

**SEDAC 2009 -2010**  
**END OF YEAR REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Special Education District Advisory Committee (SEDAC) advises the Board of Education to foster understanding of how the district can best meet the needs of our diverse population of Special Education students. SEDAC is currently comprised of 17 members, Staff Liaison, Dr. Sara Woolverton, and two Board Liaisons – Ben Allen and Kelly Pye. SEDAC meets monthly, on the second Tuesday of the month. Below is a summary of the work completed this year and recommendations by our active Ad Hoc Committees.

**I. SEDAC’S FINANCIAL AD HOC COMMITTEE**

SEDAC’s Financial Ad Hoc Committee was created in 2009 to “work with the Director of Special Education, the District’s Chief Financial Officer and the Financial Oversight Committee (FOC) in developing recommendations.” To this end, the Committee worked closely and effectively with the CFO and members of the FOC in assembling and reviewing budget-related reports specific to Special Education finances. Several of the reports reviewed are summarized briefly below followed by the Committee’s preliminary observations and recommendations.

**A. REPORTS:**

**Special Education Five-Year Comparison.** This spread sheet compares actual revenues and expenditures for Special Education from Fiscal Year 2002-03 through Fiscal Year 2007-08 with the Adopted Budget of Fiscal Year 2008-09.

**Special Education Analysis by Year.** This spread sheet covers Fiscal Years 2004-05 through 2007-08 and compares the Adopted Budgets for the Fiscal Years with the Actual Expenditures for those years. The resulting differences are demonstrated as a positive or negative. The report breaks the expenditures into useful categories (*i.e.* Teachers, Support Staff, Administrators, Aides, NPS, etc.), and is used to predict future budgets based on prior costs.

**Chart of Accounts.** This Chart lists the accounting code numbers for the revenue streams and expenditures and is mandated and standardized by the state.

**Comparative Budget Reports.** These Reports compare adopted Special Education budgets with the actual expenditures for Fiscal Years 2006-07 through 2008-09, leading to a working budget for 2009-10. This document breaks out the revenue and expense categories and how they have been tracking over these time periods. Monthly, hourly, and substitute teachers each have lines. There are also lines for psychologists, behavioral specialists, and nurse. It goes on in this manner in some depth. It should be noted that in the Committee’s review process of the Comparative Budget Report, the current CFO found a prior mis-categorization of \$964,055 in the Legal Settlement Costs category that has been noted.

**B. OBSERVATIONS:**

**Special Education Budget and Programs:**

1. As most notably evident from the Five Year Comparison Report and the Special Education Analysis by Year, budgeting for Special Education has involved taking the previous year’s budget, comparing it to the actual expenditures for that year, and then using these figures to create new budget numbers for the coming year. This has become the practice due to the

challenge in accurately predicting the District's Special Education financial needs in advance. As is typical with Special Education, in our District each year a new class of Special Education students are enrolled with an unpredictable mix of eligibilities, students move in and out of Special Education programs mid-year and some general education students are assessed with Special Education needs mid-year. This makes budgeting for Special Education difficult to accurately predict.

2. Several of the Special Education revenue sources are "earmarked" and can only be used for particular uses.
3. There is no report in existence that can accurately or even closely budget a particular Special Education program in the district. Therefore there is no financial metric for analyzing the success of a particular program.

### **Special Education Legal Expenses:**

It is difficult to quantify actual legal costs because the District's reimbursements to lawyers for parents' legal costs are combined in the Chart of Accounts with reimbursements for student services. The district's legal fees and expenses are also difficult to quantify.

### **C. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. The Director of Special Education should continue to participate actively in budgeting for her department in order to more accurately predict Special Education needs and budget for them accordingly.
2. Develop a way to quantify Special Education Programs for internal use so that they can be analyzed more effectively that is not restricted by state accounting practices.
3. Within the Comparative Budget Report, break down the Legal Settlement Costs category. For example, break out service costs, reimbursements with subject matter and legal fees and expenses. It is recommended that the Board continue reporting out these Settlement Costs and that these broken out categories are clearly reflected in the Minutes.
4. Request the CFO to generate a customized internal Comparative Budget Report in August and a Second Interim Report in March. The Committee recommends that these Reports are printed in landscape and include all of the existing categories but also include a column for the then current adopted budget and the differences between the then current adopted budget and the then current known actual expenses as well as a "notes" column to provide any explanation. Second Interim Report – includes the original adopted budget, current with revisions, actual expenses to date.

## **II. SEDAC'S INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY AD HOC COMMITTEE**

SEDAC'S Instructional Technology Ad Hoc Committee was created in the Fall of 2009 to "review and assess the instructional technology in the District's Special Education Classes and report on how our District compares to districts that prioritize technology and utilize technology based curriculum and whether additional/updated equipment and/or software is needed to enable students to become computer literate and allow students and teachers meaningful access to current technology-based curricula." To this end, the Committee created a Survey requesting information regarding the hardware and software currently used in the classrooms and resource rooms. Information was gathered from classrooms and resource rooms at the elementary, middle and high school levels. The results represent a random

sampling of rooms and are preliminary, however, it appears that SMMUSD does not take full advantage of technology currently available to assist in the education of students with special learning needs.

Technology is an integral part of the education of all students, but may be even more significant to students with special needs for whom the traditional models are not always appropriate. Evidence is emerging that advances in technology may benefit students with special learning needs even more than those in general education.

The following are observations extrapolated from the Surveys completed by members of the SMMUSD Special Education teaching staff and recommendations for ways in which the District may be able to improve the use of technology in Special Education.

#### **A. Technology Hardware Observations and Recommendations:**

Hardware (computers) is generally 10 years old or older and was often donated by parents who were upgrading their personal computers. The older computers are very slow and frequently freeze while students are working causing students to lose interest and become frustrated. The Committee recommends that Special Education teachers should have no fewer than 2 student computers per classroom that can effectively run current instructional and assistive software and access the internet in order to use web-based instructional programs.

#### **B. Technology Software Observations and Recommendations:**

Teachers generally have outdated, older software that has often been donated by parents (when the parents are “upgrading”). The programs are slow, riddled with glitches and do not represent what is more generally available for teaching students with special learning needs. At a minimum, teachers should have access to and licensing for current software in the academic areas of reading, writing and math skills.

#### **C. Technology Training Observations and Recommendations:**

Teachers were generally unaware of the various software programs currently available. Often, even if software programs are available, teachers have not been trained in how to use the programs or how to support student use of the programs. Annual professional development should be mandated and provided to teachers to train them on what is available both within the district and in the marketplace for both assistive and instructional technology, how to use the hardware, software and other devices and how to effectively support student use of the hardware, software and other devices.

#### **D. Process and Maintenance Observations and Recommendations:**

There does not appear to be a district-wide well defined and publicized process for how to request upgrades to hardware and what the criteria for upgrades are. Teachers generally waited until their computers did not work at all before requesting an upgrade. Generally, teachers were unaware of the software programs available in our district and/or what licenses we have at various school sites. In many instances software programs were not sought because the classroom hardware would not support their use. The Committee’s recommendations in this area are as follows:

1. A system should be in place at each site to ensure accountability for maintaining and upgrading hardware, tracking and organizing software, and ensuring ongoing technology-related professional development.
2. A district wide user-friendly online software inventory (an “e-library”) should be created to ensure that our teachers know what software is available and how to access it. The e-library

should include licensing information so that teachers know where to go if they want to try a particular program.

3. The Committee recommends that the Board create (or re-create) a Technology District Advisory Committee consisting of members who have an expertise in technology hardware and software that would assist the District in “upgrading” its hardware, creating an e-library and establishing district-wide guidelines and procedures.

### **III. SEDAC’S TRANSITION AD HOC COMMITTEE**

The Transition ad hoc Committee, was created in February of 2010, to discover what pathways are available to students for the post secondary transition from life as a high school student to adult life for individuals with special needs in our district. The Committee consists of five members of SEDAC, two members of the public and three staff members including a Special Education teacher, a program coordinator and the school nurse. Thus far the group has reviewed the "Transition to Adult Living" by the California Department of Education, the Special Education Rights and Responsibilities chapter on transitions published by Protection & Advocacy, Inc, various websites and program offerings from other school districts. The group is in the process of gathering information and putting it into folders with the intent of putting together a handbook similar to the Special Education Parent handbook written by SEDAC. Related to this effort, the District Advisory Committee membership of the Beverly Hills Unified School District have provided the ad hoc with a draft document of their transitions handbook. Members have also attended a post-secondary workshop put together by the nurse, a program coordinator and the Work-ability coordinator at Santa Monica High School in May and June.

### **IV. SEDAC’S ADDITIONAL WORK**

In addition to the Ad Hoc Committee work, outreach and membership of SEDAC members include:

- Leadership and participation in Tri-City SELPA Community Advisory Committee (CAC)
- Leadership and membership on the PTA Special Education Committee
- Attendance at the Financial Oversight Committee meetings
- Participation on the PTA Parent Resource Network (PRN)
- Participation on the District’s Program Task Force
- Representation on the 2010 Strategic Plan Team
- Attendance at the Santa Monica Child Care Task Force
- Attendance on the African American Student Staff Support Group
- Leadership on PTA Council Legislation Committee

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

As reflected in the above Report, the work of SEDAC’s Ad Hoc Committees is productive and should be continued if this is the desire of the Board. In particular, the Financial Ad Hoc Committee should continue to collaborate with members of the FOC and the District’s senior administrative staff to further explore how to more accurately predict Special Education needs and budget properly for them as necessary. To this end, the Committee plans to reconvene in August and in March to review the internal recommended internal reports with members of the FOC and the CFO. In connection with the Instructional Technology Ad Hoc Committee, the Committee encourages the District to make a shift in the way it looks at and uses technology with the understanding that we live in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and we have technology available to us that can greatly assist in educating our students. The work of the Transition Ad Hoc Committee is just beginning and it will likely need to continue working through the next school year to achieve its objectives.