

Joint Statement by PTAC and Palo Alto CAC to the Board on “The Promise”, 2019/20 Budget & SpEd 3-year Plan

*From: Kimberly Eng Lee, Chairperson for the Palo Alto CAC for Special Education
Jade Chao, President PTA Council
Christina Schmidt, EVP for the PTA Council
Christine Baker, VP of Special Education PTA Council
Elizabeth May & Sara Woodham, VP Education PTA Council
Michelle Higgins, VP Outreach PTA Council*

FIRST: We recommend you invest in capacity-building and proactive IDEA compliance management, to avoid grappling with annual unbudgeted services, settlements and litigation. And importantly to improve student outcomes.

SECOND: We ask you to examine the Special Education Department’s 3-year Plan and budget for its first year of implementation.

Our new Superintendent and his Cabinet have digested past plans to arrive at what is now called “The Promise” and are now gathering feedback on it. PAUSD Special Education has been reviewed and audited internally and externally. Please clarify what your 3-5 year plans of deliverables will be. It is not clear when this “Promise” translates to action, and we want to understand how and when Special Ed reform is going to be funded, and to see actual deliverables.

Without a cohesive and sustainable strategy for inclusion (like co-teaching, aide sharing, push-in instruction) classroom support is too dependent on ‘band-aids and splints’ versus proactive, intentional, evidence-based practice. *It is important to remember that 80% of our students with IEPs and 100% of students with 504 plans are in mainstream classes.*

Does this 2019/20 budget proposal fund Special Education Department’s new 3-year Plan, and the issues which impact both General Ed and Special Ed like dyslexia, behavior, and co-teaching? If we do nothing different, students with disabilities and the staff who work with them “**will NOT be fine**”. We need new strategies for "students with autism, dyslexia and behavioral/mental health needs" and staffing for "effective and compliant service delivery", which do not seem to fit into a "Belt Tightening" budget scenario.

On behalf of students, parents and teachers, we ask you to accept SpEd’s 3 year plan and the commensurate funding for:

- increasing the service continuum
- co-teaching partnerships, and
- GenEd/SpEd coordination (example being an MTSS Coordinator)

We ask Dr. Novak to help put “fresh eyes” on disability and non-disability categories, and to project the fiscal impact of:

- earlier service delivery on mental health-related expenses
- improved services and outcome on litigation and settlement expenses
- improved RTI implementation on SpEd enrollment and disproportionality

We ask you to spend judiciously to fund student inclusion and adequately support our classroom educators. I believe dollars used wisely to right-size our capacity to deliver on services, IEP goals and IDEA compliance will stop pitting parents against teachers to educate children. We also support collaboration with staff and dispute resolution and mediation that gets people talking sooner.

The Palo Alto CAC and the PTA Council believes ALL students benefit from having a better classroom experience. In order to improve Special Education, PAUSD will need to spend money to save money.