

Community Advisory Committee for Special Education Report to the Board of Education

September 26, 2006

Introduction of CAC Board and New Members

Wanyee Francis-Babitsky, Chair (incoming)
Linda Tung, Chair (outgoing)
Robin Hansen, 1st Vice Chair (incoming), new CAC member
Amy Ottinger, 2nd Vice Chair (incoming), Committee Chair, new CAC member
Shelley Forrest, parliamentarian (incoming)
Jan Christensen, Secretary
Katy Franklin, Committee Chair, new CAC member
Rachel Norton, new CAC member

CAC Accomplishments 2004-2006

Community Outreach

- Held a community meeting in May 2005 attended by 45 parents and professionals to solicit input on CAC priorities. Guided by a professional facilitator, CAC members shaped the feedback received at this meeting into a multi-year strategic plan (see Appendix B).
- Conducted additional outreach by participating in the SFUSD Enrollment Fair, School Site Council Summit, Support for Families' Resource Fair, Fall 2005 Family Fest. Attended regular meetings of The Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF) inter-agency councils, including the Special Needs Inclusion Project and Improving Transition Outcomes Project. CAC parent members also attended Pamela Wolfberg's Autism Square Think Tank at San Francisco State University.
- Presented information on including students with disabilities in general education to students in an introductory class for special educators at CSU East Bay.
- Continued to communicate with the Board of Education, administration and community at large through the monthly mailing of our agenda and minutes.
- Participated in the Open Gate Family Resource Center Collaborative Board on an ongoing basis together with Support for Families, SFUSD Special Education, Community Mental Health, Community Alliance for Special Education (CASE), and KIDS Project.

Advocacy

- Accompanied the SELPA Director and the SFUSD Special Education Ombudsperson to Sacramento for CAC Legislative Information Day in May 2006. We attended briefings on special education funding and related legislative issues, and met with four local representatives to advocate for better special education funding. We also attended a follow-up meeting with Assembly Member Leland Yee to further urge action on funding.

CAC Accomplishments, 2004-2006, continued

- Participated in a letter-writing campaign in 2005 urging the state not to suspend AB3632, which currently allows students with mental health issues to receive services from county mental health centers. For now, students' access to these services has been retained.
- Attended Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) S.E.A.T. Special Education Advocacy Training Course (completed by one CAC member).
- Attended community input meetings on the SFUSD budget and student assignment plans to share views and ask questions of Board of Education members.
- Attended No Child Left Behind (NCLB) hearings in January 2006.
- Tracked United Educators of San Francisco (UESF) negotiations with SFUSD for potential impact on special education staffing.
- Organized a celebration of "National Inclusive Schools Week" at Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy. Students wrote essays and drew pictures on the topic "Together, We're Better" and a CD-Rom of the essays and work was produced and showcased along with an essay on inclusive schools written by CAC members for beyondchron.org, a local online news magazine (the essay is attached as Appendix C). The Harvey Milk students' artwork was subsequently chosen by the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative to be featured on note cards promoting the 2006 National Inclusive Schools Week.
- Published a three-part series on inclusiveness in SFUSD and an article urging greater participation in the CAC for beyondchron.org in June 2006 (attached as Appendix D). Wrote a column for the Fall 2006 Support for Families of Children with Disabilities newsletter describing the CAC and its activities, and urging greater participation (see attached Appendix E).

Education and Building Capacity

- Held "Effective Communication" workshop for CAC members and community members to learn strategies for meetings and negotiations.
- Hosted guest speakers on various topics, including:
 - Stasha Wyskiel, SFUSD Director of Emergency Planning on Emergency Preparedness.
 - Myong Leigh and Vic Milhoan on Special Education budget process and Weighted Student Formula.
 - Katherine McCauley, SFUSD Supervisor of Designated Instruction and Services (DIS), on speech and language programs.
 - Janet Frost of SFUSD Screening and Assessment Center, on SB1895, which puts Social Work interns in schools to provide extra support to at-risk students.
 - Kevin Marlette, Project Manager for SFUSD Arts Education Master Plan.
- Conducted extensive revision of the CAC Bylaws to bring them in line with our Strategic Plan; introduced the concept of a CAC Resolution which would allow the CAC to take public stands on issues of interest and importance to parents of children receiving special education services.
- Transitioned successfully to a new CAC Board.

Collaboration with the SFUSD

- Participated in various district committees on an ongoing basis, including the Special Education Inclusion Think Tank, the SFUSD Inclusion Task Force, the Parent Involvement Coalition, and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Initiative.

CAC Accomplishments, 2004-2006, continued

- Assisted with implementation of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) training for resolving special education disputes: attended two-day conference in April 2005 alongside district representatives. Recruited parents for ADR training with Support for Families of Children with Disabilities.
- Assisted in gathering parent input for the CDE Self-Review of Special Education programs in Spring 2005.
- Participated in monthly meetings with the SELPA Director.
- Shared our ideas and concerns with SFUSD's Special Education Ombudsperson on an ongoing basis.

Special Education Department Accomplishments, 2004-2006

Summary prepared by Community Advisory Committee for Special Education. Please see also Appendix A: "Special Education Accomplishments, 2004-2006," prepared by SFUSD Special Education Department (pp 9-10).

- Sponsored ongoing Developing Minds Video Series.
- Updated and expanded special education information and resources available on SFUSD web site.
- Created and distributed Special Education Enrollment Guide for families enrolling for 2005-06 school year.
- Created Autism Task Force to educate and support parents of children with autism in SFUSD.
- Conducted Special Education parent survey for self-review coordinated by the California Department of Education.
- Conducted professional development for special education staff, including programs from the Northern California Diagnostic Center, TEACCH, Speech and Hard of Hearing Services, and training in Houghton Mifflin and Prentiss Hall curriculums.
- Opened three additional programs for children with High Functioning Autism and Asperger's Syndrome.
- Implementing software for computerized IEPs.
- Held training for participants in planned Alternative Dispute Resolution program.
- Sponsored Transition to Kindergarten workshop for special education parents with Support for Families of Children with Disabilities.
- Held regular Assistive Technology workshops at Aptos Middle School.

CAC Goals for 2006-2007

(see Strategic Plan, attached as Appendix B)

Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee

- Continue to work with SELPA Director, Special Education Department, and the Board of Education to monitor, evaluate and offer input into SFUSD's special education programs.
- Update the CAC Handbook to incorporate I.D.E.A. 2004 regulations and include information about transitions and a transition-planning guide.

Training and Education Committee

- Complete our report on Inclusion in SFUSD.
- Complete training document for teachers and paraprofessionals on how to facilitate social interactions between children with disabilities and their typical peers.
- Work with district to distribute our completed brochure on integrating Special Day Classrooms into existing school communities.

Parent Involvement

- Develop our Web site with tools, resources and information for families.
- Work with district to reach out to special education families so that we can more effectively communicate with them.
- Work to widely distribute our Special Education Comment Form so families have a way to make the CAC and the district aware of their experiences in special education.
- Increase participation of non-English speaking families by providing translation services needed for CAC meetings.

Disability Awareness

- Continue with advocacy activities such as letter-writing campaigns and contact with lawmakers.
- Notify school sites about National Inclusive Schools Week (December 4-8, 2006) and make suggestions about how they could celebrate diversity and inclusiveness at their schools.
- Participate in bus driver training.

Recommendations for District

Parent Outreach and Assistance

- **Cooperate with the CAC to get a newsletter from the CAC to every parent or caregiver of a child with an IEP at least three times a year**, and provide these materials in English, Spanish and Chinese. Currently, our newsletter goes just to the parents who have joined our mailing list at outreach events, and many special education parents are not aware that the CAC exists – particularly those parents who do not speak English.
- **Inform the CAC as early as possible** in the budget cycle about proposed budget cuts to Special Education.
- **Create a Special Education Transition Guide to inform parents on the process for transitions between education levels**, i.e. pre-K to elementary, elementary to middle, middle to high, and high school to post-secondary or community-based programs. Parents need to know timing and procedures in order to be prepared, particularly for students who may be preparing to transition out of high school.
- **Post an up-to-date version of the Local Plan for Special Education** on the district web site annually.

Program Availability and Placement

- **Track children transitioning from elementary to middle school or middle school to high school** to ensure that there is program availability at the next school level for children who will be moving up. Assist families with planning for these transitions.
- **Create additional full inclusion opportunities for all students in accordance with Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) requirements.** For example, there is currently one preschool full inclusion option, with space for 12 inclusion students. Students in elementary, middle and high school seeking inclusion placements are denied the same enrollment choices and opportunities offered to students without disabilities.
- **Create Special Day classrooms that provide the coursework for admission to the California Public University systems for those students capable of grade-level work.** Currently, no high school special day classroom provides coursework to fulfill the foreign language requirement.
- **Create small class size options for students who are capable of grade-level or higher work** but whose disabilities require small class sizes. For example, there are currently no small classes for students identified as GATE/LD. Creating small-sized classes would bring the District more in line with Section 504.
- **Ensure that all Special Education Classes and Programs do not exceed their student capacity** or staffing allocation ratios as outlined in the current UESF contract.
- **Ensure that teachers hold the appropriate credential** for the students being taught in their classrooms.

Recommendations for District, continued

Curriculum

- **Bring innovative and effective teaching approaches into the schools.** Lindamood-Bell has benefited students with difficulties in reading (decoding and comprehension), concept imagery and receptive and expressive language skills. Programs like Making Math Real and On Cloud Nine have helped many students struggling with math. Michelle Garcia-Winner's Social Thinking curriculum boosts the executive function abilities and interpersonal skills of many students with autistic spectrum disorders and nonverbal learning disorders. These are just a few of the cutting edge methodologies that are proven to be successful, but are not widely available in our schools.
- **Increase the length of the school day for preschoolers in special education** from 4 hours to 5 hours. The National Research Council states that a minimum school program for preschool children with autism should be 25 hours a week.

APPENDICES

- **Appendix A:** Special Education Accomplishments, 2004-2006, prepared by the SFUSD Special Education Department (pp 9-10) ;
- **Appendix B:** CAC Strategic Plan, 2005-2008 (pp 11-15)
- **Appendix C:** “School Beat: Is Inclusive Education a Privilege or a Right?” essay by CAC members Katy Franklin and Rachel Norton, published February 16, 2006 on beyondchron.org (pp 16-17);
- **Appendix D:** “School Beat: Reaching Special Education Ideals is Still Far Off,” three-part series by CAC member Rachel Norton, published May 31-June 2, 2006 on beyondchron.org (pp 18 – 22) ;
- **Appendix E:** “The Community Advisory Committee and Why it Matters,” by CAC 2nd Vice Chair Amy Ottinger, published June 8, 2006 on beyondchron.org and reproduced in the Support for Families of Children with Disabilities Fall 2006 newsletter (pp 23 – 24).

APPENDIX A

Prepared by the SFUSD Special Education Department

Special Education Department Accomplishments 2004 – 2006

What's New?

Expanded Program Options: Special Education Services has expanded program options in the areas of autism, deaf/hard of hearing, and transition. This includes

- **New Autism Programs:**
 - TEACCH Programs: Grattan, Marina, Lowell, Washington
 - High Functioning Autism: Garfield, Roosevelt, and Lowell
- **New Deaf/Hard of Hearing Programs**
 - Toddler: Tule Elk
 - K-2: Chavez
 - Itinerant teacher of deaf
- **New Transition Programs**
 - Marshall, Balboa

Increased Equitable Distribution of Services: Special Education Services worked with the Program Placement Committee to redistribute special education programs across all quadrants of the City and to increase the continuum of service across schools. This includes

- **New Programs**
 - Feinstein, Ulloa, Sutro, Grattan, Lafayette, Presidio
- **Non-Public Schools**
 - Moved Erikson and Spectrum on to public school site

Expansion of Services: Special Education Services has expanded services to staff, parents and students in a number of significant areas.

- **Automated IEP and Information Management System** The district is preparing to implement a new system that will help plan and track student and staff achievement, improve accountability, facilitate compliance and improve collaboration in the IEP process. This will include resources to help with referrals, evaluations/assessments, IEPs, service tracking, medical reporting, student progress reports and transition.
- **Alternative Dispute Resolution Training** Special Education Services trained 38 participants, 18 parents/community members and 20 educators, during 5 days in April and May 2006 in alternative dispute/mediation skills. Starting Fall 2006, these participants will be used to help solve concerns of parents and staff.
- **Additional Services** Program expansion includes starting to develop a sub para pool, added technology resources, and behavior consultations at school sites.

On Going Programs

- Hired SELPA Director who worked with the CAC and improved communication between the CAC and Special Education.

Appendix A, continued

- Continued to ensure that each school site's academic plan included provisions for ensuring compliance with previously identified CDE areas of non-compliance.
- Continued to ensure that all school sites had a speech and language therapist assigned. Research and designed a comprehensive service delivery and collaborative model for Speech and Language and began implementation of new model.
- Expanded Professional Development opportunities to include Behavior De-escalation strategies, Autism techniques (TEACCH), Differentiated Instruction, SB 1895, Auditory Processing Workshop, Transition to High School, Core Curriculum, Legal Issues for Administrators, Alignment of Curriculum to Standards, Para training, Inter-departmental professional development, Northern California Diagnostic Center Programs and *Let Them Hear Foundation* professional development

Outreach

- Continue to collaborate with Schwab Learning, the San Francisco Public Library, the CAC and other organizations to present the *Developing Minds* Video Series. The first program for this year will be October 25 and the topic is "Getting Organized and Having Good Work Habits".
- Continued monthly meetings with UESF
- Updated and expanded special education information and resources available on SFUSD web site
- In coordination with EPC, provided Special Education Enrollment Guide for families enrolling for 2005-06 school year
- Provided Autism support groups for parents of children with autism in SFUSD.
- Sponsored Transition to Kindergarten workshop for special education parents with Support for Families of Children with Disabilities
- Held regular Assistive Technology workshops at Aptos Middle School.
- Continued review of district wide inclusion programs through an Inclusion Think Tank
- Conducted Special Education parent survey for self-review coordinated by the California Department of Education
- Collaborated with Schwab Learning to bring school assembly programs to elementary schools on learning disabilities

Grants

Worked with community to assist in grants with Performing Arts Workshop grant for arts programs in special day classes, drafted Special Olympics MOU; special education teachers at school site received San Francisco Education Fund pre-school program grant.

APPENDIX B

CAC Strategic Plan, 2005-2008

PROMOTING “DREAM” SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mission Statement

Our mission is to bring together and support parents, professionals and community members for discussion of strategies to promote effective special educational programs and services.

OUR VISION

External Vision: As a result of CAC’s efforts:

- The CAC and the District have a positive relationship based on mutual trust and respect. They actively work together, regardless of administration changes, to ensure that issues and concerns of families are addressed on a systemic level.
- SFUSD respects parent input and incorporates their experiences and concerns into the Local Plan for Special Education.
- SFUSD is accountable to parents of special education students as well as accountable to state and federal agencies.
- SFUSD considers CAC as an authoritative and representative voice of experience and a resource for practical solutions. Through the CAC, parents’ concerns are taken seriously and problems are resolved through non-adversarial means.
- SFUSD makes special education a priority and creates a structured and supportive system for special education that would be a model for our nation. Special education and the needs of our students are seen as equally important as the education and needs of all SFUSD students.
- Teachers and parents receive ongoing training to ensure students’ success.
- Teachers are valued as collaborative partners with parents and the District.

Internal Vision: If CAC is operating at its most effective and efficient capacity:

- Parents understand the purpose of the CAC and the unique and important role that it plays among all the public and private agencies providing services which impact special education students.
- Parents feel that they can have an impact in effecting change through their participation in the CAC.
- CAC is able to promptly respond to families’ concerns with referrals and/or information.
- CAC has an active and involved membership made up of parents as well as teachers, paraprofessionals, representatives of agencies, and students. The membership represents the diversity of the special education students served by the District.
- CAC is viewed as a collaborative and respected partner by the District.
- CAC members have ongoing training to increase their knowledge of issues related to special education as well as trainings that strengthen their leadership capacities.

Appendix B, continued

- CAC has the necessary administrative structures and systems in place to ensure effective and efficient operation of its activities.
- CAC has effective communication systems in place, including a website that provides parents and others with up-to-date information on CAC activities and links to relevant information.
- Leadership is shared by all CAC members: individuals are willing and able to take on leadership roles and participate in various CAC and district committees and task forces.
- CAC has committees that mirror the issues and concerns of parents and professionals, and individuals serve as representatives to SFUSD standing and ad hoc task forces.
- CAC, in collaboration with Support for Families and the SFUSD, sponsors ongoing forums for parents and professionals to ensure all voices are heard.
- CAC is representative of San Francisco's diverse community.

GOAL 1: PLANNING, MONITORING, AND EVALUATION

Promote effective programs and services for students with special needs by providing input into SFUSD's planning, monitoring, and evaluation (Local Plan).

Long Term Objectives:

- 1.1 Annually review the Local Plan for Special Education and advise the Board of Education and SFUSD Administration of priorities to be addressed by the Plan.
 - 1.1.1 Meet regularly with the SELPA Director and other SFUSD officials to communicate families' concerns, and to strategize as to how SFUSD can respond to these needs.
 - 1.1.2 Provide at least one representative on any committee organized to assist in the development of the SFUSD contract for special education transportation.
- 1.2 Have an annual meeting bringing together families and those who serve special education students in order to discuss what exists, what is working, where the gaps are, what the strategies are, and what groups can assist.
- 1.3 Annually produce a report that can be used by SFUSD and the Board of Education in the Local Plan. The annual report should contain a list of parents' concerns and priorities and suggested solutions so that the District is able to:
 - Have a school climate that encourages success for all students.
 - Build consistency throughout the district with regards to effective school programs.
 - Identify strategies and supports so students are not disruptive to classes, using best practice methods for learning disabilities and behavior supports.
 - Train staff on true modification and adaptation of curriculum so students have access to the core curriculum and are learning successfully.
 - Identify the individual needs of students so they can be supported appropriately.
 - Implement what is in the IEP.
 - Stress early identification, screening and intervention.
 - Promote the participation of all students with special needs in general education classes, not just those students who are receiving inclusion services according to their IEP.

Appendix B, continued

- Value the good work of teachers, paraprofessionals and DIS providers, and encourage positive reinforcement for them.
 - Stress the importance of teachers, parents, and students working together.
 - Identify the needs of the various diverse communities, including translation services, and how well they are being met.
 - The annual report should also include information (which we would get from the District) on the annual dropout rate, and legal disputes between parents and the District.
- 1.4 Work with SFUSD to ensure that there is an effective ADR program, in an effort to minimize lawsuits and maximize parents and the District working together for the benefit of students.
- 1.5 Advocate for information to be provided by SFUSD to families who are not fluent in English. This includes encouraging the District to provide professional translation for IEP meetings and all IEP-related materials and reports, to ensure that language is not a barrier to children getting the support they need.

GOAL 2: PROMOTE ONGOING, QUALITY, AND UP-TO-DATE TRAINING AND EDUCATION TO ENSURE STUDENTS' SUCCESS

Long Term Objectives:

- 2.1 The CAC will actively work to include families from diverse communities on the SFUSD committees that plan for and allocate resources for training and education.
- 2.2 Advocate for sufficient resources and support to ensure that staff have research-based and up-to-date knowledge of best practices, as well as ongoing training.
- 2.3 Advocate for ongoing support for general education teachers so they see the student as a whole child, not just as disabled.
- 2.4 Encourage the District to publicize trainings to families, so that parents and teachers have the same information about how to support their children's success.
- 2.5 Develop and distribute materials that increase families' knowledge of special education. This would include a family-friendly directory of services, staff, information about legal rights and process, descriptions of programs at different sites, and resources for parents.

GOAL 3: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, RECOGNITION AND OUTREACH

Increase the involvement of families and students to ensure quality education and support for students with disabilities.

Long Term Objectives:

- 3.1 Develop strategies that address the barriers to participation of families in their children's education, and support more active involvement of families in the activities of groups such as CAC, PTA, SSC, PPS. This could include conducting a survey of families to find out why they can't or don't get involved.

Appendix B, continued

- 3.2 Identify and publicize model special education programs so that best practices can be replicated. This could include having teachers, parents, therapists and students nominate a school or support person to be recognized each year by the CAC.
- 3.3 Develop and implement the means to recognize the successes of special education students.
- 3.4 Recruit individuals from San Francisco's diverse communities so as to maximize their involvement in the CAC and their leadership in the community.
- 3.5 Maintain ongoing working relationships with other community organizations that represent the range of families in the district, for example Support for Families, PTA, PPS, Caracen, Coleman Advocates, Chinese for Affirmative Action.
- 3.6 Identify, publicize and collaborate with community resources that provide training that might benefit families.

GOAL 4: DISABILITY AND DIVERSITY AWARENESS

Increase public awareness and community acceptance of individuals with exceptional needs.

Long Term Objectives:

- 4.1 On an ongoing basis search for opportunities to promote awareness of and sensitivity to all abilities. This would include appreciation of cultural differences and diversity of abilities, including invisible disabilities.
- 4.2 Create educational materials for the SFUSD staff, Board of Education and public-at-large which focus on the positives of why we have special education, its benefits, and help people to see beyond special education encroaching on the general education budget.

GOAL 5: MANAGEMENT OF THE CAC

Ensure that the objectives as articulated in this Strategic Plan are implemented by members of the CAC and other volunteers.

Long Term Objectives:

- 5.1 Annually elect officers to serve as the Executive Committee and assign responsibilities including committee appointments. The Executive Committee meets regularly to ensure work is being accomplished, and effective coordination of resources and activities.
- 5.2 Develop and implement a committee structure to ensure that our mission gets accomplished and that the workload is fairly and reasonably distributed among all volunteers (members and others).
- 5.3 Survey members regularly regarding leadership training needs. As necessary, provide regular orientation for new members and skills training for all.
- 5.4 Annually evaluate the CAC in terms of impact and how well the organization is effectively and efficiently functioning.

Appendix B, continued

- 5.5 Create opportunities and recruit individuals from San Francisco's diverse communities to participate in CAC activities.
- 5.6 Annually review the Strategic Plan and what we have and have not accomplished. Based on an assessment of our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats make modifications to this plan so as to maximize the achievement of our mission.
- 5.7 Create an annual calendar, which will include the programs for monthly meeting.

APPENDIX C

Inclusive Education: A Privilege or a Right?

Essay by CAC members Katy Franklin and Rachel Norton published on beyondchron.org, Feb. 16, 2006. Artwork by students at Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy was also posted with the article.

Despite laws prohibiting such discrimination and segregation, more than 65% of San Francisco Unified School District schools ban children with special needs from being educated in classrooms alongside their typical peers.

“Our school does not have an inclusion program,” is the polite way the school administrators put it. But, to parents seeking an inclusive education for their children who have disabilities, it is the same as being told, “We don’t enroll their kind here.”

The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), the Federal law which guides special education, mandates that all children have the right to a free, appropriate public education, regardless of disabilities. It also requires that children with disabilities be educated in the “least restrictive environment,” or the setting in which children can participate with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible.

As always, the devil is in the details. Sometimes parents reject the “least restrictive” placement, and have many good reasons for choosing to place their children in self-contained Special Day Classes. Sometimes districts discourage families from enrolling a child with disabilities in a general education classroom because they fear the child’s special needs will overwhelm the teacher and require more staff support to help that child achieve. Sometimes parents of non-disabled children protest when a child with disabilities is placed in their child’s classroom, believing that child will take away attention and resources from the rest of the class.

Another problem that affects the decision to place a child in a particular setting is ingrained attitudes and preconceived notions teachers and administrators in both general and special education have toward each other. Special education is seen as highly specialized, requiring separate training and teaching methods. Budgets are separate, making it difficult for the two groups to work together and cross-pollinate with each other’s ideas and methods.

What has resulted from these attitudes and organizational barriers is an educational system that offers “separate but equal” programs for students with disabilities—not out of any conscious desire to segregate, but out of a belief that students with disabilities are better served by educational programs designed expressly for them and delivered in a special-education friendly environment.

Still, many parents and special education advocates believe inclusive placements are often in the best interests of all children, whether they are disabled or not. Children who attend inclusive programs grow up accepting everyone as members of their community, learning from a young age that everyone is unique, everyone has different minds and different abilities and that these differences are something to be celebrated, not something to be frightened of or hidden away.

Appendix C, continued

But successful inclusion programs involve more than mere physical presence in the classroom. Successful inclusion takes careful attention and commitment to ensure that all children are treated as active members and participants of the school community. It takes strong leadership to bring together teachers, students, parents and administrators, and guide them in the development of a caring community where diversity is the norm.

Sadly, even here, in progressive, diverse San Francisco, full inclusion is regarded as more of a privilege than a right and special education students have second-class status. For now, most San Francisco parents of special education students choose not to get into a legal battle about their limited placement options, because winning entry to schools that have no experience in how to include children with disabilities and no experience in promoting the culture of inclusion is truly an empty victory.

The problem is widespread. In 2000, the National Council on Disability found that every state in the union was out of compliance with the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and that no officials were actively enforcing compliance.

In December, to commemorate National Inclusive Schools Week, the parents and staff at Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy, a small public elementary school, decided to ask the children what they gained from their inclusion program. Students drew pictures and wrote essays around the theme "Together We're Better", to illustrate how important it is for children with and without disabilities to be friends, to help each other, and to be educated together. Seeing their efforts truly inspires hope that someday, every public school in San Francisco will accept and fully include children with disabilities.

APPENDIX D

“Reaching Special Education Ideals Is Still Far Off”

Three-part series by CAC member Rachel Norton, published on beyondchron.org
May 31 – June 2, 2006.

Part 1

Google the expression “special education is a service, not a place” and you will come up with many references from special educators, disability advocates, parents and school administrators nationwide. In a perfect world, this slogan would describe reality. But as a parent and an advocate for effective education programs for all children, it seems to me that we still have a long way to go.

Full Inclusion’s History and Benefits

Currently, my child attends a San Francisco elementary school where she receives services allowing her to participate as a full member of a general education classroom, an educational program known as full inclusion.

Full inclusion grew out of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), which was first passed in 1975. IDEA guarantees the right of students with disabilities to receive a “free, appropriate public education” in what it calls “the least restrictive environment” (LRE). Subsequent court cases have defined LRE as the general education classroom at the school the student would have attended if not disabled.

Once the courts mandated a transition to LRE for all students with disabilities, school districts began trying to figure out how to educate these students in their existing programs. In 1994, San Francisco public schools began transitioning to full inclusion for students with disabilities. Eventually, district policy decreed, every school in San Francisco would comply with the LRE requirement by welcoming students with disabilities in general education.

This was not just another educational fad. In 1995, the National Longitudinal Study of Special Education Students found that those students who were removed from general education were more likely to drop out and to be dependent on public assistance in their post-high school years. These students were less likely to be living independently, and more likely to have criminal records. Sadly, scholars and advocates agree that the findings of this decade-old study are still current.

Exposure to the expectations of the general curriculum encourages students to achieve, even as they are receiving supports and modifications to assist them. There are many anecdotes about people who at one time were assumed to be ineducable but who eventually found the inner resources and community support to build independence and fulfillment in their lives. Segregation creates a cycle of lowered expectations and failure. The theory behind inclusion is that it sets higher expectations while supporting students to succeed at the level appropriate for them.

The benefits of inclusion extend beyond students with disabilities. Inclusion allows general education peers to view disability as only one aspect of the individual; they see their classmates as people first and are less likely to be intimidated or put off by their differences.

In the 1990s, inclusion in San Francisco grew rapidly. In 1994, there were just 50 full inclusion students at 10 schools. Today, there are 45 schools in the district offering full inclusion programs

Appendix D, continued

and about 450 students participating (though this still only represents 38 percent of all schools in the district and just six percent of the district's total special education enrollment). The district created the Inclusion Task Force, a group of teachers, administrators and parents who created resources for the transition. Some of these resources were licensed by major publishers and are still distributed nationwide, generating royalties for the district. Scholarly journals cited San Francisco as a national model for others to follow.

But progress toward fully including students with disabilities in our schools has slowed, even though the laws remain clear that the general education classroom--with necessary modifications and supports--should be the first placement considered for any child with a disability. The district has chosen lately to focus on self-contained classrooms, partly out of a belief that they represent lower staff costs, and partly because the earlier experience with inclusion was just plain hard for everyone involved.

Implementing Full Inclusion

Implementing inclusion is hard. It requires commitment and tremendous collaboration between general education teachers and their counterparts in special education. It requires training for all staff, and it requires flexibility from all parties. But after functioning separately for decades distrust and organizational barriers between general and special education run deep. General education teachers feel intimidated by disability and do not believe they have the training to teach students with marked differences; special educators feel they are treated as "country cousins" when it comes to the general curriculum and content standards. The irony is, however, that most teachers who participate in a well-designed inclusion program find that it is satisfying and rewarding work.

It is probably not true that well-implemented inclusive schooling must cost more than self-contained classrooms, according to Dr. Ann Halvorsen, a Professor of Special Education at California State University, East Bay, and a longtime participant in the district's Inclusion Task Force. In a 1996 study, Dr. Halvorsen and her colleagues found that supporting students with disabilities in general education classrooms produced small savings in facilities and transportation costs, and provided resources from special education to general education students as well. While there are staff costs involved in professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals providing inclusive education, districts must invest in professional development for any new programs they institute. Finally, paraprofessional costs depend more on students' needs than on their classroom program; a student who cannot move at all independently will probably need full time staff support in any placement.

Part 2

In 1994, the San Francisco Unified School District began moving towards a more inclusive approach towards students with disabilities, and started to phase in "full inclusion" programs at every school. In full inclusion, students with disabilities spend all of their time in general education, receiving supports and modifications to help them participate in the class work to the fullest extent possible.

But after several years of tremendous progress, management shifts and other factors led to yet another change in focus. The goal of fully including students with disabilities at every school was quietly set aside in favor of "inclusiveness" and an increased focus on self-contained classrooms, where students are grouped together by age and need and taught by a special education teacher and several aides for most of the day. Students are "mainstreamed" into general education where

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possible, but their “home” classroom is special education. These classrooms are known as “Special Day Classes” or SDCs.

With their smaller class sizes, SDCs should boost achievement through personal attention and a differentiated curriculum. But the reality in San Francisco is that these self-contained classrooms do not fully expose students to the state’s content standards, nor do they always provide the course work necessary for students to fulfill college admission requirements. One parent discovered quite by chance that spending any time in an SDC in high school meant that her child would not meet the admission requirements for the California State University system and other four-year colleges and universities; she claims that the district content specialist assigned to her child’s case—the person whose job it is to ensure a proposed program is academically appropriate—was unaware of this until she pointed it out. For students with mild to nonexistent cognitive impairment but other needs that justify a special education placement, an SDC is not currently an academically rigorous option, and spending time in one may significantly restrict post-secondary options.

Academic expectations aside, time spent in an SDC means that students are segregated from their peers – and this is particularly true for students of color. Hispanic and African American students are over-represented in San Francisco’s special education programs, consisting of about 55 percent of the caseload even as these groups make up only 35 percent of total district enrollment. A blistering report in 2005 by the court-appointed monitor of the district’s desegregation efforts found that African American and Hispanic students in special education are often bused across town just to be placed in self-contained classrooms that give them little contact with broader school populations.

Segregated classrooms also introduce unintended barriers. In some schools, SDC students are not allowed to attend general education classes without a paraprofessional, or must “compete” with full inclusion students for mainstreaming opportunities. The scheduling complexity that results from these policies is sometimes insurmountable – one senior with significant needs spent no time in general education this year, despite positive mainstreaming experiences in the past, because there was no way to accommodate her. Unless principals continually and forcefully articulate the importance of including and integrating special education students, general and special education tend to go their separate ways.

The way classrooms are placed at schools also interferes with community-building. In an effort to spread out special education programs to many neighborhoods, the district has often placed a K-2 class at one school, and the corresponding grade 3-5 classroom at another. If there were provisions for transitioning children between SDCs and full inclusion, this arrangement might not matter. But such transitions are rare. Instead, elementary students enrolled in SDCs in the early grades change schools more frequently than general education students do, and as a result they have fewer opportunities to become part of their school communities.

From an administrative standpoint, these changes may make sense, but they fail to take into account the relationships and bonds that are disrupted when students are moved around. If inclusiveness is a central goal for our schools, these relationships should be nurtured, valued and encouraged as part of administrative decision-making. Finally, there is little incentive for individual schools to revisit inclusiveness if there is no district-level expectation for these efforts or any oversight of them.

Part 3

Almost 30 years after the passage of laws guaranteeing a free, appropriate public education to students with disabilities, children enrolled in special education face many barriers to their full participation in academic and extracurricular activities in regular public schools. Special educators like to say that “special education is a service, not a place,” but as a parent of a child enrolled in special education and an advocate for effective education for all children, it seems to me that we still have a long way to go.

Barriers to Full Inclusion

For my own child, who requires little curriculum modification but significant help in other areas, full inclusion is the only choice. She needs high academic expectations and the example of typically-developing peers, and the general education classroom is the only environment where she can receive these supports. Still, enrolling her in a full inclusion program was not without some unpleasant surprises.

First, there is very little assistance for families undergoing placement. Other than a list of schools offering different program types, there is no centralized source---like an enrollment fair similar to the one held for general education---that offers deeper information about special education programs at the various school sites. Even data like total requests, capacity and open spots (routinely published for general education) are difficult to obtain from the district.

Without enrollment data, and because programs offer a variety of staffing arrangements and differing levels of training for teachers and paraprofessionals, parents who want input into their child’s placement must do the legwork themselves. As a hearing officer scathingly put it in one court case, San Francisco parents have to “embark on (a) Goldilocks-like quest to find a placement that is ‘just right.’” When I was looking at full inclusion programs for Kindergarten, the guides on the school tours I took could not answer any questions about special education; most of my questions required a separate appointment with the inclusion specialist or the principal.

Second, there are limited choices, and these choices narrow dramatically as children move through the system. While San Francisco does have a larger full inclusion program than many other districts, most schools still do not offer full inclusion, even though the law is meant to apply to all schools. For the 2006-07 school year, there are 297 inclusion “seats” available in grades K through 5 at 31 schools, or an average of 50 seats per elementary grade across the district. There are 108 middle school inclusion “seats” available at six schools, or an average of 36 seats in grades 6 to 8. (Claire Lilienthal has an additional inclusion capacity of 24 seats, representing two or three additional seats per grade level for grades K through 8). At the high school level, there are 81 inclusion seats available at six schools, or just 23 seats per grade. Clearly, the district does not expect students with disabilities to stay in full inclusion programs throughout their school careers; this attitude is curious when you consider that the general education classroom is the law’s clear preference for placement.

It should be noted that, district-wide, full inclusion programs in San Francisco Unified do not appear to be fully enrolled (though it is close at the high school level, with just one inclusion seat currently open for 2006-07). However, this obscures the fact that the district is not making the same commitment to fully including children that it did in the past, and that its actions are suppressing demand. In placement meetings, for example, families report being strongly cautioned against requesting full inclusion, because they are told their children will receive more comprehensive and

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personal support in a self-contained classroom. Faced with the choice of battling for minimal (let alone “appropriate”) support or choosing an environment that is portrayed as personalized and welcoming, many families fail to assert their right to the general education classroom with necessary modifications and supports and instead opt for Special Day Classroom (SDC) placement.

Ultimately, whether or not the district has sufficient inclusion capacity, the real issue is access and the equity of the choices being offered to students with disabilities compared with those offered to non-disabled students. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, a Federal law, decrees that publicly-funded entities must not offer people with disabilities opportunities, benefits or choices that are not equal to those given to non-disabled people. But in San Francisco,

- Children with disabilities have fewer choices of school sites even as non-disabled students can choose from any school in the district;
- Non-disabled students are guaranteed the right to attend school with an older sibling, but students with disabilities and their non-disabled siblings do not receive the same guarantee;
- The top-scoring high school (Lowell) and top-scoring middle school (Presidio) do not admit full inclusion students.

The Future: Implementing Positive Change For All Students

I feel worried when I survey my daughter’s future school and program choices. There are some wonderfully inclusive schools in San Francisco, but there are still too many where “inclusiveness” is an afterthought if it is considered at all. At the district level, policies seem to place program availability – the “place” for special education --over the flexible and thoughtful approach to my child’s needs that the laws require. The reality is that here, as in many other districts, special education is still much more of a place than a service.

Someday, perhaps, children with severe to mild disabilities will be able to access therapeutic services and educational supports at every school, learn alongside familiar and understanding peers, and be encouraged throughout their academic careers to reach their fullest potential, whatever it might be. What it will take to get there is a renewed commitment to inclusiveness, high-quality professional development, flexibility, collaboration and vision.

APPENDIX E

The Community Advisory Committee for Special Education Provides a Voice for San Francisco Parents

Article by CAC 2nd Vice Chair Amy Ottinger published in the Support For Families of Children With Disabilities Fall 2006 newsletter. An earlier version of this article was published on beyondchron.org June 8, 2006.

Advocating for a child with special needs can feel like a full time job. There are so many things to learn: your child's rights, best teaching practices vs. what may be available in the district, what type of programs are offered at the different schools and where to turn if things aren't going smoothly. On top of that, as with any child, we only get to rear them once, and the time goes by quickly. With so much to do and so little time, why would volunteering be a good idea? Because volunteering and working with others who have faced similar challenges allows us to share our experiences and learn from one another.

The Community Advisory Committee for Special Education (CAC for SPED) cannot advise on a child's needs, nor recommend placements, but it is a place where parents can work together with teachers and administrators on new ideas and better communication. The CAC is mandated by California Education Code to advise the administration and the Board of Education on the Local Plan—the "blueprint" of special education services. The committee consists of community members, professionals, district representatives, and parents of children with disabilities, who must make up a majority of the committee.

At the monthly meetings, members make connections with other parents and teachers of children with special needs and have an opportunity to share their views with SFUSD administrators and policy makers. David Wax, the Director of our Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) and Carol Kocivar, SFUSD's Ombudsperson for Special Education, attend most meetings, and we often have a guest speaker from the district. Myong Leigh, the Chief of Policy and Planning, and Pamela Macy, Program Administrator for DIS Services are scheduled to attend upcoming meetings this Fall.

This past year has been an exciting time for the CAC. We have formulated a Strategic Plan from input gathered at a large community meeting a year ago. Throughout the past year a trained facilitator worked with the CAC to prioritize, condense and shape that input into a clarified vision and five goals that translate to committees chaired by CAC members. Those committees are:

1. **Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation** [Promote effective programs and services for students with special needs by providing input into San Francisco Unified School District's planning, monitoring and evaluation.]
2. **Promotion of Ongoing, Quality, and Up-to-Date Training and Education to Ensure Student's Success**
3. **Leadership Development, Recognition and Outreach** [Increase the involvement of families and students to ensure quality education and support for students with disabilities.]

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4. **Disability and Diversity Awareness** [Increase public awareness and community acceptance of individuals with exceptional needs.]
5. **Management of the CAC** [Ensure that the objectives as articulated in this Strategic Plan are implemented by members of the CAC and other volunteers.]

In addition to the work on the Strategic Plan, the CAC has also been involved in legislative advocacy. Last year, the state legislature was pushing a plan to make school districts responsible for providing mental health services to students. Currently, county mental health centers handle these services and SFUSD does not have the capacity or expertise to take them on.

If the state were to force greater mental health responsibilities on the schools, counselors and other staff would have to be hired to provide these services, but the state's record on fully funding such mandates is not good. And ironically, such a system would replace one -- the community mental health centers that currently provide mental health services -- that many people agree is actually working. Local CAC members joined in opposing the bill, which was ultimately tabled.

The CAC also participated in the SELPA Legislative Action Day at the beginning of May. Six parents joined Mr. Wax and Ms. Kocivar in Sacramento for a morning of legislative updates and networking with others from across the state. In the afternoon, we met with our local representatives and their staff members.

We learned that of all fifty states, California provides the lowest funding to meet the federal disability mandates. We asked our representatives to fight for better funding for our school district, particularly for special education. We were also able to put human faces to "special education" and share stories of our kids' struggles and triumphs.

At the recent Board of Education budget committee community meeting, a CAC member was able to meet the school district's lobbyist in Sacramento. This contact gives us another avenue to pursue better state funding in order to minimize special education's encroachment on the school district's general fund.

This year has also been a year of transition for the CAC membership. After four tireless years as CAC Chair, Linda Tung is stepping down from a leadership position, though she will remain a CAC member. Wanyee Frances-Babitsky has been elected as the new Chair, and four new members have joined, all stepping up to Board positions and committee chairs. We have our work cut out for us as we plan our annual report to the Board of Education, transition to the new CAC board, begin to implement the Strategic Plan and broaden our outreach.

As with any volunteer organization, the more members there are, the more the workload can be shared and the more that can be accomplished. We hope to continue to see new faces at the meetings—held on the fourth Thursday of each month (except July and December) at Open Gate, 2601 Mission Street, Suite 300, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Childcare and translation services for those meetings can be reserved in advance by calling Open Gate at 920-5040; parents of children with disabilities can apply for a \$50 stipend for attending the monthly meetings. Go to www.cafec.org for details.