
SPUSD SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION: A FORUM FOR COLLABORATION

**South Pasadena PTA Council Special Needs Committee
Report
Parent Input from the October 29, 2009 program,
SPUSD Special Needs Education: A Forum for Collaboration**

April 9, 2010

Introduction: On October 29, 2009 the South Pasadena PTA Council Special Needs Committee, in partnership with SPUSD held the titled program to solicit parent feedback about the special education services provided by the District.

To publicize the event a flyer went out in all registration packets prior to school opening. Flyers about the event were then sent home via backpack mail after school started and the district sent flyers direct mail to middle school, high school, non-public and SELPA school families. It was also publicized in all PTA newsletters in the months of September and October.

The forum was held in the SPUSD boardroom. Over 30 parents were in attendance. There were also over 11 district staff and school board members in attendance to hear the comments from the parents. All five principals were also in attendance.

The goal of the forum was to record input from interested parents or guardians of children with special needs, and then to pass the input to the School Board, District staff and to the PTA Council Special Needs committee for review. All groups can then use this input to work together to take action to improve our district's services and ways of working with special needs students and their families. There was no intent to evaluate the accuracy of the comments, to obtain data scientifically, or take action on the input.

The meeting began with introductory remarks from Laura Kieffer, chair of the South Pasadena PTA Council Special Needs Committee, Steve Seaford, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, SPUSD, and Kendra Rose, Director of Special Needs, SPUSD.

We then broke the attendees into 6 breakout groups and assigned each group a trained facilitator and recorder to work with their group. Staff and board members either situated themselves with a group or moved around to each group to listen to the input being given.

The groups each addressed 2 different questions:

1. What is your school or the district doing well in providing services?
2. What suggestions or ideas do you have for improving services?

There was time given for brainstorming and some groups had time to group individual answers and prioritize them with stickers. Comments that could be prioritized are shown listed numerically and in bold type under the questions. As a wrap up, the groups came together and facilitators summarized comments from each of the groups.

Summary of Comments:

These were some of the common themes among the groups. People would like to see improvements in the following areas:

1. ***Updated Special Needs Services and Programs.*** Many parents feel that the district needs new cutting edge Specials Needs services and programs
2. ***More General Education Teacher and Staff Training.*** There was a consensus that the Special Education staff is well-trained but the general education teachers and classified staff need more training on working with Special Needs students.
3. ***Better Transition Supports.*** Parents feel there is a lack of good high school transition plans, successful transitions between grade levels, and life skills trainings specific to Special Needs students.
4. ***Improve IEP Preparation.*** Parents felt that the preparation by staff for IEP meetings needs to be greatly improved.

Our committee has the following specific suggestions for the board and the district.

1. *With the large increase in diagnoses of Special Needs students, there has also been a large increase in the development of special services and program directed for this population. The district should be proactive in identifying and utilizing new programs and services that focus on their strengths, i.e., technology, software, social skills groupings.*
2. *The district should work on better ways to train and work with general education teachers and staff in implementing a student's IEP and modifying curriculum and homework in the general education setting.*
3. *The district should provide specific training on high school transition plans for all involved. This will enable Special Needs students can transition out of high school with higher success rate. The district should also provide more directed programs to transition Special Needs students from the elementary to middle school level and from the middle school to high school level. The district should develop more directed life skills programs at all levels for Special Needs students.*
4. *The district should develop standard procedures and deadlines for providing IEP documents, reports, and test results to parents in a timely manner prior to an IEP meeting.*

Elementary School Resource and Speech

1. What is your school or the district doing well in providing services?

1. Great occupational therapy services provided by Center for Developing Kids (CDK)
2. Good communication, accessibility, support, and encouragement from speech program
3. Collaborative, caring and helpful general education teachers
4. Good adaptive physical education (PE) program
5. Good assessments and strategies to help students provided by outside services

2. What suggestions or ideas do you have for improving services?

- 1. Work with the strengths of the special needs students and find programs that focus on these strengths**
- 2. Copies of IEP documents (including goals, present levels of performance (PLOP), services) should be given to family prior to IEP meeting. Documentation should be included to support PLOP.**
- 3. Allow for modified curriculum in regular classroom and resource for students in full inclusion**
4. More efficient response from School District to requests/inquiries
5. More streamlined Individual Education Program (IEP) Process
6. Better communication between specialists from different sites
7. Resource program, curriculum and strategies need to meet the needs of the student
8. Increased education about acceptance and tolerance for teachers and students
9. Better communication to parents about professional development (PD) and Special Needs areas
10. Provide more Professional Development (PD) for teachers and instructional aides about learning disabilities
11. Make parents aware of outside resources that can provide parents and teachers with alternative strategies
12. Provide monthly live chat rooms where district specialists can respond to questions about special needs issues
13. Focus on improving social skills of special needs students
14. Better written and organized IEP forms
15. Proactive early intervention program to help identify younger students needs

Elementary School SDC or Inclusion

1. What is your school or the district doing well in providing services?

1. Highly qualified staff
2. Good idea to have speech therapist and occupational therapist “in-house”
3. Resource specialist is a positive aspect to MHS program
4. Students with different disabilities are mixed within classrooms
5. Appropriate classroom setting
6. Strong collaboration between SDC and general education classroom
7. Provide good, well-structured IEPs
8. Improved communication with district

2. What suggestions or ideas do you have for improving services?

- 1. Better capacity to provide full inclusion**
- 2. More services for students with less mediation and lawyer involvement**
- 3. Better means to train, inform staff and support staff to get better understanding of specific disabilities**
4. More descriptive goal planning specific to IEPs
5. Provide information readily to make parents aware of various services
6. Find funding for staff development as needed
7. Stronger transition planning for students from SDC to general education classroom
8. Look at other school districts as models for full inclusion

Middle Resource and Speech

1. What is your school or the district doing well in providing services?

1. E-mail and website (homework)
2. Communication via e-mail
3. Responsive, compassionate and well-intentioned RSP teachers
4. Provide parents with adequate notice prior to IEP meetings
5. Responsive administrator
6. Often good communication between RSP and GE teacher, especially when requested by parent
7. Specialized homerooms
8. Weekly grade reports e-mailed to parents.

2. What suggestions or ideas do you have for improving services?

- 1. Better support in GE classroom (better training for para-professionals/aides)**
- 2. All teachers need to implement entire IEP as it is written, including accommodations and modifications.**
- 3. Students should be recognized for completion of homework, not just accuracy.**
4. Provide teachers with in-service to better understand disabilities and inclusion strategies.
5. Provide incentives to turn in homework instead of penalizing for late homework.
6. SPMS to implement SPUSD district-wide homework policy.
7. Systemize how teachers collect homework.
8. Teachers to provide list and verify assignments on a daily basis.
9. Update website on a weekly basis
10. Improved teacher awareness of students' individual needs.
11. Allow students to do homework in homeroom.
12. Provide students with study guides prior to testing.
13. Provide Special Education program specifically for LD students.
14. Students in resource program should be allowed an elective.

Middle School SDC, Inclusion or Transition

1. What is your school or the district doing well in providing services?

- 1. Teachers/staff quick to respond when problems arise.**
- 2. Supportive staff**
- 3. Small, intimate setting provided for students.**
4. Where Everyone Belongs (W.E.B) Mentoring Program
5. Teacher websites
6. Common planning period, collaborative, team approach.
7. Provide help with homework during homeroom.
8. Layout of school is good for special needs students.
9. GE staff knowledgeable of special education needs.
10. Effective IEP process.
11. Phone calls are returned.
12. Binder reminder.

2. What suggestions or ideas do you have for improving services?

- 1. Provide better homework management with a clear understanding of assignments and utilizing teacher websites.**

2. **Provide life skills training. (i.e. – community learning through walking field trips)**
3. **More RSP support in the classroom.**
4. Provide program for social skills.
5. More elective courses.
6. DIS (Designated Instructional Services) reporting.
7. Provide social support during lunch and brunch.
8. Improved block scheduling.
9. Rough in sports area during breaks.
10. Better configuration of classroom per grade level.

High School Resource and Speech

1. What is your school or the district doing well in providing services?

1. **Receptive staff.**
2. **“It’s like having a parent at school.”**
3. **Compassionate staff.**
4. In depth knowledge of students’ needs.
5. Proactive staff.
6. Staff supportive of parents.
7. Increase in type of district services offered.

2. What suggestions or ideas do you have for improving services?

1. **Improved outreach to parents with students in NPS (non-public school).**
2. **Better support of transition from “safe haven” of SPHS.**
3. **Provide basic “alphabet soup” guide (504, IEP, SST, etc.)**
4. Provide students with a better sense of independence.
5. The designation of “case carrier” sounds negative.
6. Better response time.

High School SDC/ Inclusion or Transition

1. What is your school or the district doing well in providing services?

1. SDC is like a private school within the larger organization.
2. Students have their classes but can be part of the larger social group.
3. “Atmosphere” of INCLUSION across the campus.
4. Sense of safety and acceptance on campus.
5. Expectations are communicated.

6. Staff committed to success.
7. Teamwork between special ed and general ed staff
8. Administrative support.
9. GE teachers are growing as professional educators with relation to Special Education students.

2. What suggestions or ideas do you have for improving services?

- 1. Improved identification and assessment of new students.**
- 2. Improve resources – technology and hardware.**
- 3. Consistent financial resources.**
4. Provide college counseling for special need students.
5. Improve student support with additional instructional aides.
6. Better transition from MOST restrictive to LEAST restrictive environments with all necessary supports.
7. Better transition plan implementation by counselor and guidance staffs.
8. How can resources be realigned to better meet needs?
9. Address long-term needs of students.