

Special Education Ad-Hoc Committee
Report to the Houston Independent School
District Board of Education

September 13, 2018



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Introduction

The Special Education Ad-Hoc Committee was created by the Houston ISD Board of Education in February 2017 for the purpose of assessing HISD's current special education program, reviewing the findings of the Houston Chronicle's investigative series on special education as they concern HISD, identifying strengths and areas for improvement for HISD with regards to special education, and improving two-way communication between HISD and other stakeholders. The committee includes HISD trustees, special education specialists, parents, teachers, and principals, as well as special education experts and parent advocates external to the district.

Since its formation, the committee has met 17 times. The committee provided input into the scope of the Houston Special Education Program Review conducted by American Institutes for Research (hereafter "AIR Report"), reviewed the AIR Report, reviewed the district's strategic plan for Special Education for the 2018-19 school year, and brought forward the resolution "Resolution Of The Board Of Trustees Of The Houston Independent School District On Guiding Principles Regarding Inclusive Education Practices" (see Appendix 1) which was approved by the HISD Board in November 2017.

Although the focus of this committee has been special education, the committee recognizes that students requiring special education services are first and foremost general education students. In offering this report on special education, the committee respectfully reminds the board that an emphasis on quality teachers, services, and supports across all levels of the district is needed to enhance the learning and experience of students with disabilities.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the HISD superintendent and administration's (and in particular the special education department's) acceptance of the committee's invitation to partner throughout this process, including making administrative resources available at meetings, listening to concerns, updating the committee on changes being implemented by the district, and partnering with the committee on professional development of stakeholders and parent listening sessions.

The committee also applauds steps that the HISD Board of Education has taken in the past year in support of students with disabilities, including:

- Adopting the "Resolution of the Houston Independent School District on Guiding Principles Regarding Inclusive Education Practices" and directing the administration to prepare documents for incorporating this position into policy in November 2017
- Adopting in December 2017 an updated Education Philosophy policy (AE Local) inclusive of students with disabilities. The district's updated mission is "To equitably educate the whole child so that every student graduates with the tools to reach their full potential." The Declaration of Beliefs and Vision states that "We believe that instruction should be customized/personalized to meet the learning needs for each individual child, including students with disabilities, gifted and talented students, and English Language Learners, so that they have the support and opportunity they need to flourish." One of four superintendent constraints states that "The superintendent shall not allow achievement gaps for student groups, including African-American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged students, students receiving special education services, and English language learners (ELLs) to increase in reading, writing, and mathematics."

As part of the board monitoring system, the board receives regular reports on the achievement gap between students with and without disabilities.

- Adopting budgets for the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years that added \$2.2 million and \$13.5 million respectively in additional funding for special education and interventions.

The Special Education Ad Hoc Committee respectfully submits this report to the HISD Board of Education. This report seeks to complement, not replicate or replace, the AIR report, which offered comprehensive findings and recommendations with specific *administrative* strategies and actions for the HISD administration to take to improve special education services in the district. This report offers findings and recommendations to the board for how to strengthen the board's *governance and oversight* with respect to special education. The committee believes that working together in their respective roles, the HISD Board and Superintendent can dramatically improve outcomes for students with disabilities in HISD.

Committee Membership

Anne Sung, HISD Trustee and Committee Chair

Diana Dávila, HISD Trustee

Holly Maria Flynn Vilaseca, HISD Trustee

Elizabeth Santos, HISD Trustee

Jackie Anderson, HISD Teacher

Courtney Bensch, HISD Assistant Principal

Jackie Cross-Ecford, Parent Advocate

Kara DeRocha, HISD Parent

Ebru Erdini, HISD Parent

Jack Fletcher, PhD, Child Neuropsychologist and Professor of Psychology, University of Houston

Shana Halvorsen, HISD Parent

Erin Hasbrouk, HISD Parent

Lashondra Jackson, HISD Special Education Program Specialist, Team Lead

Gerry Monroe, HISD Parent

Hannah Mose-Harvey, HISD Principal

Barbara Mullen, PhD, HISD Program Specialist, Inclusion and Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities

Karina Quesada-León, HISD Parent

Joshua Rotenberg, MD, Pediatric Neurologist

James Troutman, EdD, HISD Parent

Jamie Wilkes, HISD Teacher

Role of Board and Committee

The Texas Education Code gives a school district's board of trustees the responsibilities of (1) oversight of management of the district and (2) ensuring that the superintendent implements and monitors plans, procedures, programs and systems to achieve appropriate, clearly defined, and desired results in the major areas of district operations. The board acts as a body corporate through majority vote at public meetings held in accordance with Texas law.

As a governing board, the HISD Board of Education is responsible for developing and adopting the district's vision and goals, adopting district policies, evaluating student outcomes, hiring, supervising, and evaluating the superintendent, and adopting the annual budget. The superintendent and administration are responsible for developing plans and regulations, implementing operations, and evaluating progress. Within the board's oversight responsibilities are (1) ensuring there are desired results in place that are appropriate and clearly defined, (2) making sure plans, systems, and procedures designed to achieve desired results exist, and (3) making sure the existing plans, systems and procedures are monitored for effectiveness and changed if necessary.

This Special Education Ad Hoc Committee was created as a committee of the HISD Board of Education, and as such is advisory to the HISD Board specifically in its governance and oversight responsibilities.

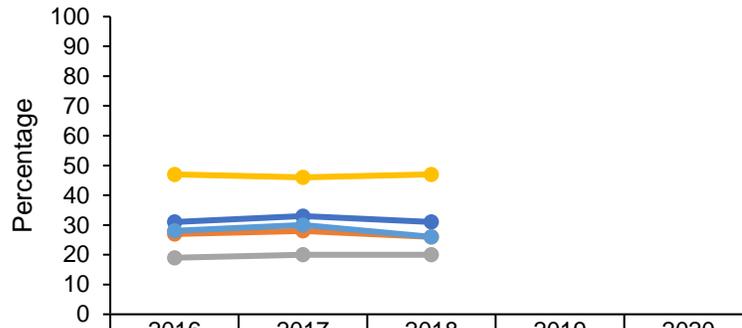
In 2018, the HISD administration also created a special education advisory committee. This committee will provide parents and educators the opportunity to partner directly with administration and to give input into management decisions.

Achievement Gap

In 2017, the HISD Board began tracking the achievement gap between students receiving special education services and students not receiving special education services.

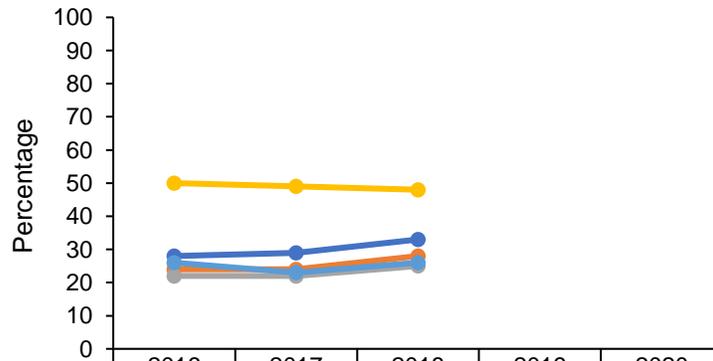
The graphs that follow, from HISD Board's August 2018 Constraint Monitoring Report, show that while there has been some progress in closing this gap in math and writing, large achievement gaps of over 40 percentage points remain between students receiving special education services and students not receiving special education services. While this gap is similar to the statewide and national achievement gaps, the committee believes that it is possible to significantly close this gap for students with disabilities with high quality instruction and intervention through collaboration of general and special education, and other often-siloed resources for struggling students.

STAAR Reading Percentage Point Gap



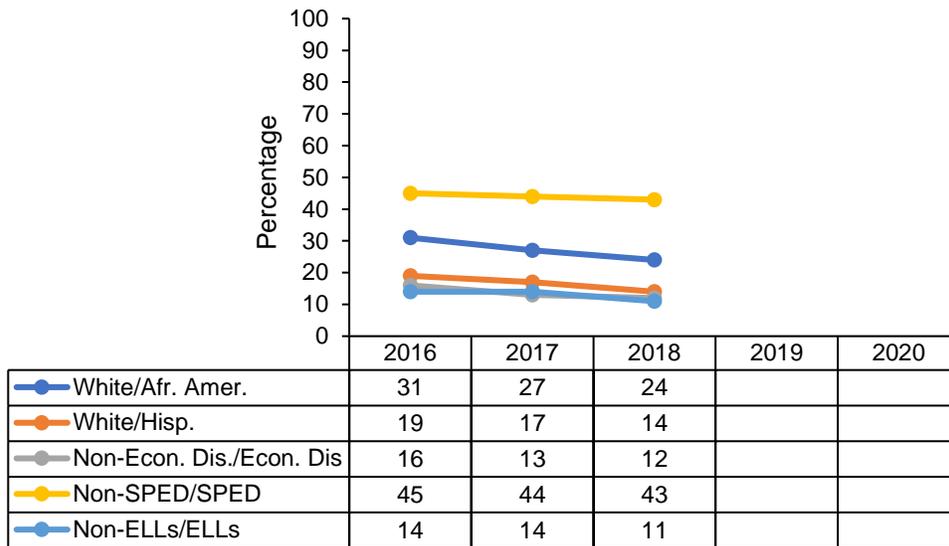
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
White/Afr. Amer.	31	33	31		
White/Hisp.	27	28	26		
Non-Econ. Dis./Econ. Dis	19	20	20		
Non-SPED/SPED	47	46	47		
Non-ELLs/ELLs	28	30	26		

STAAR Writing Percentage Point Gap



	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
White/Afr. Amer.	28	29	33		
White/Hisp.	24	24	28		
Non-Econ. Dis./Econ. Dis	22	22	25		
Non-SPED/SPED	50	49	48		
Non-ELLs/ELLs	26	23	26		

STAAR Math Percentage Point Gap



Findings

The state of special education in HISD is grave.

While the Texas Education Agency’s 2016-17 Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) gives HISD an overall 2017 Accountability Rating of “Met Standard,” it marks HISD’s 2017 Special Education Determination Status as “Needs Intervention.”

When the AIR report came before the HISD Board in March 2018 and representatives of AIR presented their findings and recommendations, following a 10-month review of special education in HISD, they said that against an ideal scenario, special education in HISD rated a 1 on a scale from 1 to 5 (5 being the best). This rating was not part of their prepared presentation, and they did amend this informal rating to a 3 when compared to similar large urban school districts. However, this is far from where the committee believes HISD should aspire to be.

The committee concurs with the findings of the AIR Report, including the Areas of Strength and Areas in Need of Improvement listed below.

Areas of Strength identified in the AIR Report

- (1) Proactive approach to addressing stakeholder concerns regarding HISD special education
- (2) Dedicated and knowledgeable staff ready to support program improvement
- (3) Initial implementation of districtwide Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) process
- (4) Increase in professional development opportunities to support principals and teachers in supporting students with disabilities

Over the past year and half, the administration has worked to clarify the IAT process and to clarify processes for identification of students with disabilities, creating flowcharts that establish timelines and responsibilities. The administration has also hired parent liaisons to advise parents in interacting with the special education system. Furthermore, the administration has hired and trained dyslexia interventionists and increased special education staffing for the 2018-19 school year. The committee acknowledges these important steps in improving the identification of students with disabilities. However, as noted in the AIR report, many instructional services in HISD exist in silos with tension among different departments. A key component of progress towards enhanced student outcomes is to continue to integrate instructional services across departments and to develop a district-wide plan for enhanced student outcomes. Although the focus of this committee is on students identified for special education, we concur with the AIR report in noting the need for an integrated approach to instructional service delivery that begins in the general education classroom.

Areas in Need of Improvement identified in the AIR Report

- (1) There is confusion about, and inconsistent implementation of, processes related to intervention and special education identification.
- (2) IEPs lack sufficient individualization, in accordance with the intention of IDEA.
- (3) Equitable access is lacking for students with disabilities to the full continuum of special education service options.
- (4) Focus on ensuring that students with disabilities have access to high-quality instruction is insufficient.
- (5) HISD staff express a need for professional development that is sustained and focused on in-person coaching and mentoring rather than one-time or online trainings.
- (6) The current staffing allocation in HISD is insufficient to meet the needs of its population of students with disabilities.
- (7) Tension and division persists between general education and special education that impedes effective implementation of practices and procedures that target the needs of students with disabilities.
- (8) The process for communicating about and rolling out new policies and procedures appears to be uncoordinated, inefficient, and rushed.
- (9) There is a systematic underutilization of data to drive programmatic decision making and monitoring.
- (10) HISD lacks a systematic process for ensuring that families are appropriately involved in decision making regarding intervention and special education for their children.

Particular areas of concerns for the committee include:

- **Student outcomes:** The Office of Special Educational Programs (OSEP) has moved towards an outcomes based approach to accountability for students with disabilities. Levels of reading, math, and writing achievement, graduation rates, and similar indicators have been prioritized. As the AIR report notes, some of the district goals are moving in this direction, but the movement is inconsistent and not clearly articulated.

- **Multiple Tiered System of Supports (MTSS):** In line with the focus on enhanced student outcomes, the first recommendation in the AIR report was for the implementation of layered, tiered approaches to service delivery. As the report notes, MTSS approaches, when properly implemented, are effective for all students, but especially for struggling students. There is a focus on instruction beginning in the general education classroom with alternatives outside the general education classroom for additional tutorial interventions. The AIR report was especially concerned about the reduction in resource room opportunities for students with disabilities, which can be effective if they increase instructional time and intensity. While the hiring of more dyslexia interventionists is laudatory and responsive, it begs the question of how these interventionists interface with general education and special education and whether these personnel become another instructional silo. In MTSS systems, all available instructional resources are organized into layered interventions that attempt to prevent disabilities first and increase intensity for students who continue to struggle. HISD has language and procedures for MTSS, but the penetration is weak despite the district's historic participation in early reading intervention and PEER reports on enhancing reading instruction and addressing severe reading problems under previous superintendents.
- **Universal screening and progress monitoring:** Screening and progress monitoring have been shown to enhance student outcomes because they bring to the teachers' attention those who are at risk and provide data on progress that permits instructional adjustments. The AIR report lamented the absence of data on student progress, which is essential to individualization of instructional plans. HISD recently purchased the Renaissance 360 system for universal screening and progress monitoring, which should be used to replace the multiple approaches to screening and progress monitoring presently in place across the district. Linkage studies enabling Renaissance 360 to be used to predict STAAR scores create an opportunity to reduce the use of other snapshots and benchmarks for math and reading, thereby restoring time for instruction. Simply purchasing the system is not enough. There is an urgent need to establish how it will be used and integrated with instruction and the benchmarks at each grade level. Presently there is some danger that this tool will become siloed and not linked with instruction.
- **Inclusion:** Though the HISD board passed the Resolution of The Board of Trustees of The Houston Independent School District on Guiding Principles Regarding Inclusive Education Practices in November 2017, HISD still has a long way to go before these guiding principles are achieved. In 2016-17, 23% of HISD students with disabilities were placed in general education for 40% or less of the school day (AIR Report, p. 19), far higher than the state average and earning HISD the poorest possible rating on TEA's PBMAS indicator and contributing to HISD's 2017 special education determination status of "Needs Intervention" on the 2017 TAPR. The committee commends the Office of Special Populations for explicitly tracking and addressing this in its 3-Year Strategic Plan. However, the committee notes that challenges of inclusion go beyond classroom placement and extend to school placement as well. Many of HISD's magnet schools have very low rates of students with disabilities; in at least some instances this is because magnet principals discourage enrollment and/or offer inadequate supports for students with disabilities. Conversely, many of HISD's longest-struggling neighborhood schools have the responsibility of educating far higher ratios of students with disabilities. Some schools in HISD are great examples of inclusion, educating students with disabilities by default in general

education classroom and training teachers in Universal Design for Learning; however, this is more the exception than the rule.

- **Professional development:** To achieve enhanced outcomes for students with disabilities and for inclusion to be successful, the district must improve the quality of instruction for students with disabilities in all classrooms and by both general and special educators. HISD offers teachers many excellent special education tools and resources that go underutilized because teachers are unfamiliar with them. The committee has heard many reports of problems with the initial rollout of Renaissance 360 and notes the importance of training in the use of the universal screener and progress monitoring tools. HISD has taken some important steps to improve professional development, including a required online training on special education for all teachers in 2017. HISD additionally offers high-quality in-person professional development at its annual special education conference each summer, although participation by general educators greatly lags participation by special educators. The district also required special education training for all principals and their teams at the June 2017 Professional Learning Series, with follow-up professional development at the June 2018 Professional Learning Series. Special education is a required component of professional development for principals during the 2018-19 school year. However, the committee is concerned that the district lacks a comprehensive system to ensure participation and mastery by all SSOs, principals, teachers, and paraprofessionals in special education beyond minimal training required by law.
- **Collaboration between general educators and special educators:** As detailed in the AIR report, division between general education and special education exists both on campuses and in central administration. HISD has taken steps to improve communication across departments, for instance bringing general education curriculum, interventions, and special education into a single office. However, HISD still needs to develop systems to ensure all these departments are working effectively together to address reading, writing, and math gaps for students with disabilities.
- **Principal accountability:** HISD lacks an effective system to hold all principals accountable for the educational and behavioral outcomes of students with disabilities. While some principals make special education a priority, including it as part of their campus improvement plan, some principals are unfamiliar with the data of students with disabilities and do not provide campus leadership in appropriate development and implementation of IEPs. Special education is currently not a part of the Principal TADS Tool, and special populations including special education are not addressed during principal instructional walks, observations, and feedback documentation to principals by SSOs. The screening and progress monitoring tools should be priorities for professional development of principals and the SSOs that support and assess them, so that they have information on which students are at risk and on student progress.
- **Underidentification of students with disabilities:** At their March 2018 presentation before the HISD Board, AIR researchers indicated their agreement with the Houston Chronicle's reports that students with disabilities were not appropriately identified by HISD, consistent with districts across the state of Texas. While the committee did not as part of its work attempt to uncover specific examples of underidentification, the committee is concerned that there may students with disabilities in HISD who are not be identified and do not receive services. One suggestion the committee made to special education in response to the Child Find issues was the documentation of parental requests for evaluations and the district's response to these

requests. Once the district agrees to evaluate a child, there is good compliance with the IDEA 60-day requirements. However, many parents complain that their child was never considered for evaluation. Special Education was responsive to the suggestion for documentation of parental requests for evaluation and the school's response.

- **Possible underidentification of Asian students with disabilities:** In the draft 3-year strategic plan provided to the committee by the HISD Office of Special Populations on May 31, 2018, disaggregated data indicates that Asian students were only 40% as likely to be identified enrolled in special education services as compared to HISD students overall. The committee was concerned that HISD did not have a system to determine whether this discrepancy represented underidentification of students with disabilities in this subpopulation or to address the problem if substantiated.
- **Adequate staffing of special education personnel:** In the December 2016 [Denied series](#), the Houston Chronicle reported that "Officials [in HISD] have cut nearly 600 special ed positions over the past decade." As detailed in the AIR report, lack of special education personnel, including diagnosticians and school psychologists, has caused much higher caseload ratios than recommended by best practice. The 2018-19 budget approved by the HISD Board added 51 special education positions to the district¹. However, for some positions HISD continues to struggle to compete on salary with neighboring districts and private practice. As of August 23, 2018, the district had 20 special education campus vacancies.
- **Transition supports for students with disabilities:** The committee is concerned about long-term outcomes for students with disabilities and the effectiveness of transition supports for students with disabilities as they transition from elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and after high school graduation. This was not an area intercluded in the scope of the AIR report.
- **Communication with and voice for students with disabilities and parents of students with disabilities:** The committee applauds the creation of parent liaison positions to help HISD parents navigate the district's special education services. The committee has heard of both positive and negative examples of parent experiences with parent liaisons and urges the district to ensure there is a system for feedback and continual improvement of this important service. The committee is encouraged by the establishing of a district-wide special education advisory committee. The committee is also grateful to the district for working with parents and advocates to create SEPAC (the Special Education Parent Advisory Committee), an organization by parents and for parents with district buy-in and supported by district resources. If these committees are sustained and support genuine parent engagement, they will help to improve communication and build trust between parents and the district. However, the committee notes that when parents of students with disabilities and special education teachers are not included in site-based decision-making committees, bond advisory committees, and other committees engaging community members in important decisions affecting all students, the result is that special education is often an afterthought. The committee also wishes to stress the importance of outreach to and communication with non-English speaking families of students with

¹ 8 Special Education Teachers, 12 Teaching Assistants, 1 Speech Pathologist Program Specialist, Team Lead, 2 Special Education Parent Liaisons, 3 Itinerant Behavior Specialists, 2 Employment Representatives, 5 Evaluation Specialists, 4 Evaluation Specialists, Team Leads, 5 LSSPs, 5 Special Education Program Specialists, Team Leads, 2 Special Education Program Specialists, 1 Asset Management Clerk, 1 Administrative Assistant II

disabilities. The low participation rate on the AIR survey by Hispanic parents is not unusual but just underscores the importance of greater efforts to communicate with parents of students with disabilities who speak Spanish and other languages.

- **Identification and services for students with dyslexia:** While in Texas dyslexia may fall either under special education or 504 services, the committee notes that early identification and services for students with dyslexia can dramatically impact outcomes for students. The committee is concerned that as of May 7, 2018, only 4,105 HISD students were identified to receive dyslexia services, less than 2% of the student population and well below even conservative estimates of dyslexia prevalence. The committee acknowledges and is encouraged by steps HISD has taken to hire and train dyslexia interventionists for the 2018-19 school year. However, the question remains as to how these interventionists will integrate with general and special education. These are long-term concerns that date back to the Hehir report on special education in HISD.
- **Special education in HISD's in-district charters:** HISD's in-district charters have startlingly low rates of identified students with disabilities. While these charters are offered special education services by HISD, the committee is concerned as to whether the district's oversight is sufficient to ensure students with disabilities at these independently-operated schools are appropriately identified and evaluated and whether the teachers and administrators at these schools have sufficient special education training to deliver quality instruction and supports to students with disabilities in both special education and general education classrooms.
- **District response to AIR Report:** In reviewing the administration's 3-Year Strategic Plan of the Office of Special Populations, the committee notes that it is unclear whether and how the plan addresses the findings and adopts the full recommendations (which each include short-term implementation activities, long-term implementation activities, and suggested indicators of success) from the AIR Report.

Recommendations

The Texas Education Code states that "The board of trustees of a school district or the governing body of an open-enrollment charter school has primary responsibility for ensuring that the district or school complies with all applicable requirements of state educational programs." (TEC 7.028) Given HISD's 2017 Special Education Determination "Improvement Required" status and the numerous findings in the AIR report, it is critical that the HISD Board of Education appropriately exercise its oversight responsibility and ensure that systems are in place to improve special education services. The committee recommends that the HISD Board take the following actions within its governing and oversight responsibilities to strengthen special education in HISD.

(1) Request a Response to the AIR Report

The board should direct the superintendent to give a formal response to the AIR report. For each Finding, the administration should indicate how and when it will be addressed. For each recommendation, and its associated short-term implementation activities, long-term implementation activities, and suggested indicators of success, the administration should indicate whether it or an

alternative would be adopted. Especially important is the first recommendation involving MTSS service delivery models, which would require consideration of all instructional programs in the district. An overall message is that siloed services are less effective than intervention services that are organized, layered, and supported by universal screening and progress monitoring.

In receiving the administration's response, the committee reminds the board that AIR prefaced its recommendations with the following caution: "It will take time to build the district and school infrastructure necessary to prepare staff to implement changes adequately and ensure ongoing fidelity to these changes. For systematic changes, implementation science suggests that schools and districts invest at least 3-6 months to build stakeholder buy-in and another 6-12 months to adequately prepare ... for full implementation. Using a validated, systematic approach to implementing and monitoring these recommendations will lead to efficient and effective use of resources, greater adherence to the established processes, and most importantly, sustained improvement in student outcomes." (AIR Report, page 46)

(2) [Revise HISD's Site Based Decision Making Committee Policy](#)

The board should empower the board's policy committee to recommend changes to HISD Board Policy BQB Local to ensure special education representation on SDMCs. This committee should work appropriately with the superintendent and the district's consultation process to revise BQB Local and should present its recommendation no later than the board's December 2018 meeting.

(3) [Update Policy to Reflect Guiding Principles Regarding Inclusive Education Practices](#)

In November 2017, the HISD Board adopted the Resolution on Guiding Principles Regarding Inclusive Education Practices and directed the administration to prepare documents for incorporating this position into policy.

The board should direct the superintendent to provide the board with an update at the October 2018 board workshop on special education on the administration's preparation of documents pursuant to this November 2017 directive and to work expeditiously with the policy committee to bring forward any recommended policy updates for consideration by the full board.

(4) [Oversight of Professional Development Systems](#)

The board should direct the superintendent to include in the October 2018 board workshop on special education a discussion of how HISD fulfills both the letter and the spirit of the Students with Disabilities section of HISD Board Policy DMA Legal: **"Staff development must include training that is evidence-based, as defined by Section 8101, Every Student Succeeds Act (20 USC 7801), that relates to the instruction of students with disabilities and is designed for educators who work primarily outside the area of special education.** A district is required to provide such training only if the educator does not possess the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the individualized education program developed for a student receiving instruction from the educator. A district may determine the time and place at which the training is delivered. In developing or maintaining such training, **a district must consult persons with expertise in research-based practices for students with disabilities, including colleges, universities, private and nonprofit organizations, regional education service centers, qualified district personnel, and any other persons identified as qualified by the district.**" (Emphasis added.)

(5) Data Disaggregation

The board should direct the superintendent to include in any future presentation of student data to the board disaggregation for students with disabilities, whenever disaggregated data is readily available. The participation number and rate for students with disabilities should be included.

(6) Annual Oversight, Board Monitoring, and Budgeting

AIR researchers advised HISD to proceed thoughtfully and deliberately in adopting their recommendations, drawing on best practices from implementation science, to transform special education in HISD. Progressing from a 1 to a 5, relative to best practices in special education, will require dedicated effort over years. Resources certainly matter, but just as important is putting into place the right focus by all educators on the learning outcomes for students with disabilities and the right structure to support organizational change. To support this, the committee makes the following recommendation to the HISD Board for annual oversight, board monitoring, and budgeting with respect to special education.

Until the board determines the quality of special education in HISD has sufficiently improved, the board should request annually a strategic plan for special education, an associated implementation integrity rubric and dashboard, and thrice annual board workshops on the progress of implementation. As recommended by both the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education and by AIR, it is important that the district focus not only on compliance but on student outcomes. Therefore, each workshop should include an analysis of student learning outcomes. Each year's annual plan should be presented no later than April of the previous school year and should include the administration's assessment of whether budgetary constraints are affecting the district's capacity to achieve its vision and goals for educating students with disabilities, so that the board can make an informed decision about allocating resources for special education in adopting its annual budget.

(7) Attention to Special Education in the HISD Board Governance Framework

When the board next updates the district's governance framework, including vision, mission, beliefs, goals, and constraints, the board should ensure special education continues to be a priority within the framework. To address concerns about communication and engagement with parents of students with disabilities, the board should consider development of a constraint to strengthen HISD's community engagement, inclusive of families of students with disabilities.

References

Documents informing this report by the Special Education Ad Hoc Committee include:

- [A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Their Families](#), by the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, July 1, 2002
- [2016-17 Texas Academic Performance Report for Houston ISD](#), Texas Education Agency
- [Houston Special Education Program Review](#), American Institutes for Research, February 22, 2018

Appendix 1: Resolution Of The Board Of Trustees Of The Houston Independent School District On Guiding Principles Regarding Inclusive Education Practices, adopted November 9, 2017

WHEREAS, it is a collective challenge to the Houston Independent School District (HISD) to strengthen current services provided to HISD students with disabilities and their families; and

WHEREAS, the district believes that for a clear majority of special-population students, there is a need (and an effective way) to increase their time and success in the general education;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the HISD Board of Education hereby endorses the following bedrock practices of effective schools in serving students receiving Special Education services:

- Students requiring special education services are, first and foremost, general education students who need additional services and support in order to succeed in school. Their success, therefore, is the joint responsibility of all HISD educators, including general and special educators.
- Inclusive education is not a separate initiative in education; it is a basic characteristic of school restructuring to improve student performance that includes in-class instructional methods for differentiated instruction to address academic diversity.
- Inclusive practices recognize that decisions about student services are based on the specific needs of each student, including those with disabilities. When an objective, service-oriented process is used, it is apparent that 1) many more students can find success in the general education classrooms with appropriate supports and 2) there will be a continuing need for services provided outside of the general education classroom for some of our students.
- Across HISD schools, it will be necessary to increase our expectations for students with disabilities and to collaboratively educate all students within the least restrictive environment.
- Schools shall include parents/guardians as an integral part of the educational process for all students, including students with disabilities. All staff communications will reflect respect, empathy, professionalism, and transparency.

Appendix 2: HISD Office of Special Education Services Response to Special Education Ad Hoc Committee Concerns

September 12, 2018

The Office of Special Education Services (OSES), in response to the HISD Ad Hoc Committee concerns, proposes the following actions or responses to remediate or address the concerns in a timely manner to promote student success. Please note that where concerns align with findings from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) Report findings the correlation is indicated in the AIR Findings column. The strategies listed are either currently being implemented or planned for launch during the 2018-2019 school year.

Ad HOC Concerns	AIR Findings	OSES Strategies
<p>1. Student Outcomes</p>	<p>(4) Focus on ensuring that students with disabilities have access to high-quality instruction is insufficient.</p> <p>(9) There is a systematic underutilization of data to drive programmatic decision making and monitoring.</p> <p>(10) HISD lacks a systematic process for ensuring that families are appropriately involved in decision making regarding intervention and special education for their children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The OSES is engaging in stronger collaboration with Elementary and Secondary Curriculum Departments to ensure instructional and intervention supports are embedded in curriculum documents for students with disabilities. • IEP Progress reports will be generated either each six weeks or each nine weeks to determine students' progress toward IEP goals. • The OSES staff, in collaboration with other Special Populations staff, has begun planning and implementation of a continuum of services to support teachers and campus administrators, to effectively and proactively address the needs of struggling students in the areas of: (1) data driven instruction, (2) structured literacy, and (3) social and emotional learning. • The Parent Portal has been implemented in EASY IEP as a way for parents to view and provide feedback on IEPs in draft form prior to ARD-IEP meetings. Once a Proposed ARD/IEP has been created for a child, parents are sent an email notification with a link that allows them to access the Parent Connect Portal.
<p>2. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support</p>	<p>(1) There is confusion about, and inconsistent implementation of, processes related to intervention and special education identification.</p> <p>(10) HISD lacks a systematic process for ensuring that families are appropriately involved in decision making regarding intervention and special education for their children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Interventions office has assigned IAT managers to oversee the functions of campus-based Interventions Assistance Teams as well as Rtl processes on campuses. • The Interventions Office has developed standard documents and processes to ensure that campuses are identifying students' needs based on a tiered approach and providing interventions as specified in guiding documents. • Standard documents for conducting Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) meetings have also been developed and implemented on campuses to ensure that the transition from IAT to special education referral is seamless. • OSES has begun the process of training principals and other school leaders in Full Independent Evaluation (FIE) and Child Find. These trainings will be mandatory for campus department leads and program specialists to ensure that consistent processes are practiced district wide. 9/12/2018

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve consistency in evaluations, all special education evaluators have begun to engage in a minimum of 105 hours of professional development opportunities that are aligned with best practices in evaluations to hone their skills and to keep current in evaluation and child find procedures. OSES, in collaboration with the Interventions Office, has begun to provide coordination for campus- based programs designed to meet the needs of students who qualify for specialized instructional and behavioral interventions. Instructional Interventions are provided to students through the District’s Response to Intervention (Rtl) process. The purpose of Rtl is to ensure that each student will benefit from instruction at the appropriate level of intensity to promote academic success. OSES, in collaboration with other Special Populations teams, has begun discussion and efforts to write or revise curriculum planning guides. A review of data specifically related to students with disabilities will provide entry points for the accommodations that will provide a multi-tiered level of support, where there is currently none provided, as well as indicators to ensure clarity and user-friendly support for teachers.
3. Universal Screening and Progress Monitoring	(9) There is a systematic underutilization of data to drive programmatic decision making and monitoring.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OSES, in collaboration with the Curriculum Department and the Interventions Office, will lead the review of universal reading and math screener data with campus and district leadership to determine the need for interventions. OSES has established a process and a timeline to ensure data collection and progress monitoring are implemented in accordance with the ARD/IEP. ARD/IEP progress reports will be prepared and available for parents every six or nine weeks.
4. Inclusion	(3) Equitable access is lacking for students with disabilities to the full continuum of special education service options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OSES has added specialized services to multiple campuses to provide equitable access to a continuum of services for students with disabilities. OSES has begun partnering with the Curriculum and Student Support Services departments to ensure that supports (academic, behavioral, and social/emotional supports) for students with disabilities are clearly embedded in the general curriculum. Special Olympics will transition from a traditional model to the Unified Champion Schools model which is geared towards unifying all students with and without disabilities- using sports and the arts as a catalyst for social inclusion
5. Professional Development	(7) Tension and division persists between general education and special education that impedes effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OSES will continue to provide training to campus leaders on instructional resources and strategies available to support students with disabilities.

	<p>implementation of practices and procedures that target the needs of students with disabilities.</p> <p>(4) Focus on ensuring that students with disabilities have access to high-quality instruction is insufficient.</p> <p>(5) HISD staff express a need for professional development that is sustained and focused on in-person coaching and mentoring rather than one-time or online trainings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSES launched two major trainings for special education and general education teachers during summer and pre-service weeks. Course Descriptions are as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Power of Two- Effective Models of Collaborative Teaching All participants will gain a clear understanding of the roles of both special education and general education teachers and the benefits of Co-Teaching and Support Facilitation. Supporting students with disabilities in the general education classroom provides an opportunity for students to receive high quality instruction from both general and special education teachers. In a collaborative teaching setting, teachers will need to work together successfully to meet the needs of these diverse learners. (General Education & Special Education Teachers) Specially Designed Instruction Participants will explore Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) and how it can be used to address the unique needs of students that result from the child's disability; and to ensure access to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the educational standards adopted by the state. This course is designed for general and special education teachers looking for "the way" to instruct students with disabilities to ensure that you are addressing their skill deficits as well as teaching grade level standards. • The OSES will launch two Special Education cohorts (Department Chair Lead and Program Specialists) to build a strong pool of personnel to serve in lead roles to support schools (<i>December 2018</i>). • OSES launched Teach SPED-U in spring 2018 to support the PD needs of new special education teachers. This year long teacher induction program will provide training and mentoring in the areas of instruction, compliance and behavior support. • During the 2018-2019 school year, OSES staff will initiate <i>Authentic Instructional Rounds</i> to support the instructional capacity of teachers and administrators. • OSES has created district level trainings that provide support for programs and initiatives used by general and special education teachers (Unique, Restorative Practices, GoalBook, STAAR ALT 2, Self-Determination, Easy IEP, IEP writing, etc.). Guides will be provided to parents and teachers during trainings and meetings.
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<p>6. Collaboration between General Educators and Special Educators</p>	<p>(7) Tension and division persists between general education and special education that impedes effective implementation of practices and procedures that target the needs of students with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The OSES launched The Power of Two: Effective Models of Collaborative Teaching, a training specific to collaboration between the general education teacher and the special education teacher. • OSES will continue to maintain a close partnership with the Curriculum department to ensure that supports (academic, behavioral, and social/emotional supports) for students with disabilities are clearly embedded in the general curriculum. • The OSES leadership has begun working with campus leaders and other central office leaders to promote more consistent and rigorous inclusion of special education teachers in campus based Professional Learning Communities to focus on data, student work analysis, high yield instructional strategies and lesson planning.
<p>7. Principal Accountability</p>	<p>Not Applicable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSES has begun collaboration with the Talent Development team to determine areas for revision in the School Leadership Appraisal Rubric tool to include indicators that specifically address all subpopulations, specifically special education. • The OSES will deliver mandatory special education sessions during monthly principal's meetings during which the following will occur: updates and learning opportunities to increase principals' capacity to support students with disabilities; an overview of topics related to improving academic outcomes for identified students; guidance on the evaluation process and other related topics.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSES curriculum specialists have created “indicators” or “look-for” documents to support campus leaders/administrators in providing feedback and support to special education teachers to strengthen instruction for students with disabilities. This effort also aims to increase the accountability of leaders in supporting effective instruction through appropriate feedback. • OSES is developing the Principal & School Leader’s Implementation Guide, which will focus on guidance for special education services around Instruction, Compliance and Behavior. This will be available by October 31, 2018.
8. Under identification of students with disabilities	(1) There is confusion about, and inconsistent implementation of, processes related to intervention and special education identification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The OSES has partnered with Region 4 Education Service Center to train all evaluation personnel around best practices for responding to requests for evaluation. The training dates are as follows: 8/16/18, 8/22/18, 9/14/18, 10/12/18, 11/9/18, 12/14/18, 1/11/19, 2/8/19, 3/8/19, 4/12/19, 5/10/19, 6/7/19 • Campus based IAT’s have been trained on the process for responding to parent requests for evaluations. • The Interventions Office in collaboration with the OSES has implemented clear systems for progress monitoring through IAT to clearly define the process for determining when to move from providing interventions to referral for special education. • Based on the review of data from the 2017-2018 school year, OSES has committed to improving our efforts to proactively identify, locate, and evaluate struggling students; and providing a robust Full and Individual Evaluation (FIE) that will clearly define the student’s strengths as well as needed supports and services to ensure academic success.
9. Possible under identification of Asian students with disabilities	(1) There is confusion about, and inconsistent implementation of, processes related to intervention and special education identification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSES has reviewed the 2017 PEIMS data which shows Asians identified as students with a disability in the following categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Other Health Impaired (02): 0.6 ○ Intellectual Disability (06): 0.7 ○ Emotional Disturbance (07): 0.4 ○ Learning Disability (08): 0.3 ○ Speech Impaired (09): 2.2 ○ Autism (10): 3.4* • Based on the review of data from this report and review of national data from the United States Department of Education Multi-Year Disproportionality analysis, OSES’s identification trends for Asian students are consistent with national trends. OSES is committed to ongoing proactive efforts to conduct

		<p>culturally sensitive evaluations and appropriately identify, locate, and evaluate struggling students of all ethnicities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LSSPs will attend training on October 25, 2018, entitled, “Addressing Multicultural Needs in Evaluations.” Presenters are: Dr. Traci Whittenberg, Sr Manager of LSSP’s and Dr. Dahl Rawlins, LSSP
<p>10. Adequate staffing of Special Education personnel</p>	<p>(4) Focus on ensuring that students with disabilities have access to high-quality instruction is insufficient.</p> <p>(6) The current staffing allocation in HISD is insufficient to meet the needs of its population of students with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a result of the increase in the number of students with Autism and Emotional Disturbance, eight (8) additional teachers were added to campuses to create new service opportunities and expand existing services. Additional Program Specialists have been hired to provide job embedded coaching to support students with disabilities in Special Education classes and inclusive environments. Evaluation staff has also been added to support efforts to ensure that evaluations are timely and efficient.
<p>11. Transition supports for students with disabilities</p>	<p>(3) Equitable access is lacking for students with disabilities to the full continuum of special education service options.</p> <p>(4) Focus on ensuring that students with disabilities have access to high-quality instruction is insufficient.</p> <p>(10) HISD lacks a systematic process for ensuring that families are appropriately involved in decision making regarding intervention and special education for their children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OSES has begun collaboration with Innovations for Secondary Programs to expand Project Explore and Project Emerge to ensure student participation in Postsecondary planning and education. Programs such as Co-Pilot and Naviance has guided students towards career options and help monitor student attainment of goals. Professional development is ongoing to ensure the process implementation at all secondary levels. OSES continues to provide training to campus leaders, transition coaches, and department chairs to support students with disabilities. OSES leadership promotes collaboration among transition coaches, campus leaders and department chairs to ensure that the message of inclusive practices for college readiness reaches every student. OSES has begun developing a Community-Based Vocational Instruction(CBVI)/ Community-Based Instruction (CBI) handbook that provides guidance to parents, teachers, campus leaders and other stakeholders. Transition Services opportunities have expanded to include HCC Transition, H.E.A.R.T., Project SEARCH, Dow Chemical, Texas Children’s Health Plan, as well as Campus Based 18+ Transition Programs. Because of high-quality preparation and support for students, campus administrators, special education department chairpersons, teachers, staff, parents, and other stakeholders, 45.9%, of students with disabilities applied to college between the years 2016/2017 and 2017/2018. Additionally, 52

		<p>students with cognitive disabilities participated in community based vocational internships and classes in the 2017/2018 school year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSES, Operations and Nutrition Services will collaborate to open a Starbucks coffee kiosk at the South Field Office to provide a supportive work environment for students with Cognitive and Developmental Disabilities.
<p>12. Communication with and voice for students with disabilities and parents of students with disabilities</p>	<p>(10) HISD lacks a systematic process for ensuring that families are appropriately involved in decision making regarding intervention and special education for their children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSES created opportunities to communicate with and give voice to parent concerns by creating Quarterly Parent Advocacy Committee meetings. • OSES will continue to host Bi-Yearly Parent Summits (fall and spring) to create opportunities for parents, caregivers and other stakeholders to learn together, share ideas, and form networks of supports and services for students with disabilities. • Students are proactive in their ARD/IEP participation through the Transition Student Input Form which guides them in leading part of their ARD/IEP meeting. • Students have voice in self-advocacy by determining their post-secondary goals.
<p>13. Identification and services for students with Dyslexia</p>	<p>(1) There is confusion about, and inconsistent implementation of, processes related to intervention and special education identification.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSES, in collaboration with Dyslexia Team Leads, has begun to provide supervision to dyslexia interventionists to ensure that progress monitoring and instructional plans are properly developed and implemented for students with Dyslexia. • Dyslexic students are serviced by Dyslexia Interventionists that have been trained to ensure that progress monitoring data as well as other relevant data is collected and used to adjust interventions as needed. • A Dyslexia handbook has been developed to clarify dyslexia evaluations, possible indicators, as well as systematic tools for interventions. This handbook is being used to guide the work of evaluation personnel, Dyslexia team leads, Dyslexia Interventionists, and campus-based Dyslexia coordinators.
<p>14. Special Education in HISDs in-district charters</p>	<p>(6) The current staffing allocation in HISD is insufficient to meet the needs of its population of students with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSES supports students with disabilities at in-district charter schools with the utilization of six (6) itinerant teachers providing direct/facilitation support as well as collaborative or consultative facilitation support. • OSES provides speech therapy services, psychological services, counseling as a related service, OP/PT, AI/VI, and assistive technology. • Each in-district charter is provided technical assistance by a Special Education Senior Manager and a Special Education Program Specialist. OSES maintains responsibility for Child Find for in-district charters.

15. District response to AIR report	American Institute Research Recommendations (1-10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The OSES has developed a 3-Year Strategic Plan to address the recommendations as indicated in the American Institute for Research (AIR) report.• The OSES has begun to strengthen practices and collaborations to create and/or adjust practices and processes to address concerns to ensure that all stakeholders, service providers and advocates for students with disabilities are informed, empowered, and motivated.• Goals, action steps, and metrics have been established to provide clear plans for refining practices and ensuring that there is tangible evidence to track progress toward achieving specified goals.• OSES has consulted with AIR to provide feedback on the strategic plan and adjust as needed.
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