

Article from the April 2011 SF Educator, followed by UESF Policy Statement

UESF Policy Statement on SFUSD Inclusion Plan Calls for Full Support

Next school year the SFUSD plans on a major expansion of the inclusion program for Special Education students district-wide in general education Kindergarten, 6th, and 9th grade classes. The program is in response to an audit conducted last school year that found many faults with Special Education delivery in the SFUSD.

Prompted by comments and concerns from teachers, paras, and support staff about the SFUSD's proposal, UESF has created a policy statement in order to help ensure that the educational needs of all affected students are met and that educators are supported.

UESF Secretary and Staff Representative Susan Solomon headed up a committee of UESF Executive Board members to create the initial draft of the policy. It was then reviewed and amended by the UESF Special Education Committee, members of the Elementary and High School Committees, and by several Union Building Committees. Ultimately, the Executive Board passed the policy statement on April 6th and it was approved by the UESF Assembly on April 20th.

“The UESF policy statement focuses on the need for the district to provide adequate staffing, training, and resources to support the new inclusion program,” says Susan Solomon. “This includes training and support for all of the educators who will be expected to implement the program – including general education teachers, Special Education teachers, paras, and other support staff such as psychologists, nurses, and counselors.”

A chief concern raised in the policy statement is that the SFUSD is rapidly expanding their inclusion program during a period of budget deficits. As school site budgets are being pared down, and teachers and support staff are subjected to layoffs, the district is proposing a massive change in every school in the city.

“In order to make sure any inclusion program is successful, the district must back it up with full funding,” says UESF Executive Vice-President Linda Plack. “Without adequate resources, the proposed inclusion program could end up being a disservice not only to the inclusion students, but to their fellow classmates as well.”

Because of concerns about funding and sufficient preparation, the UESF policy also strongly urges the district to use the 2011-2012 school year as a pilot year for the inclusion program, focusing on a rollout in just a handful of schools, along with a joint UESF/SFUSD committee to assess the program.

The UESF Special Education committee presented the policy statement to SFUSD's Director of Special Education Cecilia Dodge at a meeting on April

18th. Before the end of the school year, the committee plans on a presentation to the district's Community Advisory Committee, the state-mandated parent group that advises the district on Special Education.

"We will continue our advocacy efforts to make sure the inclusion plan is implemented properly," continues Linda Plack. "As always, we encourage rank-and-file members to bring forward their suggestions and concerns." Email Linda Plack at lplack@uesf.org with your ideas.

A copy of the policy statement appears below:

UESF Position on Inclusive Practices For Special Education Students

Passed by the UESF Executive Board on April 4, 2011 and by the UESF Assembly on April 20, 2011

I. Principles and Concerns

A. UESF Statement of Beliefs

1. A program of inclusive practices can be an exciting and useful model that helps to insure equal access to and participation in a quality education for all students when it is implemented in a manner that provides the necessary services and supports that each student needs to be successful.
2. When the necessary services and supports are implemented with fidelity, a model of inclusive practices is a model that can be beneficial to all students, and not just to students with special needs.
3. Students with special needs have the legal right to be educated in the least restrictive environment, and the school district has the obligation to provide the necessary services and supports to insure successful outcomes for all students.
4. UESF is dedicated to providing a quality education for all students.
5. Teachers' autonomy in making decisions about the needs of individual students and the class as a whole during the instructional day must be respected. This includes a teacher's ability to determine when a student needs respite from the classroom for a limited amount of time.

B. Planning for and Implementation of Inclusive Practices

1. Contractual provisions must be respected at all times.
2. The Inclusion Support Team, as described in the UESF/SFUSD collective bargaining agreement, Article 31.8.6, must be fully staffed and activated

at each site that has Inclusion, and it must be allowed to do its work in an expedient way.

3. Input from parents, guardians, teachers, paraprofessionals, psychologists, counselors, nurses and speech pathologists in the move to inclusive practices, from planning to implementation, is critical if inclusive practices are to be successful.
4. The goals for implementing an inclusive model must be clearly defined, realistic, practical and practicable.
5. While UESF understands that there are school sites that currently have Inclusion programs, it must be pointed out that these are not necessarily model programs, as they are frequently understaffed.

C. Staffing and Professional Development

1. UESF is acutely aware of the need for extensive, high-quality professional development and training for certificated and classified personnel to take place before full implementation of inclusive practices.
2. Staffing, professional development, and programmatic decisions should be based on sound, scientific, outcome-based educational research and authentic input from SFUSD educators who provide direct, daily services to students.
3. UESF advocates for an emphasis on in-classroom support, in addition to the general education classroom teacher, for a majority of the day on a daily basis.
4. UESF is acutely aware of the need for ample, adequate staffing in order to provide the necessary and fair quality education for all.

D. Health and Safety

1. The safety of all of our students and educators is always of utmost importance to UESF.

E. Financial Concerns:

1. UESF understands that the cost of providing non-public settings (NPS) to students is extremely high (\$16-18 million per year), and believes that NPS referrals can be reduced by providing SFUSD educators with the necessary resources and training.
2. UESF is extremely concerned that, because one of the District's main goals in the reorganization of the Special Education Department is to save money, our members will be under-resourced and overworked. Our students will not be well served by such an approach. Rather than

attempting to save money by cutting resources and increasing the workload of special and general education educators, UESF recommends that the District focus its efforts on improving the special education program, with an important goal being to decrease greatly the number of NPS referrals.

II. Recommendations for immediate action, based on the above principles and concerns, are listed below.

A. Planning for and Implementation of Inclusive Practices

1. The plan that SFUSD has shared so far (a single four-hour Professional Development session on March 4, 2011) is truly inadequate. In addition, any plan that does not include extensive training for paraprofessionals is clearly not in the best interests of students. There must be additional extensive PD for teachers and extensive PD for paraprofessionals.
2. Input from parents, guardians, teachers, paraprofessionals, psychologists, counselors, nurses and speech pathologists must be sought immediately.
3. UESF recommends a more limited rollout—a pilot—of inclusive practices, rather than the full kindergarten, 6th grade and 9th grade rollout that the District has planned for the 2011-2012 school year. While the audit of the SFUSD Special Education Department found serious deficits, there is no deadline by which time recommended changes must be made, and it is far preferable to develop a plan with care, deliberation and intentionality than it is to rush to roll out a major change for which the District is ill-prepared. (It should be noted that very few UESF members were interviewed for the audit.)

B. Staffing for Inclusive Practices

1. “Adequate staffing” does not mean that a general education teacher is the only adult in a classroom with general education and included students.
2. “Adequate staffing” includes a clear plan for who will work on IEPs, with the understanding that classroom and Inclusion teachers, Resource Specialists, and support personnel cannot be required to work beyond their contractual hours and days.
3. “Adequate staffing” does mean that there is a fundamental need for special education paraprofessionals in every classroom that has Inclusion students.
4. Currently, some of the needs required by Special Education and Inclusion students are being met by non-Special Education

paraprofessionals, including security aides, due to understaffing of paraprofessionals. The layoffs of non-Special Education paraprofessionals for 2011-2012 will impact our ability to provide adequate services to Special Education and Inclusion students, especially at sites not presently providing Inclusion services, just as reducing support personnel and security positions and/or hours has negatively impacted sites during the 2010-2011 school year.

5. UESF must be informed about credentialing requirements and job classifications. For example, what role will the many special education teachers who have mild-to-moderate credentials have? What role will Resource Specialists and N10 paraprofessionals have?
6. UESF recommends a co-teaching model, with a general education and a special education teacher working together in a classroom, along with in-class support from special education paraprofessionals.

C. Professional Development and Credentialing

1. An increasing percentage of Inclusion students have disabilities on the autism spectrum. UESF recommends a plan and a timeline for ensuring that sufficient numbers of special education teachers receive the support needed to get their autism credentials. This support must include, but need not be limited to, the contractual agreement (Article 18.11) that special education teachers will be reimbursed for tuition for coursework leading to an autism credential.

D. Health and Safety

1. There must be clear, consistent and useful practices and protocols in place, with attendant training for all faculty and staff, to ensure that situations that can jeopardize the safety and well-being of children and adults are prevented whenever possible, and handled immediately, lawfully and carefully when they are not preventable.
2. Health and hygiene protocols and precautions must be put in place in every classroom in which students who wear diapers are enrolled. Currently, S10 paraprofessionals are responsible for changing students' diapers. UESF expects no changes to that practice.

E. Contractual Issues and Working Conditions not Previously Covered Above

1. Contractual provisions must be respected and strictly enforced at all times, including but not limited to paraprofessional transfers; administration of medication; class sizes; work day and work year; recognition of the Inclusion Teacher and Resource Specialist positions and the unique roles the two positions have; and all other subjects

covered by the collective bargaining agreements for classified and certificated personnel.

2. To the extent that the rollout of inclusive practices is likely to affect the working conditions of UESF members, the District will have to negotiate with UESF over those effects.
3. In recognition of the likelihood that including students with different needs into general education classrooms will necessitate additional and different teacher time and resources, UESF recommends class size limits, as well as the use of a ratio or percentage of inclusion and general education students in determining class size. (This issue has a unique component for kindergarten classes, as the possibility that there are students with special needs who have not yet been identified is much higher in kindergarten than in other grades.) UESF recommends that a labor-management committee be formed immediately to make recommendations about aforementioned ratios and/or percentages.

When establishing these ratios, the factors to be considered include but are not limited to: the number of Inclusion students assigned to a class; the responsibilities of the faculty and staff as described in the students' IEPs; the school and classroom facilities; and the availability of support personnel.

4. There should be no link between teacher evaluations and the standardized test scores of any students, including those of students enrolled in Inclusion programs.

F. Assessment of SFUSD's inclusive practices

1. UESF recommends the formation of a labor-management-community committee to conduct an ongoing, data-driven assessment of the program as it is rolled out next year. Participation of general and special education educators is essential for this committee.

G. Information Needed

1. UESF recommends and seeks verification that the current procedure for a student's placement into an Inclusion program--- that the IEP team determines a student's placement into an Inclusion program, based on what constitutes the least restrictive environment for the student--- will remain unchanged.
2. As the student enrollment process will be completed in the spring of 2011 for the 2011-2012 school year, school sites need to receive information about the special needs of the incoming students, per their IEPs, so that sites will be prepared to meet those needs as soon as school starts in August 2011.

3. If the District has a transportation plan in place for the rollout of the 2011-2012 Inclusion Program school year, it has not been disclosed. UESF recommends disclosure of the transportation plan, or lack thereof, for Inclusion students.
4. What tools are in place to reflect on and assess the inclusive practices model once it is implemented? (Please see II.F.1 above.)

H. Concerns about Student Needs

1. UESF demands a meeting with the Special Education Department so that concerns about student needs can be addressed. These concerns include but are not limited to:
 - a) Currently SDC and some RSP students are taught with accommodations and/or a modified curriculum. How are they going to be accommodated in the Inclusive model?
 - b) A significant number of students enrolled in special education need remedial tutoring. How will that be done?
 - c) Life skills, such as personal hygiene tasks, dressing, riding public transportation, etc. are taught by Inclusion teachers. A plan is needed for continuation of this instruction.
 - d) Will the graduation requirements for students in special education change under the new model?
 - e) How will the needs of students with sensory requirements be met?