

Santa Rosa City Schools

SPECIAL EDUCATION REVIEW

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SRCS Board of Trustees
SRCS District Office
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CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND - EDUCATIONAL GAPS & SPECIAL EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

Transforming Education to Improve Outcomes for students with Disabilities



The Prevailing Model

Special education as a separate, 'bolt-on' system to general education is contrary to research-backed best practices.



Integrated Vision

Transform understanding from 'special education as a place' to a service within general education systems.



Guiding Focus Areas

Seven focus areas from the 2015 report, including early learning, educator preparation, assessment, and family engagement.

IMPACT OF REFORM MOVEMENTS:

Accountability-drive reforms over 20 years have heightened achievement gaps for marginalized groups, including students with disabilities.

CALIFORNIA'S RESPONSE:

Established a Statewide special education task force in 2013 to address inequities and improve outcomes

2015 REPORT:

One System: Reforming Education to Serve All Students. A report of the California Statewide Taskforce on Special Education. Emphasizes integrating special and general education for all learners.



ABOUT DR. WILLIAM GILLASPIE

EXPERIENCE

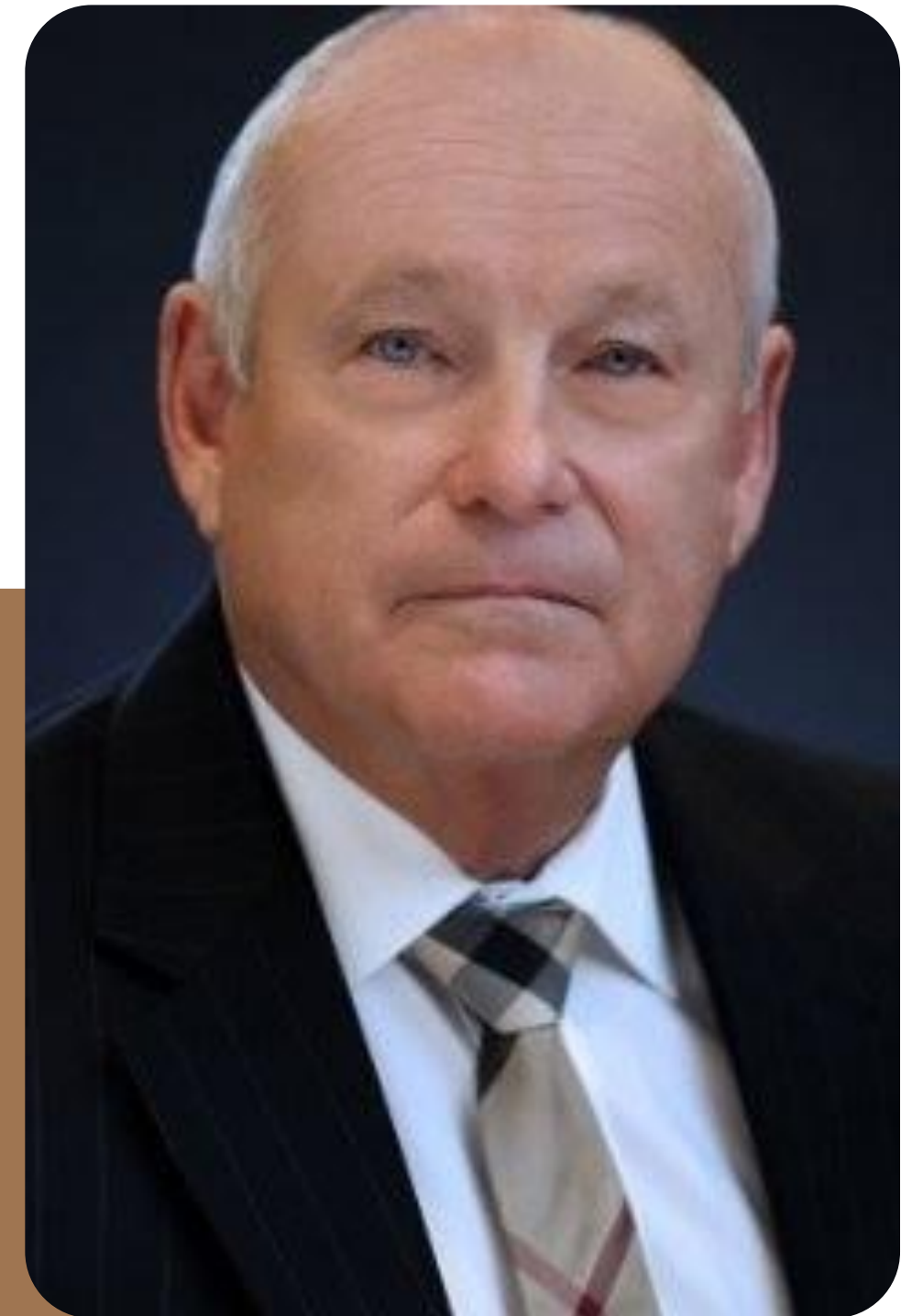
- Over 35 years in public education including County Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent Educational Services, Teacher, Director of Special Education & School Psychologist.
- Deputy Administrative Officer for FCMAT (2002-2016)
- Conducting 250+ studies for California Schools

CREDENTIALS

- Doctor of Education, San Francisco University
- Lifetime credentials in Pupil Personnel Services, Secondary Teaching, Administration & Community College Education.

CURRENT WORK

- Founder of Educational Strategic Planning LLC (2016), serving districts, COEs, and SELPAs statewide



SANTA ROSA CITY SCHOOLS SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM REVIEW

District Overview

- Serving ~14,200 students across 12 elementary, 4 middle, and 5 high schools, plus alternative education programs.

Current Challenges

- Lack of consistent leadership & structured policies in special and general education.
- Absence of a unified service delivery framework that promotes a cohesive district-wide delivery system.

Background

- Recent leadership changes, including the Board hiring an outstanding District Superintendent, experienced Executive Director of Special Services, and knowledgeable Coordinator of Special Services, provide an opportunity for strategic organizational development.

Key Opportunity

- Develop a coherent, district-wide special education system aligned with the 2015 *One System* report recommendations.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT



Early Intervention

Establish evidence-based academic and behavioral strategies in general education to address learning difficulties before special education placement.

Inclusive Practices

Recognize special education students as general education students first. Then integrate special education services into a unified support system to promote inclusion and equity.

System Alignment

Create a collaborative culture between general and special education and coordinate with family service agencies.

Fiscal & Organizational Oversight

Implement transparent, balanced budgeting and consistent administrative processes for special education.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - KEY FINDINGS

Strategic Plan Update Needed

- SRCS's 2019-2024 Strategic Plan should be revised to include clear goals emphasizing inclusion & support for students with disabilities in general education.

Challenges Identified:

- Over-identification of Students with Disabilities:
 - •19.37% of students identified with disabilities compared to the 12.48% state average, costing an additional \$26M annually.
 - •Disproportionate identification of English Learners as special education students (22% vs. 14% district-wide).
- Lack of Interventions:
 - •Insufficient MTSS & absence of consistent Student Study Teams (SSTs).
 - •No district-wide SST policies, guidelines, or training.
- Staffing Strains:
 - •High caseloads for Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs), exceeding state-mandated caps.
 - •Reliance on contracted special education assistants instead of district-employed staff.
- Transportation Costs:
 - SRCS contracts with WCTA for special education transportation, projected to cost \$9.6M, with 60% funded by SRCS. Ridership increases have outpaced the statewide average.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - Recommendations & Next Steps

Strategic Planning:

- Create a district-wide special education strategic plan, aligned with the 2015 One System report, emphasizing:
 - inclusion of students with disabilities in general education
 - Evidence-based interventions (e.g., MTSS)

Organizational Improvements:

- Develop clear systems, policies, and procedures for special education delivery.
- Form a district-wide task force co-chaired by the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and Executive Director of Special Services.

Staffing Solutions:

- Negotiate with unions to hire more district-employed special education aides and reduce SLP and teacher caseload overages.
- Create a procedural manual for all related service providers such as SLP, psychologists, etc. outlining responsibilities, eligibility, and exit process.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

Professional Development:

- Provide comprehensive training on MTSS, SSTs, and evidence-based practices for all general and special education staff.

Fiscal Management:

- Continue optimizing general fund contributions, which remain below the state average of 64.3%.
- Explore opportunities to increase ADA funding through improved attendance ratios.

Action Plan:

- Implement an action plan to establish a compliant, fiscally sound, and student-centered special education system, along with collaboration with general education, with benchmarks for progress and success.

Commendations:

- The report commends the district for its dedicated and professional staff for delivering quality education and valuable student services through strong curriculum and professional development.
- The Board of Trustees is recognized for hiring leadership focused on both systems.

SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT ALIGNMENT WITH DISTRICT GOALS

Challenges & Recommendations for Inclusion



- The Special Education Department lacks mission and vision statements and alignment with District goals. It must define its vision and align focus and professional development with:
 - Governing Board goals, emphasizing inclusion of special education students in general education.
 - The 2015 One System report's focus on coherence, inclusive practices, and integrated systems.



Current Misalignment
Special Services lacks mission, vision, and goals aligned with district objectives and the 2015 One System report.



Need for Inclusion
District struggles to integrate special education students in K-6 and 7-8, relying on restrictive practices instead of inclusive systems.



Inclusion Priority
Inclusion must be prioritized through collaboration, professional development, and cohesive policies.

FINDINGS: SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT ALIGNMENT

- Limited integration of special and general education; inclusion is voluntary, not prioritized, requiring collaboration and professional development district-wide.
- No inclusion initiative to reduce special education numbers through inclusive practices.
- Board's 2019-24 strategic plan lacks focus on supporting special education in general education or alignment with the 2015 One System report
- Governing Board goals lack clear direction to enhance support for students with disabilities in general education.
- No cohesive systems, procedures, or policies for unified educational delivery across general and special education.





Commendations & Recommendations: Special Education Department Alignment

Commendations:

- General education teachers participating in co-teaching with special education teachers demonstrate outstanding professionalism and dedication to inclusion.



Recommendations:



- Establish a unified K-12 continuum for special education services, breaking down elementary vs. high school divisions.
- Align the Special Services Department's vision and professional development with:
 - Updated Governing Board goals, emphasizing inclusion.
 - The 2015 *One System Report*'s focus on coherence, inclusivity, and integration.
- Adopt a vision statement for the Special Education Department:
 - *“To support inclusive education for students with disabilities, offering specialized services within general education settings to help them reach their full potential and prepare for life after high school.”*

RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT ALIGNMENT (PART 2)

- Develop a strategic plan with goals, actions, milestones, and metrics for success, aligned with Governing Board goals. This should be a 3-5 year plan.
- Emphasize a continuum of service options for special education students, ensuring 80% general education access, particularly for EL students.
- Expand and prioritize the co-teaching program to include more participants.
- Provide professional development opportunities to meet updated Board goals.
- Update the District's website with a statement promoting inclusion, emphasizing:
 - Respect, dignity, and a welcoming school family.
 - Addressing biases, policies, and barriers that impact student outcomes and impeded equity.
 - A commitment to eliminating disparities in educational outcomes for underserved populations.



SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENT IDENTIFICATION COMPARISON



- Proper identification for special education ensures students meet IDEA's criteria, avoiding over-identification that can lead to stigma, limited access to rigorous instruction, and reduced peer interactions.
- Utilizing interventions, multi-tiered supports, and regular evaluations supports better outcomes, promotes inclusion, and ensures students exit special education when they no longer qualify.

Identification Rate and Cost	
The District k-12 student enrollment as of Oct.	14,307
Student's identified as students w/ disabilities	2,771
% of student populations within the district with IEP's	19.37%
State wide average percentage	12.48%
Number of students over-identified as compared to the state	983
Cost to the district over identifying students	\$26,107,647
Cost per student identified	\$26,569.29

SPECIAL EDUCATION ELIGIBILITY & RECOMMENDATIONS



Key Facts:

- The district's special education rate exceeds the state average, even as overall enrollment declines.
- Eligibility requires meeting IDEA's two-pronged test: 1 of 14 disability categories and the need for specially designed instruction.

Recommendations:

- Prioritize and expand the co-teaching program to foster inclusion
- Provide ongoing professional development on evidence-based practices, such as MTSS, for all staff.
- Increase access to general education for students receiving special education services, focusing on exceeding least restrictive environment targets.
- Reduce over-identification by refining the identification process and emphasizing general education interventions.





Disproportionality in Special Education Identification

Over-Identification of English Learners

- ELs constitute 22% of students with disabilities but only 14% of the overall student population (796/ EL/SWD students).
- 68% of EL students spend less than 80% of their day in general education settings.

Data & Instructional Challenges

- Lack of disaggregated special education data by gender, EL status, and race/ethnicity.
- Insufficient implementation of Tier 1 strategies and best first instruction practices.
- Deficit-based perspectives affecting student engagement and expectations.
- Inconsistent curriculum use and lack of cultural context in instruction.
- Variability in program effectiveness across different sites and communities.
- Lack of cohesiveness across the educational system and administrative support.



Disproportionality in Special Education Identification: Recommendations

Data Monitoring & Professional Development

- Annually monitor special education percentages by gender, race/ethnicity, EL status, and disability category.
- Provide professional training for all staff on serving EL students and correctly identifying students for special education.
- Develop mechanisms to track special education referrals and outcomes.

Enhancing Support & Inclusion

- Review EL students' placements to increase their time in general education with appropriate staff support.
- Develop and implement SST policies, procedures, and manuals consistently across all sites.
- Create a master plan for MTSS to provide necessary interventions before special education referrals.
- Reduce the amount of time EL students spend in special education classrooms to meet LRE requirements and improve effectiveness.
- Address systemic issues such as lack of administrative support, shared language, professional development, and equity audits to improve teaching practices and student learning outcomes.



STUDENT STUDY TEAM (SST) OVERVIEW & RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose:

- A general education process to support struggling students with interventions before special education referrals, ensure LRE.

Key Issues:

- Inconsistent SST processes across SRCS due to lack of district-wide policies.
- Over-identification for special education caused by insufficient Tier 1 and MTSS implementation.
- Serving students via IEPs is costlier and less effective without prior general education interventions.

Recommendations:

- Develop consistent district-wide SST policies, procedures, and a handbook.
- Provide regular training on SST, PBIS, and behavior management.
- Strengthen early interventions and MTSS to address needs within general education.
- Use data to monitor referral rates, intervention outcomes and family engagement.
- District Administration has a “Draft” proposed Framework of Restorative Skills & Practices (RTI/MTSS), however, use caution identifying IEP at the top of the pyramid. Tier III as a Special Education service and Tier II is for everyone.



TEACHER STAFFING RATIOS, CLASS & CASELOAD SIZE

- The district's delivery system includes RSP, SDC, and push-in models, with county-operated classes costing \$104,000 per student annually.
- Lacks standardized procedures, proactive problem-solving, clear communication on placement changes, and a consistent approach to staffing and specialized program management.
- **Recommendation:** establish objective staffing criteria, develop a database to monitor caseloads & class sizes by school & service delivery, & regularly review the allocation of assistants, particularly when adding new staff.



	RSP Teachers	# RSP Students	SDC Teachers	# SDC Students	Educ. Spec. Teachers (serving a blend of RSP/SDC)	# Students Served by Blend Teachers	ESN Teachers	# ESN Students	CEP Teachers	# CEP Students	RISE Teachers	# Rise Students
Preschool	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	47	0	0	0	0
Elementary	13	307	9	110	1	20	12	102	0	0	4	39
Middle School	2	39	3	45	16	251	6	47	1	7	2	17
High School	24.6	564	13	179	11	221	8	81	6	57	2	21
18-22 Transition	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	60	0	0	0	0
District Goals	39.6	910	25	334	28	492	39	337	7	64	8	77

STAFFING ALLOCATIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSISTANTS

Key Issues

- Heavy reliance on contracted instructional assistants due to lower district pay, increasing costs (~\$50/hour) and turnover.
- Lack of clear policies for assigning, monitoring, and phasing out assistants, with no fading plans included in IEPs.
- Overstaffing classroom assistants due to contractual ratios that exceed statewide standards.

Current Special Education Assistants at SRCS as presented by District Data	
Behaviors Assistant	13
Enhanced Special Education Assistant	1
License Vocational Nurse-Instructional Assistant	1
Special Education Assistant	31
Special Education Assistant Severely Handicapped (ESN)	36
Special Education Assistant, DHH	9
Total Number of District Employed	91

Contracted Special Education Assistant	
ADEP Interpreting	4
Amergis	17
Emerald	21
EP Behavior Consulting	9
Inspire	120
PBS	6
Redwood Pediatric	4
RO Health	2
Soliant	2
The Nature of Interpreting	5
Total Contracted with Outside Agencies	190

TOTAL SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSISTANTS - 281

STAFFING ALLOCATIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSISTANTS

Commendations:

- Staff commend the district's responsiveness in processing requests and emphasize the benefits of employing district staff for greater retention and ownership.

Recommendations:

- Negotiate competitive salaries with classified union to reduce reliance on contracted staff and increase retention.
- Develop policies for assigning and fading SCIA's and ensure fading plan in IEPs to promote independence.
- Review and optimize assistant placements to prevent overstaffing ensuring efficient resource use.
- Provide mandatory training on SCIA's, behavior management, and confidentiality for all staff.
- Create a comprehensive resource guide for instructional assistants covering roles, strategies, and fostering independence.



General Fund Contribution to Special Education

Overview

- SRCS funds 56.96% (\$41.9M) of special education budget from general fund, below state average 64.3%.
- State and federal funding cover only 38% of special educations costs; the remaining is funded locally.
- Costs are driven by salaries, benefits, transportation, and nonpublic school/agency services.

Commendations

- The district manages budgets effectively, keeping contributions below state averages while efficiently meeting student needs.

Recommendations

- Monitor general fund contributions through MOE exemptions to reduce costs.
- Hold monthly meetings with Business, Special Education, and fiscal staff to address budget development, monitoring, staffing and transportation.
- Review Staffing assignments and contracted positions across departments to ensure cost efficiency.
- Assign staff to analyze resource allocation and expenditures.



ADA Attendance Percentage & Financial Impact



Current Data

- 2023-2024 Enrollment: 12,853; ADA: 11,747.70 (91.40% attendance rate).
- Chronic absenteeism: 22% of students, impacting funding and student outcomes.

Potential Financial Benefits

- Increasing ADA by 1-5% could generate \$1.15M-\$5.76M in additional LCFF revenue annually.

Recommendation:

- The Department of Wellness and Engagement should implement strategies to improve ADA by 1% annually over the next five years, addressing chronic absenteeism to enhance funding and student success.

Specialized Transportation Costs & Delivery Model

- Since 2013-14, LCF covered 35% of costs, requiring SRCS to subsidize \$9.59M annually.
- This increases general fund contributions by over \$3M due to rising ridership.
- Adopt a transportation decision tree to ensure eligibility, improve communication, and reduce costs.
- 20% of IEP students currently receiving specialized transportation at \$9.59M annually.



Routes and Staffing for 2024-2025		
RT Type	# Routes	Uncovered
SPED Ambulatory	49	3
SPED W/C	13	3
SPED Van	22	2
Gen Ed	35	4
Total RT	119	12
Standby Driver	20	
Total Et al.	139	12
Special Needs Ridership		
926 – School Year 2022-23 (485 SRCS)		
929 – School Year 2023-24 (535 SRCS)		
965 – October 2024 (562 SRCS)		

WCTA & SRCS Student Comparison			
Route Type	WCTA Total	SRCS	Current % of Use
General Ed Routes	35	17	42.1%
SPED Students	965	562	58.3%

Budget Information					
Year	% of Use	Gen Ed Budget	% of Use	SPED Budget	Total
2022-23	42%	\$1,764,712	58%	\$5,870,251	\$7,634,963
2023-24	42.5%	\$2,229,962	57%	\$6,886,374	\$9,116,336
2024-25	42.1%	\$2,280,499	59%	\$7,3054,859	\$9,586,358

Recommendations on transportation costs & delivery model

- Collaboration & Data Sharing: Strengthen communication between departments for efficient transportation planning with regular meetings.
- IEP Process: Train teams, refine decisions, and involve WCTA staff.
- Transportation: Improve routes, reduce costs & reassess bus aide needs.
- Program Efficiency: Transition programs, reduce costs, and assess transportation needs.
- Parental Communication: Enhance clarity on ESY participation and transportation services.



COST AND PLACEMENT OF EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR

Overview

- ESY provides instruction beyond the school year for eligible students.
- Eligibility is determined by the ARD committee and documented in IEPs.

Findings

- Eligibility criteria and forms are inconsistently used by staff.
- Staff lack awareness of the admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee's role and process.
- Most ESY students served are ESN; 802 in-district, 108 out-of-district.

Recommendations:

- Conduct cost analysis to determine ESY and transportation expenses.
- Verify all ESY students meet ARD-determined eligibility criteria.
- Train staff on ESY purpose, criteria, and responsibilities.
- Standardize communication for ESY documentation and planning processes.
- Improve parent involvement and understanding of ESY decisions roles.



ANALYZE STAFFING & CASELOADS FOR RELATED SERVICES PROVIDERS



COMMENDATION:

Commitment to staff supporting students' academic, social-emotional and behavioral needs.



OVERVIEW:

- School psychologists and SLPs face increasing caseloads (exceeding standards), impacting efficiency and service quality.
- Inconsistent procedures for eligibility, exit criteria, and staffing lead to inequities across district.
- Mental health referrals and behavior management lack cohesive MTSS implementation.

Staffing and Caseloads for Related Services Providers Recommendations

Speech Services

Create SLP manual with eligibility, exit criteria, and clear district-wide service guidelines.

Efficiency Improvements

Streamline onboarding, align programs across grades, and balance caseloads to improve service delivery.

School Psychologists

Focus roles on special education needs and train for defensible Manifestation Determination reports.

Parent Communication

Enhance parent engagement in IEP process through transparent systems and collaborative planning efforts.

Industry Standards Consultation vs. Direct Service

Consultation vs. Direct Service	Range	Source or Notes
APE	1:45-55	*# of FTE - 4
D/HOH	1:15-25	
OT/PT	1:45-55	*# of FTE OT – 5
OI	1:45-55	
Nurse	1:2784	Calculated by total District population KidsData.org *Total # of FTE – 5 ; Enrollment 14,377 Industry standard 1:2,784
Speech Pathologist	1:55	Education code 56563.3
VI/OM	1:10-30	
Psychologist	1-to-977	
SLP Preschool	1-to-40	

SRCS SPECIAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE

Goal: Create a cohesive, district-wide special education delivery system.

Purpose: Improve communication, address concerns, and standardize policies and procedures.

Structure: Diverse Stakeholders led by Special Services and Educational Services leadership.

Strategies:

- Form inclusive taskforce with subcommittees for key areas.
- Establish goals and pilot changes before full implementation.
- Monitor, evaluate, and adjust system as needed.



SPECIAL EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN

Purpose

Create a 2-5 year plan for compliant, efficient system.

Collaboration

Involve stakeholders for transparency and input.

Key Steps

Define goals, standardize policies, optimize resources, train staff, and implement in phases.

Outcome

Build a cohesive, effective special education delivery system.



SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCEDURAL MANUAL



PURPOSE

Create a comprehensive, consistent guide for special education placements, processes, and compliance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop the manual by June 2025 with stakeholder input.
- Provide district-wide training during 2025-26 for consistent implementation.
- Make manual accessible online and in hard copies at all sites.
- Review and update annually to meet legal requirements.

OUTCOME

Establish a cohesive, compliant, and transparent system for special education services.

Non-Public Schools (NPS) Overview

Definition:

NPS and NPA provide specialized services for students with disabilities when districts cannot meet their needs.

Current Stats:

- Students in NPS: 156
- 2024-25 Projected Cost: \$9,031,896 (\$57,896/student)
- Potential Savings: \$5M if students transitioned to district programs.

Recommendations

- Review IEPs: Identify students who could be served within district programs.
- Behavior Support: Develop teams to train staff in managing challenging behaviors.
- Build Alternative Programs: Create district programs for students in restrictive settings.
- Monitor NPA Contracts: Explore ways to provide these services within the district.



Nonpublic Schools Enrollment santa rosa schools as of October 2024

NPS	# of Students	Total Cost Per Student for 180 days	Total Costs for Year
ANOVA	<u>40</u>	\$56,226.60	\$2,249,064.00
Cypress	<u>14</u>	\$54,243.00	\$759,402.00
Greencare's	<u>18</u>	\$55,800.00	\$1,004,400.00
Hanna Academy	<u>18</u>	\$54,988.20	\$989,787.60
Journey	<u>12</u>	\$55,800.00	\$669,600.00
Lattice	<u>17</u>	\$54,406.80	\$924,915.60
New Directions	<u>10</u>	\$53,033.40	\$530,334.00
New Horizons	<u>2</u>	\$47,242.80	\$94,485.60
North Valley	<u>3</u>	\$47,187.00	\$141,561.00
Oak Hill	<u>1</u>	\$51,120.00	\$51,120.00
Plumfield	<u>6</u>	\$43,966.80	\$263,800.80
Sierra	<u>12</u>	\$55,159.20	\$661,910.40
Star Academy	<u>2</u>	\$64,067.40	\$128,134.80
Star View Adolescent Center/South Bay HS	<u>1</u>	\$42,359.40	\$563,380.23
		NPSs Grand Total for 24-25 SY thus far -	\$9,031,896.03

SRCS SPECIAL EDUCATION REVIEW CONCLUSION

- Over 100 recommendations provide a roadmap for creating cohesive special education systems, procedures, and policies districtwide.
- Staff expressed a need for clear guidance from administration to develop unified systems.
- Collaboration, trust, and respect among the board, administration, and staff are essential for success.
- Emphasizing that special education students are general education students first, with access to tailored services, is key to creating a model delivery system.
- Lack of alignment and support between the board and superintendent is a key indicator of fiscal distress.
- The board must prioritize informed decision-making for long-term fiscal stability over addressing public popularity.

