

CAC

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
for Special Education
ADVISING THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
San Diego Unified School District

Date: September 29, 2009
To: San Diego Unified School District
Board of Education
From: Joyce Clark, Chair
Subject: **CAC Committee Report**
Recommendation to approve the IDEA Stimulus Proposal
To Improve Academic Performance of Students with Disabilities

The California Education Code (Part 30, Chapter 2, Article 7, and Section 56190) requires each Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) to establish a Community Advisory Committee for Special Education (CAC).

The CAC advises the Board of Education and the Special Education Program Division (SEPD) regarding issues related to special education, provides access to training and information and works collaboratively with the school district to improve student outcomes. The CAC participates in the development, amendment and review of the Local Plan for Special Education and recommends annual priorities to be addressed by the plan. The Local Plan describes how services will be delivered to special education students in accordance with federal and state laws.

The Community Advisory Committee for Special Education (CAC) is composed of volunteers, including parents of individuals with exceptional needs enrolled in public and private schools, parents of other students enrolled in school, pupils and adults with disabilities, general and special education teachers, other school district personnel, representatives of other public and private agencies, and persons concerned with the needs of individuals with exceptional needs.

The CAC would like to acknowledge and commend the work and effort put forth by the administration, staff, parents and community involved in the various work groups and task forces, initiated per ***The Recommendations of the Hehir Report to address the three core goal;*** *improving the academic performance of students with disabilities, creating a unified system of general and special education that meets the diverse needs of all learners in their neighborhood schools and eliminating, the over-identification of African-American students and English Language.*

The Hehir report identified root causes which encapsulate the serious ramifications of repeated failures by SDUSD to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities in accordance with the law, resulting in educational disparity among student classifications. Deficient academic performance affecting both students with and without disabilities has occurred far too long, creating serious life-long consequences; limiting opportunity for higher education, viable careers and quality of life.

For nearly two decades CAC leaders, parents, educators and community members have communicated and submitted documentation to the District, including the Board of Education, about ongoing concerns related to student performance deficits, restrictive access to curriculum, absence of an educational continuum, system failures and dysfunction, and blatant legal violations and discrimination of students with disabilities. These issues and findings are consistent and corroborated by various compliance complaints, past litigations, and validated in the Hehir Report.

Several years ago, the CAC leadership met with Superintendent Cohn to discuss and problem solve these compelling educational failures. Consensus was reached, which led to the initiation of a comprehensive evaluation of special education program and services, as opposed to legal proceedings; compliance complaints and class action litigation. CAC, parents and community alike were in agreement that time was of the essence, and in the best interest of students, a genuinely collaborative process was required to improve academic performance outcomes for all students. Additionally, resolutions were required to address the pervasive system dysfunction short and long term. Superintendent Grier and staff continued to support this process and forward the implementation of the Hehir report which was adopted and approved by the Board.

The CAC Executive Committee reviewed the IDEA stimulus proposal with Dr. Ramanathan. We offer our full endorsement and strongly recommend the Board of Education unanimously approve this proposal for a multitude of reasons...The most relevant being the plan universally addresses student performance deficits and stagnation affecting students with and without disabilities. The implementation of a universally designed education system will unlock doors for many students, improve access to core curriculum and provide the means for educators to teach and provide for a quality education through the use of innovative curriculum, technology and professional development.

Secondly, the proposal addresses long overdue reading interventions for students across the learning spectrum. Literacy is an essential requirement to progress in school, enrich one's life and succeed in the world. All students deserve an opportunity to learn how to read including students with significant cognitive disabilities.

The CAC represents approximately 17,000 students who have been identified for special education services in our District. We acknowledge there are significant numbers of students who do not qualify for special education, however, struggle to achieve, as well as, students who would benefit from accessing a more challenging curriculum. The proposal provides for a systematic approach to address learning diversities within our school community and create a 21st Century accessible, progressive, respectful classroom, without the stigma often experienced by students associated with "special education" services.

Accommodations are essentially invisible in a universally designed classroom. It is time to break down the barriers that currently exist and prevent students from educational benefit. Parents are optimistic for the first time in many years. The proposal has generated hope with regard to the resolve of long-term pervasive issues impeding specialized academic instruction to the detriment of students.

The Board of Education is in a unique position to meaningfully change lives and educational benefit and outcomes for all students. We acknowledge your commitment to quality education and respectfully request your support of the proposal, including the continuation of consulting services provided by Dr. Thomas Hehir. Dr. Hehir's oversight and leadership is essential to successful implementation and will provide for continuity during the transition to a new administration. Approval of this plan is the first step, a step in the right direction, a giant step on behalf of students and families.

Respectfully submitted,



Joyce Clark, Chairperson