



**The Working Group Report
on Special Education in the
Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District**

April 23, 2009

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I. List of Working Group Members

Steve Barnett	Parent, NPS	Early Identification
Bekah Dannelley	SE Coordinator, Pre-School	Inclusion/Integration
Suzanne Forman	Parent, Malibu	IEP
Craig Hamilton	Parent, SAMOHI	Program/Communication
Theresa Harris	Parent, Pre-School	Communication/Staffing
Ilana Herson	Instructional Assistant	Staffing
Christy Hobart	Parent, McKinley	Inclusion/Integration
Lee Jones	Parent, SAMOHI	IEP, Inclusion/Integration
Lauren Lambert	Parent, Muir	Inclusion/Integration
JoDee Moen	Teacher, SAMOHI	IEP
Lora Morn	Nurse/Parent, SAMOHI	IEP
Debra Shepherd	Parent, JAMS, LMS	Inclusion/Integration
Monica Simon	Child Dev. Coordinator, CREST	Staffing/Communication
Lupe Smith	Parent, Pre-School	Early Identification, Equitable Access
Lisa Szilagyi	Teacher, Malibu	Staffing
Diane Toppel	Teacher, John Adams	Inclusion/Integration
Kris Vegas	Psychologist, Malibu	Early Identification
Lorelei Woerner-Eisner	Parent, Malibu	IEP
Martha Durán-Contreras	Project Leader	Equitable Access
Laura Peck, Claros Group	Consultant/Facilitator	

II. Background

The Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District has grappled for years with issues within its Special Education department. Some of the main areas of concern have been the IEP process, program/instruction development, the timely hiring and retention of staff, and the overall culture of SMMUSD as it relates to Special Education. While parents have been at the forefront in opening these issues up to public discussion, teachers and staff have also publicly sought to improve the situation.

Since 2001, Special Education in SMMUSD has been the subject of three reports and one independent evaluation, all of which while noting strengths, have identified problems which were (*Appendix, A: List of Reports*) highlighted repeatedly in each subsequent report culminating in the Barber Report.

The Barber Audit was done in 2007 at the request of the Santa Monica City Council after a group of parents took their concerns to the City Council. Concerned about private settlement agreements and confidentiality clauses, both of which prevented a complete understanding of the state of Special Education, the Council intervened. A scheduled payment to the District was withheld pending the discontinuation of confidentiality clauses in settlement agreements with parents and an independent audit of the District. The District hired Lou Barber and Associates to conduct the audit, and results were reported to the Board of Education in May 2008.

At the same time, the President of the PTA Council contacted the San Ramon Valley (SRV) Unified School District, which had recently completed an extended collaborative Special Education reform effort, including the hiring of a Special Needs Liaison. Representatives from SRVUSD made a presentation to Santa Monica's Board of Education and the community. This prompted the PTA Council to create a PTA/Special Ed Committee, similar to that of SRVUSD.

Shortly after assuming an interim role, Superintendent Cuneo worked with the Board of Education to establish The SMMUSD Special Education Collaborative: a Sponsor Group and the Working Group, comprised of parents, staff and community members.

The goals of the Collaborative were to (1) make recommendations to the Superintendent that will strengthen the quality and climate of Special Education throughout the District, (2) clarify roles and decision-making authority, as well as inclusive and respectful processes for Special Education, and (3) develop a collaborative approach for addressing issues of change.

The Board approved the approach in October and Claros Group, which had assisted SRVUSD, was retained by SMMUSD to facilitate the Working Group and consult with the Sponsor Group. (*Appendix, B: SE Collaborative Charter.*)

III. Overview of Process

The Working Group accomplished a great deal in a short time period. They met ten times between the end of November and the beginning of March. Meetings were held from 4-8 pm on weekday evenings. Subgroups composed of parents and educators met separately to draft, refine, and finalize recommendations for the seven goal areas. (*Appendix, C: Overview of the Collaborative Process*)

The first task of the Working Group was to review past reports, plans, and financial and program information about the District. They then identified broad goals for improvement. Within each goal area, the subgroups developed more specific recommendations and milestones.

The SMMUSD PTA, Special Education District Advisory Committee (SEDAC), and SMMUSD co-sponsored a Town Hall Meeting on February 9, 2009 at the Santa Monica Public Library. The Working Group presented its preliminary recommendations in both English and Spanish to over 70 members of the community and solicited feedback from this group of parents, staff, and elected officials. (*Appendix, D: Town Hall Invitation*)

Input from the Town Hall participants was used to refine the recommendations, which the Working Group later discussed with Tim Cuneo, Superintendent, and Dr. Sally Chou, Chief Academic Officer. This February 18th discussion session provided a better understanding of the resource environment and other efforts underway. Over the next two meetings (with significant investment of time before and after), the Working Group completed its task.

IV. GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through meaningful collaboration, our diverse group of eighteen members, staff and parents alike, worked hard to produce strong recommendations within a limited timeframe. If implemented with transparency, inclusion, and understanding, these recommendations will no doubt strengthen the climate of Special Education throughout SMMUSD.

The list of recommendations are in no way meant to be exhaustive or to supplant the Barber Report, the Strategic Plan or the prior reports. The Working Group was asked to identify *priorities* with the understanding that some recommendations would be immediately actionable and others would require further assessment and the engagement and input of others.

Due to the limited timeframe in which the Working Group operated and the limited information the Group was able to obtain and analyze, the most developed recommendations are in areas that did not require an in-depth review of data or information. The group drew on first hand parent and staff knowledge and presentations from the Directors of Special Education, the Personnel Commission and Human Resources. The Working Group developed recommendations in six goal areas: Inclusion/Integration, Staffing, IEP, Equitable Access, Communication Systems and Websites, and Early Identification. The Working Group also recommended the creation of a Program Task Force to address the area of Programs/Instruction.

The Working Group did not assess the fiscal impact of the recommendations or analyze current spending (expenditures, staffing ratios, NPA/NPS costs) for potential savings. We are in a time of dramatic fiscal constraints and growing demand for meaningful education for all. Careful financial analysis will be required to prioritize the Working Group's recommendations and to continue to identify opportunities to strategically and practically deliver excellent Special Education programs and services in the most cost effective way.

Looking forward, Superintendent Cuneo has expressed his intent to reconvene the Working Group within four months to discuss the District's progress on improving the climate and quality of Special Education and to tap individual members of this Working Group for future efforts. The Working Group is hopeful that this commitment to build on the collaborative framework embraced by the Working Group will serve to break the cycle of inaction and change the current culture.

GOAL 1: CREATE A CULTURE OF INCLUSION AND INTEGRATION

Cultivate and maintain a culture of inclusion and integration throughout SMMUSD by updating and monitoring the District's current Policy of Inclusion and Integration, hiring a full-time Integration Director and holding Principals accountable via their performance reviews.

Rationale:

"Inclusion is based on the belief that people/adults work in inclusive communities with people of different races, religions, aspirations, disabilities. In the same vein, children of all ages should learn and grow in environments that resemble the environments that they will eventually work in." – Dr. Susan Etscheidt, Professor of Special Education, University of Northern Iowa.

There needs to be a shift in thinking to one that holds that all students are learners and can be included in all classes and activities. The Special Education Strategic Plan and the Barber Report have previously made specific recommendations that address the need for a change in culture, the need for an increase in the amount of time that learners with disabilities spend in General Education classrooms and the need for accountability of the Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, Principals and the Special Education department.

The Working Group believes change requires policy, practice, and performance accountability as well as dedicated resources and support for all those who interact with Special Education children. The Group looks to the Board of Education for policy, to the Superintendent and CAO to shape a culture of inclusion and ownership for the education of all students, and to the Special Education Department, guided by an Integration Director, to assure options consistent with LRE and build capability at school sites. Finally, the Group looks to each Principal to embrace, uphold, and promote the integration of all children in their schools.

By desegregating campuses, we will enrich the lives of our children. When students of differing abilities have the opportunity to get to know and learn from one another, they learn that everyone has something valuable to share and that everyone benefits from these relationships.

Recommendations

1. Revise the District's current Policy of Inclusion and Integration and monitor its success.

Update District policy #6159 of placing children in the least restrictive environments (LRE). Provide an opportunity for, and give meaningful consideration to public input from families of children of all ability levels within SMMUSD, staff members, and other stakeholders prior to finalizing the new policy. Once revised, disseminate the new policy and ensure that it is included in mandatory Special Education training sessions for both General Education and Special Education teachers. The new policy should also be given to parents annually with their Parent Handbook and prior to their IEP.

During the IEP meeting, the District will inform parents of placement options including full inclusion in a General Education classroom with necessary modifications and supports as well as other inclusive models on the continuum of LRE.

2. Hire a full-time Integration Director who will ensure that a culture of acceptance and integration is established and maintained with consistency throughout the District. This person will be a bridge between Special Education and General Education and will be responsible for the hiring of Inclusion Specialists as needed. The Integration Director will also give support to the Specialists, Special Education teachers and aides, General Education teachers, Principals, and other appropriate staff. The Integration Director will ensure that an atmosphere and culture of inclusion (as well as acceptance, tolerance, compassion and understanding) is instilled and maintained on all SMMUSD campuses. The Integration Director will explore models to support inclusive practices including full inclusion, collaborative classes, mainstreaming and integration. The Integration Director will build capacity in all SMMUSD staff, classified and certificated, and offer support when needed.

The Integration Director will be responsible for coordination, implementation and oversight of the following:

- Expand the elementary school “buddy” program at each school site to include children in Special Education, which will provide opportunities for social interaction and facilitate relationships between children in General Education and Special Education.
- Establish voluntary “buddy” programs in middle schools (such as those developed by Best Buddies).
- Acknowledge the importance of, and support, the Circle of Friends club at Santa Monica High School.
- Establish collaborative classrooms at all grade levels at all sites.
- Ensure that before IEP meetings take place, parents will be informed of placement options including full inclusion and other inclusive models on the continuum of LRE. At the IEP, all options – from full inclusion in a General Education class to placement in a SDC – will be discussed. Staff will explain the mechanics of each option, including accommodations and modifications that may help in making each option a success.
- Develop and write an Ability Awareness Curriculum or Program for elementary and secondary students and make ongoing presentations to encourage sensitivity, understanding, compassion and friendship.
- Offer training on inclusive practices, which includes an Ability Awareness curriculum, to all SMMUSD staff to help teachers and aides understand how to

integrate, include and support children with special needs in General Education classrooms.

- Offer an Ability Awareness program to parents of typically developing children as well as to parents of children with special needs.
 - Ensure that children in Special Education are able to participate in all school activities including, but not limited to, field trips, winter and summer camps, after-school programs.
 - Ensure that children with special needs are treated with respect and have the same rights as other children.
 - Ensure that teachers of children with special needs and their staff are treated with respect and are made to feel welcomed on campus.
 - Ensure that parents of children in Special Education are treated with respect and that they have the same rights as other parents, including access to elementary school classrooms.
 - Ensure that parents are encouraged and permitted to volunteer in classrooms. Include Special Education information and highlights in school and District newsletters.
 - Provide information at open houses, kindergarten round-ups and other informational meetings so that ALL parents are aware of the District and the site policy of Inclusion and Integration.
3. Evaluate Principals on their success in embracing, upholding and promoting the integration of all children at school sites in job performance evaluations. The standards stated in Principals' evaluations should articulate the District's values and expectations of its leadership so that the integration and meaningful education of all students will not be considered optional.

Milestones:

1. Create an updated SMMUSD board policy regarding integration/inclusion – *Summer 2009.*
2. Articulate the policy about inclusion/integration to all staff and families at the start of the new school year. – *Fall 2009.*
3. Hand out printed copies of the policy to families before their IEPs. – *Fall 2009.*
4. Begin interview process immediately for an Integration Director. – *Spring 2009.*

5. Hire an Integration Director to be in place by – *Summer 2009*.
6. Institute an Ability Awareness curriculum from Pre-K through 12th grade at start of school year – *Fall 2009*.
7. Offer an Ability Awareness program for parents and staff by – *Fall 2009*.
8. Provide at least one collaborative classroom at each site by – *Fall 2009*.
9. Establish collaborative classrooms at every grade level and every site by – *Fall 2012*.
10. Institute a buddy program at all sites by – *Fall 2009*.
11. Present full inclusion in General Education (as well as all other placement options on the continuum of LRE) in parent/District IEP-related discussions for all children with special needs by – *Fall 2009*.
12. Articulate performance standards for which Principals are accountable by – *Spring 2009*.
13. Evaluate Principals on the success of their efforts at first evaluation of 2009 and at subsequent evaluations. – *Fall 2009*.

GOAL 2: RECRUIT, RETAIN AND TRAIN EXCELLENT SPECIAL EDUCATION STAFF

Rationale:

Critical to the success of our Special Education programs is the hiring, retention and training of highly qualified teaching and classified staff. The labor market is competitive and our District must be able to attract and retain the best possible Special Education staff. It is also critical that both classified and certificated positions be filled at the beginning of the school year. There is a particular need to streamline the hiring of classroom assistants and to develop a retention strategy for all positions. These concerns have been raised in every prior report about the SMMUSD in recent history as well as the Special Education Strategic Plan and the Lou Barber Report. The Working Group feels that these staffing related recommendations cannot continue to be ignored and require an expedited response.

Recommendations:

1. Require the Personnel Commission and the Human Resources department to expedite the hiring process to ensure that both certificated and classified staff positions are filled at the start of the school year. Expedite testing, fingerprinting, interviewing, and placements.
2. Require the Personnel Commission and Human Resource to strengthen recruitment efforts through community outreach and maximizing job posting opportunities at local universities and colleges. Outreach should be designed to ensure that the District for both certificated and classified staff positions reaches a diverse group of applicants who may have particular skill sets and/or experience that would benefit the special needs students in the District (e.g. bilingual, ASL-proficient, nursing, ECE). Job posting both on-line and at all local colleges and universities should be continual and updated on at least a monthly basis.
3. Require the Personnel Commission and Human Resources departments to continue to conduct comparative compensation surveys and make adjustments as warranted. An evaluation of the compensation structure for instructional assistants ("IA"), particularly IA's who work with the most severely disabled students, needs to be performed with the specific goal of staff retention. Consider creating and supporting (e.g. through scheduling) job opportunities that would enable part-time staff to obtain additional hours within the District so they may qualify for benefits.
4. Offer and encourage internships and volunteer opportunities. Promote and encourage internal staff for career advancement.
5. Mandate monthly reconciling among Personnel Commission, Human Resources and Special Education department, to ensure an accurate number of current openings.
6. Institute periodic blind surveys with existing staff to better understand current needs. Conduct exit interviews with all departing staff to acquire feedback regarding the reason for leaving the position.

7. Complete and distribute the District's Special Education Procedural handbook to all staff (i.e. teachers and assistants) to ensure that strategies and important Special Education information is conveyed when they begin the school year.
8. Make staff training in Special Education related topics mandatory, scheduled prior to, as well as during, the school year. Utilize the SELPA resources and District educators to expand and strengthen the trainings offered to staff. The District should try to minimize the financial impact of hiring substitutes by offering these trainings during buyback, pupil free and minimum days. Require General Education teachers to participate in training focusing on accommodations/modifications for children with special needs. Cross-training between General and Special education on RtI and SST as forms of early intervention should be required, not optional.
9. Schedule staff trainings so that Special Education staff can attend important trainings offered to General Education teachers and vice versa. All staff should participate in trainings that will impact the ability of teachers and IA's to support all learners (.e.g. curriculum, policies, IEP implementation, etc.)
10. Ensure a work environment that is free of fear, one that respects, values and supports all staff in order to promote a learning environment that is innovative, creative and fosters the ability of staff to advocate for all children.
11. In coordination with BTSA, establish a mentor program to support all new Special Education staff.

Milestones:

1. Staff fully (100%) with qualified and diverse staff that are trained and versed on handbook and policies and procedures by the beginning of the 2009 - 2010 school year. (This includes preschool through Grade 12, DIS, and after school programs.)
– *September 2009.*
2. Collaborate with local community educational institutions and outside resources to maximize job placement opportunities, and develop a pipeline for internships and volunteer candidates to work with children with special needs.
– *September 2009.*
3. Begin documentation of improvements in the recruitment process as well as the steps that have been taken to expedite and streamline the hiring process within the Personnel Commission and Human Resources department – *September 2009.*
4. Institute an ongoing plan to conduct exit interviews and yearly blind surveys
– *September 2009.*
5. Distribute a Special Education handbook including Best Practices and staff procedures and policies to all staff. – *September 2009.*

6. Post a schedule of planned staff development opportunities for the 2009 – 2010 school year. – *September 2009*.
7. Commit to a change in culture that supports Special Education staff and promotes a positive atmosphere. (District and site administrators.) – *September 2009*.
8. Institute a mentor program for all new staff. – *Fall 2009*.

GOAL 3: IMPROVE IEP PROCESS

In order to improve the IEP process, IEP team meetings need to be understandable, transparent, open, friendly, respectful and consistent throughout the District.

Rationale:

The IEP is the legal document that assures a student his or her legal right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). At this time, a number of parents and staff feel the IEP process is broken. Some parents and staff members feel the meetings can be unnecessarily long, adversarial and foster a feeling of distrust. There is a need to improve communication and training for staff and parents.

Recommendations to the District:

1. Develop an IEP Parent Packet to be sent home prior to IEP meeting and returned to teacher prior to meeting, which includes:
 - a. A District Special Education parent questionnaire (to be developed – *see Appendix, F: Sample Parent Preparation Questionnaire for example*);
 - b. Agenda for IEP meeting including a time limit on IEP meetings (may need to schedule subsequent meetings);
 - c. Parent rights (including ability to tape meeting and receive assessments prior to IEP meeting if requested in writing);
 - d. Summary of assessments and goals; and
 - e. Programs and services available at the Campus and throughout the District, as applicable.

2. Conduct annual mandatory trainings for both Special Education and General Education teachers so that staff is appropriately trained in the following areas:
 - a. Advocating for students;
 - b. The IEP process (before, during, after);
 - c. Implementation of accommodations and modifications in the classroom;
 - d. Having experienced Special Education teachers assist/mentor new Special Education staff in IEP preparation as well as sitting in on IEP's at the beginning of the school year;
 - e. Scheduling of IEPs: duration limitations, scheduling during prep periods, who to invite;
 - f. Assessment training in the giving of academic testing relating to the triennial IEP, interpreting the test results to the family, and driving goals based on the test results;
 - g. Classroom teachers providing work samples as part of their data collection; and
 - h. To complement the current legal compliance training, the Working Group recommends mandatory training of staff by staff (if possible), knowledgeable in Special Education law who will provide alternative dispute resolution and collaboration training in order to foster a less legalistic IEP environment.

3. Require that the person running the IEP have direct, consistent teaching contact with the student.

4. Require that a District-wide form and protocol completed by service providers each month, which will include: date, time, duration, description of service for that month all of which will be provided to parents and available for IEPs. In addition weekly progress reports, or formed email, or mailing home, or communication log, which will include student progress and content during each session, will be provided to parents.
5. The Working Group agrees with the following recommendation stated in the Barber Report, "...It is strongly recommended that the District establish a means by which information pertinent to a student's services be incorporated from a settlement agreement into the student's IEP either by adding the document or including information related to the programs and/or services into the IEP document."
6. Hire a Special Needs Liaison (ombudsperson) who is a parent of a child with Special Needs in our District. The liaison can facilitate communication and understanding between parents and staff and assist with coordination of services.
7. Develop a policy stating that no staff or parent will intimidate, threaten, and coerce any person for any reason. Protect all Staff (including teacher, DIS provider, Instructional Assistant or contractor), who help a parent or guardian of a Special Education student to obtain services or accommodations from any form of retaliation. Adopt District guidelines similar to the City of Santa Monica Customer Service Standards. (*See Appendix, G: City of Santa Monica Customer Service Standards*)
8. Collaborate with the PTA, SEDAC and other stakeholder groups regarding the best ways to reach parents of children with special needs within the District and ensure that they are offered regular opportunities to educate themselves about the IEP and related subjects (e.g., through jointly sponsored forums and speaker series).
9. Develop consistent practices surrounding transitional IEPs and ensure that these practices are effectively communicated and monitored.

Milestones:

1. Develop IEP Parent Packet and begin mandatory training in Special and General Education – *Spring 2009.*
2. Institute monthly protocol and weekly progress reports – *Fall 2009.*
3. Incorporate all information pertinent to students' services into the IEP – *Spring 2009.*
4. Hire a Special Needs Liaison – *Fall 2009.*
5. Develop Staff protection policy – *Spring 2009.*
6. Beginning with the Spring Forum, collaborate with other stakeholder groups to develop outreach strategies and educational programs for parents of special needs children. – *Spring 2009.*
7. Develop consistent practices for transitional IEPs – *Spring 2009. (Make effort to start now to insure smoother transition in Fall 2009)*

GOAL 4: ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS

Ensure equitable access to Special Education for families of all cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds by identifying successful practices that strengthen partnerships between home and school, building upon them, and developing new strategies for parent integration. These processes will ensure that families become better informed and educated about Special Education thus equalizing their roles in their children's educational experiences.

Rationale

When the status distinctions of poverty, minority and childhood exceptionality intersect, the families are uniquely vulnerable to systematic discrimination... Many Minority families face a fourth disadvantage- they do not speak the language of the school

– Beth Harry, Cultural Diversity, Families and the Special Education System: Communication and Empowerment

The achievement gap between SMMUSD African American and Latinos students on the one hand, and White and Asian students on the other, is of great concern to students, parents and District staff. Forty-six percent of the students with special needs in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District are identified as being African-American, Latino, and other non-white. More than thirty-seven percent participate in the National School Lunch Program. Approximately fifteen percent speak Spanish.

The Working Group believes that strengthening the partnerships between home and the school is a crucial part of addressing the achievement gap. In order for all families to access services and be knowledgeable members of the IEP team, the District needs to ensure that outreach, communication, and training are culturally and linguistically appropriate. The District should continue to provide opportunities that are responsive to the cultural aspects of both the American school system and the system knowledge and experience the parents bring with them.

Language, cultural and literacy barriers exclude many parents from being integral to their student's success. The District has successful practices upon which to build, but outreach to these members of SMMUSD community is limited and inconsistent relative to websites, print media, and IEP materials (reports, goals, placement options.)

At IEP meetings, Spanish-speaking parents often must rely on someone translating all of the reports, goals, and placement options. Bilingual Community Liaisons are not always utilized or trained to assist parents in securing services or communicating with educators or service providers. IEP materials can be translated upon request, but parents may wait weeks to receive the copies.

Recommendations:

1. Assure all information and materials pertinent to Special Education is available in Spanish (including but not limited to IEP) and provided to parents in a timely manner. (California Ed Code 48985, NCLB, & IDEIA).
2. Ensure that translators and when possible, bilingual community liaisons are available and prepared to assist Special Education parents in the IEP process.
3. Align goals and coordinate efforts with Task Force on the Achievement of Students of Color and the Communications Task Force.
4. Offer an annual series of culturally responsive Parent Education workshops/training focused on Special Education. Use workshops for education, engagement, and leadership training.
5. Actively recruit to increase the diversity of volunteers in the Parent Resource Network.
6. Ensure that the SEDAC outreach efforts are designed to encourage membership that is reflective of all cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Milestones:

1. Assign Special Education staff to work with Task Force on the Achievement of Students of Color and Communications Task Force – *May, 2009*.
2. Identify and publish contact information for personnel at district and site level who are bilingual and can communicate with parents – *Spring 2009*.
3. Check progress on efforts to make PRN and SEDAC membership reflective of all cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds – *Fall 2009*.
4. Spring Forum outreach, materials, and delivery are accessible to parents whose primary language is Spanish – *Spring 2009*.
5. Special Education Department will partner with PTA to pilot a culturally responsive Parent Education workshop – *Fall 2009*.

GOAL 5: IMPROVE COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS AND WEBSITE

The District has taken steps recently to evaluate its communications practices (via the Communications Audit) and to modernize its electronic communications systems and student database. Our recommendations focus on ensuring that these systems and the new Student Information Systems (“SIS”) database are responsive to the unique needs of the Special Education students and parents. In addition, the Working Group feels a redesign and fortification of the SMMUSD District and Campus websites would be an excellent way to inform, educate and encourage connections among the various individuals and groups that intersect with Special Education. In order for the implementation of these recommendations to be successful and maintained the Working Group is suggesting that, in the short term, a Task Force be developed to assist the District and, in the long term, oversight and maintenance duties and responsibilities be assigned to technology-savvy District staff position(s) or a new hire.

Rationale:

There is concern that the needs of the Special Education students and parents will not be adequately addressed by the new communication systems and database. Additionally, much can be done via the SMMUSD and Campus websites to enhance the experience of Special Education parents, staff and visitors and to further the goals of transparency, knowledge, integration and support. Finally, key to the success of these recommendations will be the creation of a Task Force to assist the District in analyzing the findings of the Communication Audit, determining the most efficient and effective ways to meet the needs of Special Education students and parents with respect to the new communications systems and practices and providing oversight in the redesign of the District and Campus websites.

Recommendations:

1. Evaluate the new email system (Microsoft Outlook) and add the necessary features to ensure that email messages meant for only the parents of Special Education students are current, targeted and confidential. Targeting should be on District-wide as well as a Campus-by-Campus basis and grade level basis. Full deployment of Microsoft Outlook is recommended prior to the commencement of the 2009/2010 school year.
2. Ensure that the new SIS contains the following features relating to the District’s Special Education population:
 - a. Database should have the ability to target all IEP parents via email.
 - b. Database should enable the storing of all IEP information, reports, progress notes, and the “one-page” IEP summary, etc.
 - c. Database should enable limited parent access via log-in/password.
 - d. Consider adding a checklist to the Database that can be used as a tool for early assessment and program development – see p.47 (IA – IF) of Special Education Strategic Plan.
 - e. Database should support/enable cross-pollination of information from SEIS to minimize the extra work in updating both systems with new information.

3. Redesign the SMMUSD websites so that there is, among other things, improved placement of the Special Education department, a listing of contact information for all Special Education staff on a campus by campus basis, and readily accessible links to resources and other information. Employ “email alerts” to let parents know that there is new content on the website. (See *Appendix, H: Detailed Website Recommendations for specific recommendations.*)
4. Form a Communications Task Force that is comprised of technology savvy members of stakeholder groups including the Special Education Working Group subcommittee members. The Task Force would:
 - a. Assist the District in analyzing the findings of the Communication Audit;
 - b. Determine the most efficient and effective ways to meet the needs of Special Education students/ parents with respect to the new communications systems;
 - c. Evaluate all existing communication practices District-wide and make recommendations on how to improve and standardize these practices;
 - d. Provide oversight in the redesign of the District and Campus websites;
 - e. Review the District and each Campus’s technical infrastructure/bandwidth, human resources related to the e-communications system; and
 - f. Determine ways to maximize other communication mechanisms available to the District (e.g. the automated voice mail system).
5. Assign the following duties to an existing staff member who has expertise in technology and the Internet:
 - a. Oversee the above modifications/upgrades to Microsoft Outlook and the SIS;
 - b. Perform the redesign and fortification of the SMMUSD and Campus websites using the list on *Appendix, H: Detailed Website Recommendations* as a guide; and
 - c. Assume responsibility for continued maintenance and weekly updating of all e-communications systems.

Milestones:

1. Create Communications Task Force by – *Spring 2009.*
2. Add necessary features to Microsoft Outlook and the SIS by – *Summer 2009.*
3. Full Deployment of Microsoft Outlook and the SIS should be completed by – *Summer 2009.*
4. Assign e-communication and redesign duties to existing staff or hire a Communications Specialist by – *Summer 2009.*
5. Complete Redesign of SMMUSD websites by middle of 2009- 2010 School Year. – *Winter 2010.*

GOAL 6: STRENGTHEN THE PROCESS OF EARLY IDENTIFICATION, ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION

Rationale:

By identifying children with special needs as early as possible, and by promptly utilizing the District's trained staff, General Education interventions, and Special Education resources, there is a greater likelihood that our students will make academic and social progress.

In addition, by shifting away from a hard demarcation between General Education and Special Education, SMMUSD can view assistance for special needs as part of a single continuum. This will prove easier to quickly link the student with the aid they require to succeed. Supporting our children at their level of need should not be viewed as only the responsibility of Special Education, but of the entire school community.

The early identification of students with special needs, such as autism, behavioral difficulties, and reading disabilities, followed by swift interventions and access to resources, is essential for their future success in school. In the long run, the Working Group believes it will also be cost effective for the District.

Recommendations:

1. Establish as formal policy that General Education teachers and staff and CREST personnel are to be pro-active in the early identification of students with behavioral and academic special needs.
 - a. This policy will mandate that staff listed above will be trained in the early indicators of the spectrum of special needs as well how to communicate concerns to parents and how to refer them to assistance for their child.
 - b. Though pre-school, kindergarten and elementary school are especially critical periods for this, this policy will continue early identification efforts through middle and high school, as many special needs only become evident over time.
2. Fully develop a district wide Response to Intervention (RtI) program for students in General Education who are displaying academic and/or behavioral difficulties with the aim of promptly offering evidence based resources and assistance as soon as needs are identified.
 - a. Under RtI, interventions and resources will be made available to prevent the loss of academic progress, rather than waiting for failure to offer assistance.
 - b. A student's interventions and resources will be regularly monitored and then reviewed in a timely fashion to confirm success or to make needed changes.
 - c. Under RtI, levels of intervention will increase in intensity if the child does not respond to his or her tier of instruction.
 - d. What are now deemed Special Education resources will be reviewed for their use in the intervention continuum prior to benchmarks in current discrepancy models.

3. Develop a consistent Student Success Team (SST) process designed to efficiently suggest and implement in a timely manner further interventions for student academic and behavioral progress.
 - a. Though sometimes overlapping, SST's can be considered a next step from RtI for engaging the child in the continuum of resources provided by the District.
 - b. The RtI or SST should not be seen as a requirement or a prerequisite if a student's needs clearly indicate to teachers, staff, or parents that Special Education assessments and resources are called for.
 - c. District policy will state that staff and teacher participants in SST's will be free to openly suggest interventions and accommodations ranging along the full continuum of District resources including Section 504 Plans and Special Education assessments and services.

4. Make information regarding District Special Education resources and staff roles readily available to all parents.
 - a. Make information about resources readily available; for example, a poster on the wall of the front office of every campus, listing contact information for District's Special Education department, the parent Resource Network, the District Special Education WEB page, and a referral to the front desk of the campus for more detailed literature noted below.
 - b. Available at the front desk of every school will be copies of the Special Education Parent Handbook and a new, supplemental handout detailing the General Education interventions and the Special Education resources offered at each of the campuses through out the District.

Milestones

1. Early Identification of Students With Special Needs
 - a. Conduct a needs assessment of all General Education teachers and CREST staffers. Identify and/or design training programs to familiarize General Education staff on the early indicators of special needs – *Winter 2010*.
 - b. SMMUSD will require that its General Education teachers and staff (preschool through 12th grade) and CREST be trained in the early identification of special needs and in how to approach parents on their observations. Substitutes and/or training days will be provided by the District to allow for this instruction. – *Fall 2010*.

2. RtI
 - a. Complete a detailed examination of the District's RtI pilot program and the RtI programs of comparable districts – *Winter 2010*.
 - b. Complete training of staff who will be implementing RtI – *Summer 2010*.
 - c. Use standardized RtI process in all schools. Each school will identify specific General Education staff that will implement and monitor the RtI process – *Fall 2010*.

3. SST

- a. With input from all stakeholders (staff and parents) identify and/or design a consistent SST framework, including documentation and testing, – *Spring 2010*.
- b. Standardized SST process in all elementary sites – *Fall 2010*.

4. Information

- a. Make Parent Handbooks available at all District sites – *Fall 2009*.
- b. Complete a detailed audit of existing intervention and Special Education resources available at each site in the District and publish a pamphlet describing them – *Spring 2010*.

Special End Comment

The Working Group is certain that by enacting the processes recommended above, the District will have a tremendously positive impact on the education of our children with special needs, providing them with timely access to the tools needed for their education. However, without capacity in interventions and resources, the District may find that its RtI and SST staff are referring children to help that is overburdened, not yet identified, or does not exist. The Working Group urges the District to work with the Programs Task Force recommended in the Working Group's Goal #7 to help establish this capacity.

Additional Notes On Early Identification, Assessment And Intervention (Goal 6)

Below are a few details, notes and comments that did not seem to fit into the format above, but are relevant to the work at hand and should be taken into account in the execution of these recommendations.

A. Early Identification Recommendation:

It might be useful to refer to the Special Education Strategic Plan for its work on the early identification of children with reading disabilities on pages 18 and 19 and for its work on pre-school and kindergarten transitioning on pages 72 through 79.

B. RTI Recommendation:

The RtI process should be implemented consistently across the District. Structure the RtI process so that it can be, but is not required to be, integrated and utilized within the Student Success Team (SST) process. (For example, RtI data may be reviewed by a select group of staff and a parent without a formal SST meeting.) Refer to Wright's Law's WEB page on Response to Intervention for a parents group perspective on RTI.

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/nltr/09/nl.0303.htm#1>

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/rti.parent.guide.htm>.

C. SST Recommendation:

District SST's would include standardized forms, timelines, evidence-based interventions, progress monitoring systems, and parent hand outs detailing the continuum of District intervention and Special Education resources.

GOAL 7: CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE PROGRAM/INSTRUCTION

Provide a comprehensive range of research based program offerings to be responsive to student needs based upon individual IEP goals. *(Including, but not limited to placements, services, teaching approaches, curriculum, and instructional strategies in Special Education.)*

Rationale:

There is little shared understanding in the broader SMMUSD community of the range of Special Education programs and services currently offered by the District. There is also some misunderstanding about what constitutes FAPE for any particular child.

Clarifying the District's offerings and making the rationale and continuum more transparent will create a framework for conversation about the quality and methodologies offered. We believe that (better) informed parents and teachers and IEP teams will develop better strategies for each student.

A common framework will also facilitate the opportunity for discussion about strengths and weaknesses, and program improvement relative to evolving research, evidence, student profiles and needs.

The limited time frame of the efforts of the Working Group precluded a detailed review of the programmatic recommendations of the earlier reports and plans. In particular, the Working Group did not conduct a comprehensive review of all current offerings nor did the Working Group carefully review strategies developed as part of the Special Education Strategic Plan and wants to assure that the District acts on this important task.

Recommendations:

Convene a Special Education Program Task Force responsible to a sponsor group selected by the Chief Academic Officer. The Sponsor Group would draft the task force charter, specifying, membership, deliverables, time frames, and decision making authority as well as needed administrative support.

The Task Force composition would assure all relevant perspectives and expertise: educators and administrators from across the District and parents with students in pre-school, elementary, and secondary settings, and parents and staff who participated in the development of the Special Education strategic plan. Of the members drawn from the parent community, at least two seats would be reserved for members of the Working Group with an interest in continuing to work on this initiative.

The charge would include the following:

1. Develop common definitions and terminology.
2. Describe the current overall approach to Special Education program offerings for all eligibilities. Provide a matrix for preschool, elementary, middle school, high school and transition.
3. Review and articulate policy, philosophy and methodologies consistent with FAPE & LRE.

4. Review and bring forward, as appropriate the following instructional recommendations from the 2004 Special Education Strategic Plan:
 - a. Curriculum
 - i. Reading and Written Language Curriculum
 - ii. Mathematics Curriculum
 - iii. Functional Curriculum
 - iv. Learning Technology Curriculum
 - b. Differentiated Learning
 - i. Autism Spectrum Disorder Program
 - ii. Communication, Accommodation and Modification

5. Review and bring forward, as appropriate the 17 major issues and 27 recommendations from the Barber Report (sections IV and VI).
 - a. Major Issues (Section IV): Incorporate recommendations and comments of items 1,3,4,5,6,8,9, and 10.
 - b. Recommendations (Section VI): Review the 27 recommendations and ongoing updates from the District.

6. Review internal and external programs and providers with the goal of providing programs and services in the most cost effective manner possible.

7. Review costs of existing and proposed programs and services with the goal of making prioritized recommendations for implementation.

8. Develop a program development process to assess, strengthen/ select and implement programs that move us from compliance to best practice.

9. Establish professional development program, training, on-going supervision, resources, and standards, that supports program implementation.

10. Recommend initial targets for improvement.

Milestones

1. Draft charter. – *Early Spring 2009.*
2. Identify Sponsor Group and Task Force Leader. – *Early Spring 2009.*
3. Create readiness by sharing the intent and approach with community and staff forums. – *Late Spring 2009.*
4. Organize information about current offerings and identify external resources. – *Late Spring 2009.*
5. Launch Task Force by end of school year. – *Late Spring 2009.*
6. Task force work process – *Summer 2009.*
7. Community feedback, Initial report, and implementation plan – *Fall 2009.*

SUMMARY OF GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The most powerful insight that emerged was the need to cultivate a culture of collaboration, transparency, and continuous improvement without which the best of intentions, messages and strategies cannot be successful.

While those below are not a complete or final set, they describe themes that cut across all the recommendations:

- For too long we have created unnecessary divisions between General Education and Special Education. SMMUSD is dedicated to the education of all students. Differentiated instruction that supports all learners should be standard practice
- The Working Group wants each campus to be a welcoming and inclusive community, fully integrating all students, families and educators. The Group sees the Principal as key individual who sets the context and the tone.
- The Working Group envisions informed parents and teachers, respectful communication, productive meetings: all working to assure each student a meaningful education.
- The District has a rich and underutilized resource in our SMMUSD faculty. The District should look for ways to draw on the talents and knowledge of staff to help build internal capacity.
- While the Working Group understands that relationships and community are built face-to-face over time, the Group wants the District to leverage technology to enable communication, resource sharing, and community building.
- Strong leadership and policies that come from top administrators and deliver a consistent message and holds District employees accountable for performance are essential to change."

V. LOOKING FORWARD:

Recommendations for Building Collaborative Capacity

In addition to our efforts to continually improve our instructional programs we will focus this year on creating a culture of collaboration with District stakeholders – District employees, parents, the cities of Santa Monica and Malibu, agencies that serve youth and others. The outcome of this initiative is to strengthen our relationships, clearly define roles, build trusting partnerships and become a more transparent organization.

– Superintendent Cuneo (website) August 2008

From the earliest conversations in Summer of 2008 to the last formal meeting of the Working Group on March 3, the world has changed significantly:

- There is new Board composition and leadership
- There is a permanent superintendent
- The California budget crisis has hit SMMUSD
- The Director of Special Education has accepted a position in another district.

This is a challenging and uncertain time, ripe for new ways of addressing old problems. The Working Group urges the Superintendent to thoughtfully consider these recommendations, discern what is needed, and mobilize the resources of the District to translate them into action.

The Working Group believes that progress around this set of strategic priorities has the potential for transformation. The Working Group also recognizes that significant and sustained progress will require different thinking and different behavior and that the culture must change to reinforce these new ways of working on behalf of Special Education students.

The recommendations below focus on key levers for change: the words and actions of leaders, assuring measurement and accountability, and building collaborative capacity.

Recommendations

1. *Provide visible leadership.*

- **Confirm the commitment** of SMMUSD to cultivate a culture of collaboration, transparency, and continuous improvement.
- **Communicate clearly and often about Special Education.** Tell stories about success and innovation, productive collaboration, as well as ongoing challenges. Practices might include:
 - Superintendent delivers quarterly state of Special Education to Board of Education
 - Principals' Meeting initiates standing item for Special Education
 - Superintendent's public communication consistently highlights Special Education.

- **People commit to what they co-create.** Continue to engage District administrators, teachers and staff, and community members in diagnosis, planning and implementation. Draw on members of the Working Group as resources and members of future work groups to assure both accountability and continuity.
- **Reinforce accountability** by tying performance evaluations of District and site administrators to progress on established milestones.

2. Build capacity for collaboration.

- Apply the positive elements of the Special Education Working Group experience. *(See Appendix, C: Overview of the Collaborative Process for stages and recommendations)*
- Assure that any temporary task group has clear goals and timelines, sufficient resources and information to accomplish its work, and includes “lessons learned” in any final report.
- Provide common tools and training to build collaborative capacity:
 - Provide meeting management and facilitation training and coaching to leaders of District initiatives, PTA, and SEDAC.
 - Establish SMMUSD ground rules for respectful and constructive communication across all settings.
 - Introduce consistent decision-making practices.
 - Host a regular forum for leaders of SEDAC, PTA, and the District where they can communicate, coordinate, and identify emerging issues and opportunities.

VI. Lessons Learned: Reflection on the Working Group Experience

A learning organization is one that knows how to learn from experience and adapt its practice accordingly. In reflecting on their experience, Working Group members responded to a series of questions. The illustrative comments below provide highlights.

The Working Group was designed to be a diverse group of stakeholders, including employees and staff, Malibu and Santa Monica, individuals with different roles, training, experience and tenure.

How Well Did the Working Group Use Its Diversity?

- Teachers/coordinators brought valuable insight that parents couldn't know or wouldn't have thought of. And vice-versa.
- Some members had a historical context that others did not have, and others were able to bring a fresh vision as to the District's current functioning.
- It was good to put a face to the issues, to hear it directly rather than through others with biased opinions. Ultimately, it gave me hope for the future.
- With the perspectives of both teachers and parents, the subgroups were able to entertain multiple perspectives of each topic.
- I think that the recommendation for equitable access to special ed services represents this point. Most people who never experience being left on the outside can't relate to the experience or they believe that complaints of others who have been have no validity.

What Voices, If Any, Were Missing?

- Principals, general ed teachers (all levels) and General Education parents
- Students
- More Instructional Aides
- Representation from the mayor's office or a non-profit organization integral to the Santa Monica community.

The Working Group was charged with recommending strategic priorities to the Superintendent in order to focus District efforts and investment.

How Confident Are You That the Working Group Has Identified The Right Priorities?

Group members expressed a high level of confidence in the priorities that were identified with the caveat that there was not time to really dig into program or financial issues.

- I feel very confident that the Working Group identified the key issues that need to be addressed so that that Special Education services across the District can move beyond the history of problems that have plagued us and into a new era of collaboration.
- Very confident, although I wish the Working Group had had the opportunity to make specific recommendations regarding program

What Concerns, If Any, Do You Have About This Set Of Recommendations?

- That it will go on the shelf, that past good work will be lost, that budget concerns will be used to sidestep reform
- That programming will not be looked into
- So much of (the substance of) our recommendations rely on a complete change of culture and I am worried that the Working Group were not specific enough concerning actions that will make that change occur
- That the Working Group didn't have enough time to vet some of them

The Working Group was intended to model a collaborative process.

What Practices Or Behaviors Contributed To the Working Group's Effectiveness?

- The facilitator kept us focused, set ground rules for appropriate behavior and made everyone feel that they could speak out if they disagreed
- A willingness to respectfully listen to one another.
- Keeping on task while being able to voice opinions and moving fast through the process. Everyone made themselves available on weekends and after hours to work on this.
- Solicitation of broader input
- Subgroups composed of parents and staff
- District staff and teachers who were so refreshingly transparent. The best collaboration came out of discussions with these individuals
- Hearing the various sides of a subject and coming up with a compromise

What Practices Or Behaviors Got In The Way?

- The long history of mistrust by both staff and parents, and the emotional nature surrounding the issues sometimes got in the way
- Lack of (and confusing) information provided by the District
- The group was too big
- The task was too broad to be done in such a short period of time
- The 4pm to 8pm window was very challenging
- Additional clerical support would have been helpful
- Would have been helpful to meet more often with the Sponsor Group to assure buy-in and accurate information

Implications For future efforts:

What Practice Or Behavior Would You Like To See Become Part Of The SMMUSD Way?

- Staff feeling safe to speak and ... empowered (and supported) to make change at their sites
- Collaboration, open communication, culture of inclusion, trust between families and District

- Meaningful collaboration on a subject by subject basis with knowledgeable and motivated participants
- A set of standards regarding the interaction between individuals be implemented immediately
- Greater outreach to families of color.
- I would love to see a culture of transparency, honesty and collaborative practices become the norm for the SMMUSD
- I would like to see open consideration of ideas and practices. I feel the current culture exemplifies a yes/no or black/white mentality that is not positive for anyone. Questions and comments should be raised, processed and a decision should be made. People will not always like decisions that are made, but the process that leads to the decision should be understood.

LAST WORDS

- I think the Working Group delivered a sense of hope to the Special Education community of SMMUSD, which may permeate to the rest of the District family. It was a privilege to be a part of that with some very incredible people.
- No matter what is recommended, it takes committed people to make it work. Parents and staff working together for kids.

APPENDIX/SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- A. List of Reports**
- B. SE Collaborative Charter presented to BOE October 2nd and 16th.**
- C. Overview of the Collaborative Process**
- D. Invitation to Town Hall Meeting**
- E. Glossary of Terms**
- F. Sample Parent Preparation Questionnaire**
- G. City of Santa Monica Customer Service Standards**
- H. Detailed Website Recommendations**

A. LIST OF REPORTS REVIEWED BY WORKING GROUP

Materials used by the Special Education Collaborative Working Group
Nov. 2008- March 2009:

Fred Weintraub (Chief Investigator) Study, March 2001

“Report of the Study of Special Education Policies, Procedures and Resources related to Compliance in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District”

Atlas Report, Nov. 2003- Jan. 2004

Analysis of the Special Education Department

SMMUSD Special Education Strategic Plan, 2004

Barber Report, March, 2008

“An Independent Evaluation of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Special Education Program”

B. SMMUSD SPECIAL EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE “WORKING COLLABORATIVELY FOR 21ST CENTURY SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS”

Presented at the Board of Education Meetings October 2 and October 16, 2008

Goals of the Collaborative:

1. Make recommendations to the Superintendent that will strengthen the quality and climate of Special Education throughout the District
2. Clarify roles and decision making authority as well as inclusive and respectful processes for Special Education
3. Develop a collaborative approach for addressing issues of change

Guiding Principles

The intent of this effort is to both strengthen the quality and climate of Special Education *and* to establish a precedent and a prototype for how the District addresses issues. We want to design and build the *social architecture*, the agreed upon structures and the inclusive and respectful processes that will support educational professionals and the communities they serve to deliberate productively on behalf of what is best for all students.

To be successful, we will have to do the following:

- articulate clear boundaries and decision rights
- agree to explicit rules of engagement
- use a smaller representative working group along with broad community engagement
- design a well-organized, interactive process
- communicate often to all stakeholders about process, progress, and outcomes
- assure that the process is fair and transparent
- build capacity for productively addressing difficult issues
- assure sustainability by identifying the leadership, accountability, and resources for follow through

This will be a fast-tracked process so that recommendations can be incorporated into the next budget cycle. The set of strategic priorities, once approved by the Board, will require ongoing leadership, capacity building, and monitoring.

Project Structure and Roles

The Superintendent:

- appoints the Working Group and receives its recommendations
- keeps the Board and the school community apprised of the progress on a regular basis
- is a member of the Sponsor Group

The Sponsor Group

The Superintendent, CAO, Director of Special Education, and Project Leader will serve as the Sponsor Group for the Special Education Collaborative. The Sponsor Group is part architect, part advisor, and part champion. Over the life of the collaborative, sponsoring work will have four aspects:

- Ensure that the initial expectations are clear, the resources available, and the support sufficient
- Advise and participate as the Working Group requires
- Be informed of the Working Group's deliberations and recommendations
- Translate recommendations into work plans, providing leadership and resources for implementation

Project Lead

The SMMUSD Project Lead will:

- Partner with Claros Group to provide context, plan, and lead the Working Group meetings
- Inspire the Working Group to full constructive participation
- Assure ongoing communication with community stakeholders
- Manage the project timeline and deliverables.

Martha Durán-Contreras is designated as the Project Lead. Her membership in the Sponsor Group will assure consistent communication and guidance. The Project Lead is responsible for assuring frequent communication that keeps all stakeholders informed, efficient use of SMMUSD and consulting resources, and capacity building to support the transformation.

Working Group

The Working Group will convene in November 2008 and work through February 2009, at a minimum. The charge of this group is to review, integrate, and prioritize Special Education goals, strategies, and deliverables currently embedded in disparate documents, including the Barber Report and earlier strategic planning documents. The Working Group will submit recommendations to the Superintendent, who will share these recommendations with the Board in February 2009.

Working Group Participant Roles and Responsibilities:

- Commit up to twenty hours per month for three months to meetings, collecting input, and communicating with key constituents
- Follow the rules of engagement developed by the group
- Actively participate in all deliberations
- Facilitate two-way communication with important stakeholder groups
- Attend all scheduled meetings

Claros Group

This effort will be supported by Laura Peck of the Claros Group and her associates. They provide expertise in organizational assessment and re-modeling and helping organizations navigate change. Ms. Peck will work closely with Martha Durán-Contreras to design and facilitate the project flow as well as the team meetings.

Working Group

Composition

This work group will have sixteen members, drawn equally from the District and the community.

- **District members** may include Principals, psychologists, SDC teachers, RSP, coordinators, speech and language specialists, instructional aides, General Education teachers.
- **Community members** may include CREST,, SE parents, GE parents, community members at large.
- **Others** may be invited in as needed, for example, Human Resources, Finance, IT, or legal counsel.

Criteria for Membership Selection

- Represent diversity and a diverse viewpoints and able to consider the good of all
- Have a history of active participation and be willing and ready to have new conversations
- Credible in eyes of peers
- Represent balance of perspectives, grade levels, and school sites
- Willing to hear and respect all perspectives
- Committed to participating in robust communication between the working group and local sites, job-alikes, and the parent community
- Demonstrated leadership skills
- Voluntary service, committed to meeting a minimum of 20 hours/month for four months
- Overlapping membership with key stakeholder groups, including involvement in planning efforts and the Barber report

Selection Process

The Superintendent in consultation with the Sponsor Group develops the criteria for membership of the Working Group.

The Superintendent will give an update on the progress of the Special Education Collaborative as a discussion item at the next two consecutive Board of Education meetings on Oct. 2nd in Malibu and Oct 16th in Santa Monica. This gives an opportunity for community input regarding the criteria. People can also send their written input to Martha Durán-Contreras (duan-contreras@smmusd.org) no later than the 17th of October.

The Sponsor Group will incorporate community feedback regarding criteria and finalize the application for the Working Group. Applications will be available October 20 and due October 30. Applications will be available at the reception desk at the District Office or can be requested from Martha Durán-Contreras, Project Lead, either by phone (310) 450-8338, ext. 282 or by email at duan-contreras@smmusd.org.

In early November, the Superintendent will convene a Selection Committee composed of the Sponsor Group and chairs (or their representatives) from the SEDAC and the PTA-Special Education Committee. The Selection Committee will review the applications for diversity and parity and recommend membership to the Superintendent by November 7th.

The Superintendent will review the recommendations and appoint members to the Working Group in time for the first meeting of the Special Education Collaborative.

C. STAGES OF THE WORKING GROUP COLLABORATIVE PROCESS



**A sponsor/sponsor group is part architect, part advisor, and part champion. Over the life of a project, sponsoring work has three aspects:*

- To ensure that the initial expectations are clear, the resources available, and the support sufficient;*
- To advise and participate as the work team requires;*
- To help disseminate the learning when the project is completed.*

***The sponsor develops a charter with the following elements:*

- 1. Purpose/Mission & Pertinent Background*
- 2. Scope & Parameters of the Work*
- 3. Expected Outcomes & Timeline*
- 4. Membership*
- 5. Working Relationships with Others*
- 6. Resources Available*

****Activities of formation include: clarifying what the group is being asked to do, establishing a calendar and format for meetings, inventorying the experience and talents of each member and agreeing on practices that will help the group get its work done.*

E. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Inclusion: Students with moderate to severe disabilities are educated as members of General Education classrooms with supports and adaptations to the curriculum.

Mainstreaming: Students with disabilities are educated at specific times of the day or in specific classes of General Education, based on their strengths and abilities.

Collaborative Classrooms: The teaming of a General Education teacher and a Special Education teacher to instruct a blended class of students with and without Individual Educational Programs, either centrally structured or informally arranged by the involved teachers and using strategies and adaptations to maximize individual learning.

Inclusive Practices: District and school sites to consistently and meaningfully provide opportunities for students with disabilities to be interactive with non-disabled peers, in academics and non-academics.

Integration: Philosophy, practice, and culture of educating students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers, in the school they would attend if not disabled, to the maximum extent appropriate. This encompasses inclusion, mainstreaming, collaborative classrooms, and inclusive practices.

G. CITY OF SANTA MONICA CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

- We maintain the highest ethical standards
- We are polite, helpful, respectful and understanding at all times
- We solve problems and provide accurate information and timely, responsive services
- We promote a safe and welcoming environment for the public and staff
- We are sensitive to the special needs of our customers
- We value customer feedback and are committed to continuous improvement
- We provide excellent customer service to our colleagues, which in turn benefits our service to the public
- And we thank customers for treating city staff with respect and courtesy

H. DETAILED WEBSITE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SMMUSD Home Page: Add a “Special Education” hyperlink to the menu at the left hand column.
2. On the Landing Page, add Definition of Special Education – see San Ramon Valley Unified School District (SRVUSD) for example.
3. Include list of S.E. “Programs and Services” each with hyperlink to explanations/campuses – See SRVUSD, NMUSD for examples.
4. Include link to “Key Contacts” list at the District and School Sites – see SRVUSD for example.
5. Include Quicklinks/hyperlink to Resources and Forms – that will take you to a page that warehouses all documents and forms that would be of interest to a Special Ed parent e.g. S.E. Policies and Protocols, IEP forms (see MBUSD), the Parent Handbook, Strategic Plan, Barber Report, Communication Bill of Rights, Developmental Milestone Chart, Meeting Agenda’s for PTA S.E and SEDAC.
6. Add list of related groups with hyperlinks for more information: SEDAC, PTA S.E. Committee, Parent Resource Network – See SRVUSD for their “box” approach.
7. Include “What’s New” section that would have hyperlinks to things like the latest correspondence from the Superintendent or articles written about SMMUSD S.E.
8. Mission Statement – TBD
9. Include information regarding the “Local Plan” - TBD
10. Suggest removing “Responsibilities” and “Strategic Plan” and adding “Resources/Forms’ (where the long and abbreviated Strategic Plan would be housed), “Glossary,” and revising “Services” to read “Programs/Services.”
11. Add Robust Employment Section – see Elk Grove USD.
12. Add links to other School District Websites (with permission) that may have state-of-the-art videos regarding the law/IEP process e.g. LAUSD’s video on the IEP process.
13. Revise each School Site Websites:
 - a. Include Special Education Department hyperlink to a landing page with Services/Programs/Course Descriptions and Contacts and anything else to bring the S.E. students in parity with the General Ed students.
 - b. Provide consistent location for site specific S. E. information on each school site.
14. SMMUSD/School Sites: Include information about all clubs and groups that offer programs and activities for special needs children e.g. Circle of Friends, Leaps and Bounds, Step by Step.
15. Publicize the existence of the Special Ed section of the Website (and the availability of the Parent Handbook) with a Poster at the District Office and each campus that is in a well-trafficked area.