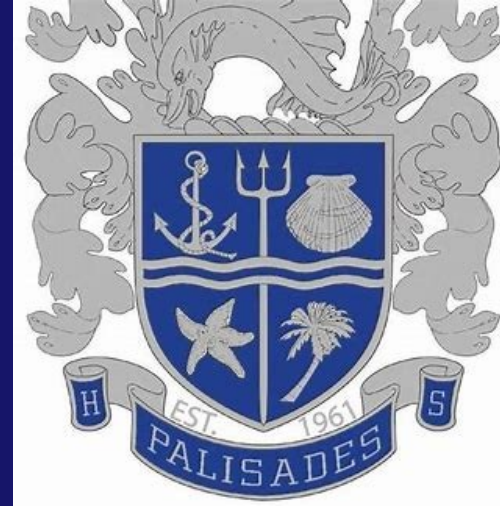# FCMAT

FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM

Special Education Review

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Fiscal Crisis & Management Assistance Team

- External state agency established by Assembly Bill 1200 in 1992 to help California's transitional kindergarten through grade 14 (TK-14) local educational agencies (LEAs) comply with fiscal accountability standards.

- Helps LEAs identify, prevent and resolve financial, operational and data management challenges by providing management assistance, professional learning, and fiscal and organizational tools and resources.

Approach

- Findings and recommendations are based on multiple sources of information.

- Information is gathered through a comprehensive review of documents, state information and interviews.

- A deficit model is used to prepare our findings and recommendations.
  - FCMAT reports focus on areas that need improvement and do not usually comment on things that are working well.

Special Education Continuum of Services

Least Restrictive Environment

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

- LRE placement is assessed using the California Department of Education's local level annual performance report.

Least Restrictive Environment (cont.)

- The school met all three targets that measure LRE in its most recent local level annual performance report, which is commendable.

- Ensuring access to general education settings and fostering interactions with neurotypical peers are essential for maximizing the performance and outcomes of students with disabilities.

Collaborative Teaching Program

- The school offers a collaborative teaching program in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher are paired and co-teach in a general education setting, which is an industry-standard best practice.
- The school could strengthen its collaborative teaching program by providing training for staff in:
    - The different co-teaching models.
    - How to co-plan and co-teach.
    - How to differentiate instruction and plan for the needs of all students.
    - How to build the school's master schedule to support collaborative teaching.

Pull-Out Academic Courses

- The school has academic pull-out courses, which are parallel to its general education academic courses but are self-contained, taught by a special education teacher, and serve only students with disabilities.
- This causes students with disabilities to lose access to their typically-developing peers and the academic rigor of a general education class setting.
    - The school should develop a plan to reduce the number of pull-out academic courses offered and increase the number of general education classes that use collaborative teaching.

Pull-Out Study Seminar Courses

- The school offers pull-out study seminar courses for students with disabilities.
  - Staff reported a wide variation in how these courses are structured because there are no standards for these courses.
- Study seminar courses should focus on individualized instruction that addresses a student's individualized education program (IEP) goals; whole group instruction designed to build executive functions, self-advocacy, and study skills; and services to help a student transition to adult living.
  - The school should establish standards and curricula for its study seminar courses.

Special Education Administrative and Teacher Staffing

Special Education Administrative and Support Staffing

- The school's special education administrative and support staffing is similar to that of comparable school districts and charter schools FCMAT surveyed.

Special Education Teacher Staffing

- Schoolwide resource specialist program (RSP) teacher staffing is slightly higher than the Education Code (EC) 56362(c) standard but is needed to support the school's inclusive model.

- The schoolwide mild-to-moderate special day class (SDC) caseload average is slightly higher than the industry-standard range, and its moderate-to-severe SDC caseload is slightly lower than the industry-standard range.

Special Education Instructional Aide Staffing

Instructional Aide Staffing

- The school has 17 (was 18) special education instructional assistant positions, almost all of which provide 1-to-1 student support.

- The school does not assign any special education instructional assistants to support the RSP or SDC programs.

- The school should evaluate whether assigning special education instructional assistants to its RSP and SDC programs according to industry-standard staffing levels and adult-to-student ratios would allow it to provide better support for students.

1-to-1 Student Support

- Staff reported that the school does not use a special circumstances instructional aide (SCIA) assessment process to determine whether a student requires 1-to-1 support from a special education instructional assistant.

- Using an SCIA assessment is the best practice because it clarifies decision-making and procedures and is in keeping with the fact that assigning 1-to-1 student support is a significant decision that should be based on a thorough, data-driven evaluation that includes consideration of all less restrictive alternatives.

- The school should adopt an SCIA assessment process, train staff, and use it consistently to determine the need for 1-to-1 special education support.

Related Service Provider Staffing

Related Service Provider Staffing

- The school contracts with nonpublic agencies for its adapted physical education teacher, teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, occupational therapist, physical therapist, and speech and language pathologist.

- This is appropriate because the level of student need does not require a full-time staff person in any of these areas.

School Nurse Staffing

- The school has a 1.0 full time equivalent (FTE) credentialed school nurse, which is 0.30 FTE less than the industry-standard staffing for credentialed school nurses.

- The school has been unable to recruit an additional credentialed school nurse.

- For the 2024-25 school year, it added 20 days to its credentialed school nurse's contract and is currently recruiting for a health services assistant.

School Psychologist Staffing

- The school has 2.0 FTE school psychologists, which is 1.02 FTE less than the industry standard for school psychologists.

- Because the school should be using an SCIA assessment to determine the need for 1-to-1 student support and because this process is facilitated by the school psychologists, the school would benefit from increasing school psychologist staffing to align with industry standards.

- The school hired an additional 1.00 FTE school psychologist for 2024-25.

Individualized Education Program Meetings

Use of Schoolwide IEP Meeting Calendars

- The best practice is for schools to use a schoolwide calendar at the start of each school year to plan for IEP meetings.

- The school introduced a schoolwide IEP calendar this year and should use it to schedule all annual and triennial meetings.
  - This ensures that a private space can be reserved for all IEP meetings and helps distribute the workload for all staff who perform assessments, write IEPs, and attend as the administrative designee.

Other IEP Meeting Recommendations

- The school would benefit from training additional staff members to serve as administrative designees for IEP meetings.
- The school should develop IEP meeting agendas, use them consistently, and train staff in their use.
  - This encourages compliance with the IDEA's procedural requirements and helps ensure IEP meetings are conducted in a sequence that leads to the school making a defensible offer of a free and appropriate public education.

Unrestricted General Fund Contribution

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- The school's adjusted 2022-23 unrestricted general fund contribution to special education was $2,010,771, or 37.34% of total special education costs.

- This figure falls below the last available (2021-22) statewide average of 64.3%, as calculated by School Services of California.

Questions?

Thank you!