated instruction, others expressed concern that this practice was not used consistently and effectively for all students in a way that would match instructional resources and strategies with students’ reading-readiness levels. Overall, participants indicated that there was a substantial need for more training on effective and inclusive instructional strategies for all stakeholders, including administrators, special and general educators, related-services staff, and paraprofessionals. Needed topics for professional development that were frequently mentioned included: co-teaching and support-facilitation roles; effective collaboration; differentiated instruction, including accommodating and modifying the general education curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners; and academic content areas.
- ***Application of Professional Development and General Educator Access.*** Professional development in the area of inclusive instruction is not mandatory. As a result, necessary stakeholders (such as general educators) are not consistently present when inclusive practices are put into place. In addition, there does not appear to be a mechanism to ensure that

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educators carry forward information learned during professional development into the classroom. Because of this concern, the Special Education Department now requires every training session it sponsors to include an e-mail to participants and their principals identifying major themes and expected classroom applications.

- ***Coaching and Mentoring.*** Although coaching and mentoring strategies would be useful according to many focus-group participants, it does not appear that the AISD has an institutionalized mechanism to support these practices. Focus group participants emphasized that professional development that was provided on campus to grade-level teams was most effective. One step in this direction was initiated in October 2009 when the district used ARRA funds under IDEA to hire two inclusion specialists to provide campus-based training, along with follow-up classroom observations and feedback in some schools.
- ***Proportionate General Education Class Enrollment.*** It was reported that in some schools classes have a majority of students with IEPs and Section 504 plans. Some suggested that this practice enabled special education teachers to concentrate their support in fewer classes. But they also reported that it had a negative impact on the quality of instruction.
- ***Scheduling.*** At the high school level, scheduling was a challenge, according to focus group participants. The problem appeared to be exacerbated when students with IEPs were not scheduled first.

This school year, special education staff members indicated that applications for school-based funding for professional development outside of the school day included a requirement for submission of a spreadsheet to document interventions the school uses and the types/frequency of support the school received. This data will be used to identify campuses, teachers, and materials with the greatest average student gains and to direct future efforts.

Support for Positive Behavior

This section analyzes data on disparities between disciplinary actions taken with the special education student subgroup, compared with students without disabilities. The section also contains relevant information from interviews and focus groups.

Data Analysis

- ***Disciplinary Removals for Students with/without Disabilities by Race/ Ethnicity***

The four exhibits below show the percentage of students (white, African American, and Hispanic) with/without disabilities that are removed from classes for disciplinary reasons for varying lengths of times. The exhibits also show the numbers of single vs. multiple infractions.

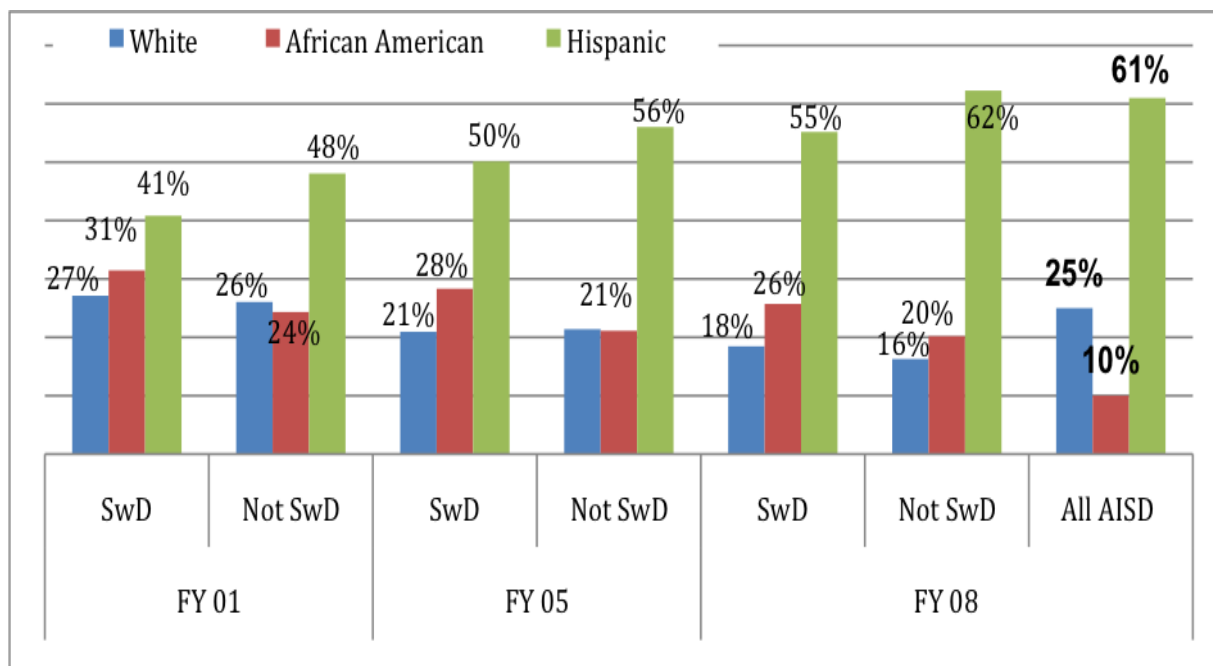
- ***Removed One Time for Fewer Than 10 Days***

Exhibit 43 shows data on students removed from classrooms one time for fewer than 10 days. In this category, Hispanic and white students with/without disabilities have been removed at comparable rates and represent a smaller proportion than their peers without disabilities. African American students with disabilities, however, were removed at a higher rate than their

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nondisabled peers. The removal rate for both African American groups (disabled and nondisabled) has decreased a few points over time.

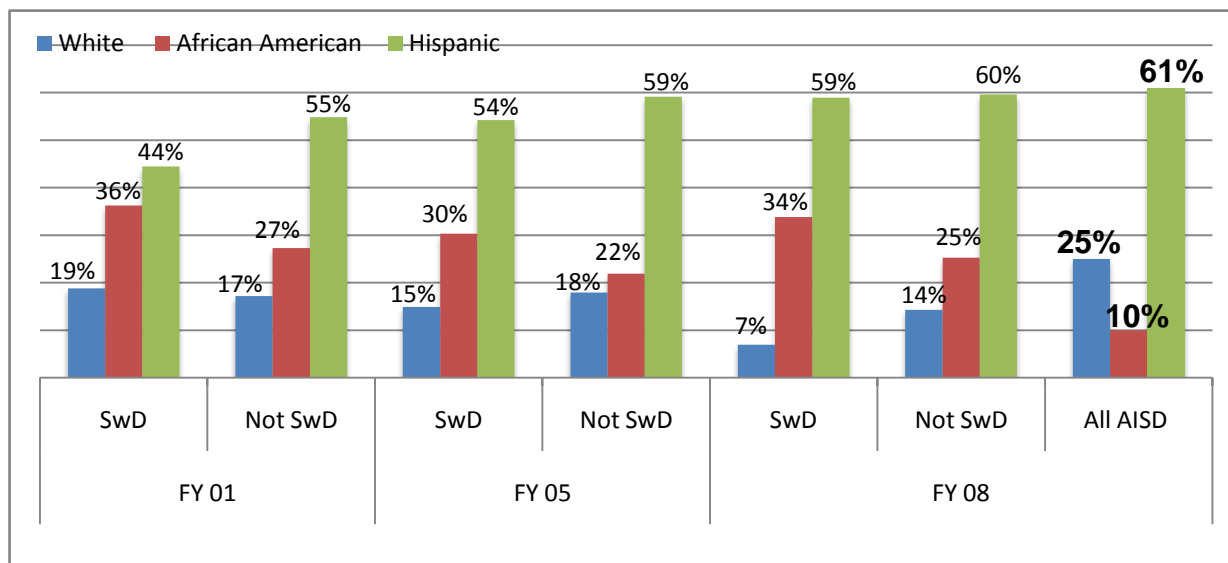
Exhibit 43. Single Infraction Fewer Than 10 Days of Removal



- **Multiple Infractions for Fewer Than 10 Days**

Hispanic students without disabilities were removed for fewer than 10 days at a higher rate than their nondisabled peers. A few percentage points separate the two groups of white students. African American students with disabilities always were removed at higher rates than their nondisabled peers, increasing from a 6 to 9 percentage-point difference.

Exhibit 44. Multiple Infractions Fewer Than 10 Days of Removal

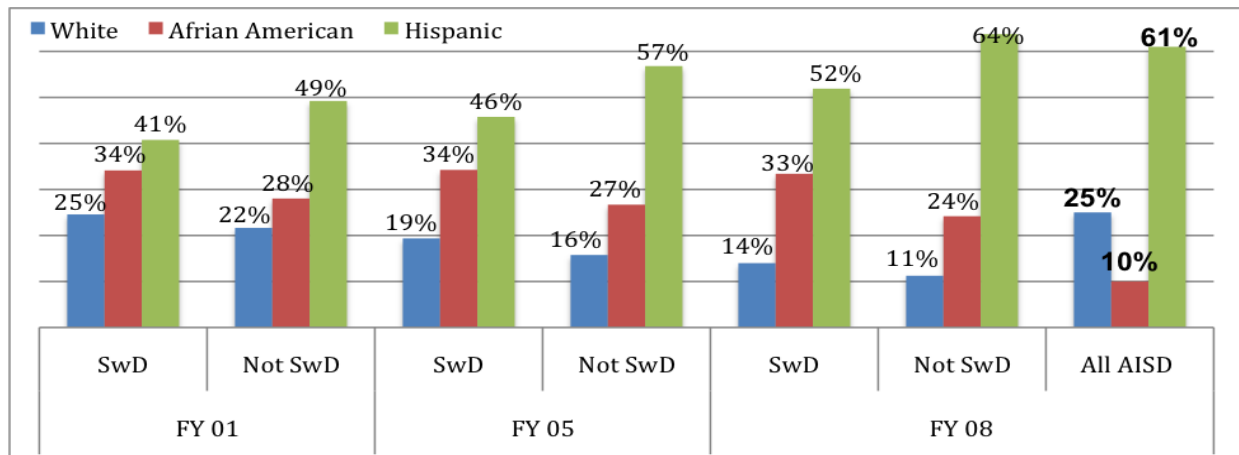


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- ***At Least One Infraction for More Than 10 Days of Removal***

In FY 2008, Hispanic students with disabilities were removed at lower rates than their nondisabled peers (52 percent vs. 64 percent). White students with disabilities were removed at somewhat higher rates as those without disabilities (14 percent vs. 11 percent). African American students with disabilities were removed at much higher rates than their non-disabled peers (33 percent vs. 24 percent), and more than three times the rate of African Americans in the district.

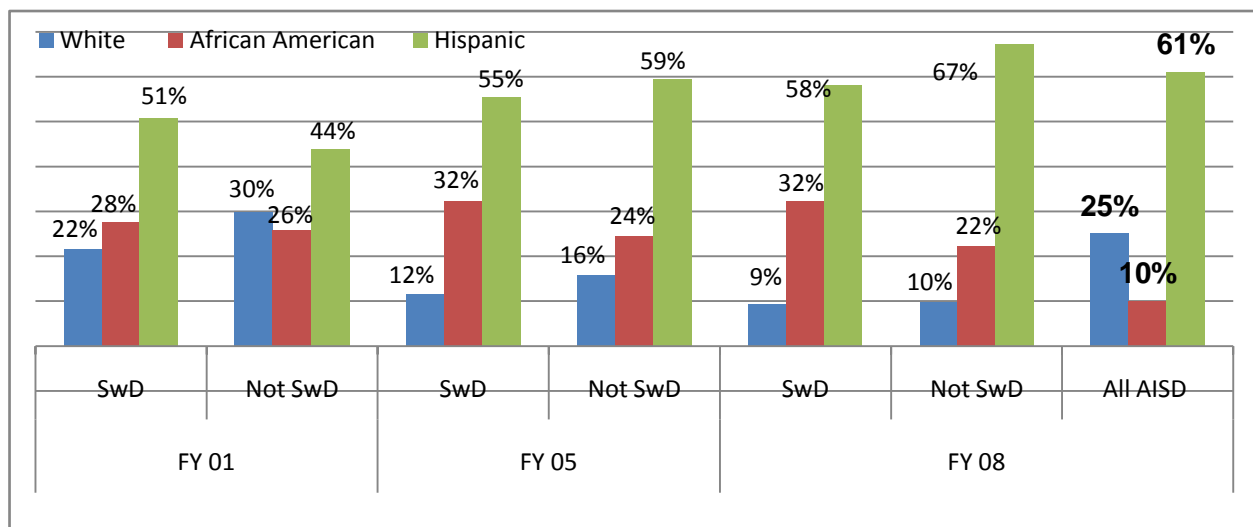
Exhibit 45. At Least One Infraction More Than 10 Days of Removal



- ***Multiple Infractions Resulting in More Than 10 Days of Removal***

Hispanic and white students with disabilities were also removed at rates lower than their nondisabled peers and below enrollment rates of Hispanic and white students districtwide. The pattern differed for African American students with disabilities who are removed consistently at much higher rates than their nondisabled peers and more than three times the rate of African American students enrolled districtwide.

Exhibit 46. Multiple Infractions More than 10 Days of Removal

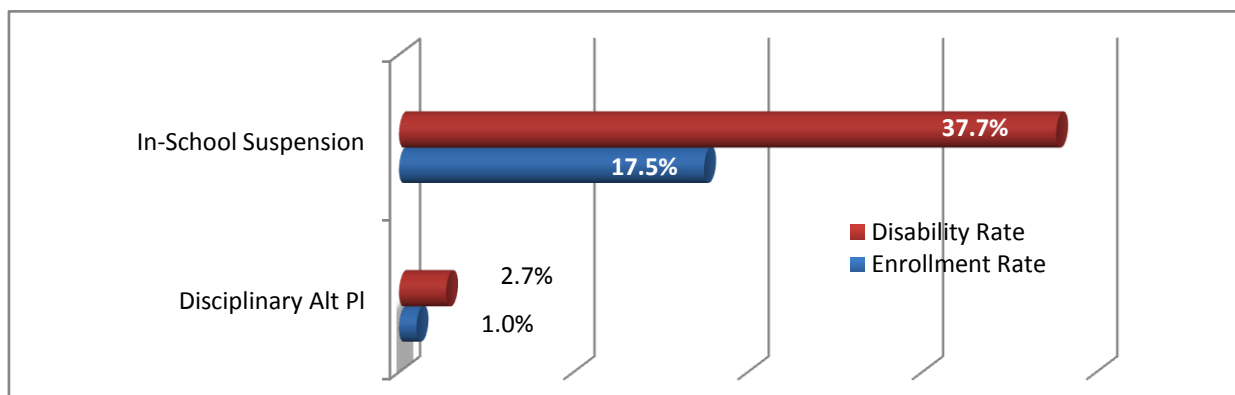


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- ***PBMAS Indicators for In-School Suspension and Disciplinary Alternative Placement***

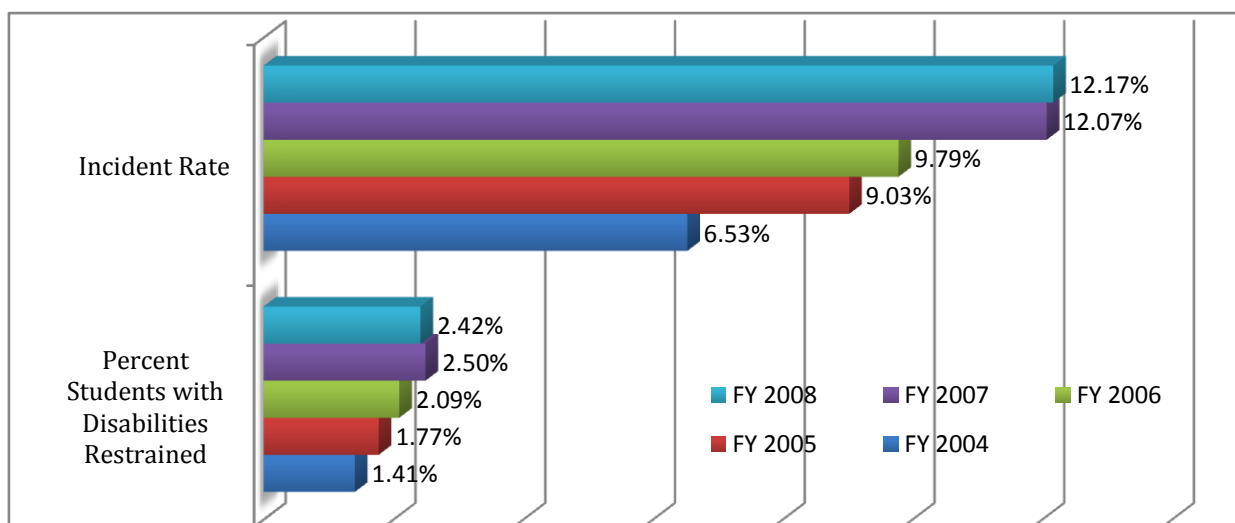
Texas' Performance-Based Management Analysis System (PBMAS) accountability includes two indicators that compare the rates of in-school suspensions and alternative disciplinary placements for students generally and students with disabilities. The results are shown in Exhibit 47 below. The FY 2009 AISD rate of in-school suspensions for students with disabilities (37.7 percent) is 20.2 percentage points higher than the rate among all students (17.5 percent) and 10 percentage points above the targeted 10-point difference. In the area of disciplinary alternative education placements (DAEP), 2.7 percent of students with disabilities are removed, compared with 1.0 percent of AISD students, exceeding the state target of 1.0 percentage-point difference.

Exhibit 47. Rate Comparison of Students with Disabilities to All Students



The AISD earned a PBMAS performance index of “1” in both areas shown in the exhibit above. In the area of in-school suspensions, the district’s performance improved over FY 2008’s level of “2.” In addition, the district’s special education subgroup rate for out-of-school suspensions is 22.6 percentage points more than the rate for all AISD students, exceeding the targeted 13 percentage-point difference. (This finding is at a “report only” stage, however.)

Exhibit 48. Percentage of Students with Disabilities Restrained and Incident Rates



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- *Use of Restraints*

Data from FY 2008 show that the AISD for the first time reduced the percentage of students who were physically restrained for one reason or another (2.42 percent from 2.5 the previous year), as seen in Exhibit 48. This rate had been growing steadily since FY 2004 when it was 1.41 percent. The percentage of incidents per students with disabilities, however, continues to grow (12.17 percent in FY 2008, compared with 6.53 percent in FY 2004), although the rate of growth has slowed (.10-point growth since the previous year).¹⁷ (See Exhibit 48 on previous page.)

The AISD has provided school staff with a significant amount of professional development to encourage alternatives for managing student aggression. Sessions have included 13 full-day initial training periods, 12 half-day refreshers, and four full-day “advanced self-protection” sessions. This course supports verbal and physical “de-escalation” of students, and teaches least restrictive, safe ways to help a student in crisis regain personal control. In Texas, all staff members working with students receiving special education services are required to have completed Texas Behavior Support Initiative (TBSI) training, which is designed to build staff capacity for the provision of Positive Behavior Support (PBS). In addition, the AISD provides a “Toolkit Services” for case managers and general education teachers who instruct and support students with disabilities having behavioral challenges. Multiple sessions are available in eight different classes (Phase System; Positive and Proactive Approach to Classroom Management; Proactive Strategies for Case Managers; Functional Behavior Assessments; Behavior Intervention Plans; Advanced Practices; Paraprofessional Approaches; and Boot Camp).

Information from Interviews and Focus Groups

Information from interviews and focus group participants on support for students with disabilities having social/emotional needs indicated the following:

- ***PBS and Social/Emotional Curriculum.*** As discussed above, 82 campuses are engaged in the use of PBS, but poor fidelity of implementation may be affecting the program’s effectiveness with students with disabilities. Also, the AISD’s lack of a standard social curriculum impacts students receiving special education services who require positive behavior support. The district appears to use a “shot-gun” approach to training and alignment of materials related social/emotional development.
- ***Behavior Specialists.*** The district’s eight FTE behavior specialists assist school staff with data analysis, conducting functional-behavior assessments, and developing behavior intervention plans. There is concern, however, that they do not provide sufficient coaching to teachers and staff for positive behavior interventions. Although a coaching model appears to be in development, the specialists are perceived to be overwhelmed and there are too few of them to be very effective with either coaching or mentoring.

¹⁷ Note: AISD’s report compared only the number of incidents without taking into account the corresponding decrease in the number of students receiving special education services.

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- **SBS Classes.** Classes designed to provide social behavior skills (SBS) would benefit from an approach that included effective academic interventions and the management of intensive behaviors.
- **Behavior Support Collaboration.** Responsibility for behavior support is distributed throughout the district's administrative departments and there does not appear to be any institutionalized collaboration to ensure coordinated management, data analysis, and strategic planning.
- **Special Education Counselors.** Special education counselors are available to assess a student's need and, as appropriate, provide direct counseling related services.

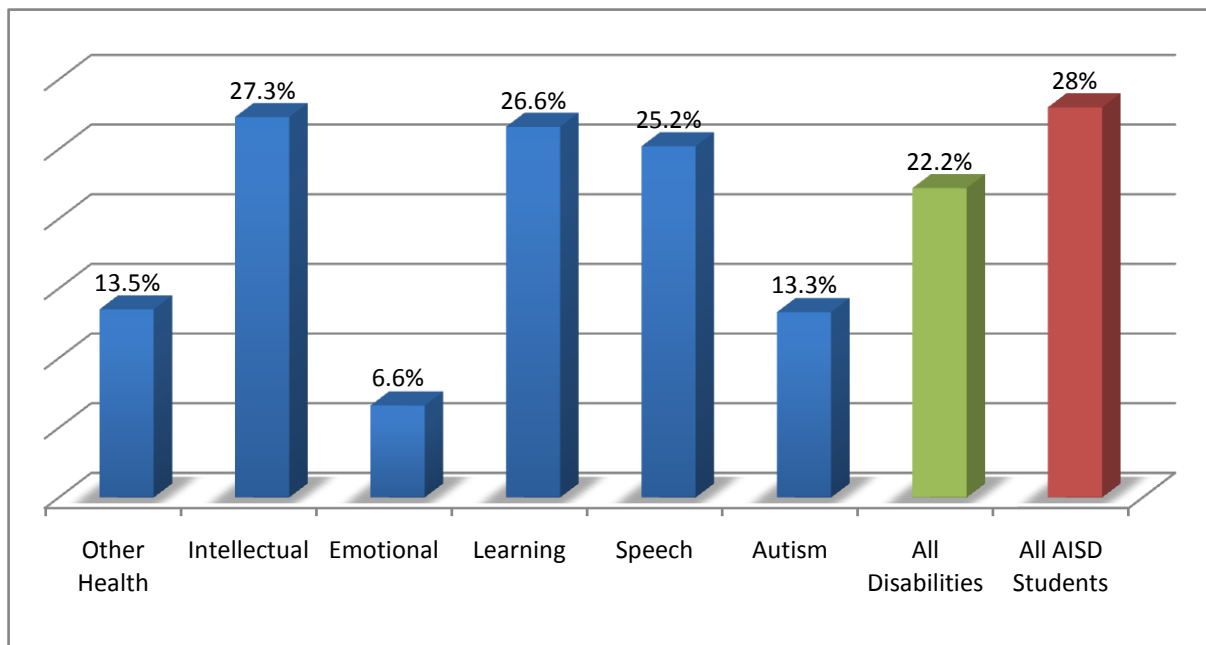
Instruction for Students who are English Language Learners and Receiving Special Education Services

AISD students speak 90 different languages and may require special education services. The section below summarizes data on English language learner (ELL) students with disabilities and information received from interviews and focus groups.

Proportion of ELL Students with Disabilities by Race/Ethnicity

As shown in the Exhibit 49 below, students with disabilities who are English language learners (ELL) generally receive special education services at a somewhat lower but not disproportionate rate, compared with ELL students in the AISD (22.2 percent compared with 28 percent for all AISD ELL students). For the six major disability areas, ELL students are represented at a proportionate rate in the areas of intellectual, learning, and speech/language. As with Hispanic students, ELL students with disabilities are underrepresented in the areas of other health impairments, autism, and emotional/behavior disabilities.

Exhibit 49. Comparison of ELL Students with Disabilities to All ELL Students



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Information from Interviews and Focus Groups

Information from interviews and focus group participants related to support for ELL students with disabilities indicated the following:

- ***Collaboration.*** Administrators responsible for ELL and special education programming meet monthly to discuss joint issues, and are aware that their students have similar instructional needs. In addition, there are students who are not ELL that have similar needs for intensive instruction in language acquisition. This collaboration provides a venue for maximizing instruction for all students.
- ***Bilingual Staff.*** Caseloads have increased for bilingual speech/language therapists, and the district has found it difficult to hire a sufficient number of bilingual therapists, psychologists, and special educators—a challenge similar to that experienced in other big-city school districts.
- ***Bilingual Special Education Strategic Plan.*** The AISD has developed a Bilingual Special Education Strategic Plan, which it revised on March 23, 2010. The plan includes the following three priorities:
 - Ensure equity in programming and delivery of scheduled services for ELLs with disabilities and provide best practices for support and improved services by gathering and analyzing relevant baseline data;
 - Recruit and retain bilingual special education staff, including speech/language therapists, and support development of cultural practices of nonbilingual staff; and
 - Increase parental involvement.
- ***Professional Development.*** On March 4, 2010, the AISD held its first annual mandatory program meeting for all bilingual special educators involved in the areas of life skills, resource allocation, preprimary programming, and autism. Participants received information about the district’s revised program manual and other program updates to ensure quality instruction for the district’s ELL special education students. The agenda was developed in collaboration with the bilingual department and campus principals, with input from parents and community members. A make-up session was held and substitute teachers were provided to enable regular teachers to attend.

Instruction for Students with Autism

The AISD uses the Social Communication and Resources and Services (SCORES) trans-disciplinary team approach to support students with autism spectrum disorders and/or other disabilities that demonstrate impairment in social, communicative, and behavioral functioning. This approach is used in all instructional arrangements and the level of support is determined by the needs of individual students. Autism specialists support about 23-25 campuses in order to model instructional approaches and collaborate with teachers. They are hired for their high level of knowledge in this area and attend monthly professional development meetings to further their skills and expertise. In general, the team received positive feedback about SCORES and its

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coordinator who has improved professional development and advocated for more research-based instructional strategies.

SCORES Strategies. SCORES utilizes research-based approaches that include applied behavior analysis (ABA), discreet trial and pivotal responses; use of functional routines, Picture Exchange Communication System, visual supports, organizational strategies, and sensory processing strategies; and development of social cognitive skills. In particular, the district utilizes Michelle Garcia Winner’s “Social Thinking” as a tool to support social/emotional development. The AISD has four strategies for increasing the quality of services provided for students with Autism Spectrum disorders: comprehensive in-home and parent training; ongoing professional development; a library for staff and families; and preprimary program for children with disabilities to provide intensive ABA intervention. In each of these areas, the Special Education Department helps identify specific strategies, utilizes data, provides training, and conducts assessments.

Bilingual Support. One area in which focus group participants expressed special concern with respect to SCORES involved the need for more bilingual staff. It was reported to the team that six bilingual Spanish-speaking special educators support the program, and students with other multiple languages are supported only to the extent possible. As discussed above, 13.3 percent of students with autism are ELL, compared with 28 percent of all AISD students.

Professional Development. With ARRA/IDEA funding, the district is providing intensive professional development to support data-driven service delivery; is developing model classrooms as training sites to provide hands-on experiences for staff; is expanding in-home training; and is expanding campus-based libraries. These initiatives are intended to support 600 students at 26 elementary and 16 high schools.

Transition Services

Transition SPP Indicator

One of the State Performance Plan (SPP) indicators pertains to the percentage of youth aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes coordinated, measurable, annual goals, and transition services to enable students to meet postsecondary goals. The U.S. Department of Education requires 100 percent compliance with this indicator. The AISD’s rate in FY 2009 was 26 percent, according to an oral report from the Texas Education Agency to the AISD. The district is expected to meet this SPP indicator this year, however.

According to AISD documents, the following areas of noncompliance were identified based on last year’s data related to transition support:

- ***Initial Discussion.*** Discussions of transition services—which are required no later than the first IEP in effect when a student turns 16—were not occurring consistently. The district may be waiting until the students turn 16 before initiating the discussion instead of initiating the discussions in the previous year when the students turns 15.
- ***Transition Evaluations.*** Age-appropriate transition evaluations were not always completed;

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- ***IEPs.*** Student needs were not taken into account and strengths, preferences, and interests were not always reflected in a student’s IEP postsecondary measureable goals. Moreover, the IEPs were not reviewed and updated annually. Students were not always invited to ARD meetings and his/her preferences and interests were not always taken into consideration when developing the IEP. Consent of the parent or adult student was not always obtained. Agencies responsible for providing transitions services were not consistently invited to the admission, review and dismissal (ARD)/IEP meeting. And meetings were not always reconvened to develop alternative strategies when participating agencies failed to provide services.
- ***Transition Services.*** Transition services were not always evident in the areas of coordinated activities, instruction, related services, community experiences, development of employment/adult living, acquisition of daily living skills, and functional vocational evaluations.

To improve compliance in this area, the AISD has taken important steps, including mandatory training for special education case managers and holding individual meetings with relevant principals; developing an electronic process to provide real-time feedback on quantitative compliance issues; ensuring that all regular high schools have a minimum 0.5 vocational adjustment class position; providing training on vocational assessments, IEP development, and reporting requirements; and developing written procedures in the Special Education Departments’ operating guidelines for agency involvement.

Career and Technical Education Programs

Inclusive career and technical education (CTE) programs are available at each high school. Although every high school does not offer every CTE program, students may transfer to another school to access a desired program. Focus group participants expressed the need for more job training opportunities at high schools and greater opportunities for students to be certified in multiple career areas.

The Clifton Career Technical School provides instruction to students with disabilities in five half-day programs, including those with industry certification. Community-based internships and classes at Austin’s community college are also available. Reportedly, students won 29 awards at the Travis County Youth Fair, competing against students from general education. Clifton students typically participate in TAKS-Alt/M assessments and class sizes have a maximum of 15 students with a paraprofessional. Surprisingly, interviewees shared that Clifton classes are not full.

The AISD is using ARRA/IDEA funds to increase vocational supports for 75 students with disabilities by increasing courses at six campuses, and increasing community-based vocational instruction opportunities for students with significant disabilities.

Positive Findings

Improved Performance

- ***Activities to Support Higher Graduation and Lower Dropout Rates.*** The Special Education Department initiated 25 projects funded with \$17.3 million in ARRA/IDEA funds. Two of these initiatives directly support dropout prevention.

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Reading

- **AYP.** In FY 2008, the AISD met AYP targets for all student groups, and was the only large urban district in Texas to do so. In FY 2009, the state target for reading increased from 60 to 67 percent, which the special education subgroup narrowly missed at 64 percent. This fiscal year, the state target increases to 73 percent.
- **PBMAS and SPP Accountability.** In FY 2009, 33 percent of AISD students receiving special education took the TAKS (not modified or alternate), which did not meet the 50 percent standard set by the state. That year, 74.8 percent of these students passed the TAKS at grade level or alternate achievement standards, exceeding the 70 percent PBMAS target. Note that *No Child Left Behind* caps on alternate and modified assessments do not apply to the state's PBMAS accountability system.
- **NAEP.** In FY 2009, fourth-grade students in the special education subgroup scored 41 percent at or above basic attainment levels on the NAEP, the second highest percentage among urban districts participating in the TUDA, and exceeding the nation's 35 percent and large-city rate of 24 percent. The district's score was one of four districts showing gains between 2005 and 2009, and was tied for first among TUDA districts on the rate of gain during that period (14 percentage points). In 2009, Austin's eighth-graders in special education scored 38 percent at or above basic levels on the NAEP, one point lower (statistically insignificant) than the highest score of 39 percent and above the nation's 37 percent and the average large city rate of 25 percent. The AISD's increase of 13 percentage points among eighth-graders was the second highest among TUDA districts.

Math

- **AYP.** In FY 2009, the AISD's special education subgroup scored 56 percent, two points below the state's target.
- **Accountability.** In FY 2009, 64.6 percent of students passed the TAKS (with accommodations) or TAKS-Alt, exceeding the state's SPP target of 55 percent.
- **NAEP.** In 2009, fourth-grade students with disabilities scored 60 percent at or above basic attainment levels on the NAEP, the second highest among TUDA school districts. The district averaged slightly better than the nation (59 percent) and significantly higher than the other large cities (45 percent). The district's percentage, however, fell from 74 percent in 2005 to its current 2009 level. In the eighth-grade, students scored 47 percent at or above basic, outscoring all other TUDA districts and exceeding the national percentage of 37 percent and the large city percentage of 24 percent. The district's gain of 11 percentage points was the second highest increase among TUDA districts.

Preliminary FY 2010 Results

- The preliminary 2010 results for TAKS-Accommodated tests show increased performance of students receiving special education services in all tested areas. In reading and writing, this subgroup posted the highest increases, compared with other student subgroups. In math and science, the group posted the second highest increases.

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- Preliminary results for the TAKS-Alt test also show improved performance in almost every grade and area tested. Remarkably, all tested seventh- and eighth-grade students passed the assessment in reading, math, and science. Some 98 percent passed the writing assessment. Also, all tested 10th graders passed math and social studies, and 98 percent passed reading and science.

Initiatives to Improve Academic Performance

- ***Targeted Interventions.*** In October 2009, Special Education Department staff members met with campus teams to identify students likely to score at or below passing levels on the TAKS (including accommodations) but who scored well (commended) on the TAKS-M in 2009 in order to provide the group with targeted interventions. ARRA/IDEA funding was used to purchase intervention materials, provide professional development, and support tutoring and progress monitoring.
- ***Initiatives.*** The AISD funded six ARRA/IDEA initiatives to support improved academic performance and positive behavior for students receiving special education. These initiatives involved expanded preschool programs for children with disabilities; after-school and Saturday instructional support; alignment of curriculum with the TEKS for students with significant disabilities; professional development on effective practices; improved performance-related IEP goals and TAKS-M benchmark development; and a Web-based IEP monitoring system for academic and behavioral goals.

Supporting Inclusive Instruction

- ***Studies and Reports.*** The AISD has commissioned two external reports (Stetson and Collier) that provided comprehensive findings and recommendations. Also, the Special Education Department facilitated a 20-member task force that issued a February 1, 2009, report with recommendations about decentralizing services for AISD students with disabilities. Through these and prior initiatives implemented by the district, more students are educated in less restrictive settings than in the past. Although the AISD is not likely to meet SPP indicators for FY 2010, its percentages are not far from state targets.
- ***Professional Development.*** Beginning in October 2009, the district used IDEA/ARRA funds to hire two inclusion specialists to provide campus-based training, along with follow-up classroom observations and feedback. In addition, to encourage educators to practice skills they will learn during professional development beginning in 2010-2011, the Special Education Department is requiring every training session it sponsors to include e-mails to participants and their principals that identify major themes and expected classroom applications. Moreover, the department funded 80 individuals from campus-based teams to attend the state's Inclusion Works Conference. Teams included special education and general education teachers, as well as administrators and parents. This summer, the Special Education Department will be developing districtwide, research-based quality standards of practice for inclusion and will be offering training to teams from every campus on how to implement best practices.

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Behavior Support

- ***Disciplinary Removals.*** Data show that white and Hispanic students with disabilities are not removed from classrooms for disciplinary reasons at rates above those for all white and Hispanic students or their nondisabled peers.
- ***PBMAS Indicator for In-School Suspension.*** The AISD's performance level for students with disabilities removed for discretionary in-school suspensions improved in FY 2009, earning a level of "1" from the state, compared with a "2" the previous year.

Improving Instruction for Students who are ELL and Receiving Special Education Services

- ***Proportion of ELL Students with Disabilities by Race/Ethnicity.*** Generally, students with disabilities that are ELL receive special education services at a somewhat lower but not disproportionate rate, compared with all ELL students in the AISD (22.2 percent, compared with 28 percent). For the six major disability areas, ELL students are represented at a proportionate rate in the disability areas of intellectual, learning, and speech/language. As with Hispanic students, they are underrepresented in the areas of other health impairments, autism, and emotional disabilities.
- ***Administrative Collaboration.*** Administrators for ELL and special education programs meet monthly to discuss programmatic issues and to leverage maximum support for all students needing support with language acquisition and usage.
- ***First Annual Bilingual Special Education Meeting.*** This school year, the AISD held its first annual mandatory program meeting for all bilingual special educators involved in the areas of life skills, resource deployment, preprimary programs, and autism services.

Instruction for Students with Autism

- ***SCORES.*** In general, the team received positive feedback about SCORES and its coordinator who has improved professional development and advocated for better research-based instructional strategies. This trans-disciplinary team provides integrated instructional, communications, and social/emotional support for students with autism or who have similar characteristics, such as those with significant ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, etc. This support is used in all instructional arrangements and is modified based on each student's individual needs.
- ***Autism Specialists.*** These specialists support about 23-25 campuses to model instructional approaches and collaborate with teachers. They are hired for their high level of knowledge in this area and attend monthly professional development meetings to further their skills and expertise.
- ***Initiatives.*** The AISD is using ARRA/IDEA funds to provide intensive professional development to support data-driven service delivery; develop model classrooms to be used as training sites for hands-on experiences for staff; strengthen in-home training; and expand campus-based libraries.

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Transition Services

- ***Strategies to Improve AISD's Performance.*** To improve its 26 percent compliance rate for completed IEPs in the area of transitions, the AISD has taken a number of initial steps. Based on oral communication with the Texas Education Agency, the district has made significant progress in this area and it fulfilled the requirements of the AISD corrective action plan.
- ***Career and Technical Education Programs.*** The district provides numerous CTE programs at every high school for students with disabilities. Also, Clifton Career Technical School provides a comprehensive half-day program, which includes internship and junior college courses for students taking the TAKS-Alt/M assessments. Using ARRA/IDEA funds, the AISD is increasing its vocational supports for 75 students with disabilities by increasing courses at six campuses, and is increasing community-based vocational instruction opportunities for students with significant disabilities.

Areas of Concern

Performance

Graduation Rate. In FY 2009, AISD's graduation rate increased from 56.4 to 56.5 percent, earning a "2" performance level on the state's PBMAS Indicator #11. Four of the state's other major-city school also earned a "2." One city earned a "1." Similarly, the AISD did not meet the state's SPP graduation criteria for Indicator #1 in FY 2008, which is the most recent report available to the team.

Dropout Rate. In FY 2009, the AISD's annual dropout rate remained at 3.9 percent, earning it a performance level of "1" on the state's PBMAS Indicator #9. Four other large urban districts in Texas also earned a "1." One district earned a "2," and one earned a "0." The AISD did not meet the state's SPP dropout criteria for Indicator #2 in FY 2008.

Modified and Alternate Assessments. Improving the passing rate of students taking modified or alternate assessments will not enable the AISD to meet AYP requirements under the No Child Left Behind law. Although the legislation does not cap the number of students that may take TAKS-Alt or TAKS-M, it caps the percentage of students taking the TAKS-Alt who have proficient-level scores at 1 percent of all students taking the assessment, and the state caps the percent of students taking TAKS-M who have proficient scores at 2 percent. The AISD exceeded the TAKS-M cap. In 2009, 85 percent of students (1,714) taking the TAKS-M reading test were proficient, but only 945 could be counted as proficient. As a result, the TAKS-M proficiency rate fell to 47 percent. This cap is not applied at the campus level for AYP purposes; only AISD scores are impacted. In FY 2011, the results of the TAKS-M/Alt tests will be included for the first time in the Texas accountability system, Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). The AEIS does not incorporate *No Child Left Behind* sanctions for proficient scores that exceed the federal law's established percentage caps. Therefore, the relatively high passing rates on TAKS-M (reading 85 percent, math 74 percent) and TAKS-Alt (reading 83 percent, math 87 percent) will help most schools stay out of sanction. But unless there is a gain in the number of students passing the TAKS (with or without accommodations), it is likely that the AISD will miss AYP in the current school year and perhaps the future. The Special Education Department

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has stressed the importance of assessing each student using the most rigorous assessment tool and avoiding having students take an assessment on which he or she has little chance of success.

Instruction

Targeted and Intensive Interventions. The lack of a systemic and fidelity-based system of multi-tiered academic and behavioral interventions—along with poor progress monitoring—negatively affects the performance of students receiving special education.

Instructional Barriers. A number of issues pose instructional challenges to the academic progress of district students: lack of individual planning guides with differentiated strategies for diversified learners; conflicting priorities on providing specialized instruction to one group of students when others require testing accommodations on practice or actual TAKS assessments; lack of a uniform curriculum with alternative academic achievement standards for students taking TAKS-M; the unavailability of IEPs at the beginning of the school year; scheduling practices that fail to ensure appropriate courses for students with disabilities; and insufficient support for students transitioning from elementary to middle to high school.

LRE Rates Compared with State Targets. The percentage of AISD students educated at least 80 percent of the time in general education settings decreased from 63.8 percent in FY 2008 to 58.6 percent in FY 2010, while the state target increased from 56.7 to 69 percent (10 points above the AISD's rate). Among students educated in general education settings less than 40 percent of the time, the district's rate increased from 11.6 percent to 12.1 percent, while the state target decreased from 11.46 to 10 percent (two percentage points above the AISD's rate). In the "separate school" category, the district's rate decreased from 1.9 to 1.6 percent, while the state target decreased from 1.2 to 1.0 percent (0.6 points below the AISD's rate). Consequently, it is not likely that the AISD will meet its SPP targets when the state issues its report for this fiscal year. Also, considerable variation exists across schools, grade bands, and areas.

PBMAS Indicators. The percentage of students receiving special education in less restrictive settings (as defined by state accountability indicators) exceeded targets for all three-age range groups. At the preschool age level, 22 percent of students were placed in LRE, compared with the 15 percent target; for six-11 year olds, the AISD rate was 45.1 percent, compared with the 40 percent target; and for 12-21 year olds, the AISD's 63.4 percent rate exceeded the target.

Ratio of Students in Segregated Settings 25 Percent Higher Than Texas' Rate. For FY 2009, AISD has projected that 125 percent of the Texas LRE ratio (students in separate classes more than 50 percent of the time) will be 0.191269. The district projects it will meet this ratio with a rate of 0.132871. The district's rate is projected to be higher than in FY 2008 and is on an upward trend.

Barriers to Effective Inclusive Practices

- ***Value.*** There does not appear to be a widespread appreciation in the district for the value of inclusive education or recognition of its importance to student performance.
- ***Professional Development.*** Professional development in the area of inclusion is not mandatory. As a result, stakeholders (such as general educators) do not consistently attend sessions. At the same time, more training on effective inclusive instruction is needed for all

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administrators, special and general educators, related-services staff members, and paraprofessionals. Needed topics frequently mentioned included co-teaching strategies; effective collaboration; differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all diverse learners; and academic content. Even though teachers and staff prefer school-based training, followed by mentoring and coaching, this type of training is often not available (although it did increase for a limited time, thanks to ARRA/IDEA funds).

- ***Proportionate Classes.*** It was reported to the team that some schools and classes in the district have students with IEPs and Section 504 plans concentrated in classrooms together. Some individuals interviewed by the team suggested that this strategy enables special education teachers to concentrate their support in fewer classes, but they also acknowledged the negative impact on the quality of instruction.
- ***SCORES.*** Bilingual staff shortages also affect the implementation of SCORES for students who are English language learners. Language barriers help explain the underrepresentation of ELL students in the area of autism support (13.3 percent, compared with 28 percent of AISD students). One parent reported delays in the receipt of consistent in-home services for her child.

Support for Positive Behavior

Disproportionate Removal of African American Students with Disabilities. Data show that African American students receiving special education services are removed from classes for one day or more at rates that are disproportionately high, compared with all African American students enrolled in the district and to their nondisabled peers.

PBMAS Indicators for In-School Suspension and Disciplinary Alternative Placement. The AISD's rate of in-school suspensions for students with disabilities (37.7 percent) is 20.2 points higher than that of all students (17.5 percent) and 10 points higher than the targeted 10-point difference between these two groups. In the area of alternative disciplinary placements, 2.7 percent of students with disabilities are removed, compared with 1.0 percent of AISD students, exceeding the targeted 1.0-point difference between these two groups. In addition, the rate of out-of-school suspensions among students with disabilities is 22.6 points higher than the rate for all AISD students, exceeding the targeted 13-point difference between these two groups.

Use of Restraints. The percentage of restraint incidents per student with disabilities continues to grow (12.17 percent in FY 2008, compared with 6.53 percent in FY 2004). However, the growth rate has slowed (0.10-point growth since the previous year). The AISD's report on the issue, however, compared only the number of incidents without taking into account the corresponding decrease in the number of students receiving special education services.

Support of Positive Behavior. As discussed above, 82 campuses are engaged in PBS, but the lack of fidelity in implementing the program may be affecting the program's effectiveness with students with disabilities. In addition, the district appears to use a shotgun approach to the teaching of social skills. Moreover, the district appears to lack coaching and mentoring by behavior specialists to affect teacher effectiveness. Responsibility for behavioral support is spread throughout the district's administrative departments and there does not appear to be much

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institutionalized collaboration to ensure coordinated management, data analysis, and strategic planning.

SBS Classes. Classes designed to provide social behavior skills could be more effective and could benefit from more useful interventions and intensive-behavior management.

Support for Transition Services

SPP Transition Performance. The AISD did not meet the state performance indicator related to developing IEPs for youth aged 16 and above that includes postsecondary transition goals. The district's FY 2009 rate was 26 percent and the federally required compliance target is 100 percent. The district does not expect to meet this target in FY 2010.

Clifton Career Technical School. The Clifton program is not being fully utilized in that there is room for a significant number of additional students.

Increased CTE Access. Focus-group participants cited the need for more job training opportunities at high schools and opportunities for students to be certified in multiple career areas. The AISD is using ARRA/IDEA funds to increase vocational supports for 75 students with disabilities by increasing courses at six campuses.

Recommendations

B. Instruction and Performance of Students Receiving Special Education Services

Performance

3. **Increase the number of first-year students “on track” to graduate.** In a December 2009 report, *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools: A Focus on Students with Disabilities*, the Consortium on Chicago School Research and the National High School Center found that freshman-year course performance—more than background characteristics, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status or prior achievement—predicts which students with disabilities are most at risk for dropping out of high school. Specifically, “on-track” students who accumulate at least five semester-long credits and fail no more than one core course during their first year are three-to-six times more likely to graduate than their off-track counterparts.¹⁸ In addition, the report found that:
 - Students with emotional disturbances and students without disabilities who entered high school two or more years below grade level had the lowest course performance of any group studied;
 - First-year course performance is a strong predictor of five-year graduation rates for students with disabilities and students who entered high school two or more years below grade level. Despite the utility of absences, grades, course failures, and on-track status in predicting graduation rates, the researchers found that at each level of course

¹⁸ http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub_id=137 Most of the analyses in the report concern students who were first-time first-year students in 2004. Researchers based their findings on students with learning disabilities, mild cognitive disabilities, emotional disturbances, speech/language disabilities and physical/sensory disabilities.

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performance, students with disabilities and students who entered high school two or more years below grade level were less likely to graduate than their nondisabled peers.

- Higher absentee rates are an important reason that students with disabilities fail more classes and have lower grades than students without identified disabilities.

Given the likelihood that these findings are relevant to improving the AISD’s graduation rates for students receiving special education services (and any student without disabilities who may enter high school two or more years below grade level), the following actions are recommended—

- a. *Students “Not on Track.”*** Initiate a strategy to identify and support all first-year students who are “not on track” to graduate by:
 - 1. *Database.*** Utilizing a database to regularly identify first-year students who are “not on track” to graduate, i.e., those not likely to accumulate at least five semester-long credits; are likely to fail more than two core courses during the first year; and/or have high absentee rates.
 - 2. *Research-Based Strategies.*** To the extent possible, for each student “not on track,” provide research-based strategies that would utilize all available resources, including mentoring, intervention services, counseling, tutoring, and other supports that are likely to reverse the student’s performance trend.
 - b. *Identify and Support High Schools.*** In addition to the strategies meant for individual students, identify high schools that have dropout rates below state targets and require the principals of those schools to collaborate with stakeholder groups on developing targeted plans and utilizing research-based approaches available through the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities at <http://www.ndpc-sd.org/>. In addition, the district should identify feeder schools and involve principals and staff to address identified issues proactively.
- 4. *Increase and/or initiate policies on statewide assessments to influence appropriate participation of students with disabilities.***
 - a. *Proficiency on TAKS-M Over Cap.*** The AISD leadership and representative stakeholders should discuss the unique situation in which only 945 of 1,714 students in the special education subgroup who passed the TAKS-M are not counted as proficient on the district’s *No Child Left Behind* AYP analysis because the percentage exceeded the federal 2 percent cap. The discussion can be helpful in seeing if the district should approach the state or the U.S. Department of Education on the matter. The discussion should also address next year’s inclusion of TAKS-M on the state’s AEIS accountability system, which will not incorporate *No Child Left Behind* sanctions related to passing scores that exceed the 2 percent cap. The district should analyze potential AEIS incentives to encourage participation in the less rigorous TAKS-M, district AYP consequences, and student benefits in passing the more rigorous TAKS and TAKS-A assessments. As part of this discussion, consideration should be given to the Department of Special Education’s guidance to use the most rigorous assessment tool and avoid transferring students to assessments on which they have little chance of success.

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- b. Selecting Appropriate Assessment.* Based on this discussion, the AISD should issue a clear written directive about ARD IEP decision making on the selection of an appropriate statewide assessment for students receiving special education services. The appropriate AISD department should collect campus-based data reflecting the implementation of this guidance and disseminate it during AISD leadership meetings and to associate superintendents to guide any follow-up action needed.

Instruction

- 5. *Ensure students receiving special education services receive targeted and intensive interventions that are reviewed and adjusted regularly through progress monitoring.* The lack of a systemic system of multi-tiered academic and behavioral interventions that are faithfully implemented—along with progress monitoring—significantly affects the performance of students receiving special education. Such interventions are essential to improved reading, math, and behavioral performance. (Also see Recommendation 14 in Section D.)
 - a. Mapping of Intervention Resources.* Review and evaluate the interventions available for students with disabilities in each school (considering those used with students with and without disabilities) and identify schools without sufficient materials. (Also see Recommendation 16.)
 - b. Phasing in the Purchasing Plan.* Based on these results, develop a phase-in plan for the development or purchase of needed materials, training, and support. (Also see Recommendation 7.)
- 6. *Remove barriers to effective instruction.*
 - a. Individual Planning Guides.* Consider incorporating differentiation strategies into individual planning guides in order to better address the needs of diverse learners. Review the School District of Philadelphia’s *Access to the Core Curriculum – Strategies Guide* for one approach. <http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/s/oss/manuals>
 - b. Provision of Assessment Accommodations.* Investigate the assertion that some special educators are spending as much as 25 percent of their time providing IEP-required accommodations for students practicing, preparing for, and/or taking benchmark or statewide assessments. If this is true, then classroom instruction is probably being shortchanged. Based on the results, consider alternative actions to implement accommodations without negative consequences for students and staff.
 - c. TAKS-M Aligned Curriculum.* Consider the benefits and costs of developing a uniform curriculum aligned with the alternative academic achievement standards for students taking the TAKS-M in light of the high passage rate. If deemed beneficial, initiate and implement a plan for moving in this direction. If not beneficial, communicate with stakeholders the rationale behind the district’s decision not to move in this direction.
 - d. Access to IEPs at Beginning of/During School Year.* Provide appropriate personnel access to student IEPs online and ensure that all teachers and staff members have necessary access at the beginning of and during each school year beginning in FY 2011.

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Consider whether any personnel require a hard-copy of the IEPs and ensure that they have them in a timely manner. Quickly develop an “IEP At a Glance” document for knowledgeable stakeholders that would include the most important IEP-related information for teachers and staff having a “need to know.” Once implemented, conduct periodic campus-based surveys to determine the extent to which staff members have IEP information.

- e. Scheduling for Students Receiving Special Education Services.* Identify schools that are developing schedules for students receiving special education in general education classes, so that the district can ensure that schedules take IEP and intervention needs into consideration. Develop processes with staff from these schools that may be replicated in or improved by other schools. Based on the results, develop a strategy for working with schools needing assistance to facilitate improved scheduling next year. (Also see Recommendation 14.a.8 in Section D.)
 - f. Support for School Transitions.* To ensure that students with disabilities who move from one instructional level to another (i.e., from elementary to middle, etc.) are supported appropriately, meet with stakeholders (including the Special Education Community Advisory Council, SECAC) to identify issues arising from these transitions and use strategies that will maximize students’ positive experiences. (Also see Section D, Recommendation 14.a.9).
- 7. Build on the AISD’s initiative with Stetson & Associates, Inc., to maximize inclusive practices.**
- a. SPP LRE Performance and Targets to Drive Change.* Change the AISD’s primary reliance on Texas’ PBMAS data for LRE monitoring (students with disabilities in less restrictive settings) and its 125 percent of state ratio (students in separate classes more than 50 percent of the time) to a firmer reliance on the federally required and more rigorous indicators specified in 7.a.1 below. While the AISD is meeting the state monitoring criteria, it is missing the federal indicators.

 - 1) Disseminate Data.* Disseminate school and districtwide data on the following three SPP indicators: in general education at least 80 percent of the time; more than 40 percent of the time; and special schools.
 - 2) Set Data Targets.* Set relevant targets for each school that will take into consideration cluster-site placements.
 - 3) Support Identified Schools.* Identify schools with rates below expected targets and establish/support campus-based activities related to the Stetson collaboration. (Also see Section D, Recommendation 14.a.)
 - b. Distributive Collaboration.* Cross train all individuals in the AISD who provide direct services to campus-based teachers and students on effective inclusive practices in order to maximize impact and leverage greater expertise. All professional staff delivering services to students should be expected to know how to differentiate instruction for students with diverse needs. To the extent that the professional development being provided through the Stetson collaboration has not included staff from other divisions (e.g., bilingual,

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curriculum and development, etc.), plans should be drawn up to include them to the greatest extent possible. (Also see Section C, Recommendation 11.)

- c. **Co-Accountability.** The Stetson collaborative includes a staff accountability component to maximize effectiveness. This will require the identification of priority areas that will be monitored for implementation and a system of recognition, support, and consequences to promote attention to this important initiative. (Also see Recommendation 14.a.6.)

8. *Improve identification of and supports for ELL students with disabilities needing help through SCORES and the provision of in-home services.*

- a. **Bilingual Support.** Consider the following steps with bilingual staff members who are involved in providing support to students through the SCORES program:

- 1) **Identification.** Identify the extent to which language acquisition for students who are ELL may be interfering with the appropriate identification of disabilities and who may benefit from SCORES. If there are concerns, identify strategies for utilizing available bilingual staff and training others to ensure appropriate identification of student needs.
- 2) **Enhancing Instruction.** Consider how current bilingual staff members can be better utilized—through professional development, technical assistance, or co-teaching—to help improve the effectiveness of staff members who only speak one language in providing instructional services to students who are ELL and are receiving special education.
- 3) **Progress Monitoring.** Use progress-monitoring data to analyze the usefulness of district strategies and periodically determine if they should be maintained, modified, enhanced, or dropped.

Note that a Bilingual Special Education Strategic Plan is in place; if implemented effectively, it should increase staff deployment in shortage areas.

- b. **In-Home Services.** Determine the frequency of delays in in-home services, investigate causes—if frequent—and initiate a plan for resolution. Monitor effectiveness of the plan and evaluate for results.

Support for Positive Behavior

9. *Increase effective support for positive behavior.*

- a. **PBS Implementation with Fidelity.** Review districtwide multi-tiered academic and positive behavior intervention strategies school-by-school to ensure they are being implemented universally and with fidelity. To decrease the disproportionate removals of African American students receiving special education services, schools should have the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to provide targeted and intensive interventions for identified students. Faithful implementation of behavioral interventions will also positively affect the district's reliance on discretionary in-school suspension and DAEP

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placements; help the district meet the state's PBMAS targets; and reduce the number of students requiring restraints.

- 1) ***Districtwide Implementation.*** The AISD should expand PBS and/or other AISD-approved research-based approaches to positive behavior, so that that an effective model is in place in every AISD school by a specified date.
- 2) ***Social Skills Curriculum.*** To support the effective implementation of schoolwide Tier I PBS in all schools, the AISD should adopt and implement one or more research-based social skills curricula. The AISD leadership should phase in implementation that is realistic based on available funds.

Additional suggestions related to the AISD organization and how it supports student positive behavior are provided in Section C, Recommendation 11. Suggestions on accountability provisions to support program implementation are addressed in Section D, Recommendation 14.

- b. ***SBS Classes.*** The Special Education Department should observe behavior skills classes at various grade levels and gather appropriate data to identify which students are making significant gains in academic performance and positive behavior. Assuming there is a group at each grade level that does well, identify the factors that contributed to the positive outcomes, so that these factors can be replicated. Use these factors to modify, if necessary, written materials and professional development to improve student outcomes at other sites. (Also see Section D, Recommendation 14.b.2 and b. 5.)

Support for Transition Services

10. Improve transition services by increasing enrollment at Clifton Career Technical School and improving access to CTE.

- a) ***SPP Transition Indicator.*** The Special Education Department has developed a comprehensive plan to improve its compliance with the SPP transition indicator. But successful outcomes are dependent on campus-based implementation that may be improved with monitoring and co-accountability activities. (See Section D, Recommendation 14.a.10.)
- b) ***Clifton Career Technical School.*** As soon as possible, determine whether enrollment at Clifton is at capacity, and, if not, investigate why more students are not choosing to enroll there. As part of this process, gather information from past, current and potential students and parents, school counselors, and other knowledgeable staff. Based on the results, determine whether this program has sufficient value to maintain and, if so, what immediate steps may be taken to increase enrollment.
- c) ***CTE Access.*** After using ARRA/IDEA funds to expand access to vocational education at the six campuses, determine the impact of this support and the demand for expansion or continuation through student, staff, and parent surveys, and examination of IEP transition data. Based on the results, consider what other fiscal resources are available if the review shows that expansion is necessary.

C. Organizational Structure and Staff Resources Supporting Students and Parents

Interdepartmental Collaboration

Central-office staff members report that there is a new spirit of collaboration between the chief school officer and chief academic officer. The AISD, however, does not have a history of senior and mid-level collaboration and communication of districtwide strategies for addressing systemic issues affecting *all* students. Specifically, the Special Education Department and other special programs have a history of isolation from other instructional units. Cabinet and associate superintendents have met regularly, but staff reported that regularly planned discussions between administrators with programmatic responsibility did not always occur. Recently, however, collaboration between the bilingual and special education units has increased, according to focus group participants.

Such collaboration is important to supporting consistent and strategic implementation of multi-tiered academic and positive behavior interventions, because responsibility for these functions has been located in differing departments and divisions. For instance, the Special Education Department's early intervening services unit has one set of behavior specialists and the learning support unit has a second set of 2.5 (FTE) behavior specialists. In addition, the dropout prevention's IMPACT system, the curriculum and instruction's unit RTI initiative, and the student services unit's intervention specialists all have some responsibility for one component of the intervention system or another. (See AISD organization chart in Appendix A).

Special Education Department Support

The special education administrative support team is highly qualified, knowledgeable, and committed to ensuring that instructional and behavioral supports for students with disabilities are of the highest quality. Also, there was widespread recognition of the special education director being accessible and responsive to parent and school concerns.

Moreover, the Special Education Department piloted an electronic newsletter, SPEDS UP, in February and March 2010 to improve communications about critical special education developments in a succinct and informative manner. The document was sent to principals, department chairs, and teachers. The editions included "kudos," a section for appreciation; optional items; facts; tools and resources; parent comments; and a final "thanks" section recognizing individual actions. The user-friendly format contained relevant information and easy-to-use links.

- *Directors, Supervisors, and Coordinators*

As shown in the organization chart in Appendix A, a director—who is supported by two assistant directors (one elementary and one secondary)—leads the Special Education Department. Instructional coordinators are the primary administrators for supporting campuses. There are five full-time and one half-time administrators at the elementary level and four full-time and one half-time administrators at the secondary level. All of the campus assignments of coordinators, however, are not aligned with the associate superintendents' campuses. As a result, there are multiple points of contact between the two groups. At the time of the team's review, the

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special education director was developing an organizational plan that would have coordinator positions being aligned to facilitate collaboration with their respective associate superintendents.

In addition, three supervisors report to the elementary assistant director (bilingual support, evaluation and counseling, and speech/language support/preprimary children with disabilities). Two supervisors report to the secondary assistant director (low incidence disability areas, and extended school year/other nonrelated areas); and two report directly to the director (compliance and data). The speech/language supervisor is also responsible for preprimary childhood education, which in the past was supervised by another person.

Various coordinators report to supervisors. And other administrators report to the director (curriculum, instruction and inclusion facilitator, and family support specialists) and to the secondary assistant director (ARD facilitators and a parent/family relations facilitator, and autism coordinator). The principal of the specialized Rosedale School supervises occupational and physical therapists and life skills, and reports to the middle school associate superintendent.

Finally, the team did hear some concern about the extent to which each coordinator was functioning at a high level of effectiveness and had the necessary expertise.

- ***Fiscal Management***

Special education has benefitted greatly from the infusion of federal ARRA/IDEA funds into the district. Some \$17.3 million supports 25 different projects. Significant staff time is devoted to ARRA/IDEA fiscal and programmatic management, and data reporting. But no additional staff members have been allocated to assist with this effort.

- ***Maintenance of Special Education Records***

Historically, the Special Education Department has housed all archived special education records. Also, department personnel have been responsible for collecting all records on students receiving special education services who transfer to another school during the summer; reviewing and organizing those records; and personally bringing them to the next school. It is not known whether other departments interfacing with student records (e.g., Section 504, IMPACT, and bilingual records) have similar responsibilities. It was reported to the team that requirements of the four special education management system clerks and secretaries have significantly changed over the years. These staff members now audit data and special education folder contents for compliance and input data where direct entry of evaluation information is not yet available to some personnel, such as psychologists and speech/language therapists.

Campus-Based Support for Special Education

- ***Management and Coordination***

Each campus has a special education case manager (elementary) or department chair (secondary) who is responsible for overseeing compliance, communication with parents, transportation arrangements, management of various aspects of statewide assessments (including performance monitoring), transition planning at the secondary level, and data collection. The Stetson report indicated that the workload of team leaders/case managers,

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department chairs, and some teachers is affecting their ability to provide quality services to students, and sometimes results in some inappropriate practices.

- ***Special Educators***

There is a strong sense among staff that the AISD does not employ a sufficient number of special educators to implement inclusive educational practices. This perception is especially prevalent at the high school level. Appendix B contains survey data submitted primarily to the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative from 38 urban school districts. The AISD has a ratio of one special educator for every 10.4 students with disabilities. This is actually one of the best ratios among the districts responding to the survey. Only four districts had fewer students to special educators (two with a 1:7 student ratio and two with a 1:9 ratio). The Houston school district had a ratio of 1:11 and Ft. Worth's was 1:12. The average ratio across the districts was one teacher to 15 students. The range was 1:7 to 1:37.

The AISD has commissioned three studies (Stetson, Collier, and MGT) to review staffing sufficiency. All three found that the district employed a sufficient number of special educators. The Stetson report from July 2009 found, "with a few exceptions, Austin ISD is sufficiently staffed with teachers and paraprofessionals at the campus level to serve students with disabilities; however the district is not richly staffed." It also found, though, that resources were not fairly and equitably distributed across schools. Similarly, the Collier report indicated that the AISD appeared to lack clear guidelines regarding the allocation of special education staff and resources to schools.

- ***Formula-Driven Staff Distribution***

The AISD uses a formula to determine the allocation of special educators and paraprofessionals to schools. Elementary schools are staffed at a 1:13 student ratio; middle schools at 1:21; and high schools at 1:24. Every three teachers receive a teaching assistant. Separate classes are staffed at either a 1:8 or 1:12 ratio, each with a teaching assistant. Reportedly, this formula did not change with the use of inclusive practices. Thus, the formula is based on where a student is educated (general *versus* special class) rather than the intensity of services required. The Special Education Department considers this factor when campuses indicate a need for additional staff based on student data. Focus group participants complained, however, that this process is very time-consuming.

Administrators in the Special Education Department also assert that general campuses are staffed more generously than the formula prescribes. The department unsuccessfully initiated discussions with the Human Resources Department to revise the formula to reduce the number of students for each special educator. According to the Stetson report, the process for determining staffing needs through the formula does not capture the type and level of support needed for each student. Consequently, the determination of staffing based on the current formula may be problematic.

- ***Policies and Procedures***

One factor that may affect inequitable staffing is ARD/IEP decisions that do not involve Special Education Department staff, even when circumstances would require their involvement.

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The Houston Independent School District has a policy that prohibits funding for additional school staff when special education administrative staff members are not invited to participate in the meeting. The Stetson report found a lack of efficient and appropriate staffing practices in its review, and described the AISD's categorical and siloed approach to the assignment of special educators to schools as contributing to the inequities.

- ***Teacher Assistants***

AISD data indicates that the district has one teacher assistant for every 9.7 students. Only four districts responding to the survey reported more generous ratios (three districts had a 1:7 ratio and one district had a 1:8 ratio). Houston's ratio was 1:16 and Ft. Worth's was 1:14. The average was one assistant to 17 students; and the range was 1:7 to 1:56.

The Stetson report also noted the high use of teacher assistants to support students with disabilities, especially those who are in the specialized support programs. Moreover, it found that:

- The process of assigning an individual teacher assistant for a student is confusing, and there is a lack of understanding about the detrimental effects of this practice.
- The AISD depends too heavily on paraprofessionals to assist in the provision of special education services. The number of paraprofessionals assigned to individual students seems excessive, whereas the number of paraprofessionals assigned to the remainder of the student population seems unclear.

A May 29, 2009, report by MGT of America, Inc., *Efficiency Study*, also cited a disproportionate use of teaching assistants, compared with other school districts. The report found that the AISD employs approximately 33 percent more special education instructional assistants than other districts.

As a result of its staffing formula and the ARD/IEP decision-making process, the AISD employs many more teacher assistants (824) than it does special educators (772). Since the cost of one special educator is typically the same as two teacher assistants, the AISD's teacher assistants are equivalent to about 402 additional special educators. This comparison is not intended to suggest that teacher assistants are not important for some purposes, but to emphasize the district's dependency on this position to the detriment of having additional special educators. Focus group members agreed that the AISD's paraprofessional usage could benefit from a thorough review, particularly if deploying more teachers were possible. Focus group participants also agreed that ARD/IEP decision rules affected the situation.

- ***Related-Services and Evaluation Staff***

District staff indicated to the team that no additional evaluation staff members have been added to the special education operation in three years although there are more campuses. Apparently, evaluation teams are overworked, and timely evaluation rates have been impacted. It should be noted, however, that the number of students receiving special education in the district has decreased from 9,137 in FY 2007 to 8,062 in FY 2010 (a slight increase from last year's 7,852). The Stetson report indicated that the number of appraisal staff seemed inadequate, compared with surrounding school districts and comparable schools.

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The staffing results from the survey of other urban school systems across the country shown in Appendix B indicate the following:¹⁹

Speech/Language Therapists. The AISD's ratio is **1:114**, 25th out of 38 districts. Ft. Worth's ratio was 1:85, and Houston's was 1:158. The average ratio for responding districts was 1:117 and the range was 1:44 to 1:341.

Psychologists/Evaluation Staff. The AISD's ratio is **1:233**, which is 25th out of 38 districts. Ft. Worth's ratio was 1:199, and Houston's ratio was not available. The average for all surveyed districts was 1:173 and the range was 1:31 to 1:337. Note that the AISD employs educational diagnosticians to assist with the evaluation process, which is a position that is not commonly used in other urban districts across the country.

Nurses. The AISD's ratio is **1:119**, 13th out of 32 districts. Ft. Worth's ratio was 1:58, and Houston's was 1:700. The average for responding districts was 1:468 and the range was 1:58 to 1:834. For all students (not just those with disabilities), the AISD's ratio was 1:1225. Some 35 percent of other districts surveyed employed fewer nurses per students. In addition, the AISD has 65 school health assistants.

The AISD also has a \$5.1 million contract with Seaton Hospital to provide nursing services. Seaton provides an in-kind \$500,000 donation and is reimbursed through Medicaid for \$300,000. The hospital has provided services for about 14 years, and the AISD has never put the service out to bid through an RFP. This contractual arrangement was reported as being beneficial to the district and more cost-effective than providing service in-house. According to the MGT report (pages 11-37), however, the district could realize an annual savings of \$350,000 if the service was provided in-house. The report also cited concern about the level and quality of services provided to schools and cost increases in recent years.

- ***Adaptive Art Teachers and Music Therapists***

For the past 10 years, the AISD has provided adaptive art and music therapy/adaptive music. The AISD employs four adaptive art teachers and four music therapists (who also teach adaptive music). These services are directed by the IEP team. Parents apparently value these services highly, but the team is unaware of much peer-reviewed research showing that the services are necessary for students to benefit from special education. The Council's Strategic Support Team has not encountered these services in any other urban school system that it has reviewed.

- ***Assistive Technology***

The Special Education Department and the information technology unit want to imbed assistive technology into the district's purchasing processes and compliance rubric. However, staff reported to the team that one electronic reading-intervention program used by the schools was not compatible with screen reading, which would enable written text to be read aloud to individuals with visual impairments or to others unable to read written text. A proactive purchasing process would eliminate this problem and support a universal design for technology.

¹⁹ The Texas districts in the survey, as with some other urban districts, only employ a few social workers.

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Support for Parents

The district supports the Family Support Cooperative in conjunction with Austin Travis County Integral Care and The Arc of the Capital Area. The Cooperative receives IDEA funding from the district and works closely with the Title I parent support specialist to provide linkages among families, community, and schools. Food and childcare services enable many more families to attend regular training sessions on multiple subjects. Staff members interviewed by the team suggested, however, that the Cooperative could benefit from more visibility and that cross-training with other functions should occur whenever feasible.

The Parent Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee (SECAC) operates independently from the AISD in order to provide feedback to the district on issues involving students with disabilities. The Committee's chair also sits on the district advisory council. Interviews suggested that the superintendent and the Special Education Department have received substantial feedback from parents through the Cooperative, SECAC, and four community meetings held in FY 2010.

Some parental/district tension exists, however, according to interviewees in the sense that some individuals perceive the district as "giving in" to parental demands, and others who assert that children don't receive appropriate services without such advocacy. This issue is discussed further in Section D – Accountability. In addition, some concerns were raised that parents are not sufficiently conversant in the ARD process and that meetings and communications with AISD staff fail to improve that understanding. Further, there was concern that parents have difficulty navigating the school district to find the assistance they need to help resolve issues.

Moreover, the Texas Education Agency surveyed parents to monitor the following SPP indicator: "percent of parents with a child receiving special education services" and reported that district schools did facilitate parental involvement to improve services and results, and was particularly responsive, compared with statewide results.

Overall, **78.2 percent** of AISD parents reported that schools facilitated their involvement, compared with the 74.5 percent target and 74.7 percent statewide. Results were provided in four areas related to environment, communication, ARD/IEP participation, and outcomes. Each area consists of subtopics. In almost every area, the AISD scored higher (and many times significantly higher) than statewide averages in the categories of "always," compared with "some" or "never." In two areas, favorable percentages were the same and in three areas they were slightly lower.

To address remaining parental concerns, the Special Education Department utilized AARA/IDEA funds to initiate two projects:

- ***Enhance Outreach to Spanish-Speaking Families.*** By using Spanish-language interpreters, translators, and external partners, the AISD is working to empower parents to participate more meaningfully in the ARD process at six elementary and nine high schools.
- ***Parent Liaisons/IEP Facilitators.*** These individuals assist with screening and timely evaluation of three- to five-year-olds suspected of having a disability. This project is intended to help the AISD complete more timely and compliant evaluations.

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Web Site Communication with Parents, Community, and AISD Staff

The AISD's special education Web site contains information related to a wide variety of topics: data, programs and services, support resources for parents, preschool programs for children with disabilities, the SECAC, Internet resources, SCORES, Special Olympics, supported employment, and the AISD Go Project. In addition, links to reports on special education and professional development are provided, as well as a handy frequently asked questions feature.

However, the Web site does not provide additional information that might be useful to parents (e.g., the state's Parent Procedural Safeguards document, etc.) or to staff (e.g., the Special Education Department's operations manual.) In addition, there are other Internet resources on special education available that would be of benefit to parents and staff if they were linked to the site.

Positive Findings

- ***AISD Superintendent Accessibility.*** The superintendent has been unusually accessible to parents and community members on special education issues. This accessibility has been fostered through strong ties with the Family Support Cooperative and Special Education Citizen Advisory Committee (SECAC). Significant parent feedback has been provided to the superintendent and the Special Education Department through the SECAC, and four community conversations were held in FY 2010. When briefing the Council team, the superintendent was extremely well informed about parental concerns and used these concerns to focus the team's review.
- ***New Interoffice Collaborative Leadership.*** Communications between the various instructional departments have improved markedly under the superintendent. In addition, her hiring of the new chief school officer and involvement of a recently hired academic consultant received positive reviews. Also, the working relationship between special and bilingual education departments has improved, and there is evidence of greater collaboration between the two. Similarly, assistive technology administrators reported a strong working relationship with their general education peers, which facilitated assistive technology being earmarked for part of the district's 2008 technology bond.
- ***Knowledgeable Special Education Team.*** The central-office special education administrative support team is well qualified, knowledgeable, and committed to ensuring that instructional and behavioral supports for students with disabilities are of the highest quality. Feedback indicated that the team seems to understand its constituents and appears to be "on top of" issues. Moreover, there was widespread recognition that the special education director was accessible and responsive to parent and school concerns.
- ***SPEDS UP.*** The Special Education Department's February and March 2010 SPEDS UP electronic communication tool will help improve the district's communications with principals, department chairs, and teachers on critical special education issues.
- ***Parent Survey.*** Texas Education Agency survey results indicated that 78.2 percent of parents with a child receiving special education services reported that their schools facilitated their

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involvement in improving services and outcomes for their children. These results compared favorably to the state's 74.5 percent target and 74.7 percent statewide.

- ***New Initiatives.*** The Special Education Department has used ARRA/IDEA funds to address parental concerns by supporting an initiative to enhance outreach to Spanish-speaking families and facilitate meaningful participation in the ARD process. A second initiative funds facilitators to assist with the screening and evaluation of three- to five-years olds suspected of having a disability.
- ***Bilingual Special Education Strategic Plan.*** The AISD has developed a Bilingual Special Education Strategic Plan, which it revised on March 23, 2010, to address three priorities: ensuring equitable services and effective support for ELL students with disabilities; promoting recruitment and retention of bilingual special education staff; and increasing parental involvement.

Areas of Concern

Interdepartmental Collaboration. The district's ability to implement multi-tiered academic and positive behavior interventions and progress monitoring is significantly impacted by the fragmentation of essential components of these initiatives. In almost all of the districts reviewed by the Council's Strategic Support Teams, organizational elements involving interventions and progress monitoring are centralized under the chief academic officer or an individual having similar responsibilities. In AISD, the chief academic officer has responsibility only for parts of these activities, such as curriculum and instruction's involvement in RTI. The Special Education Department is involved with early intervening services, management of behavior specialists, and coordination of services for students with significant behavioral and academic challenges. The chief schools officer (CSO) has responsibility for implementing PBS to support students' social/emotional development; using student intervention specialists to connect with schools and community social and mental health agencies; and supervising behavior specialists who provide Tier III interventions. In addition, the CSO's Office of Dropout Prevention and Reduction Initiative has responsibility for the IMPACT process, which is a campus-based mechanism for managing RTI and attendance issues. The divided responsibilities make coordination unnecessarily difficult and have hampered discussions about improved academic and behavioral programming among associate superintendents, directors, and others. In addition, the lack of organizational cohesion and coordination contributes to the perception that the AISD's RTI model is fragmented.

Special Education Department Organization. Responsibilities of special education coordinators who support campus activities have not been aligned with the responsibilities of associate superintendents who work with some of the same schools.²⁰ In addition, the special education department's organization and historical role in collecting, transmitting, and being accountable for school-based records does not appear to facilitate maximum effectiveness in areas such as record management and supervision.

²⁰ At the time of the review, the special education director was developing an organizational plan to align coordinator positions to improve collaboration with associate superintendents.

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Campus-Based Management and Coordination. Staff members interviewed by the team expressed concern that the excessive workloads of case managers/team leaders, department chairs, and some teachers is affecting their ability to provide services to students, which results in inappropriate practices.

Special Educators. It appears that the AISD has a sufficient number of special educators, compared with other major city school districts, but it does not appear that these staff resources are distributed effectively or efficiently across schools. One factor contributing to inequities in the distribution of staff involves ARD/IEP decisions that are made without Special Education staff members, even though formal procedures require their involvement. Further, as the Stetson report noted, the AISD's approach to thinking about special education as a categorical program contributes to the assignment of special educators and paraprofessionals to campuses in a way that reinforces the inequities. (Staff members interviewed sometimes described special education as a "place" rather than a "service.")

Teacher Assistants. The AISD uses teacher assistants at a disproportionately high rate compared with most other urban districts, including two in Texas. In addition, the process for assigning an individual teacher assistant was reported to be unclear.

Related-Services and Evaluation Staff. There appear to be more AISD students with disabilities per speech/language therapists and psychologists, compared with most other urban districts, but most other districts do not employ educational diagnosticians as the AISD does to conduct special education evaluations. In the nursing area, the AISD appears to be sufficiently staffed, but the MGT report estimates that the district could save \$350,000 annually if the services were provided in-house. The report also cited concerns about the level and quality of services provided to schools and cost increases over recent years.

Bilingual Staff. As with most urban school districts, the AISD has difficulty hiring sufficient numbers of bilingual therapists, psychologists, and special educators. However, the district's Bilingual Special Education Strategic Plan provides for recruiting and retaining bilingual special education staff.

Related-Services. In addition, parents expressed support for adaptive art and music therapy, but the team was unaware of peer-reviewed research showing this service was necessary in ensuring that eligible children benefitted from special education services. There was also an issue about imbedding the purchase of assistive technology into the general purchasing process and the district's compliance rubric.

Support for Parents. Some concern was expressed that the Family Support Cooperative would benefit from more visibility and cross-training with other parent activities. Some tension also exists among those who perceive that the district as "giving in" to parental demands and others who assert that children do not receive appropriate services without advocacy. In addition, there is concern that parents are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the ARD process and their understanding is not aided in meetings and communications with AISD staff. Note that some ARRA/IDEA funds have been designated for this purpose.

Web Site Communication with Parents, Community, and AISD Staff. The Special Education Department Web site does not provide the breadth of information that would be helpful to

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parents and other stakeholders about the special education process and does not provide a wide array of other available Internet resources.

Recommendations

C. Organizational Structure and Staff Resources Supporting Special Education Services

(See Appendix A for the AISD organizational chart, the Special Education Department organizational chart, and a proposed Special Educational Department organizational chart.)

11. Centralize relevant special education functions under the chief academic officer to reduce program fragmentation and maximize collaboration and coordination of activities related to improved academic performance and positive behavior/physical health. Maximized collaboration and coordination is necessary to ensure that general education interventions and specialized instruction and supports are provided in a seamless and functional way for all students, including those who are English language learners.

- a. Executive Director Oversight.** The chief academic officer (CAO) hired a new executive director who is responsible for special, bilingual, and gifted/talented education to facilitate collaboration between these diverse populations. The team recommends that this executive director oversee Title I, social/emotional and physical health staff members; and centralize staff with similar responsibilities in other units, such as behavior specialists, social workers, ACCESS, intervention specialists, nursing, etc.²¹ The CAO should leverage these staff members to improve coordination and cross-training at all levels of instructional/behavioral support (from universal to the most specialized).
- b. RTI Coordination.** Support the CAO's plan to hire a new administrator to manage RTI and consolidate all RTI activities for the entire district under this new leadership.
- c. Finance, Data, and IMPACT, Compliance.** Consolidate administrative and support personnel who would be responsible for the following areas under the CAO's direction: finance, data, IMPACT process, and compliance. These individuals would manage and coordinate these functions for all departments/divisions under the CAO's authority and ensure that related activities were developed collaboratively, implemented, communicated, and monitored. To the extent that current staff members would have expanded responsibilities, ensure that sufficient support exists to address any new functions they would be handling. In particular, ensure there is sufficient staff support to manage IDEA/ARRA grants, including strategic implementation of ARRA funded initiatives and their ongoing progress review.
- d. Support for Parents.** Maximize support for parents by enabling various special interest groups to gather together under the Parent Advisory Committee and meet based on specialized concerns. Leverage collaboration with the Family Support Cooperative to

²¹ See, for example, the scope of services under Clark County School District (Nevada)'s Student Support Services at <http://sssd.ccsd.net/index.html>.

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figure out how professional development activities could include parent information, training, and cross-training. (See Section D at Recommendation 14.b.3.)

- e. Principal Advisory Council.* Consider moving the Special Education Principal Advisory Council so it works immediately under the new executive director and includes directors and individuals with expertise in bilingual/ELL education, special education, and gifted/talented education. Workgroups might be formed in specialized areas to incorporate differentiated strategies and plans. It is imperative that the chief academic officer be highly engaged with this council. Consider changing the name to CAO's Principal Advisory Council to reflect the expanded operation of the council.
- f. Operating Principles.* Establish operating procedures and structures to ensure that senior and mid-level leadership collaborates on the design and implementation of universal strategies that improve the academics of students with diverse needs.

12. Enhance the effectiveness of the Special Education Department's organization.

- a. Special Education Liaisons.* Create a new position, "special education liaison," which would report to one of the two Special Education Department assistant directors (Elementary and Secondary) and align their work to the Offices of the Associate Superintendents of High Schools, Middle Schools, and Elementary Schools. The role of the liaisons would be to facilitate access to the general education behavior and academic curriculum. The liaisons should have a working knowledge of general education interventions, effective inclusive practices, universal design, positive behavior support, and relevant policies and procedures. The associate superintendents should be able to provide input into the liaisons selected to work with their respective campuses. Moreover, liaisons should cross train with other campus-based individuals under the chief academic officer to maximize their skills, effectiveness, and support with campus-based staff. The district should establish a clear understanding of the liaisons' roles and responsibilities, hire as many as fiscally reasonable, and clarify reporting lines to the Assistant Director of Special Education.
- b. Realignment of Special Education Supervisory Responsibilities.* Assign remaining program responsibilities (early childhood, inclusion, bilingual special education, speech, occupational therapy/physical therapy, life skills, TBI, autism, vision/hearing, ESY, transition services, regional day-school program for the deaf, Clifton, and parentally placed children in private schools) equitably to the two assistant directors. Consider consolidating all behavior support programs in the district under the Special Education Department and assign one of the assistant Directors to oversee them.
- c. Special Education Records.* Move all special education archived records from their current location to one that houses similar records. Analyze the extent to which current staff time is devoted to maintaining such records and could be redirected to other priorities.
- d. Transferring Special Education Records to Students' New Schools.* Provide guidance to campuses about the organization of student special education records and require the campus-based individual(s) responsible for students' records to review them prior to any

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transfer to another school. Require campuses to transfer directly to other schools the special education and other relevant school records for students who are moving from one school to another (both within and outside of the AISD). Provide guidance and appropriate training for schools on how to carry out this new responsibility. This procedure is followed by most of the urban school districts reviewed by the Council's Strategic Support Team. (Also see Section D, Recommendation 14.1.11.)

- e. Maintaining and Monitoring Student Records and Data.* It was reported to the team that an administrator in special education is responsible for the appropriate maintenance of relevant records, rather than principals. Special education management clerks spend a significant amount of time monitoring records. Special education leadership should review this function and consider clarifying the expectation that campus-based staff should maintain and transfer records. With implementation of this recommendation, a sample of campus-based records might be monitored periodically to identify problems that would require correcting.
 - f. Consideration of Clerk Responsibilities.* Upon implementing the changes in responsibility for archived and transferred special education records from the Special Education Department to campuses, and completing the planned electronic data changes that enable evaluation staff to enter their own results, consider phasing out clerk positions in order to help fund the increased number of special education liaisons assigned to the schools.
 - g. SPEDS UP.* Assuming that stakeholder feedback on the monthly communication tool—SPEDS UP—is favorable, continue it and consider broadening it to serve as a vehicle the chief academic officer can use to communicate activities relevant to teaching and learning.
 - h. Web Site Communication.* Survey other urban school district Web sites to gather ideas about the breadth and scope of services that could be communicated. Include the following: individuals within the Special Education Department having responsibility for assisting AISD staff, parents, and the community, including contact information and user-friendly job descriptions; operational procedures for special education relevant to various stakeholder groups, e.g., parents, and principals; and links to the Texas Education Agency Web sites and other public resources. Other Web sites to review include those of: The School District of Philadelphia's Office of Specialized Instructional Services,²² Broward County Public Schools (Student Support Services homepage),²³ and the Clark County (Nev.) School District.²⁴
- 13. Ensure that campus-based management and coordination are structured effectively and that special educators, teaching assistants, and related-services personnel are available and distributed equitably and sufficiently to meet the needs of students receiving special education services.**

²² <http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/s/oss/>

²³ <http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/studentssupport/index.htm>;

²⁴ <http://sssd.ccsd.net/index.html>.

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- a. **Team Leaders.** Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the team leaders, especially at the secondary level, to ensure that they are using their time efficiently; and create a common job description for team leaders to ensure consistency of responsibilities. (This recommendation was also found in the Stetson report.) Complete these activities and implement changes by the beginning of next school year.
- b. **Special Educators**
 - 1) **Equitable Distribution.** The Council team notes that the Stetson report also made several recommendations about the allocation of special educators to schools. In particular, it recommended that the AISD adopt a new model for determining staffing needs that offers an objective, student-centered approach for determining staffing and concludes with a broad, school-by-school design for effective staffing for LRE purposes. The district has contracted with Stetson & Associates to implement new procedures for training, staffing, and scheduling services for students with disabilities. Reportedly, the company has done this successfully with other Texas districts. It appears reasonable to the Council team that the AISD proceed with this initiative and evaluate the results using before-and-after implementation data.
 - 2) **ARD IEP Decision Making.** Develop written guidelines that specifically describe the criteria and process for determining when additional teaching assistants are required to assist individual students. Include in the guidelines a provision that indicates that staffing requests will not be approved unless the specified criteria and processes are followed. Pursuant to the Stetson recommendation, address the high ratio of teaching assistants to students evident in the district and begin moving to a system where high levels of support for students could be provided without assigning an individual to each student. Consider using a process similar to that used in some school districts whereby the need for assistance is based on the times of the day and the types of support a student needs based on the IEP. For example, see the Chicago Public Schools Position Analysis Review Form manual, which explains the district's online data submission and review process.
<http://www.oism.cps.k12.il.us/pdf/2007NEWPARFMANUAL.pdf>.
 - 3) **Related-Services and Evaluation Staff**
 - a) **Speech/Language Therapists and Psychologists.** Review the sufficiency in numbers of speech/language therapists and psychologists/educational diagnosticians and the extent to which their availability affects the timeliness of initial evaluations and reevaluations. As part of this process, review the roles and duties of these specialists. If this review shows a need for additional staff, consider competing budget priorities before phasing in additional hiring.
 - b) **Nursing.** As recommended by the MGT report, investigate the potential for cost savings by reestablishing management and staffing of the school health services program that Seton Health Services currently provides. If the move is cost beneficial, consider contractual obligations and plan for a transition as soon as practicable.

4) *Related-Services.*

- a) ***Adaptive Art and Music Therapy/Adaptive Music.*** Special Education Department staff should review and revise criteria to be used by the ARD committee to consider a student's need for adaptive art, music therapy, and adaptive music. The criteria should be strict and take into consideration the availability of peer-reviewed research and outcome data showing documented benefits for AISD students. Although the AISD historically has offered these related services and they are appreciated by parents, these services should be contingent on convincing and appropriate documentation of their benefit in light of competing priorities and the soon-to-be-gone ARRA/IDEA funds.
- b) ***Assistive Technology.*** Embed the requirement for universal design in the general purchasing process and compliance rubric, so that software is accessible to all students.

D. Accountability for Expected Practices and Results

This section discusses the ways in which the AISD has established and utilizes mechanisms—including data and accountability measures—to analyze the extent to which expected practices are used and outcomes are reached for special education students with challenging academic and positive behavior.

Districtwide Measures

The superintendent has a vision of co-accountability among the school campuses, Special Education Department, and other central-office departments that includes frequent communications with school administrative representatives.

- ***Strategic Plan Scorecard***

The AISD utilizes a strategic plan scorecard, which has measurable outcomes and targets built around four goals: all students will perform at/above grade level; achievement gaps among all student groups will be eliminated; all students will graduate ready for college, career, and life in a globally competitive economy; and all schools will meet or exceed state accountability standards; and the district will meet federal standards and exceed state standards.

The AISD uses the TAKS passing rates for students who have been in the district for at least three consecutive years and those who have been in the district for a shorter period of time—disaggregated by each of the state and federal accountability groups (e.g., African American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, special education, etc.).

- ***Strategic Plan Framework***

To support campuses and students, the AISD has four strategies and a series of key action steps that are being implemented with community partners. The four strategies include: 1) providing a high-quality, well-rounded educational experience to all students that is rigorous, culturally relevant, healthful, and engaging; 2) building strong relationships with students,

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families, and the community to increase trust and shared responsibility; 3) ensuring that every classroom has a high-quality, effective educator, supported by high-quality, effective administrators and support staff; and 4) aligning resources to accomplish priorities within a balanced budget.

Three action steps under the first strategy are especially relevant to special education:

- 1.4 Improve supports to struggling learners by strengthening interventions, resources, and training, and articulate these interventions in curriculum and instructional tools. (CAO)
- 1.8 Examine Special Education programs and their delivery to ensure adequate supports to teachers and students, and ensure clear parameters for the allocation of staff and resources. (CAO, CSO)
- 1.19 Implement behavioral, character, social, and other student support systems at all schools effectively and equitably. (CSO)

- ***Campus Administrator Appraisal Form***

Campus administrators are assessed in eight areas on a variety of indicators. Some of the most relevant indicators to this special education review include:

- Monitors, analyzes, and uses student achievement and attendance data (I-A)
- Ensures that student needs are diagnosed and addressed (I-B)
- Facilitates teaching and learning through the implementation of district initiatives (I-C)
- Encourages the use of promising instructional programs and/or strategies (I-D)
- Evaluates instruction to ensure that classroom activities are effective and are related to intended student outcomes (IF)
- Plans, implements, and assesses for the improvement of the climate in the school community (II-A)
- Ensures that students are disciplined for misconduct in an effective and fair manner (VI-C)

Federal and State Special Education Accountability

Texas uses various accountability systems to measure compliance and performance among students receiving special education: the federal special education State Performance Plan (SPP); the state's Performance-Based Management Analysis System (PBMAS); and the state's 125 percent of least restrictive environment (LRE) ratio. The exhibit below shows the AISD's performance on each of these measures.

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Exhibit 50. Summary of AISD Performance on Federal SPP and State PBMAS and 125% LRE Ratio²⁵

Indicator	Target	AISD	Performance
12 Identification Rate	8.50%	9.20%	1
1 Grad Rate	96.4%	70.30%	DNM
11 Grad Rate	70.0%	56.50%	2
10 RHSP.DAP Dip Rate	16.5%	17.10%	0
2 Dropout Rate	2.8%	17%	DNM
9 Dropout Rate	2.0%	3.90%	1
3 TAKS/TAKS Acc rate	50.0	32.5	1
Reading Part Rate	95.0%	99.0%	Met
Math Part Rate	95.0%	99.0%	Met
Reading Pass Rate	70.0%	74.8%	Met
Math Pass Rate	50.0%	52.2%	Met
Reading Pass Rate	60.0%	61.60%	0
Math Pass Rate	55.0%	64.6%	0
Science	50.0%	48.4/38.2	0 RI
Social Studies	70.0%	77.9%	0
Writing	70.0%	79.0%	0
2 Yr after exit Reading Pass	55.0%	72.9%	0
Math Passing Rate	70.0%	83.1%	0
Science	50.0%	64.6%	0
Social Studies	70.0%	89.5%	0
Writing	70.0%	86.10%	0
4 Discrepant Suspensions/Expulsions	N/A	N/A	Met
16 DAEP Placements	1.0%	1.70%	1
17 ISS Placements	10.0%	20.20%	1
6. LRE ages 3-5	15.0%	21.90%	0
5A Inside Regular Class 80% or >	56.66%	63.8%	Met
5B Inside Regular Class < 40%	11.46%	11.6%	DNM
5C Separate Schools, RF, Home/Hosp	1%	1.90%	DNM
7 LRE ages 6-11	40.0	45.1	0
8 LRE AGES 12-21	60.0	63.4	0
125% of TX LRE Ratio	0.191269	0.132871	Met
9 Disproportionate sped: race/ethnicity	N/A	N/A	Met
13 AA Representation	1.0	7.2 D	2
14 Hispanic Rep	1.0	(2.4D)	0
15 ELL/Sped Rep	1.0	(6.8)D	0
8 Parent Involvement Survey	72%	78.2	Met
11 Timely Evaluation	100%	83%*	DNM
12 3 yr old Timely IEP	100%	56%	DNM
13 Transition	100%	0%	DNM
14 Outcomes > HS	82%	No. too small	--

²⁵ DNM = did not meet. PBMAS has four scores (0-3); 0 is the best score. Red text refers to PBMAS indicators (FY 2009); green text refers to SPP indicators (FY 2008); and blue text refers to the state's 125 percent LRE ratio measure (AISD projected FY 2009).

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Based on the Texas Education Agency's letter of June 4, 2009, to the district, the AISD has been designated as "Needing Assistance." Assuming AISD performance remains unchanged, the district could move into the "Needing Intervention" stage under the PBMAS system. The Special Education Department developed the following 2009-2010 goals that align with areas in the exhibit above that do not meet targets, including goals for narrowing the achievement gap for students receiving special education:

1. Eliminate the achievement gap utilizing research-based practices and standards of service.
2. Build collaborative, trusting relationships with parents and community partners.
3. Meet and exceed state and federal standards for serving students in the least restrictive environment in order to support access to grade-level instruction and social opportunities.
4. Meet the state's standard of 8.5 percent of students identified as students with disabilities, including proportionate representation of ethnic groups.
5. Ensure special education students are not overrepresented in dropout and graduation rates or in disciplinary settings.
6. Consistently implement special education procedures per operating guidelines, including: compliance with evaluation and ARD timelines; IEP implementation; and transition indicator compliance.

Under the consent decree, *Angel G v Texas Education Agency* (Angel G), the Texas Education Agency monitors school districts statewide serving students with disabilities in residential facilities within the geographic boundaries and/or jurisdiction of each local education agency (LEA). Areas monitored include: identification, assignment and training of surrogate parents; IEP support documentation; and secondary transition. The compliance standard is 100 percent. The AISD has about 250 students living in residential facilities on 40 campuses. The Texas Education Agency has monitored 60 districts between 2006 and 2008 and all but one had issues of noncompliance. The AISD expects to receive some findings of noncompliance when its review is conducted despite proactive training on all 40 campuses, electronic systems to support activities designed for compliance purposes, and internal monitoring.

- ***Operating Guidelines for Special Education***

The Special Education Department has developed a very comprehensive document providing operating guidelines for special education. However, in addition to areas discussed previously that did not have adequate detail (i.e., requirements for interventions to be research-based, eligibility criteria with more specific than state descriptions, etc.), the manual is not on the district's Web site; nor does it include readily available links to pertinent information, e.g., relevant forms. According to the Stetson report, "the written policies, procedures, and administrative guidelines pertaining to special education are not consistently understood. Some stakeholders seem confused about various aspects of special education requirements."²⁶

²⁶ Page iv, number 6.

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• *Authority and Oversight of Special Education Department*

Even though the Special Education Department has oversight responsibility for the district's special education program, the department has no direct authority over the implementation of special education services in the schools. The associate superintendents are responsible for overseeing school administration and instruction.

The MGT and Collier reports both commented on this issue, as did many focus group participants. Parents and community members were concerned that the special education director lacked direct line authority to resolve campus-based issues, e.g., "special education has no power." They were also unaware of alternative processes for ensuring the resolution of disputes. Participants expressed frustration about the perceived "run-arounds" they received at associate superintendents offices, and indicated that involving private parent attorneys to resolve issues was the only recourse. Parents and community members interviewed by the team also believed that many parents do not understand the chain of command and the role of the Special Education Department coordinators. The Collier report summarized this predicament succinctly as follows: "[c]lear non-negotiables for teaching and learning, and clear roles and responsibilities for staff co-accountability at all levels of the organization are weak and have led to incoherence in education program understanding and execution and in mixed messages to schools."²⁷

This lack of co-accountability is particularly relevant to the following special education issues:

- Implementation of multi-tiered research-based interventions for reading and positive behavior, and the use of progress monitoring to adjust instruction (that impacts equitable special education identification and instruction of students with disabilities);
- Expansion and effective inclusive of instructional practices;
- Attention to special education students at the campus level when their numbers are not large enough to impact accountability for academic performance;
- Principal aversion to accepting students with disabilities that may negatively impact AYP or state accountability requirements;
- Reliance on the use of the TAKS-M, which will not affect a campus' federal performance accountability but would impact AISD's status negatively; and
- Campus-buy in for accountability on SPP/PBMAS special education indicators.

The absence of co-accountability was also described by focus group participants as involving very few visits to special education classes by administrators conducting classroom "walk-throughs." In addition, although the district has very few due-process requests (seven in FY 2007, one in FY 2008 and five in FY 2009) and no hearings in the last two years, any award or mediated agreement results in a payment by the Special Education Department.

Although the department has designed comprehensive plans to address the Collier report, the SPP/PBMAS/125 percent LRE ratio findings, and has supported campuses on their corrective action plans, the department does not have the power to "fix" these issues at the school level. This lack of departmental authority apparently has fed the perception by some parents that their only recourse was strong advocacy in order to obtain appropriate services for their children.

²⁷ Page 2.

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Use of Data to Support Compliance/Performance Analysis and Accountable Practices

The AISD is in the process of developing a data warehouse in order to gather and support information on various student populations and support a dashboard of critical data elements easily available to principals.

- ***Special Education Department Data***

The Special Education Department produces an impressive array of reports that show—by district, school, and in some cases by grades—indicators on the PBMAS described in this report. In one report, for example, school-based data are shared every six weeks on special education identification and counts of African American, Hispanic, and ELL students. The data are color-coded: white for “0” performance level; green for “1”; yellow for “2”; and red for “3.”

A joint district venture involving Management Information Systems (MIS) and the Special Education Department, which began in the fall of 2002, developed a Web-based Special Education Electronic Document System (SEEDS) for documenting evaluations, eligibility meetings and IEPs, progress reports, etc. The system continues to evolve as new forms and documentation capabilities are added. According to the Special Education Department, the best commercially available products would cost the district between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 a year for a software license to obtain the same services.

Some focus group participants, however, expressed concern that the SEEDS produces too much paperwork, and that an IEP may produce as many as 27 sheets of paper on a “short” document and thick progress reports for parents. In addition, some data reports contain raw numbers and are not analyzed according to any relevant variables. As a result, the reports do not trigger further action.

Analysis of Sample Six-Week Report on PBMAS Identification and Representation Data

Exhibit 51 summarizes data on three schools in East Austin (Reagan, LBJ, and Eastside Memorial) that the Special Education Department produced on March 1, 2010. These data come from the Six-Weeks Report on Identification and Representation, which is provided for every campus. The report provides information on the following: campus accountability, AYP status, involvement in EIS/RTI and PBS, special education cluster programs, PBMAS special education indicators 13-18, and LRE ratio (percent of students in self-contained classes). Elementary and middle schools that feed into Reagan and LBJ high schools are highlighted in yellow. These data show the following information.

- ***AYP and Accountability Status***

Based on recently available state accountability projections from preliminary TAKS results, 17 (55 percent) of the 31 schools in three regions increased their accountability ratings and none received a lower rating. Furthermore, Sims and Oak Springs elementary schools increased their ratings by two levels, from Acceptable to Exemplary. Six of eight schools in the LBJ area increased their ratings by one level. All elementary schools had a rating of Recognized. The Reagan team is projected to have all but one elementary school scored as Recognized or Exemplary. In addition, Reagan High School and two middle schools moved off the Academically Unacceptable list and moved onto the Acceptable category. Finally, four schools

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in the Eastside Memorial area increased their ratings: two elementary schools moving to exemplary and one to Recognized; and Martin Middle School moved off the Academically Unacceptable list. Overall, in the Eastside Memorial area, only Green High School continues to be Academically Unacceptable.

Exhibit 51. Data from 4th Six-Weeks Report on Identification and Representation

Vertical Team	Percent Special Ed	No. SpEd Programs	PBMAS Rating	Projected 2010 Accountability Ratings	Meets AYP (FY 2009)	AA Difference	Hispanic Difference	ELL Difference	SpEd DAEP	SpEd ISS	SpEd OSS (RO)	Percent SC (LRE Ratio)	Has RTI/EIS	Has PBS (Start FY)
Reagan HS	15.7	6	2	4AU > AC	M/Gr	3	0	0	3	0	23.7	18.8		2007
Dobie MS	11.3	3	1	Acc > R	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	8.8	14.9		2005
Garcia MS	14.9	2	2	2AU > AC	Yes	3	0	0	3	0	19.2	14.7		2008
Pearce MS	14.1	2	2	5AU > AC	Yes	3	0	0	1	0	16.0	23.4		2005
Webb MS	10.9	2	1	Acceptable	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	15.8	37.7		2005
Andrews ES	9.4	3	1	Recognized	Yes	1	0	0	0	0	2.9	13.0	Yes	2005
Blanton ES	5.3	3	0	Exemplary	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	0.7	34.6		
Graham ES	15.3	5	2	Exemplary	Yes	1	0	0	1	0	1.3	21.3		2006
Hart ES	6.5	3	0	Recognized	Yes	2	0	0	0	0	2.0	24.2	Yes	2006
Pecan Sp ES	8.5	2	0	Acceptable	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	2.5	15.6		2010
Pickle ES	5.2	3	0	Acc > R	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	3.8	20.7	Yes	2006
Harris ES	7.6	3	0	Acc > R	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	4.4	39.5		
Reilly ES	8.8	3	1	Recognized	Yes	2	1	0	0	0	0	34.8		2007
Sims ES	4.4	0	0	Acc to EX	Yes	2	0	0	0	0	3.3	7.7	Yes	2010
Winn ES	5.9	1	0	Recognized	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	4.7	20.8	Yes	2006
LBJ HS	17.7	4	3	1AU > AC	R/M	3	0	1	3	0	19.8	23.1		2010
Garcia MS	14.9	2	2	2AU > AC	Yes	3	0	0	3	0	19.2	14.7		2008
Pearce MS	14.1	2	2	5AU > AC	Yes	3	0	0	1	0	16.0	23.4		2005
Andrews ES	9.4	3	1	Recognized	Yes	1	0	0	0	0	2.9	13.0	Yes	2005
Jordan ES	6.1	4	0	Acc > R	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	2.4	35.7	Yes	2006
Norman ES	5.4	0	0	Acc > R	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	-0.7	0	Yes	2007
Overton ES	7.9	2	0	Acc > R	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	1.6	18.6	Yes	2008
Winn ES	5.9	1	0	Recognized	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	4.7	20.8	Yes	2006
E.M. Green HS	20.3	2	3	Yr 1 AU	New	2	0	0	3	0	4.2	19.8		2010

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Kealing MS	4.8	3	0	Acceptable	Yes	3	3	3	3	0	26.5	7.3		2005
Martin MS	18.2	2	3	2AU > AC	Yes	0	1	0	3	0	27.3	7.4		2005
Allan ES	11.2	3	1	Acceptable	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	-1.8	23.5	Yes	2007
Allison ES	6.7	1	0	Acceptable	Yes	1	0	0	0	0	3.8	16.7	Yes	2005
Blackshear ES	8.1	1	0	Acceptable	Yes	1	0	0	0	0	8.1	0		
Brooke ES	12.3	4	2	Recognized	Yes	1	0	0	0	0	-0.2	28.9	Yes	2008
Govalle ES	11.2	3	1	Acceptable	Yes	3	0	0	0	0	-1.6	27.6	Yes	2008
Metz ES	6.1	2	0	Rec > E	Yes	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	Yes	2009
Oak Springs ES	11.4	2	1	Acc to EX	Yes	2	0	0	2	0	3.7	27.3	Yes	2010
Ortega ES	12.6	2	2	Exemplary	Yes	1	0	0	0	0	1.9	38.1	Yes	2008
Zavala ES	15.6	4	2	Acc > R	Yes	0	1	1	0	0	1.6	24.5	Yes	2008

- ***Percentage of Students Receiving Special Education***

Twenty (64.5 percent) of 31 schools had a performance level of between 1 and 3 on the PBMAS indicator measuring the percentage of students receiving special education services.

- Of 15 schools in the Reagan area, five were at level “2,” and four were at level “1.”
- All but four of the 12 schools in the Eastside Memorial area schools had higher than expected levels: two were at level “3,” three were at level “2,” and three were at level “1.”
- One of the eight schools in the LBJ area was at level “3,” two were at level “2,” and one was at level “1.”
- LBJ and Eastside Memorial high schools were at performance level “3”; Reagan High School was at level “2.”
- Kealing Middle School in the Eastside Memorial area was the only middle school at the “0” level. At the elementary grade level, nine (37.5 percent) of 24 schools had a performance level of “1” or “2.” Most of the elementary schools with a performance level above “0” were related to the Eastside Memorial team (six of nine schools). Three of the 10 elementary schools in the Reagan area were included, as was one of the schools in the LBJ area.

- ***Disproportionate Rates of African American Students with Disabilities***

Of the 31 schools, all but two had a performance level above “0” on this PBMAS indicator. All schools in the Reagan and LBJ areas had levels between “1” and “3.” The levels in the LBJ area were all “3” except for Andrews Elementary, which had a “1.” All but five of Reagan-area schools had a level “3”; and schools in the Eastside Memorial area had a level “3,” except for seven with a “1” or “2.” Both Reagan and LBJ high schools had a level “3” and Eastside Memorial had a “2.”

- ***Hispanic and ELL Rates for Students with Disabilities***

A much smaller number of schools had performance levels above “0” on these indicators:

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four in the category of Hispanic students and three for ELLs. One middle school had a performance level of “3” in both of areas. That school had a very small number of students receiving special education (4.8), which may have been a contributing factor.

- ***RTI/EIS***

Eighteen (58 percent) of 31 schools have received resources for Response to Intervention (RTI) or early intervening services (EIS). Five Reagan-area schools have this support, and only one of these had a noteworthy performance level (1) on their special education incidence indicator. The seven other schools that had rates above “0” lacked RTI/EIS support. For the Eastside Memorial team, eight of 12 schools had RTI/EIS support. While three of the four schools without this support had performance levels above “0,” those with RTI/EIS also had incidence rates above the state target. Five of eight schools in the LBJ area had RTI/EIS. Those without support had performance levels of “2” or “3,” and all but one with RTI/EIS had a performance level of “1.” In other words, the use of RTI/EIS does not appear to have any obvious relationship to the proportion of African American students identified as needing special education. All schools but one (Zavala Elementary) had data related to a performance level above “0.”

- ***PBS Support and Disproportionate Special Education Placements in DAEP and ISS***

All but three of the East Austin schools have a Positive Behavior Support (PBS) program. However, two that have been implementing PBS since 2005 have a performance level of “3” for disproportionate placement of students receiving special education in discretionary disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEP). Overall, 12 of the 22 schools have a performance level above “0” for DAEP placements. All three high schools have a performance level of “3” on this measure. Three middle schools, including two in Eastside Memorial’s area have a “3.” None of the schools had performance-level scores above a “0” for disproportionate numbers of in-school suspensions. Finally, two middle schools in Eastside Memorial’s area have very high differences between special education and all students in numbers of suspensions.

- ***LRE Ratio***

The three district areas vary considerably with respect to their least restrictive environment (LRE) ratios among students placed more than 50 percent of the time in separate classes. In all, 6 schools met the 13-16 percent target. Five of them were in the Eastside Memorial area, although two schools in this area had no students in this category. Generally, three high schools in the area were near the target, and the middle schools were at or near the target. The elementary schools generally had the highest ratios.

Positive Observations

- *Vision of Co-Accountability.* The superintendent has a vision for co-accountability among the school campuses, the Special Education Department, and other departments that includes frequent communication with schools and their administrative teams.

Although it is not yet clear how the performance of students with disabilities will affect the projected 2010 accountability ratings for the Reagan, LBJ, and Eastside Memorial areas, none of the schools are likely to see a lower rating than the previous year. Projections

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indicate that 17 (55 percent) of the 31 schools having increased accountability ratings. Sims and Oak Springs elementary schools have increased their ratings by two levels from Acceptable to Exemplary. Overall, all of the AISD's schools that have had an Academically Unacceptable rating are expected to move to an Acceptable category, for the Eastside Memorial high school. All of these seven schools are in the Reagan, LBJ and Eastside Memorial areas.

- ***Strategic Plan Scorecard.*** The AISD utilizes a Strategic Plan Scorecard, which has measureable outcomes and targets that include performance indicators for student groups, including special education.
- ***Strategic Plan Framework.*** To support campuses and students, the AISD has articulated four broad strategies and a series of key action steps that will involve community partners. Several action steps are especially relevant to special education, i.e., improving supports for struggling learners; ensuring adequate supports to teachers and students receiving special education services; and implementing behavioral, character, social, and other student support systems at all schools in an effective and equitable manner.
- ***Interdepartmental Collaboration.*** The associate superintendent for high schools and the Special Education Department collaborated to conduct an external compliance audit on LBJ high school, which resulted in a comprehensive report.
- ***SEEDS Data Supervisor.*** The special education electronic document system (SEEDS) data supervisor is held in extremely high regard for his development of SEEDS and related comprehensive data reporting. An example of his work is the campus-based six-week report on the performance-based management analysis system (PBMAS) identification and representation, and the regular analysis and discussion it produces.
- ***Collaboration with General Counsel and Staff.*** The AISD's general counsel and the attorney for special education issues appear to be very involved and knowledgeable about issues affecting students with disabilities in AISD. The attorney provides training on IDEA and relevant case law, and works directly with special education directors, coordinators, and principals when necessary.

Areas of Concern

Co-Accountability for Special Education. Although the Special Education Department has oversight responsibility for special education and is the “go to” department to address campus-based issues, the associate superintendents, rather than the Special Education Department, have direct responsibility and authority for campus administration. As a result, the department is viewed as “powerless” to “fix” campus-based issues of compliance and noncompliance with special education.²⁸ The lack of co-accountability is also seen in the infrequency of “walk-throughs” to monitor classroom instruction for students with disabilities, and feeds parent perceptions that they need to turn to outside advocates and attorneys to get relief or action.

²⁸ Note, this discussion is likely to apply to bilingual education as well.

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Strategic Plan Scorecard, Strategic Plan Framework, and Campus Administrator Appraisals.

The AISD's Strategic Plan Scorecard, Strategic Plan Framework, and campus administrator appraisal form do not incorporate key measures on which the AISD is held accountable. These include the federal-state performance plan and state special education PBMAS indicators, and the Angel G residential facility consent decree. There are no targets that schools have to meet on any of these indicators, yet the district is responsible for meeting them. In addition, the following special education-related issues appear to be affected:

- Implementation of multi-tiered research-based interventions for reading and positive behavior and the use of progress monitoring to adjust instruction (and that impact equitable special education identification and instruction for students with disabilities);
- Effective inclusive instructional practices;
- Attention to the special education subgroup at the campus level when their numbers are not large enough to impact accountability;
- Principal aversion to accepting students with disabilities who may impact AYP or state accountability requirements negatively;
- Reliance on TAKS-M, which does not have an impact on a campus' federal performance accountability status, but does affect district status negatively; and
- Responsibility for transferring student records to other schools and for ensuring all student records are compiled and maintained in a compliant manner.

East Austin Performance. Based on PBMAS indicators for FY 2009, the 31 schools associated with the three vertical teams in East Austin (Reagan, Eastside Memorial, and LBJ) have significant challenges and demonstrate the need for greater accountability than is now the case. Although a substantial number of schools have RTI/EIS support and PBS, the data suggest that there are problems with implementation or the fidelity of implementation. Further, three schools do not appear to be implementing PBS and 15 are not establishing RTI or EIS.

Operating Guidelines for Special Education. The Special Education Department's document laying out operating guidelines for special education lacks sufficient detail on requirements for research-based interventions, progress monitoring, and eligibility criteria beyond vague state/federal descriptions. In addition, the manual is not on the district's Web site and does not include readily available links to relevant forms and other pertinent information. Finally, staff members indicated that the manual's content is not consistently understood.

Data to Support Compliance/Performance Analysis and Accountable Practices. Staff members sometimes viewed the SEEDS and IMPACT systems as overly burdensome. Also, all Special Education Department reports do not contain the kinds of analysis that would facilitate understanding or action. Further, the PBS data on the fourth Six-Weeks Report on Identification and Representation does not match the PBS start dates shown on the Department of Program Evaluation's PBS Evaluation for December 2009.

Recommendations

D. Accountability for Expected Practices and Results

14. Enhance the AISD's system of co-accountability by incorporating expectations for RTI, inclusive instruction, transition support, and other results required by SPP/PBMAS

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indicators. Establish, communicate, monitor, and support clear expectations and “non-negotiables” for all instructional stakeholder groups in the following areas: RTI (for all students, including those with IEPs/504 plans and who are English learners), inclusive instruction, transition support, and other SPP/PBMAS indicators. Develop specific parameters and procedures/guidelines in the following areas and establish clear lines of accountability and responsibility across departments.

a. Critical Elements. Define and establish non-negotiables for:

- 1) *Universal Screening.* As a way to determine need for tiered interventions;
- 2) *Interventions.* Multi-tiered research-based and culturally/linguistically responsive interventions for reading/math and positive behavior aligned with student needs;
- 3) *Progress Monitoring.* Research-based progress monitoring tools for specific interventions used at defined intervals to inform instructional decision making;
- 4) *IDEA Eligibility.* Parameters for equitable special education identification;
- 5) *Universal Design for Learning.* Culturally relevant universal design for learning, including assistive technology and differentiated instruction;
- 6) *Inclusive Learning Support.* Co-teaching, collaborative consultation, and other instructional supports for inclusive education where all learners experience small-group, large-group, and one-on-one integrated instruction in school or community settings;
- 7) *Common Planning Time.* Scheduling for and use of common planning time to coordinate inclusive instruction;
- 8) *Class Scheduling.* Scheduling student classes for maximum support;
- 9) *Transition between Grades/Schools.* Support for students transitioning to different grade levels and schools;
- 10) *Transition Services.* Appropriate planning and provision of transition services for students with disabilities; and
- 11) *Record Transfer/Maintenance.* Expectations for transferring student records to other schools and maintaining them in a compliant manner.

b. Planning Considerations. Address the following components in the planning process:

- 1) *Communication.* Ensure that communication to stakeholders provides a common language and understanding of special education terms and procedures;
- 2) *Staff Training.* Design professional development that is implemented collaboratively by all AISD departments involved in campus-based support and training that is differentiated based on the skills and previous knowledge of staff;

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- 3) **Parent Training.** Collaborate with parent organizations to provide training to parents on relevant issues related to special education and supports for their children. Provide translation services when appropriate to facilitate communication.
 - 4) **Data.** Develop relevant databases and user-friendly reports for various stakeholders;
 - 5) **Walk-Throughs.** Identify core elements that need review during school walk-throughs (including self-contained specialized classes);
 - 6) **Administrator Roles and Responsibilities.** Articulate the accountability requirements, roles, and responsibilities of associate superintendents, Special Education Department, and other AISD directors, supervisors and coordinators, and campus administrators;
 - 7) **Corrective Action.** Establish requirements for campus action needed to correct “non-negotiable” practices and articulate the action in the campus’ regular improvement plan rather than in a separate plan;
 - 8) **Collaborative Data Review.** Conduct data reviews collaboratively with relevant AISD departments/divisions on the critical elements for identifying schools showing significant success or little progress. Enable successful schools to share their strategies through professional development and school visits. Specify how interdepartmental administrative staff will intervene and support schools demonstrating little success.
 - 9) **AISD Co-Accountability Documents.** Include key elements in AISD’s Strategic Plan Scorecard, Strategic Plan Framework, and campus-administrator appraisal forms; and
 - 10) **Implementation.** Phase-in implementation of recommendations in the report over an aggressive period of time.
- c. **School-Based Planning.** Incorporate the above elements into the AISD’s process for school-based planning.
 - d. **AISD Co-Accountability Documents.** Incorporate core indicators into the AISD’s Strategic Plan Scorecard, Strategic Plan Framework, and/or campus-administrator appraisal forms.
15. **Include in the AISD’s system of accountability provisions for including the performance of All students, and minimize overuse of TAKS-M.** In addition to the above, incorporate into AISD’s accountability framework provisions for the following:
- a. **All Students “Count.”** Ensure that all students “count” in the district’s accountability system. Even if there is an insufficient number of students with disabilities (or who are bilingual) taking a TAKS assessment, ensure that their performance “matters”
 - b. **TAKS-M Overuse.** Establish parameters for apparent overuse of the TAKS-M, including monitoring and campus-administrator accountability. It is critical that each campus administrator be held accountable for the proper testing of students with disabilities and to ensure that TAKS-M is not over-used by school-based administrators to improve their

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testing results. The overuse of the TAKS-M at the school level is significantly impacting the district's AYP status for the special education subgroup, because the maximum percentage of students that can be counted as proficient districtwide on this assessment is two percent.

- c. Students with Challenging Needs.* Build in incentives and articulate consequences for campus administrators on the enrollment of students with disabilities who may impact AYP or state accountability systems negatively; and
- d. Over-identification.* Set goals and explicit of targets for reducing the over-identification of African American and other students for special education. Include goals and targets into principal evaluation procedures.

16. Engage East Austin schools in the development of a co-accountability framework and expedite its use in these schools. As the co-accountability framework referred to in Recommendation 14 is being developed, involve representatives of the East Austin team to obtain feedback on its potential usefulness, practicality, and effectiveness.

17. Enhance the use of the Special Education Department's Operating Guidelines.

- a. RTI.* Review the department's Operating Guidelines and provide additional information on the use of RTI based on the framework developed pursuant to Recommendation 1.
- b. Eligibility Criteria.* Add specificity to the district's eligibility criteria for special education, particularly in the areas of intellectual and emotional/behavior disabilities in order to support consistent and appropriate identification and decision making.
- c. Web Site.* Post the Operating Guidelines on Special Education Department's Web site and include readily available links to pertinent information and relevant forms.
- d. Professional Development.* Bring together stakeholders to obtain feedback on ways in which the contents of the Special Education Operating Guidelines might be communicated more effectively. Consider the development of a questionnaire that can be used to "certify" the working knowledge of the document by stakeholders, e.g., Special Education Department administrators, campus administrators, department chairs, special educators, parents.

18. Increase the usefulness of the SEEDS and the analytical features of its data reports.

- a. SEEDS.* With a knowledgeable stakeholder group, review the Special Education Electronic Document System (SEEDS) to determine whether it is possible to reduce the large number of IEP pages produced and to streamline SEED's usage.
- b. Analytical Data Reports.* Review all Special Education Department reports to identify those having only raw numbers and determine additional analysis that could be conducted to make the reports more informative, and modify accordingly.
- c. PBS Data in Six-Weeks Report.* Research the PBS start-date for schools, including the Department of Program Evaluation's report, to ensure that the dates on identification and representation are consistent and correct.

CHAPTER 4. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Recommendation Matrix

The exhibit below summarizes the recommendations from the previous chapter in table form corresponding with the categories in which the proposals were made. The subsequent section of this chapter presents a summary of the recommendations.

Activities	Co-accountability	Policy/Procedure	Data	Planning	Training	Cross-Reference
A. Identification of Students Receiving Special Education Services						
1. Ensure that the AISD utilizes a comprehensive system of multi-tiered academic and behavior interventions with progress monitoring to support continued and enhanced student outcomes.						C/D
a. Policies & Procedures		x				
b. Mapping & Planning Resource Allocation				x		
c. Data Collection & User-Friendly Reports			x			
d. Professional Development					x	
e. Phase-in Implementation				x		
2. Review and improve the special education assessment and eligibility process to incorporate fidelity- based RTI considerations.						
a. Consideration of Interventions Implemented with Fidelity	x	x			x	14
b. Eligibility Reports	x	x			x	
c. Plan to Address Special Education Disproportionality for African American Students	x	x	x	x	x	
d. Dismissal Consideration	x	x	x	x	x	
e. Regularly Monitor Sample of Files	x					
f. Protocol for Review	x		x			
B. Instruction and Performance of Students Receiving Special Education Services						
3. Increase the number of first-year students “on track” to graduate.						
a. Students “Not on Track”						
1) Database			x			
2) Research-Based Strategies	x	x		x	x	
b. Identify/Support High Schools	x		x	x	x	
4. Increase and/or initiate policy discussion regarding statewide assessments to influence students with disabilities’ appropriate participation.						
a. Proficiency on TAKS-M Over Cap			x	x		
b. Selecting Appropriate Assessment	x	x			x	
5. Ensure students receiving special education services receive targeted and intensive interventions that are reviewed and adjusted regularly through progress monitoring.						
a. Map Intervention Resources				x		1
b. Phase in Purchasing Plan Recommendation 7				x		7
6. Remove barriers to effective instruction.						
a. Individual Planning Guides				x		

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Activities	Co-accountability	Policy/Procedure	Data	Planning	Training	Cross-Reference
b. Provision of Assessment Accommodations		x	x	x	x	
c. TAKS-M Aligned Curriculum				x	x	
d. Access to IEPs at Beginning of/During School Year	x	x		x	x	
e. Scheduling for Students Receiving Special Education Services	x	x			x	14
f. Support School Transitions	x	x			x	14
7. Build on the AISD’s initiative with Stetson & Associates, Inc., to maximize increased and effective inclusive practices.						
a. SPP LRE Performance & Targets to Drive Change		x				
1) Disseminate Data			x			
2) Set Data Targets			x			
3) Support Identified Schools	x				x	14
b. Distributive Collaboration					x	11
c. Co-Accountability	x					14
8. Improve identification and supports for ELL students with disabilities needing and receiving support through SCORES and provision of in-home services.						
a. Bilingual Support.						
1) Appropriate Identification	x	x	x	x	x	x
2) Enhancing Instruction					x	
3) Progress Monitoring	x					
b. In-Home Services	x			x		
9. Increase effective support for positive behavior.						
a. PBS Implementation with Fidelity	x					1
1) Districtwide Implementation				x		11
2) Social Skills Curriculum				x		14
b. SBS Classes	x		x	x	x	14
10. Improve support for transition services by increasing enrollment at Clifton Career Technical School and improving access to CTE.						
a. SPP Transition Indicator	x					14
b. Clifton Career Technical School					x	
c. CTE Access					x	
C. Organizational Structure and Staff Resources Supporting Special Education Services						
11. Centralize relevant functions under the CAO to reduce program fragmentation and maximize collaboration and coordination of activities related to student improved academic performance and positive behavior/physical health.						App A
a. Executive Director Oversight				x		
b. RTI Coordination				x		
c. Finance, Data/IMPACT, & Compliance				x		
d. Support for Parents	x			x	x	14
e. Principal Advisory Council				x		
f. Operating Principles		x			x	
12. Enhance the effectiveness of the Special Education Department’s organization.						
a. Special Education Liaisons				x		
b. Realignment of Special Education Supervisory Responsibilities				x		
c. Special Education Records				x		
d. Transferring Special Education Records to Students’ New Schools	x	x			x	14

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Activities	Co-accountability	Policy/Procedure	Data	Planning	Training	Cross-Reference
e. Maintaining & Monitoring of Student Records & Data	x	x			x	14
f. Consideration of Clerk Responsibilities				x		
g. SPEDS UP				x		
h. Web Site Communication				x	x	
i. Transfer Some Functions to Other Relevant Units				x		
13. Ensure that campus-based management & coordination are effectively structured and that special educators, teaching assistants and related-services personnel are available and distributed equitably and sufficiently to meet the needs of students receiving special education services.						
a. Team Leaders				x	x	
b. Special Educators						
1) Equitable Distribution	x				x	
2) ARD IEP Decision-Making		x	x	x		
c. Related-Services & Evaluation Staff						
1) Speech/Language Therapists & Psychologists			x	x		
2) Nursing						
d. Related-Services						
1) Adaptive Art & Music Therapy/Adaptive Music		x				
2) Assistive Technology		x				
D. Accountability for Expected Practices & Results						
14. Enhance the AISD's system of co-accountability to incorporate expectations for RTI, inclusive instruction, transition support, and other performance required by SPP/PBMAS indicators.						
a. Critical Elements		x		x		
b. Planning Considerations	x	x	x	x		
c. School-Based Planning	x			x		
d. AISD Co-Accountability Documents	x			x		
15. Include in the AISD's system of accountability provisions for including performance of All students, overuse of TAKS-M, and acceptance of students with challenging needs.						
a. All Students "Count"	x		x		x	
b. TAKS-M Overuse		x				
c. Students with Challenging Needs	x					
d. Over identification	x	x	x			
16. Engage East Austin vertical team in development of co-accountability framework & expedite its use for these schools.						14
17. Enhance use of the Special Education Department's Operating Guidelines for Special Education.						
a. RTI Recommendation 1.		x				1
b. Eligibility Criteria		x				
c. Web Site			x			
d. Professional Development					x	
18. Increase usefulness of the SEEDS and analytical data reports.						
a. SEEDS		x	x		x	
b. Analytical Data Reports			x			
c. Six-Weeks Report PBS Data			x			

B. Summary of Recommendations

The following is a summary of the recommendations prepared by the Strategic Support Team of the Council of the Great City Schools for the Austin Independent School District.

Identification of Students Receiving Special Education Services

1. ***Ensure that the AISD utilizes a comprehensive system of multi-tiered academic and behavior interventions with progress monitoring to support continued and enhanced student outcomes.***
 - a. ***Policies and Procedures.*** Gather all written policies and procedures that have been developed to implement multi-tiered academic and behavior interventions from the district's various administrative offices and review them in order to develop a single document for the AISD that addresses universal screening, increasingly intensive levels of intervention, progress monitoring, data collection, and the use of data to review and modify instruction.
 - b. ***Mapping and Planning Resource Allocation.*** Map the resources and material available to all campuses for universal screening, tiered interventions, and progress monitoring. Based on this survey, identify those resources and materials having a research base, and the grade levels and instructional/behavior areas each addresses. Identify gaps and develop a phase-in plan for obtaining additional resources for each campus, so that each school has what it needs to meet student needs in the areas of reading, math, and social/emotional behavior.
 - c. ***Data Collection and User-Friendly Reports.*** Utilize a knowledgeable and diverse group of individuals representing campuses and administrators to evaluate the IMPACT data collection system to ensure that it incorporates critical elements that can be streamlined to the maximum extent feasible for easier use. Review the type of reports currently produced by the system, and ensure that they contain necessary information and do so in a user-friendly format that facilitates review and analysis.
 - d. ***Professional Development.*** To support the implementation of the district's policies, procedures, and data system, provide professional development materials that are available in multiple formats.
 - e. ***Phasing in Implementation.*** Based on the above resources, identify schools that will implement the new policies and procedures first.
2. ***Review and improve the special education assessment and eligibility process to incorporate fidelity-based Response to Intervention (RTI) considerations.***
 - a. ***Consideration of Interventions Implemented with Fidelity.*** Establish written procedures directing admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committees to review the provision of academic and positive support interventions to ensure that they are research-based, appropriate for student's area of needs, and implemented with fidelity.

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- b. Eligibility Reports.* Review initial evaluations and reevaluations, and develop standards for what information should be included in each, with exemplars illustrating how eligibility for various disability areas is determined.
- c. Plan to Address Special Education Disproportionality for African American Students.* The Department of Educator Quality, with support from all other divisions with responsibility for instruction and social/emotional development (e.g., curriculum, drop out, behavior, special education, etc.), should review the district's plan for addressing the disproportionality of African American students and other student groups to incorporate important elements related to RTI and cultural/linguistic considerations.
- d. Dismissal Consideration.* Establish procedures for and train case managers on collecting and reviewing student data with relevant general education teachers prior to annual ARD meetings.
- e. Regularly Monitor Samples of Files.* Develop a process that is designed to maximize consistency in systemwide special education eligibility determinations, especially in the areas of learning disabilities, emotional/behavior disability, and speech/language disabilities.
- f. Protocol for Review.* Develop a review protocol by which sample files are reviewed periodically and patterns of concern are identified and addressed.

Instruction and Performance of Students Receiving Special Education Services

- 3. Increase the number of first-year students "on track" to graduate.* Define "on track" criteria for students entering high school two or more years below grade level. Use data to identify all students not on track and utilize research-based strategies likely to reverse the student's performance trend. Require principals with high dropout rates (and feeder schools) to work with stakeholder groups to develop targeted plans, utilizing research-based approaches.
- 4. Increase and/or initiate policies on statewide assessments to influence appropriate participation of students with disabilities.*
 - a. Proficiency on TAKS-M Over Cap.* The AISD leadership and representative stakeholders should discuss the unique situation where all students taking the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills-Modified/Alternate) (TAKS-M/AI) are not counted, because the AISD exceeded the permissible cap for students scoring at/above proficiency.
 - b. Selecting Appropriate Assessment.* Based on this discussion, the AISD should issue a clear written directive regarding ARD Individualized Education Plan (IEP) decision making on the selection of an appropriate statewide assessment for students receiving special education services.
- 5. Ensure that students receiving special education services receive targeted and intensive interventions that are reviewed and adjusted regularly through progress monitoring.*

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- 1) **Disseminate Data.** Disseminate school and districtwide data on the following three SPP indicators: “in general education at least 80 percent of the time”; “more than 40 percent of the time”; and “special schools.”
 - 2) **Set Data Targets.** Set relevant targets for each school that will take into consideration cluster-site placements.
 - 3) **Support Identified Schools.** Identify schools with rates below expected targets and establish/support campus-based activities pursuant to the Stetson collaboration.
 - b. **Distributive Collaboration.** Cross train all individuals within the AISD who provide direct services to campus-based teachers and students on effective inclusive practices in order to maximize impact and leverage greater expertise.
 - c. **Co-Accountability.** Identify key elements of the Stetson collaborative that must be implemented with fidelity and implement a process for recognition, support, and consequences to promote serious attention to this important initiative.
8. **Improve identification of and supports for ELL students with disabilities needing help through SCORES and the provision of in-home services.**
- a. **Bilingual Support.** Consider the following steps with bilingual staff members who are involved in providing support to students through the Social Communication and Resources and Services (SCORES) program:
 - 1) **Identification.** Identify the extent to which language acquisition for students who are English language learners (ELL) may be interfering with the appropriate identification of disabilities and who may benefit from SCORES.
 - 2) **Enhancing Instruction.** Consider how current bilingual staff can be better utilized to help improve the effectiveness of staff members who just speak one language in providing instructional services to students who are ELL and are receiving special education.
 - 3) **Progress Monitoring.** Use progress monitoring data to analyze the usefulness of district strategies relevant to improving the performance of underachieving students, including those with disabilities to periodically determine if those strategies should be maintained, modified, enhanced, or dropped.
 - b. **In-Home Services.** Determine the frequency of delays in in-home services, investigate causes—if frequent—and initiate a plan for resolution. Monitor effectiveness of the plan and evaluate results.
9. **Increase effective support for positive behavior.**
- a. **PBS Implementation with Fidelity**
 - 1) **Districtwide Implementation.** The AISD should expand Positive Behavior Support (PBS) and/or other AISD-approved research-based approaches to positive behavior, so that that an effective model is in place in every AISD school by a specified date.

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- 2) ***Social Skills Curriculum.*** To support the effective implementation of schoolwide Tier I PBS in all schools, the AISD should adopt and implement one or more research-based social skills curricula. AISD leadership should phase in implementation that is realistic based on available funds.
 - b. ***SBS Classes.*** The Special Education Department should observe Social Behavior Skills (SBS) classes at various grade levels to gather appropriate data to identify which students are making significant academic performance and positive behavior gains. Identify the factors that most influenced the outcomes and that can be replicated.
- 10. *Improve transition services by increasing enrollment at Clifton Career Technical School and improving access to career and technical education (CTE).***
- a. ***State Performance Plan (SPP) Transition Indicator.*** Include the Special Education Department's plan to improve SPP transition compliance on the district's co-accountability and monitoring framework.
 - b. ***Clifton Career Technical School.*** As soon as possible, determine whether enrollment at Clifton is at capacity, and, if not, investigate why more students are not choosing to enroll in the school. Gather information from past, current, and potential students, parents, school counselors, and other knowledgeable staff. Determine whether this program has sufficient value to maintain and, if so, what immediate steps may be taken to increase enrollment.
 - c. ***CTE Access.*** After use of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act/Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (ARRA/IDEA) funds to expand access to vocational education at six campuses, determine its impact and the demand for expansion or continuation with student, staff, and parent surveys, and IEP transition data. Based on these results, consider what other fiscal resources are available if the review shows that greater expansion is necessary.

Organizational Structure and Staff Resources Supporting Special Education Services

- 11. *Centralize relevant special education functions under the CAO to reduce program fragmentation and maximize collaboration and coordination of activities related to improved academic performance and positive behavior/physical health.***
- a. ***Executive Director Oversight.*** Consider having the chief academic officer's (CAO's) new executive director oversee Title I and social/emotional and physical health staff members; and centralize staff with similar responsibilities in other units, such as all behavior specialists, social workers, ACCESS, intervention specialists, nursing etc., in order to facilitate a high level of coordination for all levels of instructional/behavioral support.
 - b. ***RTI Coordination.*** Support the CAO's plan to hire a new administrator to manage Response to Intervention (RTI).

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- c. Finance, Data and IMPACT, Compliance.* Consolidate administrative and support personnel who would be responsible for the following areas under the CAO's direction: finance, data, IMPACT process, and compliance. To the extent that current staff would have expanded responsibilities, ensure there is sufficient support to address any new functions and scope.
- d. Support for Parents.* Maximize support for parents by enabling various special interest groups to gather together under the Parent Advisory Committee and meet based on specialized concerns. Leverage collaboration with the Family Support Cooperative to consider how professional development activities could include parent information, training, and cross-training.
- e. Principal Advisory Council.* Consider moving the Special Education Principal Advisory Council so it works immediately under the new executive director and includes directors and individuals with expertise in bilingual/ELL education, special education, and gifted/talented education. Workgroups might be formed in specialized areas to incorporate differentiated strategies and plans.
- f. Operating Principles.* Establish operating procedures and structures to ensure that senior and mid-level leadership collaborates on the design and implementation of universal strategies that improve the academics of student with diverse needs.

12. Enhance the effectiveness of the Special Education Department's organization.

- a. Special Education Liaisons.* Create a new position, "special education liaison," that would report to one of the two Special Education Department assistant directors (Elementary and Secondary) and align their work to the Offices of the Associate Superintendents of High Schools, Middle Schools, and Elementary Schools. Include the associate superintendents in the selection process. Selected liaisons should cross train with other campus-based individuals reporting to the CAO and other departments. Document the liaisons' roles and responsibilities and hire as many as fiscally reasonable.
- b. Realignment of Special Education Supervisory Responsibilities.* Assign remaining program responsibilities (early childhood, inclusion, bilingual special education, speech, occupational therapy/physical therapy, life skills, TBI, autism, vision/hearing, ESY, transition services, regional day-school program for the deaf, Clifton, Rosedale, and parentally placed children in private schools) equitably under the two assistant directors. Consider consolidating all behavior support in the district under the Special Education Department and assign one of the assistant directors to oversee them.
- c. Special Education Records.* Move all special education archived records from their current location to one that houses similar records. Analyze the extent to which current staff time is devoted to maintaining such records and could be redirected to other priorities.
- d. Transferring Special Education Records to Students' New Schools.* Provide guidance to campuses about the organization of student special education records and require the campus-based individual(s) responsible for students' records to review them prior to any transfer to another school. Require campuses to transfer directly to other schools the

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special education and other relevant school records for students who are moving from one school to another (both within and outside of the AISD). Provide guidance and appropriate training for schools on how to carry out this new responsibility.

- e. Maintaining and Monitoring Student Records and Data.* Special education leadership should review this function of the special education management clerks and reduce this responsibility.
 - f. Consideration of Clerk Responsibilities.* Upon implementing the changes in responsibility for archived and transferred special education records from the Special Education Department to campuses, and completing the planned electronic data changes that enable evaluation staff members to enter their own results, consider phasing out clerk positions in order to help fund the increased number of special education liaisons assigned to the schools.
 - g. SPEDS UP.* Assuming stakeholder feedback on the monthly communication tool—SPEDS UP—is favorable, continue it and consider broadening it to serve as a CAO vehicle to communicate activities relevant to teaching and learning.
 - h. Web Site Communication.* Survey other urban school district Web sites to gather ideas about the breadth and scope of resources that may be communicated.
- 13. Ensure that campus-based management and coordination are structured effectively and that special educators, teaching assistants and related-services personnel are available and distributed equitably and sufficiently to meet the needs of students receiving special education services.**
- a. Team Leaders.* Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the secondary department chairs and elementary contact teachers to ensure that they are using their time efficiently; and create a common job description for team leaders to ensure consistency of responsibilities. Complete these activities and implement changes by the beginning of next school year
 - b. Special Educators*
 - 1) Equitable Distribution.* It appears reasonable to the Council team that the AISD implement the Stetson & Associates plan on the allocation of special educators to schools. The department should use pre- and post-implementation data to analyze the results.
 - 2) ARD IEP Decision-Making.* Develop written guidelines that specifically describe the criteria and process for determining when additional teaching assistants are required to assist individual students. Include in the guidelines a provision that indicates that staffing requests will not be approved unless the specified criteria and processes are followed. Consider using a process similar to that used in school districts whereby the need for assistance is based on the times of the day and the types of support a student needs based on the IEP.

3) *Related-Services and Evaluation Staff*

- a. ***Speech/Language Therapists and Psychologists.*** Review the sufficiency in numbers of speech/language therapists and psychologists/educational diagnosticians and the extent to which their availability affects the timeliness of initial evaluations and reevaluations. As part of this process, review their roles and duties. If this review shows a need for additional staff, consider competing budget priorities before phasing in additional hiring.
- b. ***Nursing.*** Investigate the potential for cost savings by reestablishing management and staffing of the school health services program that Seton Health Services currently provides. If the move is cost beneficial, consider contractual obligations and plan for a transition as soon as practicable.

4) *Related-Services.*

- a) ***Adaptive Art and Music Therapy/Adaptive Music.*** Staff in the Special Education Department should review and revise criteria to be used by the ARD committee to consider a student's need for adaptive art, music therapy, and adaptive music. The criteria should be strict and take into consideration the availability of peer-reviewed research and outcome data showing any documented benefits for AISD students.
- b) ***Assistive Technology.*** Embed the requirement for universal design in the purchasing process and compliance rubric, so that software is accessible to all students.

Accountability for Expected Practices and Results

14. *Enhance the AISD's system of co-accountability by incorporating expectations for RTI, inclusive instruction, transition support, and other results required by SPP/PBMA indicators.* Establish, communicate, monitor, and support clear expectations and “non-negotiables” for all instructional stakeholder groups in the following areas: RTI (for all students, including those with IEPs/504 plans and who are ELL), inclusive instruction, transition support, and other SPP/PBMA performance indicators. Establish clear lines of accountability and responsibility across departments.

- a. ***Critical Elements.*** Define and establish non-negotiables for universal screening, interventions, progress monitoring, IDEA eligibility, universal design for learning, inclusive learning support, common planning time, class scheduling, transition between grades/school, transition services for students with disabilities, and record transfer/maintenance.
- b. ***Planning Considerations.*** Address the following components in the planning process: communication, staff and parent training, data, walk-through guidance, administrator roles and responsibilities, corrective action, collaborative data review, AISD co-accountability documents, and implementation.

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- c. ***School-Based Planning.*** Incorporate the above elements into the AISD’s process for school-based planning.
 - d. ***AISD Co-Accountability Documents.*** Incorporate core indicators into the AISD’s Strategic Plan Scorecard, Strategic Plan Framework, and/or campus-administrator appraisal forms.
 15. ***Include in the AISD’s system of accountability provisions for including the performance of All students, and minimize overuse of TAKS-M.*** In addition to the above, incorporate into the AISD’s accountability framework provisions for the following:
 - a. ***All Students “Count.”*** Ensure that all students “count” in the district’s accountability system. Even if there is an insufficient number of students with disabilities (or who are bilingual) taking a TAKS assessment, ensure their performance “matters.”
 - b. ***TAKS-M Overuse.*** Establish parameters for the apparent overuse of the TAKS-M, including monitoring and campus-administrator accountability.
 - c. ***Students with Challenging Needs.*** Build in incentives and articulate consequences for campus administrators on the enrollment of students with disabilities who may impact AYP or state accountability systems negatively.
 - d. ***Over-identification.*** Set goals and explicit targets for reducing the over-identification of African American and other students for special education. Include goals and targets into principal evaluation procedures. In addition, embed accountability for this activity into the Superintendent’s Educator Quality Plan for diversity, cultural proficiency, and inclusion.
 16. ***Engage East Austin schools in the development of a co-accountability framework and expedite its use in these schools.*** As the co-accountability framework referred to in Recommendation 14 is being developed, involve representatives of the East Austin team to obtain feedback of its potential usefulness, practicality, and effectiveness.
 17. ***Enhance use of the Special Education Department’s Operating Guidelines for Special Education.***
 - a. ***RTI.*** Review the department’s Operating Guidelines and provide additional information on the use of RTI based on the framework developed pursuant to Recommendation 1.
 - b. ***Eligibility Criteria.*** Add specificity to the district’s eligibility criteria for special education, particularly in the area of intellectual and emotional/behavior disabilities in order to support consistent and appropriate identification and decision making.
 - c. ***Web Site.*** Post the Operating Guidelines on the Special Education Department’s Web site and include readily available links to pertinent information and relevant forms.
 - d. ***Professional Development.*** Bring together stakeholders to obtain feedback on ways in which the contents of the Special Education Operating Guidelines might be communicated more effectively. Consider the development of a questionnaire that can be used to “certify” the working knowledge of the document by stakeholders, e.g., Special

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Education Department administrators, campus administrators, department chairs, special educators, parents, etc.

18. Increase the usefulness of SEEDS and the features of its data reports.

- a. SEEDS.*** With a knowledgeable stakeholder group, review the Special Education Electronic Document System (SEEDS) to determine whether it is possible to reduce the large number of IEP pages produced and to streamline SEED's usage.
- b. Analytical Data Reports.*** Review all Special Education Department reports to identify those having only raw numbers and determine additional analysis that could be conducted to make the reports more informative, and modify accordingly.
- c. PBS Data in Six-Weeks Report.*** Research the PBS start-date for schools, including the Department of Program Evaluation's report, to ensure that the dates on identification and representation are consistent and correct.

CHAPTER 5. SYNOPSIS AND DISCUSSION

Austin schools superintendent Meria Carstarphen asked the Council of the Great City Schools to review the school district's special education operations and services, and provide recommendations for improving programs for students with disabilities. The Council assembled a team of experts with firsthand experience in running special education programs in major city school systems and direct familiarity with federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) programs and requirements. The team interviewed scores of people, both individually and in groups. Team members also reviewed an extensive number of documents and reports, and they analyzed data on Austin school district programs and results.

On the basis of this work, the team made a series of observations and recommendations in four major areas: the identification and placement of special education students; the instruction and performance of students with disabilities; the organization and staffing of special education services; and accountability for results. In this report, the team presents its findings in summary form, and then in more detail, highlighting signs that it found encouraging, as well as those about which it had concerns.

In general, the team found that the Austin schools did not have an unusual proportion of its students identified as disabled. The rates were below national averages but somewhat higher than rates statewide. However, the district did have higher than expected percentages among students who were learning disabled, other health impaired, and autistic. The prevalence of learning disabilities has declined over the last several years, while rates of autism have increased substantially. Rates among students with other health impairments, intellectual disabilities, and emotional/behavioral disabilities have remained relatively steady over the last five to 10 years. As in other major urban school districts, disability identification rates are higher in the secondary grades than in the elementary ones.

The Council's team also found that students with disabilities in the Austin Independent School District typically achieved at higher levels in reading and math at both the fourth- and eighth-grade levels than their disabled peers in other major city school districts and nationally, according to data on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). State scores also indicate that achievement among students with disabilities is increasing. But, similar to the pattern in many urban school districts, the Austin school system has a lower graduation rate and higher dropout rate among its disabled students than statewide averages.

The results of the Council study also indicated that the district has strong and very skilled leadership in both general instruction and special education. Any major school district in the country would consider itself fortunate to have such expert staff.

The Austin Independent School District also had good data systems, and was able to respond quickly to every request that the Council's team made for additional information. It also appeared that school-based staff members were generally adept at the use of data to inform instructional decisions and changes.

In addition, the school district appeared more responsive to parents and the community than the team often sees in other major city school systems. The system is not perfect and there

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are a considerable number of vocal complaints, but the school district welcomes the input even when it is sometimes unfavorable. Finally, the team was generally impressed by the strategic way that the district used its IDEA funds provided under the stimulus program to improve capacity and operations.

At the same time, the district has an organizational structure governing the district's special educational programming that is splintered. The structure puts several related special education functions in disparate departments, making it difficult to coordinate responsibilities and staff resources. The results seemed most evident in the coordination of behavioral supports and Response to Intervention, problem areas that fed perceptions among some parents that they needed strong advocacy and even legal help to leverage district services.

Moreover, the district has some difficulty in defining who is responsible for what in special education, and redundancies exist in staff duties. This is partly the result of a disconnected organizational structure and partly the result of a weak accountability system that fails to hold people responsible for special education services—good and bad. We did not see strong evidence that staff members, principals, or others were evaluated on their ability to address problem areas that plagued the district's special education results.

In addition, a number of previous reports have pointed out—and this report affirmed—that special education resources were not deployed equitably or transparently.

The team also found that African American students were more likely—some 3.86 times more likely in the area of emotional or behavioral disability—to be identified as disabled. African American students were 2.24 times more likely to be identified as intellectually disabled as their peers. Hispanic students were also prone to be over-identified. And our review showed that African American students were often suspended more often than were their white and Hispanic peers.

In general, the district also had its special education students in segregated settings at a higher rate than state or federal standards suggest. Some of this pattern was a result of the district's attending more directly to looser state requirements in this area than the stricter federal guidelines.

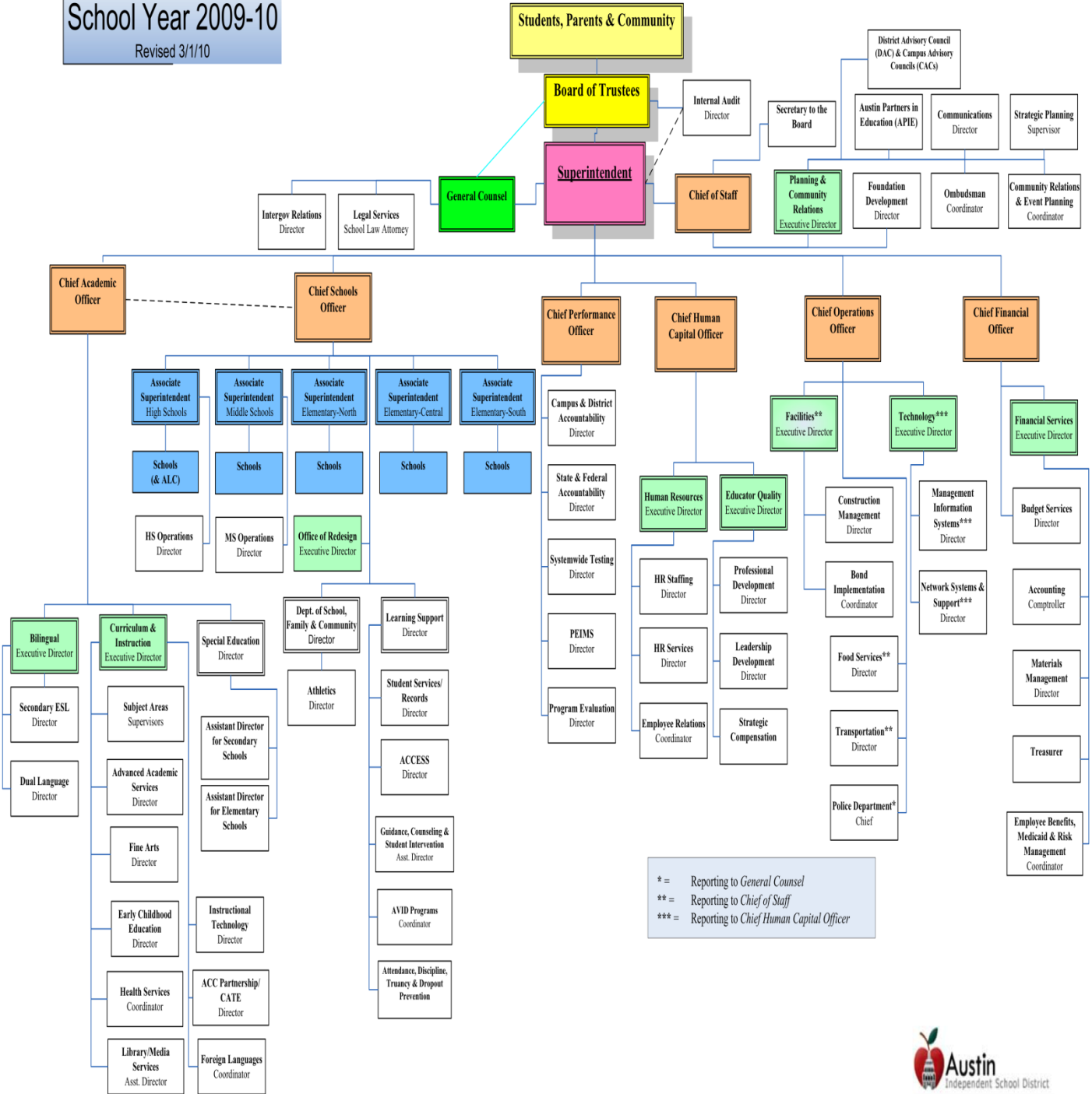
Finally, the Council's team has proposed a reasonably small number of steps that it feels the district should take to improve its special education services. These recommendations focus mostly on areas involving organizational structure and coordination, accountability for results, instructional interventions, data reporting, and the disproportionate identification, suspension, and isolation of African American students. The Council also has recommendations on the apparent overuse of the TAKS-M and records transfer procedures.

The Austin Independent School district can improve its special education services in a large number of ways, but the school system's programming and student results were far better than those in most other big cities that the Council has reviewed in the last several years. In fact, the Austin school system has all the right pieces to be a real leader in special education across the country if the district puts them together in the right way. The Council has confidence that the school system's leadership has both the commitment and the skill to make that happen.

**APPENDIX A. AISD AND SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
ORGANIZATIONAL CHARTS**

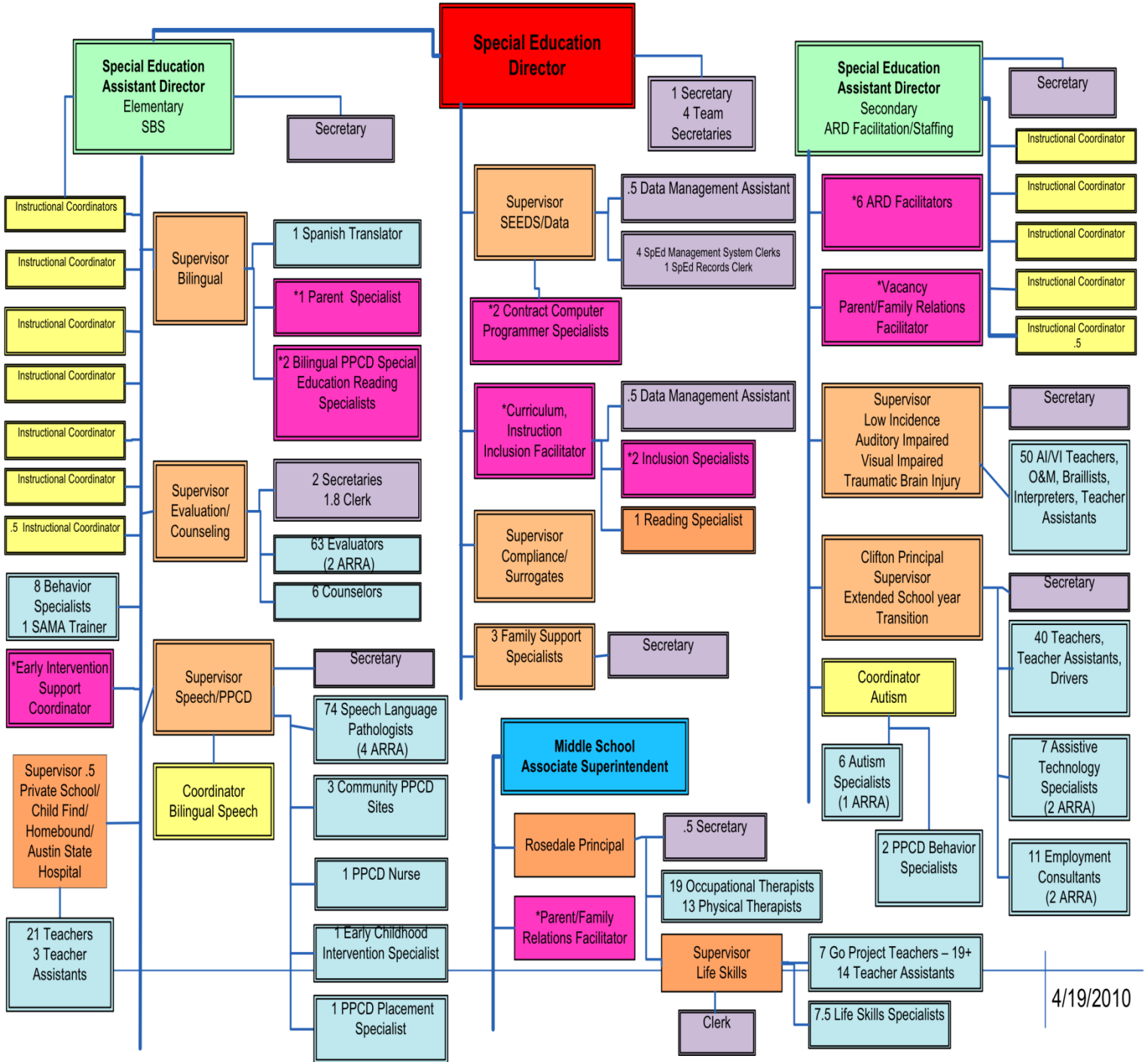
Appendix A. AISD and Special Education Department Organizational Chart

School Year 2009-10
Revised 3/1/10



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AUSTIN ISD SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

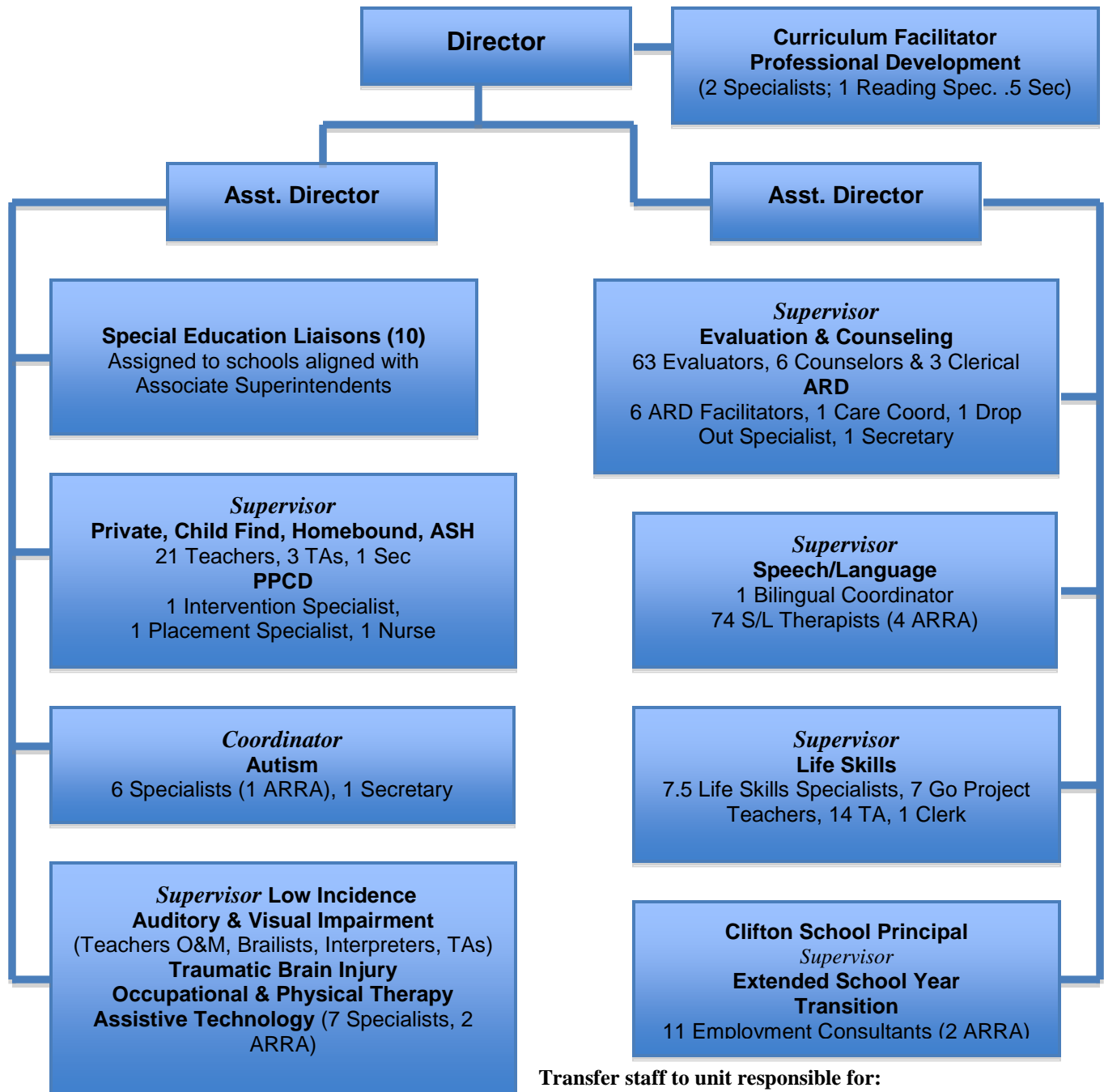


4/19/2010

*Stimulus/ARRA Funded

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Draft Special Education Organizational Structure for Discussion Only



Transfer staff to unit responsible for:

CAO: Compliance Supervisor (retain surrogate parent assignment in Special Education), SEEDS/DATA Supervisor (1 Data Management Assistant, 4 Special Education Management Systems Clerk, 1 Record Clerk)

RTI: EIS Coordinator

Parent Family Relations: Vacant Facilitator

Homebound & PRS services

2 Special Education Nurses

Consider consolidating all behavior-support under the Special Education unit.

APPENDIX B. INCIDENCE RATES AND STAFFING RATIOS

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Appendix B. Incidence Rates and Staffing Ratios*

Incidence Rates and Staffing Survey of Urban School Districts: Special Educators, Paraprofessionals, Speech/Language Pathologists, and Psychologists

	Total Student Enrollment	SwD Incidence		Sp Educator			Teacher Asst			Speech/Lang			Psychologist		
		% SwD	SwD Enr	Number	Ratio To:		Number	Ratio To:		Number	Ratio To:		Number	Ratio To:	
					SwD	Enr		SwD	Enr		SwD	Enr		SwD	Enr
Agawam Public Schools	4,347	15%	656	39	17	112	100	7	44	15	44	290	3	219	1449
Atlanta Public Schools	43,443	11%	4,950	431	11	101	224	22	194	65	76	688	22	225	1975
Austin Pub S D	84676	10%	8,062	772.5	10.4	110	824	9.7	103	70.5	114	1201	34.6	233	2447
Baltimore City Publ Sch	82,824	16%	12,866	1,121	12	74	620	21	134	92	140	901	12	NA	NA
Boston Public Schools	54,966	21%	11,534	1200	10	47	800	14	70	147	78	383	48	240	1173
Cambridge PublSchools	6,000	20%	1,200	176	7	35	103	12	59	20	60	300	22	55	273
Chicago Public Schools	419,272	13%	52,409	3,753	14	112	2,905	18	145	392	134	1072	235	223	1788
Clark Cty School Dist	309,476	10%	32,167	2,247	15	138	1,346	24	230	299	108	1036	180	179	1720
Cleve Hts-Univ Hts Cty	6,000	18%	1,100	83	14	73	58	19	104	7	158	858	8	NA	NA
D.C. Public Schools	48,991	18%	8,603	669	13	74	653	14	76	90	96	545	78	111	629
Davenport Comm Sch	15,302	12%	1,857	188	10	82	287	7	54	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Deer Valley Unified SD	36,086	9%	3,289	190	18	190	229	15	158	49	68	737	108	31	335
Denver Public Schools	78,352	12%	9,142	592	16	133	528	18	149	94	98	834	98	94	800
ESD 112	13,764	14%	1,987	55	37	251	158	13	88	20	100	689	12	166	1147
Everett Public Schools	6,100	17%	1,049	74	15	83	51	21	178	4	263	1525	5	210	1220
Fort Worth	79,885	8%	6,144	520	12	154	450	14	178	73	85	1095	31	199	2577
Houston Indepen SD	200,568	9%	17,489	1,625	11	124	1,145	16	176	158	111	1270	150	116	1337
Kalamazoo Pub Schools	12,100	14%	1,667	70	24	173	79	22	154	15	112	807	NA	NA	NA
Kyrene School District	17,910	9%	1,544	141	11	128	124	13	145	27	58	664	14	111	1280
Lakota Local	18,500	10%	1,800	126	15	147	120	15	155	39	47	475	18	100	1021
LAUSD	632,881	13%	82,326	4,470	19	142	8,470	10	75	379	218	1670	599	138	1057
Lincoln	1,060	12%	128	21	7	51	21	7	51	5	26	212	2	64	530
Marlborough Public Sch	4,835	25%	1,198	141	9	35	115	11	43	7	172	691	4	300	1209
Memphis City	110,863	15%	16,637	912	19	122	655	26	170	53	314	2092	58	287	1912
Miami-Dade	376,264	11%	40,012	2,500	17	151	1,226	33	307	209	192	1801	206	195	1827
Montgomery Cty Sch	146,812	12%	17,226	1,588	11	93	1,398	13	106	293	59	502	97	178	1514
New Bedford	12,692	21%	2,655	204	14	63	205	13	62	26	103	489	9	295	1411
Oak Park Sch Dist 97	5,400	16%	875	78	12	70	90	10	60	14	63	386	8	110	675
Pittsburgh Pub Schools	28,000	18%	5,096	359	14	78	252	20	110	40	127	700	16	319	1749
Round Rock	43,000	8%	3,313	369	9	117	171	20	252	41	81	1049	29	115	1483
San Diego Unified SD	132,500	12%	16,300	1,100	15	121	1,300	13	102	196	84	677	129	NA	NA
Saugus, MA	3,012	15%	462	28	17	108	29	16	104	6	77	502	NA	NA	NA
Sch Dist of Philadelphia	168,181	20%	33,686	1,535	22	110	610	56	276	99	341	1699	100	337	1682
Sun Prairie Area S Dist	6,656	10%	697	62	12	108	93	8	72	14	50	476	7	100	951
Tucson Unified SD	56,000	14%	8,092	409	20	137	419	20	134	61	133	919	54	150	1038
Washoe County Sc Dist	63,310	14%	8,551	472	19	135	325	27	195	77	112	823	37	232	1712
Williamson Cnty Sch	30,942	13%	4,093	227	19	137	383	11	81	34	121	911	23	178	1346
Worcester	24,825	21%	5,172	254	21	98	366	15	68	38	137	654	NA	NA	NA
Portland Public Schools	46,596	14%	6,513	355	19	132	535	13	88	92	71	507	56	117	833

Improving Special Education Services in the Austin Independent School District

Ratios for Social Workers, Nurses, OTs and PTs *

	Total Student Enrollment	Total SWD	Social Worker			Nurse			OT		PT	
			Number	Ratio To: SWD	Ratio To: Enr	Number	Ratio To: SWD	Ratio To: Enr	Number	Ratio SWD	Number	Ratio SWD
Agawam Public Schools	4,347	656	0	NA	NA	8	82	544	3	219	3	219
Atlanta Public Schools	43,443	4,950	30	165	1448	58	85	511	12	413	3	1650
Austin Pub S D	84,676	8,062	21	384	4032	68*	119	1245	19	424	13	620
Baltimore City Public	82,824	12,866	193	67	430	78	165	1062	20	644	5	2574
Boston Public Schools	54,966	11534	6	NA	NA	100	115	563	67	172	17	680
Cambridge PublSchools	6,000	1,200	16	75	375	0	NA	NA	16	75	7	172
Chicago Public Schools	419,272	52,409	358	119	1174	336	156	1250	106	494	37	1416
Clark Cty School Dist	309,476	32,167	26	NA	NA	173	186	1789	68	474	29	1100
Cleve Hts-Univ Hts Cty	6,000	1,100	7	158	858	5	220	1200	2	550	1	1100
D.C. Public Schools	48,991	8,603	90	96	545	127	68	386	48	180	16	538
Davenport Comm Sch	15,302	1,857	NA	NA	NA	7	266	2186	NA	NA	NA	NA
Deer Valley Unified SD	36,086	3,289	0	NA	NA	37	89	976	19	174	4	823
Denver Public Schools	78,352	9,142	74	124	1059	77	119	1018	25	366	12	762
ESD 112	13,764	1,987	0	NA	NA	5	398	2753	6	332	3	663
Everett Public Schools	6,100	1,049	2	525	3050	11	96	555	2	525	3	350
Fort Worth	79,885	6,144	2	NA	NA	106	58	754	16	384	10	615
Houston Indepen SD	200,568	17,489	26	673	7715	25	700	8020	17	1029	8	2187
Kalamazoo Pub Schools	12,100	1,667	5	334	2420	2	834	6050	4	417	3	556
Kyrene School District	17,910	1,544	0	NA	NA	4	386	4478	2	772	2	772
Lakota Local	18,500	1,800	6	300	3084	14	129	1322	8	225	2	900
LAUSD	632,881	82,326	275	300	2302	575	144	1101	159	518	28	2941
Lincoln	1,060	128	5	26	212	2	64	530	2	64	1	128
Marlborough Public Sch	4,835	1,198	9	134	538	10	120	484	4	300	2	599
Memphis City	110,863	16,637	55	303	2016	68	245	1641	11	1513	9	1849
Miami-Dade	376,264	40,012	35	NA	NA	206	195	1827	65	616	23	1740
Montgomery Cty Sch	146,812	17,226	14	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	112	154	61	283
New Bedford	12,692	2,655	67	40	190	30	89	424	11	242	3	885
<i>NYC District 75</i>	<i>23,216</i>	<i>23,216</i>	<i>94</i>	<i>247</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>195</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>213</i>	<i>109</i>
Oak Park Sch Dist 97	5,400	875	12	73	450	8	110	675	7	1125	1	875
Pittsburgh Pub Schools	28,000	5,096	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Round Rock	43,000	3,313	0	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	10	332	3	1105
San Diego Unified SD	132,500	16,300	3	NA	NA	129	127	1028	40	408	10	1630
Saugus, MA	3,012	462	4	116	753	5	93	603	2	231	1	462
Sch Dist of Philadelphia	168,181	33,686	31	NA	NA	280	121	601	20	1685	20	1685
Sun Prairie Area S Dist	6,656	697	8	88	832	1	NA	NA	5	140	2	349
Tucson Unified SD	56,000	8,092	26	312	2154	53	153	1057	10	810	4	2023
Washoe County Sc Dist	63,310	8,551	0	NA	NA	35	248	1836	12	713	7	1222
Williamson Cnty Sch	30,942	4,093	4	1024	7736	37	111	837	22	187	5	819
Worcester	24,825	5,172	0	NA	NA	0	NA	NA	12	431	5	1035
Portland Public Schools	46,596	6,513	10	652	4660	0	NA	NA	20	326	9	724

* Survey data collected by the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative (April 2010)
 Boston Public Schools data provided through a review by the Council of Great City Schools (Oct. 2009)
 Pittsburgh Public Schools data provided through review by the Council of Great City Schools (Feb. 2010)
 Chicago Public Schools data provided to the Council of Great City Schools (January 2010)
 Austin Public Schools data provided to the Council of Great City Schools (April 2010)

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Staffing Ratios (One Adult to Specified Number of Students with Disabilities)

Austin data is in red and bolded; data for other Texas districts is bolded and highlighted in orange.
Note: the lower the number, the more staff to students are available.

Incidence	Special Educator	Teach Asst	Speech Lang	Psych	Social Worker	OT	PT
8%	7	7	26	31	40	64	75
8%	7	7	47	55	67	68	120
9%	9	7	50	64	73	82	140
9%	9	8	58	94	75	85	154
9%	10	10	59	100	88	89	172
10%	10	10	60	100	96	89	174
10%	10	10	63	110	116	93	180
10%	11	11	68	111	119	96	219
10%	11	11	71	111	124	110	187
11%	11	12	76	116	134	111	225
11%	11	13	77	117	158	115	231
12%	12	13	78	138	165	119	242
12%	12	13	81	150	247	119	300
12%	12	13	84	166	300	120	326
12%	12	13	85	178	300	121	332
12%	13	13	96	178	303	127	332
13%	14	14	98	179	312	129	366
13%	14	14	100	195	334	144	384
13%	14	14	103	199	384	153	408
14%	14	15	108	210	525	156	413
14%	15	15	111	223	652	165	417
14%	15	15	112	225	673	186	424
14%	15	16	112	232	1024	195	431
14%	15	16	114	233	NA	245	494
15%	16	18	121	240	NA	248	518
15%	17	18	127	287	NA	266	525
15%	17	19	133	295	NA	386	550
16%	17	20	134	300	NA	398	616
16%	18	20	137	319	NA	700	644
17%	19	20	140	337	NA	834	713
18%	19	21	158	NA	NA	NA	772
18%	19	21	172	NA	NA	NA	810
18%	19	22	192	NA	NA	NA	1029
20%	19	22	218	NA	NA	NA	1125
20%	20	24	263	NA	NA	NA	1513
21%	21	26	314	NA	NA	NA	1685
21%	22	27	341	NA	NA	NA	NA
21%	24	33	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
25%	37	56	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Averages

14% **15** **17** **117** **173** **190** **468** **1004**

APPENDIX C. INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

Appendix C. Individuals Interviewed

Cheryl Bradley	Teddia Lewis	Martha Garcia	Rosemary Alexander
Andri Lyons	Wendy Bruck	Viviana Lopez	Claudia Santamaria
Ann LaQuey	Jamie Reeck	Annette Gregory	Betty Lou La Caze
Dixie Huckabee	Jean Fiske	Celia Glick	Elsa Lopez
F. Linelle Clark-Brown	Alice Busola	Dave Sanders	Jeanne Spencer
Juanita Garcia Wagstaff	Bobbie Bolen	Deborah DeStefano	Juanita Painter
Sheila Anderson	Andrew Bennett	Greg Goodman	Lori Merrell
Susan Dodd-Gray	M. Brett Morgan	Jacque Porter	Mike Thomas
Ramona Trevino	Cheryl O'Brien	Jim Granada	Sara Merritt
Michael Houser	Amanda Grantham	Michele Rusnak	Tony Dishner
Paul Cruz	Paul Mitchell	Mollie Avelino	Virginia Haas
Glenn Nolly	Rhonda Thomas	Tracy Lunoff	Peggy Garen
Bergeron Harris	Laura Weigel	Sally Freeman	Anna Pedroza
Ariel Cloud	Angela Funderburgh	Heather Merritt	Blaine Helwig
Claudia Tousek	Joe Underwood	Donald Lee	Carol E. Chapman
Maria Montoya-Hohenstein	Lauren Shipman	Judith Hutchinson	Dora Fabelo
Carolyn Hanschen	Penny Shephard	Raffy Vizcaino	Elizabeth Dickey
Debra Ready	Debra Harper	Randall Thomson	Gilbert Hicks
Holly Williams	Laura Ferrer	John Alawneh	Hector Rodriguez
Mark Billingsley	Jean Sanchez	Kris Hafezizadeh	Linda Webb
Kathy Clayton	Amy Jessee	Melody Parrish	Lori Schneider
Shirley Sanford	Audrey Sifuentes	Norman Self	Lucio Calzada
Melissa De Leon	Katie Sahadi	Paul Turner	Lynda Redler
Thomas Hansen	Kimberly Anderson	John Fuerst	Rafael Soriano
Gail Irwin	Kristy Mathieu	Martha Doolittle	Raul Moreno
Judy Mayo	Krystal Washington	Nancy Phillips	Rene Garganta
Carolyn Wilson	Laurie Barber	Curt Shah- Curt Shaw	Vickie Bauerle
Lisa Rukovena	Lee Warren	Ana Lucio Trevino	Patrick Patterson
Elsa Gonzales	Luz Garcia	Connie Sadowski	Anabel Garza
Mary Ann Rogalewski	Mandy Mathews	Craig Shapiro	Moises Ortiz
Myrna Roos	Martha Adams	Cynthia Valadez	Tina Ryan
Gloria Young	Michelle Noid	Dora Molina	Rene Sanchez
Mel Waxler	Renay Griser	Gerard Jimenez	Lori Ashley
Ylise Janssen	A. Renee Dailey	Kathleen Reisch	Phyllis Robertson
Ashley Brooks	Sean Piper	Kim Stockenbojer	Mary Hughes
Brenda Urps	Susan Naizer	Regina Staffa	Connor Grady
Christa Woodward	Terry Koenig	Roberto Pacini	Joan Bertino
Cindy Baldwin	Marcy Yanez	Kent Hawes	Elvie Swail
Donna Heimann	Don Campbell	Robin Smith	Kathy Ryan
Glkeitha Berry	Mark D. Cunningham	Claire Milam	Ann Jenkins
Jamie Heilingoetter	Maggie Bennett	Allen Weeks	Lindsay Mathews
Jeryl Leifeste	Yvonne Kelso	Alba Ortiz	Rod Reichardt
Judith Hart	Alan Guckian	Alice Marsel	Sue Beam
Karen McKee	Jennifer Woollven	Jessica Smith	Tammy Driskell
Laura Ferrer	Janis Guerrero-Thompson	Shelly Grabe	Nina Zuna
		Le Anne Gernsbacher	

APPENDIX D. DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Appendix D. Documents Reviewed

1. Disability Rates Over Time
2. Disability Rates by Grade Level Over Time
3. Current Percent of Students with Disabilities of Total Enrollment by Disability Areas & Percent of All Students with Disabilities of your Total Enrollment
4. Number of Student with Disabilities by Disability Area Over Time
5. Referral Data Over Time
6. Racial/Ethnic Data
7. Performance – Federal AYP Special Education Rating DRAFT V3
8. Graduation Rate
9. Drop-out Rate
10. Attendance Rates
11. Performance :
 - a. AYP Analysis 2008-2009
 - b. AYP Results from 2008-2009 Math
 - c. AYP Results from 2008-2009 Reading
 - d. Special Education assessment results Comparison vs. 2008
 - e. Special Education TAKS by Objectives with 2nd Math 2009 Math final
 - f. Special Education TAKS by test VERSION with 2nd math 2009
12. Staffing
13. Positive Behavior Support Evaluation
14. Suspensions/Expulsions
15. Educational Settings
16. Data Reports :
 - a. Data Reports
 - b. Recommendations for Principals in area of LRE and Inclusion
 - c. Strategies for Addressing LRE - Removals – Disproportionality
 - d. Strategies for Campuses
17. Overall Goals :
 - a. AISD Strategic Plan 2010-2015
 - b. AISD Strategic Plan 2010 2015 Measurable Outcomes
 - c. Special Education Goals 2009 2010
 - d. Special Education Vision 0809
18. Demographic Data for all of AISD
19. Accountability :
 - a. Accountability
 - b. Campus Admin Appraisal Form
20. Student Performance :
 - a. AYP Work Plan updated March 2010
 - b. Eliminating the Gap Data Collection
21. Student Choice :
 - a. Student Choice Program
 - b. Transfer Policy
22. Response to Intervention :
 - a. Campus RTI Implementation

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- b. Campus Visit Report Pickle Sept09
 - c. DIBELS Summary Report MOY First Grade
 - d. Early Intervening Services
 - e. Early Intervention Services
 - f. Govalle Principal Survey
 - g. Progress Monitoring Tool Reading revised
 - h. Response To Intervention
 - i. Response to Intervention Campus Contact Update
 - j. Response to Intervention Process Chart
 - k. RTI Campus Action Plan Metz
 - l. RTI EIS Campuses revised
 - m. RTI in Austin
 - n. RTI Intro document to Principals Support
 - o. RTI Key Points
 - p. RTI Phases overall
 - q. RTI Reading Model
 - r. RTI Specialist Campus Survey Blank
 - s. RTI Training
 - t. Timeline for RTI 2008
23. Positive Behavior Intervention Supports
24. Organization :
- a. Campus Tracking
 - b. Organizational Chart – Special Education + ALL
 - c. Organizational Structure 4March10
 - d. Special Education Staff
 - e. Vertical Team List 2009-2010
 - f. Organizational Chart Focus Areas Individual Assignments July2009
 - g. Special Education Specialist Organization
25. Case Management :
- a. Dept Chair and Case Manager Roles from Operating Guidelines
 - b. Dept Chair Role
26. High Quality Instruction
27. Referrals
- a. Accommodations & Modifications Speech
 - b. E-IMPACT Process July 2009
 - c. E-Impact Access Process for Impact Team Members Using Access AISD
 - d. E-Impact Access Process For Teachers Using AIMS
 - e. E-Impact AIMS Developmental Screen Shots
 - f. E-Impact Process Special Education
 - g. E-Impact Process Special Education
 - h. FFC (LOCAL)-Impact Teams
 - i. Impact Brochure English
 - j. Impact Brochure Spanish
 - k. Impact Focus Group
 - l. Impact Goal Setting Activity
 - m. Impact Pre-Referral Check List

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- n. Impact Process Focus Group
 - o. Impact Referral Forms Directions Speech
 - p. Impact Review Feedback from SEES Aug2009
 - q. Impact Team Rubric Checklist
 - r. Impact Team Training September & Oct 2009
 - s. Interventions for Lower Level Behavior Issues
 - t. RTI Strategies for Articulation
 - u. RTI Strategies for Expressive Language Concerns
 - v. RTI Strategies for Fluency
 - w. RTI Strategies for Receptive Language Concerns
 - x. RTI Strategies for Social Language Concerns
 - y. Scientifically Based Academic Interventions
 - z. Secondary Teacher Referral Comments Activity
 - aa. Student Referral Form for Speech
 - bb. Teacher Referral Comments Activity
 - cc. The ABC's of Writing Measureable Goals
28. Educational Setting :
- a. Campus Improvement Plan App B Assess Inclusive Practices
 - b. A Configuration of Special Education Services
 - c. Campus Improvement Plan App A Guiding Questions
 - d. Campus Improvement Plan App C LRE Q and A
 - e. Campus Improvement Plan Options for Goal 4 Aug 08
 - f. Dear Principals - Development of Campus Improvement Plan
 - g. LRE Campus Improvement Plan sample App D1
 - h. LRE Campus Improvement Plan App D2
 - i. B&C Educational Setting Initiatives
29. Autism Research based strategies and more State Performance Plan Indicators
30. State Performance Plan Indicators
- a. SPP 11,12,13 CAP 12Dec09
 - b. SPP Austin 2009 reporting from 07-08
 - c. SPP Determinations May 2008
 - d. SPP Determinations May 2009
31. Due Process –
- a. Due Process Hearings
 - b. Special Education Due Process - Council of School Attorneys
32. Professional Development :
- a. Dobie Campus Support Plan 2008-09
 - b. Professional Development
 - c. Professional Development 2009-2010 Training
 - d. Professional Development Bilingual Special Education
33. External Reviews
- a. Collier Instructional Review Report to Board
 - b. Decentralization Report Final
 - c. Decentralization Progress Chart in Isolation
 - d. Efficiency Study
 - e. Instructional Review Recommendations Work Plan 9

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- f. LBJ Special Education Compliance Review
- g. Review of Staffing Practices for Students with Disabilities July09
- 34. Policy and Procedures
 - a. Operating Guidelines
 - b. ARD Guide
 - c. Procedure Safeguards
- 35. Fiscal : Expected Roll Forward at End of 2010 & Allocations
- 36. ARRA Funds :
 - a. ARRA IDEA 2011 2012 Anticipated Costs Overview v2draft
 - b. ARRA IDEA Overview Fall 2009 for website - draft project details
 - c. ARRA IDEA Overview Fall 2009 for website Project Details – DRAFT March2010
 - d. ARRA Stimulus Funds
- 37. IEP Technology
- 38. Sample Psychological Evaluation & Eligibility Reports –
 - a. Local Support Team Information
 - b. Sample Initial Evaluation for Jane Doe
 - c. Sample Re-evaluation Report
- 39. State of the District 2009 “Road Map for Continuous Improvement in Special Education”
- 40. NAEP Special Education Results
- 41. Austin ISD Strategic Plan and Major Initiatives
- 42. 2009-2010 Bilingual Special Education Strategic Plan
- 43. Special Education Non-Qualifying Referrals
- 44. Summary of Special Education Community Forum
 - a. January 21, 2010 - St. Ignatius
 - b. January 28, 2010 – Region XIII
- 45. Data Summary of Results from Parent Survey – Superintendent Community Conversation
- 46. “SPEDS UP” Newsletters
 - a. February 2010
 - b. March 2010
- 47. Coop Newsletter Flyers (English & Spanish)
 - a. Fall 2009
 - b. Spring 2010
- 48. Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee Bylaws
- 49. IEP Samples
 - a. Auditory Impairment (AI) – grade EE
 - b. Autism (AU) – grade 11
 - c. Autism/Speech Impairment (AU/SI) – grade 8
 - d. Emotional Disturbance (ED) – grade 11
 - e. Learning Disabled/ Emotional Disturbance (LD/ED) – grade 8
 - f. Learning Disabled (LD) – grade 4
 - g. Learning Disabled (LD) – grade 7
 - h. Life Skills (Bilingual) (LS) – grade 1
 - i. Orthopedic Impairment/Speech Impairment/Visual Impairment (OI/SI/VI) – grade 8
 - j. Speech Impairment (Bilingual Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities (PPCD)) (SI) – grade EE

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- k. Speech Impairment (Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities (PPCD)) (SI) – grade EE
 - l. Autism/Speech Impairment (AU/SI) (Social Communication Resources and Services (Bilingual)) – grade 1
 - m. Autism/Speech Impairment (AU/SI) (Social Communication Resources and Services) – grade 1
 - n. Speech Impairment (SI) (Bilingual) – grade EE
 - o. Speech Impairment (SI) – grade 3
42. Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS)
- a. Austin HS 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - b. Dobie MS 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - c. Elem 1 Gullett 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - d. Elem 1 McBee 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - e. Elem 1 Ortega 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - f. Elem 2 Graham 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - g. Elem 2 Overton 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - h. Elem 3 Kiker 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - i. Elem 3 Williams 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - j. Garza HS 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - k. Gorzycki MS 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - l. Kealing MS 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - m. Lanier HS 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - n. Paredes MS 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
 - o. Travis HS 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
43. Additional Data:
- a. Disability Rates Over Time
 - b. Disability Rates by Grade Level Over Time
 - c. Current Percent SwDs of Total Enrollment by Disability Areas
 - d. Number of SwDs by Disability Area Over Time
 - e. Referral data for 06-07SY
 - f. Referral data for 06-07SY
 - g. Referral data for 08-09SY
 - h. Racial Ethnic Data
 - i. Graduation Rate
 - j. Dropout Rate
 - k. Suspensions Expulsions
 - l. Educational Settings
 - m. Activities to Address Overrepresentation 27Apr10
 - n. Alternative Learning Center
 - o. ARD Guide MAR 2010
 - p. Child Find Query-Completed ARDs ONLY 1Apr10
 - q. Clifton CDS
 - r. Counseling for Special Education Students 12-09-09 27Apr10
 - s. Counselor Level of Service Form 12-09-09 27Apr10
 - t. ELL Status by Disability
 - u. Ethnic Representation by Primary Disability

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- v. Evaluation Reports - Child Find-Completed ARDs ONLY
- w. Evaluation Reports - Initial Referrals
- x. Evaluation Reports - Initial Referrals
- y. Evaluation Reports – Reevaluations
- z. Evaluation Reports – Reevaluations
- aa. Folder Tracking Query
- bb. Initial Referrals
- cc. Janna's weekly report 12Apr10
- dd. Longitudinal Identification
- ee. LRE Systems Comparison
- ff. LRE Systems Comparison and 504
- gg. New Placements outside the control of an ARD Committee
- hh. Outcomes African American Instructional Arrangement 40 1-29-2010
- ii. Paraprofessionals
- jj. PBMAS Overton E.S. 4th 6-wks Report 1Mar10
- kk. Procedural Safeguards 2Feb09
- ll. Report of New Referrals of Students Not Currently Enrolled
- mm. Report of Students Missing LD Areas
- nn. Request Centralized Placement
- oo. Rosedale
- pp. SC-LRE 125% Ratio
- qq. SEMS Clerk Duties
- rr. Special Ed. Route Suggestion 28Apr10
- ss. Special Education Data Snapshot Pivot Table-Chart
- tt. Special Education Data Snapshot Pivot Table-Chart
- uu. Special Education Transfers from Outside the District
- vv. Special Education Transfers from Outside the District
- ww. Special Programs - Bilingual Resource Program
- xx. Special Programs - Bilingual Resource Program
- yy. SpEd Counselor Caseload 08-09 28Apr10
- zz. SpEd Counselors Duties & Schedule 2009-2010 27Apr10
- aaa. Students with Assistive Technology Devices
- bbb. Students with Assistive Technology Devices
- ccc. Tiered PD Model Samples
- ddd. SpEd Dept Organizational Chart (Adobe)16April10
- eee. Team Secretary Job Duties

APPENDIX E. WORKING AGENDA

Appendix E. Working Agenda

Tuesday, April 13, 2010	
5:45-8:30 PM	Team Dinner and Meeting with Superintendent
Wednesday, April 14, 2010	
8:15-9:00 AM	Directors, Coordinators of RTI, Impact, 504, EIS, Discipline, Professional Development
9:00-10:00 AM	Chief Academic Officer, Chief Performance Officer, Chief Human Capital, and Chief Schools Officer : Trevino and Houser attended , met with Paul Cruz on 14th
10:00-11:00 AM	All Associate Superintendents of AISD
11:00-Noon	Accountability
12:00-12:30 PM	LUNCH—Director of Special Education
12:30-1:30 PM	Texas Education Agency Special Education IDEA Leadership
1:30-2:45 PM	Special Education Instructional Coordinators and Supervisors for Homebound and Private Schools
2:45-3:00 PM	Break
3-3:45 PM	General Counsel and other appropriate Special Education Attorneys from Legal Services
4-5:00 PM	Special Education Teachers
5:00-6:00 PM	General Education Teachers
6:00PM-midnight	Working Dinner- Special Education Director and CAO worked with the team for a few hours that evening

Thursday, April 15, 2010

8:00-8:45 AM	Executive Directors of Human Resources, Educator Quality, Curriculum, Bilingual, Planning and Community Relations etc.
8:45-10:00 AM	Curriculum Directors, Advanced Academics, ESL, Dual language, Bilingual Career/Tech, Early Childhood, Health, Library, Fine Arts, PE
10:00-11:00 AM	Employee Associations, including ED Austin
11:00-12:00 AM	Finance: Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operations Officer
12:00- 1:00 PM	Working Lunch: Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee
1:00-1:30 PM	Parent/Family Support
1:30-2:45 PM	Special Education Supervisors
2:45-3 PM	Break
3-4 PM	Principals Elementary, Middle and High Schools
4-5 PM	Assistant Directors of Elementary and Secondary
5-6 PM	Parents and Advocacy Groups
6:00 PM – 2 AM	Working dinner and debriefing from the day; work on initial findings for positive areas and areas of

Friday, April 16, 2010

8:30 AM - 12:30 PM	Prepare for meeting with Superintendent; complete work on recommendations
12:30 - 1:00 PM	Working Lunch
1:15 – 2:45	Debriefing of Superintendent Carstarphen (via speaker phone) and Trevino, Cruz and Lilly

APPENDIX F. STRATEGIC SUPPORT TEAM

Appendix F. Strategic Support Team

Sue Gamm, Esq.

Sue Gamm, a nationally recognized expert on special education, formerly served as Chief Specialized Services Officer for the Chicago Public Schools and Division Director for the Office for Civil Rights, Region V (Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin). She has participated on Strategic Support Teams provided by the Council of the Great City Schools for school districts in the District of Columbia (1998), Guilford County, N.C., (2003), Richmond, Va., (2003), St. Louis (2003), Charleston, (2005), Milwaukee (2007), New York City, District 75 (2008), Rochester (2008), Boston (2009), and Philadelphia (2009). Ms. Gamm recently served as consulting attorney on the Council's amicus brief in support of the New York City Board of Education in *Board of Education of the City School District of the City of New York v. Tom F., On Behalf of Gilbert F., A Minor Child* (2007). She currently consults with the Illinois State Board of Education on the state's monitoring of the Chicago Public Schools on least restrictive environment (LRE) as part of the district's implementation of the *Corey H. v. ISBE* settlement agreement. Further, she consults with the Public Consulting Group and numerous school districts and state educational agencies and provides training at national, state, and local conferences on special education matters, particularly in the area of special education disproportionality. Ms. Gamm was an expert in 2006 for the plaintiffs in *Blackman v. District of Columbia, et. al.*, Civil Action No. 97-1629 (PLF) Consolidated with Civil Action No. 97-2402 (PLF) in the areas of special education policies, procedures, and practices. In Baltimore, she completed a review of special education services in 2004-05 for the city's public schools and was an expert for plaintiffs *Vaughn G., et al. v. Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, et al.*, Civil Action No. MJG-84-1911. Ms. Gamm has also done extensive special education consultation on LRE issues for the Los Angeles County School District and is a consultant for the class action consent decree in Los Angeles. Finally, Ms. Gamm has provided expert advice over the past five years to the New York City Board of Education. This assistance included writing a *Principal's Quick Reference Guide to Special Education* (2003). Ms. Gamm graduated with high honors from University of Illinois with a B.A. degree in regular and special education (1970) and earned a law degree from the De Paul College of Law (1976). She is admitted to practice before the Illinois Bar, the Federal, Bar and the U.S. Supreme Court Bar.

Carolyn Guess

Carolyn Guess is the Assistant Superintendent of Special Education for the Houston Independent School District, the largest school district in the state of Texas and the sixth-largest in the nation. In this capacity, she provides leadership for the implementation of instruction and related services for the district's 17,000 students with disabilities in compliance with federal laws, state laws, and requirements from the state education agency. In addition, she has developed policies and procedures, operating guidelines, and curriculum and instruction guidelines for the delivery of special education services, which impact the education of this student population in the district's 300 schools, hospitals and homebound services, and nonpublic schools. Specifically, she has implemented the assistive technology team, autism team, summer enrichment program, standards for districtwide instructional programs for reading and mathematics, the coordination of psychological and social work services, and services for students in nonpublic school placements.

Ms. Guess has been selected to serve on national, state, and local committees, as well as on the board of organizations to provide input related to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for students with disabilities. During her tenure, she has been recognized as Special Education Director of the Year, and developed specialized programs for speech therapy services, autism, assistive technology, inclusive education, and behavior programs. Ms. Guess has participated in special education program evaluations for school districts throughout the nation. This work has provided recommendations to school districts for improvements in the delivery of special education instructional and related services for students with disabilities, as well as for the professional and paraprofessional staff, and administrators providing those services.

Will Gordillo

Will Gordillo is the Administrative Director for the Division of Special Education for Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the fourth-largest school district in the nation serving approximately 40,000 students with disabilities. In this role, he provides leadership for program planning and implementation, professional development, curriculum and instruction, and compliance in special education. In addition, his office oversees the direct operation of five exceptional student education centers serving students with emotional/behavioral disabilities and significant intellectual disabilities requiring the highest level of service intensity. He has extensive expertise in the areas of emotional/behavioral disabilities, inclusive practices, schoolwide positive behavior support, and the development of specialized programs for student ages 16-22 in collaboration with community-based organizations. In his present position, he has overseen the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Florida Inclusion Network, the Miami-Dade/Monroe Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities (SEDNET), and Schoolwide Positive Behavior, and Florida Diagnostic Learning Resource System-South (FDLRS-S) grants. Mr. Gordillo has been an active administrative representative on the United Teachers of Dade County Special Education Task Force, the Superintendent's Advisory Panel for Students with Disabilities, and the Autism Task Force. He has been instrumental in developing a Local Education Agency (LEA) Resource Guide for program specialists, implementing a computerized individualized education program (IEP) system, and developing a plan of action to serve students with disabilities at or in close proximity to their home schools

Julie Wright Halbert, Esq.

Julie Halbert has been legislative counsel for the Council of the Great City Schools for more than 14 years. In that capacity, she has served as a national education legal and policy specialist, with emphasis on special education. She worked extensively on the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 and 2004. Ms. Halbert is responsible for drafting numerous technical provisions to the IDEA and providing technical assistance to Congress and the U. S. Department of Education. In 1997 and, again, in 2005, she testified before the U.S. Department of Education on its proposed regulations on IDEA 2004. Ms. Halbert has directed each of the Council's special education review teams, including special education reviews in the District of Columbia, Guilford County, Richmond, St. Louis, Charleston, New York City, Rochester, Boston, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. She was also the counsel of record for the Council of the Great City Schools' amicus briefs in the Supreme Court of the United States in (a)

Board of Education of the City School District of the City of New York v. Tom F., On Behalf of Gilbert F., A Minor Child (2007); (b) *Jacob Winkelman, a Minor By and Through His Parents and Legal Guardians, Jeff and Sander Winkelman, et.al., v. Parma City School District* (2007); (c) *Brian Schaffer v. Jerry Weast, Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools, et.al.*, (2005); (d) *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District and Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education* (2007) and *Forest Grove School District v. T.A.*, (2009). Ms. Halbert graduated with honors from the University of Maryland and the University of Miami School of Law. She is admitted to practice in the Federal Bar, the U.S. Supreme Court Bar, and the Florida and Pennsylvania Bars.

APPENDIX G. ABOUT THE COUNCIL

Appendix G. About the Council

Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 67 of the nation's largest urban public school systems, including the AISD.²⁹ The organization's Board of Directors is composed of the Superintendent, CEO or Chancellor of Schools, and one School Board member from each member city. An Executive Committee of 24 individuals, equally divided in number between Superintendents and School Board members, provides regular oversight of the 501(c)(3) organization. The composition of the organization makes it the only independent national group representing the governing and administrative leadership of urban education and the only association whose sole purpose revolves around urban schooling.

The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public education and assist its members in their improvement and reform. The Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The group convenes two major conferences each year; conducts studies of urban school conditions and trends; and operates ongoing networks of senior school district managers with responsibilities for areas such as federal programs, operations, finance, personnel, communications, research, and technology. Finally, the organization informs the nation's policymakers, the media, and the public of the successes and challenges of schools in the nation's Great Cities. Urban school leaders from across the country use the organization as a source of information and an umbrella for their joint activities and concerns.

The Council was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961, and has its headquarters in Washington, D.C. Since the organization's founding in 1956, geographic, ethnic, language, and cultural diversity has typified the Council's membership and staff.

²⁹ Albuquerque, Anchorage, Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, Birmingham, Boston, Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), Buffalo, Caddo Parish (Shreveport), Charleston County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Christina (Delaware), Cincinnati, Clark County (Las Vegas), Cleveland, Columbus, Dallas, Dayton, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Duval County (Jacksonville), East Baton Rouge, Fort Worth, Fresno, Guilford County (Greensboro, N.C.), Hillsborough County (Tampa), Houston, Indianapolis, Jackson, Jefferson County (Louisville), Kansas City, Little Rock School District, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Memphis, Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Nashville, Newark, New Orleans, New York City, Norfolk, Oakland, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Orange County (Orlando), Palm Beach County, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Portland, Providence, Richmond, Rochester, Sacramento, Salt Lake City, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, St. Louis, St. Paul, Toledo, Washington, D.C., and Wichita.

**History of Council Strategic Support Teams of the
Council of the Great City Schools**

City	Area	Year
Albuquerque		
	Facilities and Roofing	2003
	Human Resources	2003
	Information Technology	2003
	Special Education	2005
	Legal Services	2005
	Safety and Security	2007
Anchorage		
	Finance	2004
	Communications	2008
Atlanta		
	Facilities	2009
	Transportation	2010
Austin		
	Special Education	2010
Birmingham		
	Organizational Structure	2007
	Operations	2008
Boston		
	Special Education	2009
Broward County (FL)		
	Information Technology	2000
	Food Services	2009
Buffalo		
	Superintendent Support	2000
	Organizational Structure	2000
	Curriculum and Instruction	2000
	Personnel	2000
	Facilities and Operations	2000
	Communications	2000
	Finance	2000
	Finance II	2003
	Bilingual Education	2009
Caddo Parish (LA)		
	Facilities	2004
Charleston		
	Special Education	2005
Charlotte-Mecklenburg		
	Human Resources	2007
Cincinnati		

	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Curriculum and Instruction	2009
Chicago		
	Warehouse Operations	2010
Christina (DE)		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2007
Cleveland		
	Student Assignments	1999, 2000
	Transportation	2000
	Safety and Security	2000
	Facilities Financing	2000
	Facilities Operations	2000
	Transportation	2004
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Safety and Security	2007
	Safety and Security	2008
	Theme Schools	2009
Columbus		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Human Resources	2001
	Facilities Financing	2002
	Finance and Treasury	2003
	Budget	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Information Technology	2007
	Food Services	2007
	Transportation	2009
Dallas		
	Procurement	2007
	Staffing Levels	2009
Dayton		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Curriculum and Instruction	2001
	Finance	2001
	Communications	2002
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Budget	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2008
Denver		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Personnel	2001
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Bilingual Education	2006
	Curriculum and Instruction	2008

Des Moines		
	Budget and Finance	2003
Detroit		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2002
	Assessment	2002
	Communications	2002
	Curriculum and Assessment	2003
	Communications	2003
	Textbook Procurement	2004
	Food Services	2007
	Curriculum and Instruction	2008
	Facilities	2008
	Finance and Budget	2008
	Information Technology	2008
	Stimulus planning	2009
Greensboro		
	Bilingual Education	2002
	Information Technology	2003
	Special Education	2003
	Facilities	2004
	Human Resources	2007
Hillsborough County (FLA)		
	Transportation	2005
	Procurement	2005
Houston		
	Facilities Operations	2010
Indianapolis		
	Transportation	2007
	Information Technology	2010
Jackson (MS)		
	Bond Referendum	2006
	Communications	2009
Jacksonville		
	Organization and Management	2002
	Operations	2002
	Human Resources	2002
	Finance	2002
	Information Technology	2002
	Finance	2006
Kansas City		
	Human Resources	2005
	Information Technology	2005
	Finance	2005
	Operations	2005

	Purchasing	2006
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
	Program Implementation	2007
	Stimulus Planning	2009
Little Rock		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2010
Los Angeles		
	Budget and Finance	2002
	Organizational Structure	2005
	Finance	2005
	Information Technology	2005
	Human Resources	2005
	Business Services	2005
Louisville		
	Management Information	2005
	Staffing study	2009
Memphis		
	Information Technology	2007
Miami-Dade County		
	Construction Management	2003
	Food Services	2009
	Transportation	2009
	Maintenance & Operations	2009
	Capital Projects	2009
Milwaukee		
	Research and Testing	1999
	Safety and Security	2000
	School Board Support	1999
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
	Alternative Education	2007
	Human Resources	2009
Minneapolis		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Finance	2004
	Federal Programs	2004
Newark		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2007
	Food Service	2008
New Orleans		
	Personnel	2001
	Transportation	2002
	Information Technology	2003
	Hurricane Damage Assessment	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006

New York City		
	Special Education	2008
Norfolk		
	Testing and Assessment	2003
Orange County		
	Information Technology	2010
Philadelphia		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Federal Programs	2003
	Food Service	2003
	Facilities	2003
	Transportation	2003
	Human Resources	2004
	Budget	2008
	Human Resource	2009
	Special Education	2009
Pittsburgh		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Technology	2006
	Finance	2006
	Special Education	2009
Portland		
	Finance and Budget	2010
	Procurement	2010
	Operations	2010
Providence		
	Business Operations	2001
	MIS and Technology	2001
	Personnel	2001
	Human Resources	2007
Richmond		
	Transportation	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Federal Programs	2003
	Special Education	2003
Rochester		
	Finance and Technology	2003
	Transportation	2004
	Food Services	2004
	Special Education	2008
San Diego		
	Finance	2006
	Food Service	2006
	Transportation	2007

	Procurement	2007
San Francisco		
	Technology	2001
St. Louis		
	Special Education	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Federal Programs	2004
	Textbook Procurement	2004
	Human Resources	2005
Seattle		
	Human Resources	2008
	Budget and Finance	2008
	Information Technology	2008
	Bilingual Education	2008
	Transportation	2008
	Capital Projects	2008
	Maintenance and Operations	2008
	Procurement	2008
	Food Services	2008
Toledo		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
Washington, D.C.		
	Finance and Procurement	1998
	Personnel	1998
	Communications	1998
	Transportation	1998
	Facilities Management	1998
	Special Education	1998
	Legal and General Counsel	1998
	MIS and Technology	1998
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Budget and Finance	2005
	Transportation	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2007
Wichita		
	Transportation	2009