June 9, 2015

Board of Education Members and Superintendent McGee
Palo alto Unified School District
25 Churchill Road
Palo Alto, CA 94306

 RE: Report of the California Statewide Task Force on Special Education

Dear Members of the Board and Superintendent McGee:

 In March 2015, the California Statewide Special Education Task Force released its recommendations to dramatically improve education for students with disabilities. According to the report the task force was made up of, “representatives from key stakeholder groups—parents, general and special education educators, higher education professors, nonpublic schools/agencies, and charter schools as well as liaisons from the State Board of Education, the California Department of Education, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, the Legislative Analyst Office, the Department of Finance, and California state legislative staff—this Task Force was charged to study exactly why special education is not more successful and what must be changed in both *policy and practice* to improve services for all children identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as having a disability.”

 This task force was initiated by Michael Kirst, President of the State Board of Education, and Linda Darling Hammond, Chairwoman of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, whose dedication to changing the outcomes for students in special education, resulted in a committee of “California leaders who had the knowledge, experience, and foresight to grapple with current, relevant issues and determine concrete ways to change systems and improve school results for children with disabilities.”

 The Palo Alto CAC has followed this task force for the past fourteen months and submitted comments when requested. We strongly encourage you to review the seven recommendations set forth in the report. We also recommend that you establish a multidisciplinary task force modeled after the state task force to study the PAUSD Special Education Program, review data on our students in special education, conduct surveys and focus groups to hear from families regarding their experiences in the district and to establish a rigorous accountability policy and procedure to ensure consistent implementation of the special education department programs. Our hope is that a local task force will put forth recommendations about best practices for the PAUSD special education department programs which address the concerns of all our local stakeholders.

Christina Schmidt
Palo Alto Community Advisory Committee on Special Education, a sub-committee of SELPA 1 (CAC)

Stacey Ashlund
SELPA 1 Representative