



February 27, 2018

To: PAUSD School Board Members and Interim Superintendent Hendricks,

On behalf of parents and the Palo Alto CAC, we want to acknowledge the firm commitment of this Board to address and improve the outcomes for students with disabilities. This [Special Education Evaluation](#) was first requested by our committee in May 2015, after the [Statewide Special Education Task Force](#) determined “exactly why [California] 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.” As our School Board, you have made it a priority to enact a plan for our kids and we thank you.

We also appreciate that Special Education leadership, under the direction of Assistant Superintendent Conaway, is finally looking closely at our district’s own patterns of practice and need, and sharing the findings to date. This acknowledged and authentic shift to a systems-level evaluation, especially around known problems and recommendations, will help staff discern and improve systemic patterns and deficiencies that impact our students. This helps restore our trust.

With more decision-relevant data, and opportunities to teach and learn side-by-side, we see General Education teachers and administrators sharing responsibility with special educators for ALL the kids in school, including those with disabilities. So all educators do their part to prevent “wait-to-fail” delays and over/underidentification for Special Education. We hope to see more sharing of best-practices and use of effective, research-based interventions, and call for sufficient support at school sites, like elementary behaviorists, universal accommodations, bias/equity sensitivity, and professional development to make inclusion truly successful.

The primary purpose for PAUSD Special Education is the provision of targeted instruction and support in areas of deficiency or need, with the aim of promoting academic progress and long-term self-sufficiency. Whether students are in Specialized Academic Instruction classes, Learning Centers, or mainstreamed in General Education class, they all deserve experiences that are rigorous and engaging, with clear paths and supports to make individual progress.

As this process unfolds the CAC anticipates actively participating in the delivery plan for improvement and encourages a collaboration with diverse parent groups. Some specific questions we have are:

- Whether there is a targeted plan for actively engaging historically underrepresented parents, since 19% of IEPs are Hispanic/Latino students, about 32% of IEPs are socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and 13% are English Language learners.
- Great ideas to re-engage students in High School with authentic learning, but how can our district find, support and engage students before they “check-out” or falter in upper elementary and Middle School? What other innovative programs can we consider? How can the high-touch services that constitute Special Ed be optimally provided earlier by those who can uniquely deliver it?
- We are eager for this Evaluation to progress, and hope the follow-on in August will be a Plan that is both strategic and tangible with deliverables and timelines.

Finally, with the selection a new Superintendent this year, we expect this person will also place a high priority on securing funds and importantly districtwide “buy-in” for any needed additions and improvements to ensure the positive outcomes we seek.

Respectfully,
Kimberly Eng Lee
Chairperson, Palo Alto CAC for Special Education

cc: Yolanda “Lana” Conaway, Assistant Superintendent of Strategic Initiatives & Operations
Stephanie Sheridan, Director of Special Education - Secondary Schools
Alma Ellis, Director of Special Education - Elementary Schools
Clarisse Haxton, Program Evaluation Coordinator
Jeong Choe, Advanced Authentic Research Coordinator