

South Whittier School District

Special Education Program and Fiscal Review

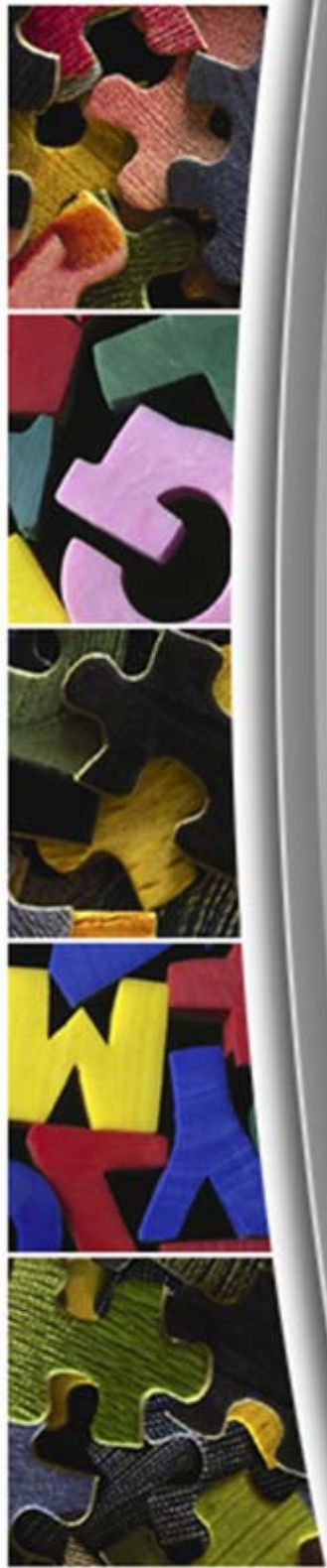
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Associate Vice President

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Study Overview

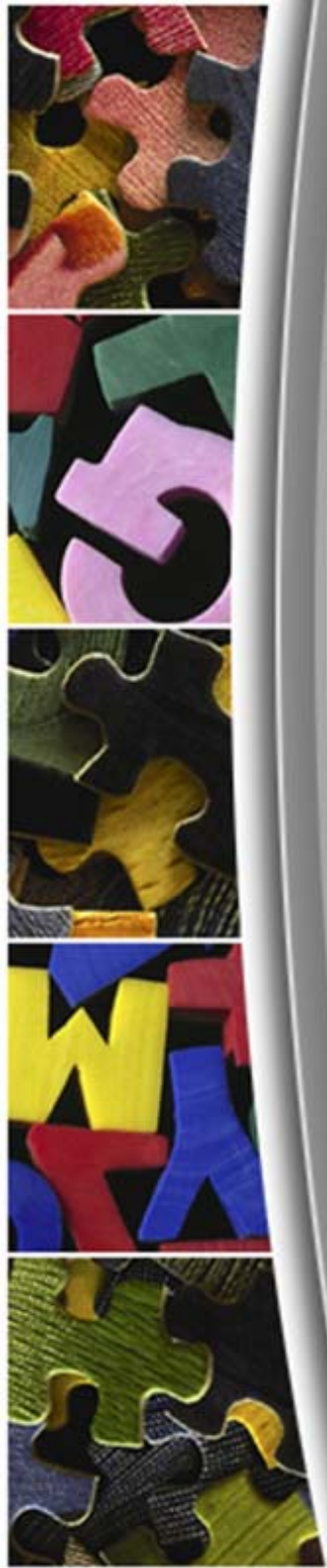
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- Special education is a necessary-but-high-cost program throughout California
 - However, this does not mean that costs are not manageable
- The purpose of this study is to provide an objective analysis and recommendations regarding how to impact the cost and quality of the special education program in a positive manner
- Why now?
 - The District expects that the budget will continue to be challenging
 - ◆ Information is needed to inform decisions
 - But this is not just about money, it's also timely to support the improvement planning and implementation underway in the District



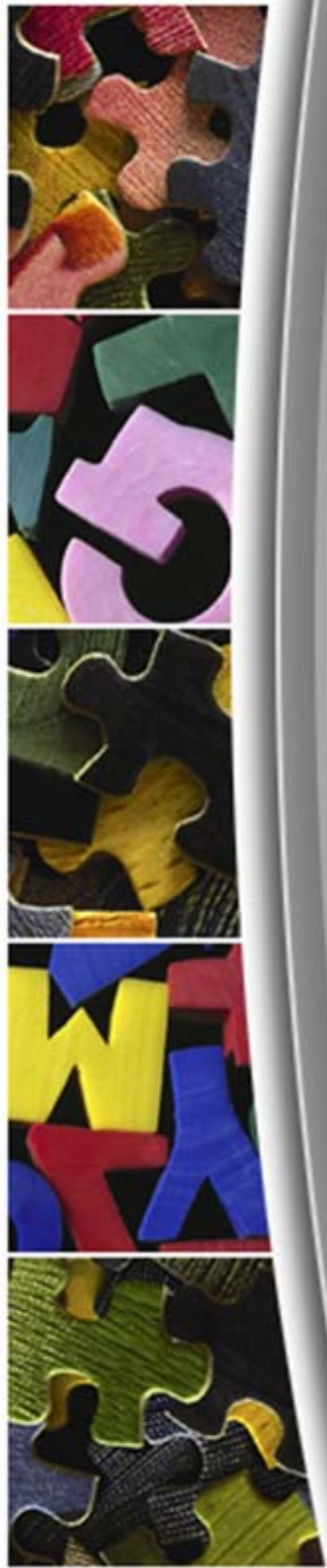
Study Process

- Findings and recommendations are developed based on considering multiple data points:
 - Financial and program data
 - ◆ Budget documents
 - ◆ Student performance
 - ◆ Staffing
 - Organizational charts and supporting documents
 - Statewide staffing and program data
 - Interviews and focus groups
 - ◆ Management staff
 - ◆ Site administrators
 - ◆ Teachers, instructional aides, specialists
 - ◆ Parents
 - Classroom observations



Study Findings and Recommendations

- Findings and recommendation are organized into three areas:
 - Fiscal
 - ◆ Overview of the budget
 - ◆ Types of revenue
 - ◆ Types of expenditures
 - ◆ Analysis of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)
 - Program Services
 - ◆ Pupil count analysis
 - ◆ Program structure and services
 - Organizational and Management Structure
 - ◆ Staffing structure
 - ◆ Staffing levels
 - ◆ Policies and procedures
 - ◆ Staff development



Findings: Fiscal

- In 2009-10, the District expects to spend \$5.5 million providing special education services
- Based on comparisons from 2008-09, approximately 17.8% of the District's expenditures are for special education, which is below the proportion of spending in comparison districts

District	Expenditures per ADA	% of Total Expenditures by Type/Goal				
		Regular Education, K-12	Special Education	Other, General Education K-12	Supplemental Education, K-12	Other
East Whittier City Elementary	\$9,555	72.81%	25.97%	0.37%	0.85%	0.00%
Lowell Joint Elementary	\$7,560	75.61%	23.89%	0.50%	0.00%	0.00%
Newhall Elementary	\$7,539	77.05%	22.95%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Whittier City Elementary	\$8,201	75.41%	21.86%	0.00%	2.73%	0.00%
Little Lake Elementary	\$8,248	76.11%	21.77%	0.00%	2.12%	0.00%
All Elementary Districts	\$8,890	77.05%	20.16%	0.33%	1.63%	0.83%
Eastside Elementary	\$8,292	79.89%	19.54%	0.57%	0.00%	0.00%
Garvey Elementary	\$9,232	73.31%	19.03%	0.22%	7.31%	0.13%
Lennox Elementary	\$10,660	81.79%	18.21%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Los Nietos Elementary	\$9,190	78.23%	18.16%	0.00%	3.61%	0.00%
South Whittier Elementary	\$9,095	82.20%	17.77%	0.00%	0.03%	0.00%
Hawthorne Elementary	\$8,569	82.54%	15.37%	0.00%	0.00%	2.09%
Mountain View Elementary	\$8,166	86.24%	13.76%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Figure 4: Comparison of Expenditures by Goal for, 2008-09


Findings: Fiscal

- The District has experienced significant declines in enrollment in its overall population, yet the overall special education population has increased in size

Year	Total Enrollment, Grades K-12	Student with Disabilities (SWD) in Grades K-12	% Students with Disabilities	% Change Enrollment	% Change SWD
2004-05	4,432	394	8.89%	—	—
2005-06	4,199	365	8.69%	-5.26%	-7.36%
2006-07	4,086	377	9.23%	-2.69%	3.29%
2007-08	4,111	388	9.44%	0.61%	2.92%
2008-09	3,906	418	10.70%	-4.99%	7.73%
Cumulative Change				-11.87%	6.09%

Figure 5: District Enrollment and Special Education Population, 2004-05 through 2008-09

- This explains in part the increased level of contribution being made by the District to support the cost of its special education program
 - Current contribution from local sources to meet program requirements is around 35% of the special education budget

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- Maximize ARRA funding by ensuring that all allowed funding flexibility is used, “new” program costs are paid for, and remaining funds are invested in program improvements
 - Use approximately \$357,850 to reduce local contribution
 - Identify new costs in 2009-10 (i.e., new nonpublic schools [NPS] costs, or other added costs for existing services)
 - ◆ Anticipated to be \$125,000
 - Invest remaining ARRA funds to implement recommendations from this study, such as one-time costs to develop programs, training, and building behavior support capacity
 - Consider modifying transportation policies to better manage transportation costs
 - Prepare for ARRA funding cliff

Findings: Program Services

- The identification rate of students with disabilities has increased from 2004-05 to 2008-09
 - The increase has occurred over virtually all types of disabilities
 - Incidences of Speech and Language Impairment are more than 50% above the countywide rate and nearly double the statewide rate
- The District's overall identification rate has gone from below that the statewide and countywide rate, to now above that rate

	Mental Retardation	Speech & Language Impairment	Emotionally Disturbed	Other Health Impairment	Specific Learning Disabled	Autism	Other*	TOTAL
Little Lake	0.16%	3.19%	0.14%	0.67%	2.60%	0.95%	0.58%	8.29%
Statewide (Elementary)	0.49%	3.22%	0.26%	0.69%	3.77%	0.83%	0.49%	9.75%
LA County (Elementary)	0.47%	2.62%	0.23%	0.78%	4.45%	1.09%	0.47%	10.13%
Whittier City	0.26%	3.95%	0.38%	0.62%	3.81%	1.48%	0.81%	11.30%
Los Nietos	0.39%	5.72%	0.15%	0.44%	3.60%	0.64%	0.44%	11.40%
South Whittier	0.23%	4.94%	0.18%	0.54%	3.53%	0.87%	0.40%	10.70%
South Whittier (04-05)	0.18%	4.15%	0.02%	0.27%	3.11%	0.59%	0.57%	8.89%

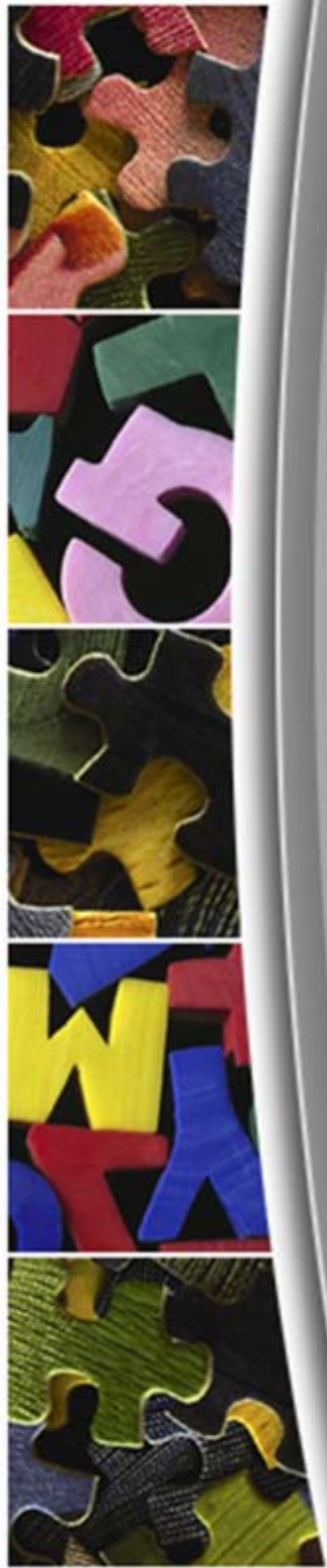
Figure 7: South Whittier School District Incidents of Disability by Type, 2008-09 and 2004-05

*Includes Hard of Hearing, Deaf, Visual Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Multiple Disabilities

Findings: Program Services

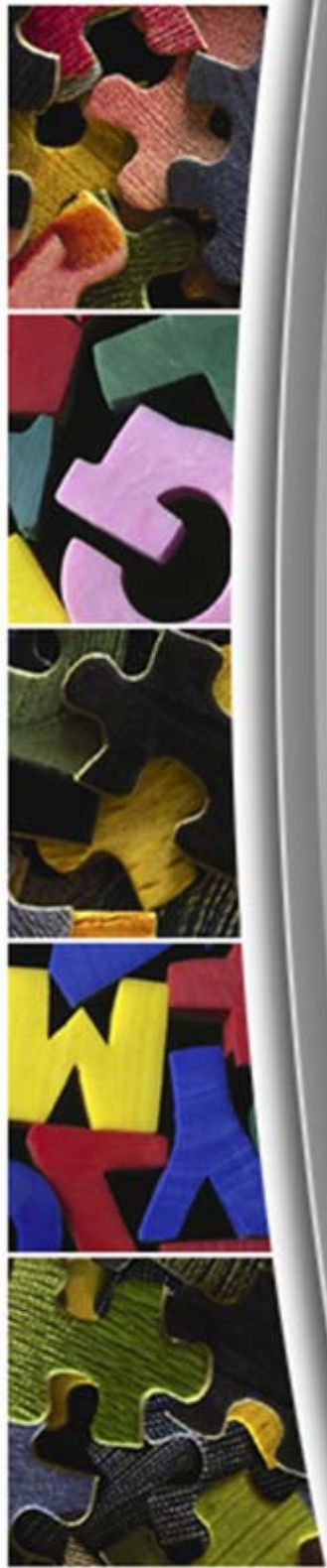
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- Most students requiring special education services receive services in a District-offered program
 - Every school has at least one Resource Specialist Program (RSP) classroom
 - Five of the schools have at least one Special Day Class (SDC)
 - Five schools support one or more full-inclusion students
- However, there are students served by outside agencies:
 - County/regional programs, of which preschool-age students comprise a significant portion of placements
 - Nonpublic Schools



Findings: Program Services

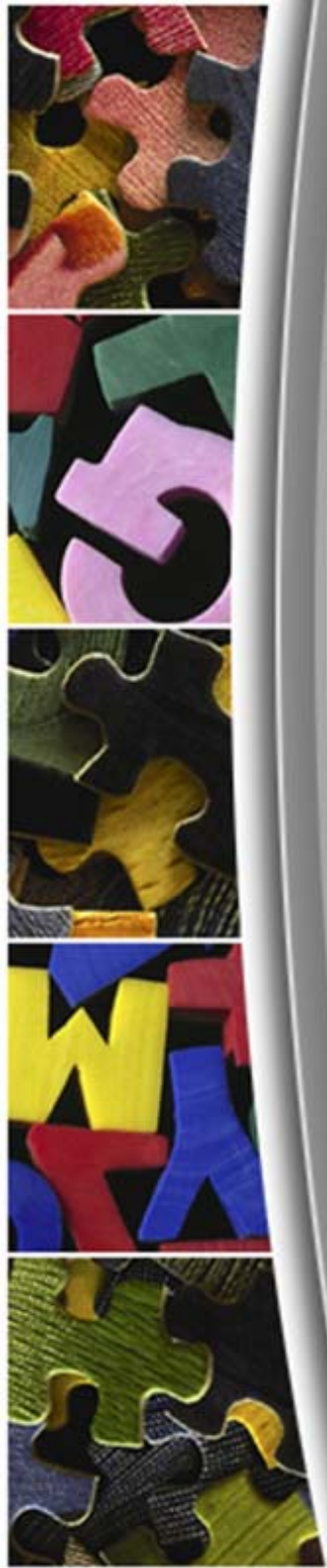
- The District's reliance on NPS to provide services to students has dropped significantly in the past year
 - In 2009-10, the average cost is estimated to be \$16,153 per student compared to \$33,431 per student in 2008-09
- Preschool students represent approximately 14.3% of all students receiving special education services
 - The District has limited space for such classrooms and it's a relatively low-funded area of service
 - The District has seen sharp increases in population in recent years
 - Whittier Area Cooperative Special Education Program (WACSEP) offers a preschool/kindergarten speech and language support program that accounts for nearly one-third of the District's preschool population
 - ◆ Intake is managed by WACSEP, which limits the District's control over the program, yet the District is financially responsible for services



Recommendations: Program Services

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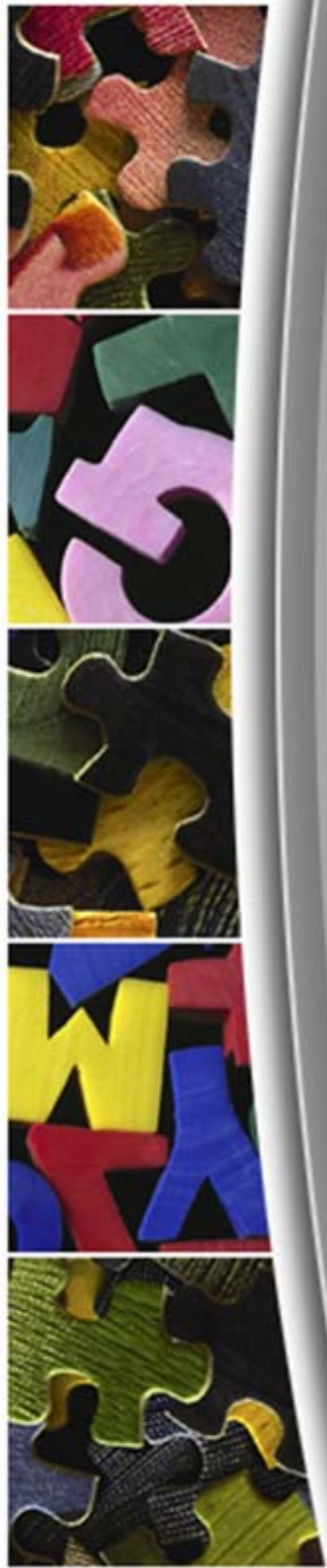
- Consider piloting a learning center model
- The District should review its students identified for speech and Language Impairment to determine whether there is possible overidentification
- The District should consider adding full inclusion and behavior intervention specialist support
- The District should consider developing a grade 3-6 SDC-SH classroom to minimize out-of-district placements
- Immediate action should be taken to ensure that Student Study Teams (SSTs) and Response to Intervention (RTI) are adequately supported as general education responsibilities in terms of both staff time and the use of financial resources



Findings: Program Management and Staffing

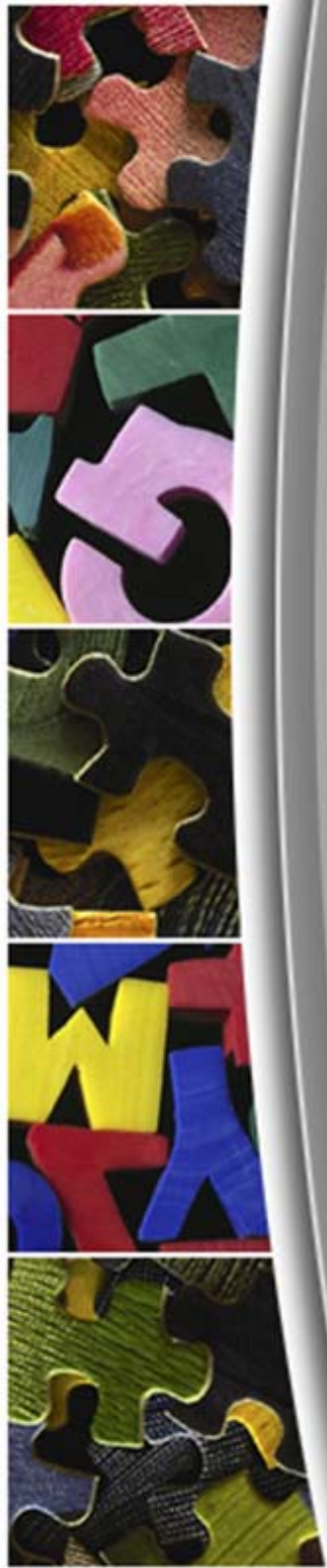
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- For the past three years, the responsibility for special education has been part of the duties of the Director of Special Programs
- Last year, a Coordinator of Special Education was added
- In addition, the District shares support from a 0.7 FTE Program Specialist with other members of WACSEP
- The District relies heavily on contracts services from nonpublic agencies and independent providers of speech and language pathologists, psychologists, and occupational therapists



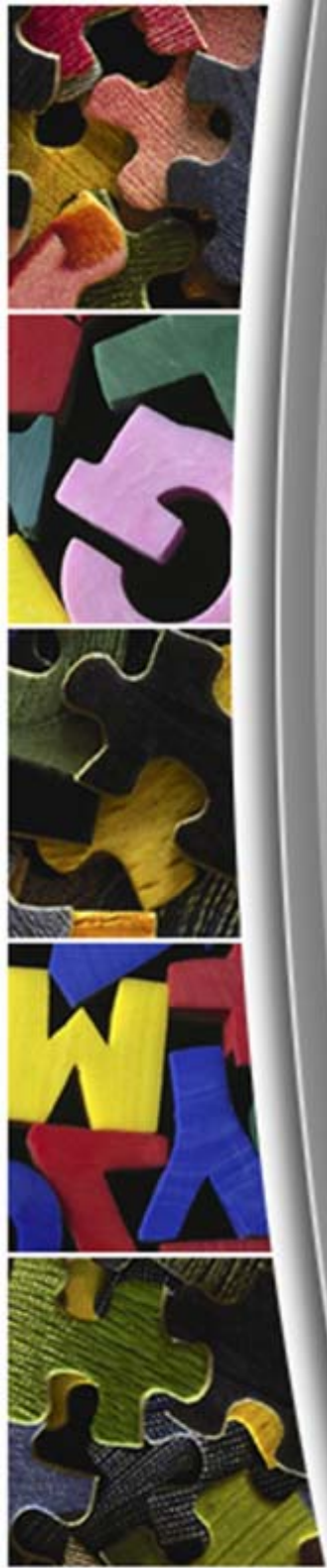
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- There are some areas where staffing levels seem low, others that are high, and a few that are just right
 - Lower than expected
 - ◆ Psychologists – about half the level of support as noted throughout the state and county
 - About right
 - ◆ Program management and coordination
 - Higher than expected
 - ◆ Speech and Language Pathologists have moderate caseloads, but heavy reliance on nonpublic agencies to provide staff
 - ◆ Classroom-based staff: Resource Specialist Program (RSP) and Special Day Class (SDC) teachers plus instructional aides, especially one-on-one aides
 - ◆ Reliance on nonpublic agencies – this includes speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and behavior intervention support



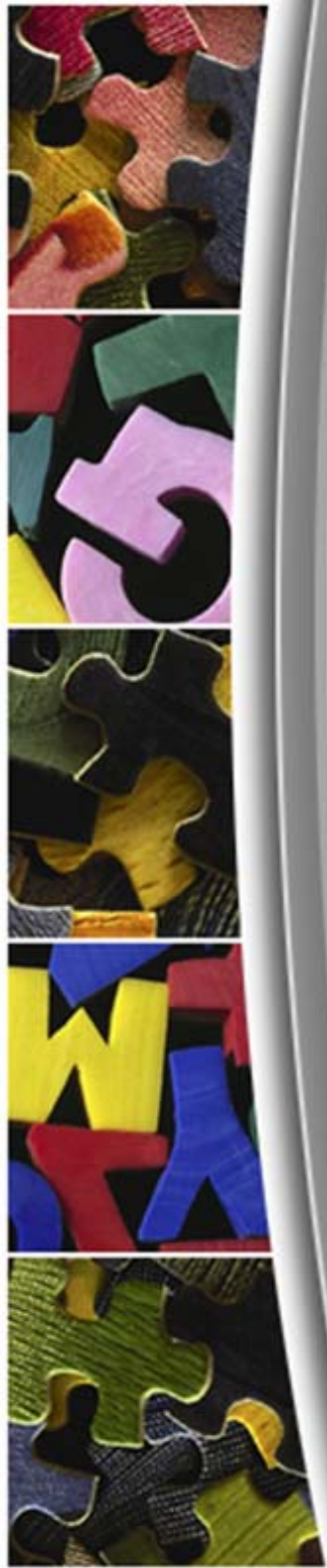
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- The District lacks a user-friendly policies and procedures handbook, which would help build consistent expectations and processes
- Staff development has improved during the past year, but needs are not fully met
 - More training for all staff is needed, especially as the program becomes better defined
 - A focus on early intervention, such as Response to Intervention, could be effective in supporting a more appropriate level of identification



Recommendation: Program Management and Staffing

- Consider options to reduce or redirect staffing as a means to save unrestricted general fund contributions to support special education
- Review level of instructional aide support – this will require a change in approach and culture that is longstanding
- Evaluate whether the District can modify its current compensation structure to effectively recruit and retain staff to fill responsibilities currently performed by outside agencies/staff such as speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and psychologists
 - Consider increasing psychologists to 2.0 FTE and paying for 0.5 FTE as part of general education intervention support with restricted resources
- Prepare principals to take more responsibility for the special education program
- Develop and deploy a user-friendly procedures handbook and ensure that it is followed and enforced



Questions and Discussion

