

INCLUSION

Executive Summary

The transforming of the Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) into an inclusive unified school system that serves all children well and together is proposed. Such a system is characterized by: 1) opportunities for all students to be educated with needed supports in the general education environment to the maximum extent appropriate; 2) both general and special educators working together in a collaborative manner; 3) systematic professional development that prepares personnel for the changes and sustains their ongoing efforts; and 4) assessment measures that demonstrate student learning in a variety of ways, and that are used to inform and support instruction.

Factors Propelling and Requiring Systemic Change

The redesign is propelled and required by several current factors:

- federal legislation, especially the reauthorized “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act” (IDEA)
- changes in services delivery as outlined in the California Department of Education draft document, Redesigning Service Delivery for Special Education (1996);
- BUSD’s commitment to serve all of its students well, to build on the progress made, and to achieve compliance, and
- national data demonstrating the effectiveness of inclusive schooling for all students. This includes academic research, as well as positive experiences reported by families, students, teachers, and administrators.

These factors are explained in detail below.

Federal Legislation:

In meeting its obligations per the reauthorized IDEA, the BUSD is mindful of the strong entitlement rights of children with disabilities and their families, the obligation to provide a continuum of services to meet the individual needs of each student with a disability, and the requirement to provide appropriate services in the least restrictive environment. These obligations date back to the passing of P.L. 94-142 (1975). The reauthorized IDEA (1997) goes beyond issues of access; Congress asserted the need for enhanced outcomes and identified the continuing existence of a dual general and special system as restricting these outcomes. The Congressional “findings” section of the new law asserts that the education of students with disabilities will be enhanced by:

1. “having high expectations for students and ensuring their success in the general curriculum...;”
2. “[ensuring] that special education can become a service for such children rather than a place where they are sent...;” and
3. “providing incentives for whole-school approaches...”

California Provisions:

The California Department of Education's draft document, Re-designing Service Delivery for Special Education (1996) presents six "essential elements" for California school districts to address:

1. Access to the core curriculum, and the availability of qualified personnel;
2. On-going evaluation, research-based practices, and prevention;
3. Family involvement, and community partnerships;
4. Assurance of safe and healthy learning environments;
5. Improved articulation between the school levels and other supportive programs to promote a seamless transition throughout schooling into adulthood; and
6. Issues of diversity and working toward the elimination of systemic inequities for students of diverse backgrounds.

BUSD Commitment to All Students;

The BUSD has adopted six strategic goals to ensure successful outcomes for all students:

1. Improve teaching and learning to enhance the academic achievement of all students;
2. Improve staff, family, and community participation in the educational process;
3. Maintain school environments that are safe, secure, and attractive;
4. Build a school environment that is fully integrated in all of its programs and activities and provides equal opportunity for all students;
5. Improve and expand the Early Childhood Education Program and integrate it into the K-12 program; and
6. Increase and expand inter-agency collaboration to better serve our students.

We are proud of the progress of the BUSD in enhancing outcomes for students, particularly in reducing the disparity in academic outcomes among student groups. This is evidenced most recently by the unique combination of an increase in the number and percentage of "minority" students taking the SAT along with an overall rise in performance for each subgroup of students. Pride in these achievements motivates our commitment to build on the success to date and gives confidence in the capacity of the BUSD to do so in an effective manner. At the same time, we recognize that there is more work to do in our schools to achieve success for all students. Bringing the BUSD into compliance for special education students is viewed as an opportunity to build educational capacity for all students. We present the recommendations as measures that will ensure ongoing compliance and enhance excellence for all students.

National and Local Data on the Effectiveness of Inclusive Education:

There is a growing body of research as to the positive academic, behavioral, and social outcomes of inclusive education programs for special and general education students. There are data from large-scale studies, as well as reports from individual school districts and academic researchers. The data addresses academic, behavioral, and social

outcomes, for both disabled and non-disabled students. Reports from administrators, teachers, families, and the students themselves confirm these research findings.¹ These national data are mirrored in the experience of BUSD's Inclusion Program.

Principles of A Redesigned System

To establish a unified and inclusive approach to education that moves from the "pilot" sites of the Inclusion Program to the core of the BUSD, will require the adoption of the following principles, all based on the premise that special education is a service, not a place:

1. access for all students to the core curriculum that is based on the content and performance standards;
2. District departments, programs and services that are coordinated and unified;
3. capacity built at the school site;
4. expanding and creating learning communities, to include school staff, students, families and community members, and;
5. excellence through ongoing monitoring, assessment, and accountability.

In the following sections of this report there are specific recommendations addressed to each of these five principles. Before summarizing them, we want to present a picture that provides a context for them, a view of an inclusive society, an inclusive school, and an inclusive classroom.

Inclusion in Society, Schools, and Classroom

Inclusive schools, according to a study conducted by ten national education organizations,² who comprised the "Working Forum on Inclusive Schools," are characterized by the following factors: a sense of community; leadership; high standards; collaboration and cooperation; changing roles and responsibilities; an array of services; partnership with families; flexible learning environments; strategies based upon research; new forms of accountability; access to the full range of school experiences; and continuing professional development.

In its study of greater than a thousand school districts pursuing inclusive education and school restructuring, the National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI), identified the following seven factors as the components of effective practice: visionary leadership; collaboration (between general and special educators, evaluation

¹ For a summary of these data, see D. K. Lipsky & A. Gartner, (1997). Inclusion and School Reform: Transforming America's classrooms. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., esp. ch. 13

² The ten organizations included the American Association of School Administrators, American Federation of Teachers, the Council for Exceptional Children, the Council of Great City Schools, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Association of State Boards of Education, National Association of State Directors of Special Education, National Education Association, and National School Boards Association. Creating schools for all our Students, (1995) Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

personnel and pedagogues, classroom personnel and related services providers); refocused use of assessment; supports for staff and students (e.g., the “supplemental aids and services” required per IDEA); appropriate funding levels and formulas (i.e., funds follow the student); effective family involvement; and curricula adaptations and effective instructional practices.³

In the inclusive school, all students attend age-appropriate classes. For those students with identified disabilities, necessary supplemental aids and services are provided to assure academic, behavioral, and social success. Classroom supports may include curricula modifications, expanded instructional strategies, adaptations and modifications in the ways of assessing student progress, use of technology, and support personnel.

The changes are designed to enhance outcomes for all students, not just those with disabilities. For those students without identified disabilities, prevention services and learning support services are provided. Increased classroom resources change the general education classroom and make it a successful learning environment for a diverse student population, disabled and nondisabled, and English language learners.

Just as the inclusive classroom serves the full range of students, so, too, it is served by the full range of personnel. Special and general educators work collaboratively.⁴ Those involved in student evaluation work closely with instructional personnel. And, providers of resource room and related services do so in collaboration with classroom teachers. Additionally, it involves a new partnership between families and the school community.

Phases and Processes of Implementation: A Spiral of Change

Just as the components of an inclusive school are integrated in function, so, too, must these recommendations be implemented through an integrated school district system. The bulk of the recommendations involve changes in the ways in which services are provided to students, and, toward the achievement of these changes, and the ways in which school sites are structured and organized. Of equal importance are changes in the relationship between school sites and the District’s departments. While these departments will continue to play leadership and supervisory responsibilities, of central importance here is their role in support of school sites and their primary role in the provision of educational services to children.

The recommended changes are both comprehensive and extensive. Fully implemented, the recommendations will mark a fundamental change in the BUSD. In developing the implementation component of this report, we were guided by the following factors: 1) build on previous efforts, e.g., the Inclusion Program; 2) recognize the extensive nature of the proposed changes; 3) accept the reality of the finite nature of resources available;

³ National Study of Inclusive Education, (1995) New York: National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion. The Graduate School and University Center, the City University of New York.

⁴ Collaborative models take many forms, including team teaching, a specialist teacher assigned to a grade level or core team, or a consultation model.

4) begin changes throughout the system at the start of the process and continue them through the entire course of the effort. Infuse issues of inclusion throughout all of the district's initiatives; 5) build momentum for systemic change over the course of a three year cycle; and 6) pay attention to issues of compliance with all pertinent federal and state mandates.⁵ Most importantly, we recognize that success in this first phase is necessary for ongoing change and the achievement of the overall goals.

Research and experience substantiate that a systemic change of this magnitude can only be achieved if all stakeholder groups become active partners in achieving its goals. There will be a great need to do development work with each of the stakeholder groups throughout the three years of implementation. The extent, magnitude, and intensity of such development and support services to school sites and stakeholder groups will be based upon schools moving from high levels of support to lower levels of support over the course of the three year period.

⁵ A predicate of initiating these changes is for the District to come into compliance with outstanding issues, i.e., to start with a clean slate. The changes themselves will enable the District to remain in compliance.

