

A Review of the

Special Education Program

for the Leander Independent School District



March 05, 2010

GIBSON
CONSULTING GROUP

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Executive Summary

Gibson Consulting Group, Inc. (Gibson) was hired by the Leander Independent School District (Leander ISD) to conduct a review of the district's special education program. The focus of this review was overall program effectiveness, major compliance areas, placement of students into the program, and operating efficiency. This review also included a parent relations component to determine overall parent satisfaction with the special education program and service delivery that Leander ISD provides to students.

Leander ISD's special education program has scored high marks through the State of Texas Performance Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS), and these rankings were reinforced by feedback from parents of special education students. A survey of Leander special education parents revealed a high degree of satisfaction with the quality of services their children receive through the district's special education program as well as with schools' efforts to partner with parents. The district exceeds the state targets for serving students in a "Less Restrictive Environment" for all age groups, and its Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) passing rates for special education students are higher than the state targets for all subject areas.

During the study, Gibson identified best practices occurring through specific programs and at several Leander ISD campuses. For example, the district has implemented several innovative programs for special needs students, including: the Language Enrichment Intervention Program for pre-school students with speech-language disabilities; Social Communication Supports and Services (SCSS) for students with Asperger's Disorder and related autistic disorders; and the Structured Learning Environment (SLE), primarily serving students with pervasive developmental disorders and autism. The district also has excellent transition programs and services for students ages 18-22.

However, there are systemic and programmatic issues that need to be addressed by Leander ISD. Some of these issues have resulted from the district's rapid growth and the related challenges of monitoring campus activity. Others are attributed to lagging information systems, accountability mechanisms, procedures, and training to support consistent application of programs and program administration across the district.

A final report contains 23 recommendations to improve the management and delivery of Leander ISD's special education programs and services. The implementation of these recommendations will help ensure a more consistent quality of program delivery across the district, improved alignment among established learning objectives, education plans, and classroom activities, and a more effective use of staff resources.

Major Recommendations

- **Modify Leander ISD’s special education organization structure to better support accountability and internal communications.** Recommended changes include:
 - Filling program and support needs. New positions for professional development, communications, assistive technology, and social workers dedicated to the special education program will help the district fill organizational gaps.
 - Improving accountability and oversight. Two leadership positions, including the Director of Special Education, have an excessive number of staff reporting to them. This appears to be contributing to communication problems, as well as inconsistencies between program intentions and classroom activities. An Assistant Director of special education programs is recommended to oversee all direct instruction, including those programs for special populations.
 - Re-defining Administrative Services position as “Assessment and Compliance,” that more closely resembles the current compliance role and incorporates diagnosticians under its leadership.

A separate recommendation to phase out ARD Facilitator positions will allow the district to add the positions listed above, as well as new special education teacher positions. The fiscal impact will be neutral, with the number of new teacher positions being the balancing variable. Leander ISD should migrate toward the new organization structure over the next three years.

- **Modify the Training for Academic Success in the Classroom (TASC) program for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.** The TASC program has many good features and is well-liked by many parents, teachers and administrators. However, the components of the program which focus on “compliance” oriented behavior improvement strategies are not based on current research, and expose the district to risk. This program should be modified to include more positive behavior strategies. In August 2009, the district hired its first Positive Behavior Specialist through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funds and this position should help facilitate the improvements to the TASC program.
- **Implement strategies to reduce the number of restraints of students in special education.** Leander ISD has experienced an extraordinary high level of restraints in recent years. While district management believes they have over-reported restraints relative to other school districts, and the number of restraints declined in 2008-09, Leander ISD still has more student restraints than its peer districts. The district should provide additional training on alternatives to restraining students, enhance management reporting to identify and isolate unfavorable restraint trends earlier, and review Behavior Improvement Plans more frequently for those students who are restrained.
- **Re-organize and improve the Assistive Technology (AT) service delivery system.** AT is understaffed and formal AT evaluations are not routinely performed for eligible students. As a result, many schools are either dissatisfied or unfamiliar with the operation of this program. The

management of AT services varies widely across campuses, with different understandings of how these services are to be provided and communicated. A more structured approach to AT and additional resources will help improve the ability of this program to meet student and campus needs.

- **Require school administrators to attend Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) meetings, and eliminate existing ARD facilitator positions.** Leander ISD’s ARD facilitators are certified teachers performing largely administrative tasks. The district should use a smaller number of clerical staff to support ARD meetings, rely on school administrators (principals or assistant principals) to participate in the ARD meetings, and convert a portion of ARD Facilitators to direct instruction or instructional support. This represents a better use of certified special education teachers and more actively engages school leadership in the campus special education program. Currently, some Leander ISD schools apply an approach that more closely resembles this model, and this best practice should be replicated across the district.

Other Recommendations

- Implement strategies for improving staff development to address the needs of general and special education teachers, instructional assistants, and other staff who are charged with implementing inclusion (i.e. education of special education students in general education settings).
- Implement strategies to reduce the over representation of economically disadvantaged students in special education.
- Replicate district practices for ARD meetings at all campuses.
- Review staffing patterns and responsibilities for the district’s Licensed Specialists in School Psychology. Add more specific responsibilities and objectives related to campus behavioral support.
- Extend ARRA funds planning process to include specific outcome measures and program level transition plans.
- Develop “Early Warning System” reporting framework for special education.
- Develop long range expenditure and funding plan for special education.
- Apply for Rider 47 (high cost reimbursement) funds.
- Establish district-wide technology application security policies and procedures.
- Create a consistent policy for storing and transmitting secure data and train all staff regarding this policy.
- Limit eSPED software export functionality.
- Update district special education website to include parent communication tools and other pertinent information.
- Set expectations for use of teacher websites.
- Clarify district policy and procedures regarding the use of email communications.

- Improve communication with parents by consistently updating parent email addresses in the enterprise system.
- Improve communication between school personnel to ensure general education teachers are aware of, and follow, student Individualized Education Programs and Behavior Improvement Programs.
- Improve communication between personnel from one school to another when special education students are transitioning from grade to grade and/or school to school.

The final report contains the information received through data analysis, interviews, school visits, and parent surveys that forms the basis for these recommendations. Further, an appendix to the report presents details regarding parent survey administration and results.

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At the request of district leadership, additional work will be performed in connection with the Individual Community Academic Program (ICAP) program. This work will continue into spring 2010 and will be reported on separately.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Gibson Consulting Group, Inc. (Gibson) was hired by Leander Independent School District (Leander ISD) to conduct a review of the district's special education program. The focus of this review was overall program effectiveness, major compliance areas, placement of students into the program, and operating efficiency. This review also included a parent relations component to determine overall parent satisfaction with the special education program and service delivery that Leander ISD provides to students.

Leander ISD's special education program has scored high marks through the State of Texas Performance Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS), and these rankings were reinforced by feedback from parents of special education students. A survey of Leander special education parents revealed a high degree of satisfaction with the quality of services their children receive through the district's special education program as well as with schools' efforts to partner with parents. During the study, Gibson identified best practices occurring through specific programs and at several Leander ISD campuses.

However, there are systemic and programmatic issues that need to be addressed by Leander ISD. Some of these issues have resulted from the district's rapid growth and the related challenges of monitoring campus activity. Others are due to -lagging information systems, procedures, and training to support consistent application of programs and program administration across the district.

This report contains 23 recommendations to improve the management and delivery of Leander ISD's special education programs and services. The implementation of these recommendations will help ensure a more consistent quality of program delivery across the district, improved alignment among established learning objectives, education plans, and classroom activities, and a more effective use of staff resources.

The list of recommendations contained in this report, by chapter, is presented below:

Chapter 2 Recommendations

Recommendation 2-1: Implement strategies for improving staff development to address the needs of general and special education teachers, instructional assistants, and other staff who are charged with implementing inclusion (i.e. education of special education students in general education settings).

Recommendation 2-2: Implement strategies to reduce the over representation of economically disadvantaged students in special education.

Recommendation 2-3: Require school administrators to attend ARD meetings, and eliminate existing ARD facilitator positions.

Recommendation 2-4: Replicate district practices for ARD meetings at all campuses.

Recommendation 2-5: Re-organize and improve the Assistive Technology service delivery system.

Recommendation 2-6: Modify the Training for Academic Success in the Classroom program for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Recommendation 2-7: Implement strategies to reduce the number of restraints of students in special education.

Recommendation 2-8: Review staffing patterns and responsibilities for the district's LSSPs. Add more specific responsibilities and objectives related to campus behavioral support.

Recommendation 2-9: Assign two social worker positions directly to the special education department

Chapter 3 Recommendations

Recommendation 3-1: Modify Leander ISD's special education organization structure to better support accountability and internal communications.

Recommendation 3-2: Extend ARRA planning process to include specific outcome measures and program level transition plans.

Recommendation 3-3: Develop "Early Warning System" reporting framework for Special Education.

Recommendation 3-4: Develop long range expenditure and funding plan for special education.

Recommendation 3-5: Apply for Rider 47 (high cost reimbursement) funds.

Recommendation 3-6: Establish district-wide application security policies and procedures.

Recommendation 3-7: Create a consistent policy for storing and transmitting secure data and train all staff regarding this policy.

Recommendation 3-8: Limit eSPED export functionality.

Chapter 4 Recommendations

Recommendation 4-1: Update district special education website to include parent communication tools and other pertinent information.

Recommendation 4-2: Set expectations for use of teacher websites.

Recommendation 4-3: Clarify district policy and procedures regarding the use of email communications.

Recommendation 4-4: Improve communication with parents by consistently updating parent email addresses in the enterprise system.

Recommendation 4-5: Improve communication between school personnel to ensure general education teachers are aware of, and follow, student IEPs and BIPs.

Recommendation 4-6: Improve communication between personnel from one school to another when special education students are transitioning.

Methodology

The review sought to answer the following questions:

1. Is the special education program meeting stated goals and objectives?
2. Does the district over- or under-identify special education students?
3. Are the students identified for special education reflective of the school district's ethnic composition?
4. What are the established pre-referral systems and are they effective in appropriate referrals?
5. What are the processes in place to ensure appropriate inclusion for students in special education?
6. Is a full continuum of services available?
7. Are placement decisions and the resulting identification codes resulting in maximum funding allotments for the district?
8. Do IEPs reflect the least restrictive environment in accordance with federal laws?
9. Does the district attempt to dismiss students from special education?
10. What are the rates of special education students taking and succeeding on state assessments?
11. What are the procedures in place to monitor compliance with all applicable laws, regulations and policies, and are they adequate?
12. What has been the number and nature of any special education litigation over the past five years? How were these resolved and what changes, if any, did they prompt?
13. Are special education student records properly maintained and secured?
14. Does the special education organization structure effectively support accountability and efficiency?
15. Has the district written for and received federal or state grants for the special education program?
16. Does the special education program effectively communicate with its stakeholders?
17. Are parents of Leander ISD special education students satisfied with the education their child receives?

18. What transition services is Leander ISD supporting in order to promote positive post-secondary outcomes for students? How does this compare to best practices?
19. How does the district demonstrate parent/student participation in the ARD process?

To comprehensively address the questions posed above, Gibson used a variety of data collection and analysis approaches. This comprehensive review of the Leander ISD's special education program included the following data collection approaches:

- Review of existing data from Leander ISD related to their special education program
- Interviews with district leadership and special education department staff
- Interviews and focus groups with campus principals and special education campus team leads
- Focus groups with special education teachers and general education teachers working with special education students in an inclusion setting
- Focus group sessions with parents of Leander ISD special education students
- Special education classroom observations at elementary, middle school, and high school campuses
- Surveys of parents of Leander ISD special education students
- Review of Individualized Education Program (IEP) folders for Leander ISD special education students

Data Collection

To provide proper context for the review, Gibson requested from Leander ISD a broad spectrum of data and documents related to the district's special education program. The purpose of this data request and analysis was to gain a deeper understanding of the Leander ISD special education program and provide background and context for the review. In addition, these data and documents were utilized to help formulate questions for the interviews and focus group sessions held with district program administrators, school administrators and staff, teachers, and parents of Leander ISD special education students.

Interviews with District Staff

Gibson conducted a site visit in order to interview key staff involved in the special education program in Leander ISD. The purpose of these interviews was to develop a better overall understanding of the program (e.g., organization of the program, processes in place to determine student special education placements, professional development opportunities, inclusion practices, policies and procedures for restraints, parent relations, etc.). The following district staff participated in interviews with Gibson team members:

- Superintendent
- Special Education Director
- Assistant Superintendent of Business and Operations

- Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources
- Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services
- Executive Director of K-12 Programs
- Coordinator for Special Education Administrative Services
- Elementary Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction for Special Education
- Secondary Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction for Special Education
- Coordinator of Specialized Population Services
- Coordinator of Transition
- Director of Accountability and Systems Measures
- Technology Director
- District Lead Diagnostician
- District School Psychologist
- District Speech Language Pathologist
- District Autism Facilitator
- Lead ARD Facilitator
- Special Education Parent Liaison
- Records Management Staff
- 18-22 Program Staff
- Child Find Program Staff

Campus Site Visits

The Gibson team conducted site visits to 12 of Leander ISD's 34 campuses. Site visits, which were conducted over the September 28, 2009 to October 6, 2009 period, included eight elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools in the district. A purposeful sample of Leander ISD schools were selected for site visits based on the review of demographic, school performance, and special education program data received from the district. Structured interview and classroom observation protocols were developed to ensure consistency in data collected from each of the campuses selected for site visits. Each site visit included the following structured activities:

- Interview with the campus principal
- Interview with the campus special education team lead
- Classroom walkthrough and observations for each of the specialized programs in place at the campus (e.g., Content Mastery, Resource and Inclusion, PSLP, ICAP, SCSS, SLE, TASC, etc.)
- Interviews with special education classroom teachers

Focus Group Sessions

Focus groups are an effective way of obtaining more in-depth information than a survey or other data collection instruments. In addition, the dynamics of a focus group often stimulate the expression of ideas that might otherwise go unstated. The project team conducted focus group sessions with varying groups of stakeholders (i.e., principals, teachers, campus special education leads, and parents). These focus groups were conducted between September 28, 2009 and October 01, 2009.

The following groups participated in focus group sessions:

- **Principals** – Gibson conducted one elementary school and one secondary school focus group with principals who were not included in the campus visits. There were a total of 12 participants.
- **Teachers** – Gibson also conducted teacher focus group sessions: two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. There were a total of 21 participants.
- **Campus Special Education Leads** – Gibson conducted focus group sessions with campus team leads that were not included in the campus visits at: one elementary school and one secondary school. There were a total of 15 participants.
- **Parents** – Gibson conducted three separate focus group sessions with parents: one for elementary school, one for middle school, and one for high school parents. There were a total of 14 participants.

Survey of Parents

To support our assessment of the effectiveness of the district’s special education program, the review team measured parent’s perceptions of the quality of the services their children are receiving, and the extent to which the district makes efforts to work together and partner with parents through a parent survey. Gibson administered an online survey that was available in both Spanish and English to parents of special education students. The survey measured various components of parent communication and satisfaction, including the extent to which services their children receive are appropriate, timely, and of high quality. Surveys were administered to special education parents electronically using the survey software Zarca Interactive. The survey was launched on September 29, 2009 and closed October 18, 2009.

IEP Folder Review

The Gibson team conducted a review of randomly selected IEP files for special education students attending elementary, middle school, and high school in Leander ISD. The purpose of the review was to evaluate the completeness of the file and to better understand the district’s Admission Review and Dismissal (ARD) process.

Data Analysis

Data related to Leander ISD’s special education program were requested and analyzed to provide background and context for the study.

Interview and Focus Group Data

Qualitative interview and focus group data were organized into key topical areas. The data were then further analyzed and grouped thematically to determine common threads across the various stakeholder groups (i.e., principals, campus special education team leads, teachers, parents).

Parent Survey Data

Of the 1,872 survey invitations sent, 31 percent of parents responded. Prior to analysis, raw parent survey data were examined (e.g., assessment of outlier data points, investigation of ranges of responses, analyzing means and standard deviations), to ensure that only appropriate respondents were included in the analysis. Reliability analyses were also conducted to determine how well scaled survey items “hung together” psychometrically. Because not all parents in the district responded to the survey, the resulting sample dataset was analyzed to determine how representative responding parents were of the population. Statistical adjustments were made, to ensure generalizability of findings.

In addition to scoring their satisfaction with the district’s services and schools’ partnering efforts, parents were also given an opportunity to articulate their opinions and experiences in an open-ended format. Responses to questions were analyzed using common qualitative data analysis techniques: First, responses were grouped by whether the comment noted was as a strength, an area parents thought the district could improve upon, or an area that parents would like to learn more about. Next, within each of these main groupings, common themes drove the creation of mutually exclusive categories. Finally, each response was coded to one of these categories. This content-coding enabled identification of the most frequently reported strengths, areas for improvement, and areas to learn more about, as well as examination of whether differences existed by various parent subgroups.

Organization of Report

The results of this analysis are presented thematically, rather than in the order that the project questions were posed. The remainder of this report is organized into the following main chapters:

Chapter 2 – Program Delivery: Examines Leander ISD special education programs, services, and student populations.

Chapter 3 – Organization and Management: Examines reporting relationships, communication, and management within the district special education department. This chapter also includes a financial analysis of Leander ISD’s special education program and a section on data security.

Chapter 4 – Communication: Examines communications between school personnel and parents/families as well as internal communications.

Chapter 2 – Program Delivery

Leander ISD is one of the fastest growing school districts in the State of Texas, growing more than 35 percent over the past five years. The district is comprised of 23 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, and 5 high schools. During the fall of the 2009-10 school year, Leander ISD had a district enrollment of 30,454 students with 2,827 students, or approximately 9.3 percent receiving special education services. While there has been a 14.6 percent increase in special education students enrolled in Leander ISD over the past five years, the district has seen a 17 percent decrease in the percentage of special education students relative to the total district enrollment during this time period (see **Table 2-1**).

Table 2-1. District Enrollment, 2005-06 to 2009-10

Year	Total District Enrollment	Non-Special Education Enrollment	Special Education Enrollment	Percentage of Students in Special Education
2005-06	22,077	19,611	2,466	11.2
2006-07	24,333	21,716	2,617	10.8
2007-08	26,551	23,909	2,642	10.0
2008-09	28,507	25,812	2,695	9.5
2009-10	30,454	27,627	2,827	9.3
Change from 2005-06	37.9% Increase	40.9% Increase	14.6% Increase	17.0% Decrease

Source: Leander ISD, Texas Education Agency Fall Snapshot Reports

Leander ISD serves special education students with diverse needs. Based on state disability categories, the majority of special education students are specific learning disabled (36 percent), other health impairment (19 percent), and speech or language impaired (17 percent). **Table 2-2** shows all special education students (as of August 2009) by primary disability category.

Table 2-2. Special Education Students by Disability Type, 2009

Primary Disability Category	Number of Leander ISD Special Education Students	Percentage of Leander ISD Special Education Students
Auditory Impairment	43	2
Autism	326	12
Deaf-Blind	0	0
Developmental Delay	0	0
Emotional Disturbance	219	8
Mental Retardation	98	4

Primary Disability Category	Number of Leander ISD Special Education Students	Percentage of Leander ISD Special Education Students
Orthopedic Impairment	27	1
Other Health Impairment	513	19
Specific Learning Disability	977	36
Speech or Language Impairment	464	17
Traumatic Brain Injury	14	1
Visual Impairment Including Blindness	17	1
Noncategorical Early Childhood	26	1
Total	2,724	100

Source: Leander ISD, fall 2009

Table 2-3 displays Leander ISD special education students by level and grade for the 2008-09 school year. The Early Education Program is for children with special needs only. In grades 3, 4 and 5, increases in the percentage of special education follow the Grade 3 TAKS testing, as additional students are referred to special education. Otherwise, the percentage of special education students by level is consistent across elementary and secondary levels.

Table 2-3. Special Education Students by Grade, 2008-09

Grade Level	Number of Leander ISD Students	Number of Leander ISD Students in Special Education	Percentage Leander ISD Students in Special Education
Elementary	15,050	1,376	9.1
Early Education	244	244	100.0
Pre-Kindergarten	322	12	3.7
Kindergarten	2,455	163	6.6
Grade 1	2,438	155	6.4
Grade 2	2,520	161	6.4
Grade 3	2,504	186	7.4
Grade 4	2,340	223	9.5
Grade 5	2,227	232	10.4
Middle School	6,240	592	9.5
Grade 6	2,106	176	8.4

Grade Level	Number of Leander ISD Students	Number of Leander ISD Students in Special Education	Percentage Leander ISD Students in Special Education
Grade 7	2,083	203	9.7
Grade 8	2,051	213	10.4
High School	7,217	727	10.1
Grade 9	2,087	225	10.8
Grade 10	1,851	176	9.5
Grade 11	1,770	164	9.3
Grade 12	1,509	162	10.7
Overall	28,507	2,695	9.5

Source: Leander ISD fall 2009, Texas Education Agency 2008-09 Fall Snapshot

The federal statutes, *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* or *IDEA* (revised in 2004) and *No Child Left Behind* (2002) ushered in a new era of accountability and enhanced the monitoring of progress by districts and individual campuses in a wide variety of areas including the composition of special education populations and the testing of disabled students along with their non-disabled peers. Many districts, including Leander ISD, responded to these new mandates by making fundamental changes in the processes associated with special education in areas such as student assessments, referrals and methods of instruction.

The State of Texas uses the Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS) as the primary evaluation tool for school district special education programs. Districts are assigned performance levels based on their comparison to targets or ratios on specific indicators in the special education portion of the system. These performance levels are analyzed and districts can compare their indicators to peer districts and also track their performance over time.

Leander ISD's PBMAS rankings reflect a strong special education program, and these rankings are supported by feedback from parents of special education students. A survey of Leander special education parents to determine satisfaction revealed a high degree of satisfaction with 1) the schools' efforts to partner with parents, and 2) with the quality of Leander's special education programming. These levels of satisfaction did not differ by the type of disability a student had, indicating that special education programming across the wide spectrum of student disabilities is meeting the needs of many of the district's special education students. While there was some dissatisfaction expressed, this dissatisfaction tended to be a minority opinion among a smaller group of parents, rather than a majority voice. While parents may have suggestions for improvements in particular areas and desire to continuously improve programs and services to students, the overall message was one of satisfaction. Details regarding the administration and results of the parent survey can be found in *Appendix A and Appendix B*.

While a useful and informative approach to identifying particular parent concerns, survey responses are limited by their self-report nature. Thus, this review also included site visits, staff interviews, focus groups, and analysis of existing data to form a holistic picture of the quality of special education programming in the district. During this review, many recommended practices were observed – sometimes district wide, and sometimes occurring on specific campuses. In addition, areas of improvement were noted and form the basis of the recommendations section of this report. However, before presenting these areas of opportunity, it is first important to commend the district in the areas in which special education programming is particularly high quality, innovative, or effective.

Commendations

1. *The district has a relatively low percentage of students in their special education program and is very close to the state target.*

The overall percentage of special education students in the district is very close to the target set by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The state target is 8.5 percent and Leander ISD is at 9.3 percent. In 2005-06 the district's special education population represented 11.2 percent of enrollment, demonstrating aggressive movement toward the state target over a relatively short period of time. Several factors appear to be contributing to this, but the district's Response to Intervention (RTI) model may be the most significant. RTI models identify student needs earlier and attempt to address them to determine if a student's needs can be met without the need for special designed instruction provided through special education.

2. *The district exceeds the state targets for "Less Restrictive Environment" in all age groups.*

Another area of strength for Leander ISD is its placement of students in the "Less Restrictive Environment" (LRE). Many Leander ISD special education students are educated for most of their school day in general education and count as students in the less restrictive environment group. Other students with higher needs spend a larger portion of time in more restrictive settings, such as a separate class. The state has set target rates for special education students by age grouping. For students who are ages 3-5, 15 percent should be in the LRE; for students ages 6-11, 40 percent is the LRE target; and for students ages 12-21, 60 percent is the state target. Leander ISD exceeds the state target rates for LRE in all three age groups. According to 2009 PBMAS data, of students ages 3-5 in special education at Leander ISD, 36 percent are in the LRE; for students ages 6-11, 56.5 percent are in the LRE, and for students ages 12-21, 65.8 percent are in the LRE. Based on site visits, observations, focus groups, and interviews with central staff and campus personnel, the review team noted that inclusion is the preferred service delivery model and that teachers are very familiar with several models of inclusion, including co-teaching and push-in inclusion support.

3. The district's passing rates for special education students are higher than the state targets for all subjects.

Another indicator in the PBMAS is the Special Education TAKS Passing Rate, which is analyzed for mathematics, reading/English Language Arts, science, social studies, and writing. In all five content areas, the district's passing rates were higher than the state's target. **Table 2-4** shows Leander ISD's Special Education Passing rates in 2009 compared to the state rate.

Table 2-4. Special Education TAKS Passing Rates, 2009

Content Area	State Passing Rate	Leander ISD Passing Rate
Mathematics	55.0%	77.8%
Reading/ELA	70.0%	87.8%
Science	50.0%	63.3%
Social Studies	70.0%	82.6%
Writing	70.0%	86.1%

Source: Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System, 2009

Leander ISD's passing rates were not just higher than the state goal, but were more than 10 percentage points higher in every area, exceeding the state rate by more than 20 percent in math.

4. The district has implemented several diverse and creative programs for students who have autism, Asperger's Disorder, and speech-language disorders.

The Special Education Department has developed several different programs that provide services to students on the autism spectrum and with speech-language disabilities, including Language Enrichment Intervention Program for pre-school students with speech-language disabilities, Social Communication Supports and Services (SCSS) for students with Asperger's Disorder and related autistic disorders; and Structure Learning Environment (SLE), primarily serving students with pervasive developmental disorders and autism. In addition, the speech-language pathologists (SLPs) provide "push in" services for students with disabilities who receive services with their nondisabled peers in general education environments. The speech-language pathologists in the district have high levels of advanced certification in their field and the leadership has provided high quality staff development to district SLPs.

5. The district has excellent transition services for students that are ages 18-22.

The district has two related programs that provide transition services for special education students who are ages 18-22 and not graduating. One program is called SELF (Skills for Employment and Lifelong Fulfillment) and the other is Empower. The Empower program is designed for students who have significant transition needs and are under an Option II

graduation plan. These young adults are provided specific opportunities related to employment, independent living, parenting/social skills, and recreation and leisure. The SELF program serves students through a combination of work experiences, college classes, and small group and job coaching support. These two programs also rely on Person Centered Planning, a process in which students identify and build networks of support. Person Centered Planning provides detailed information for transition planning and gives students and their families' opportunities for more active involvement. These programs are an excellent approach to providing services for students in this age group.

It is important that the recommendations in this chapter are taken in the context of these positive program attributes. Also, during the 2009-10 school year, the district is implementing many initiatives supported by federal stimulus funds. The review team believes that the program delivery recommendations included in this chapter will help make a good program better, and provide guidance as the district continues to implement changes already underway.

Recommendation 2-1: Implement strategies for improving staff development to address the needs of general and special education teachers, instructional assistants, and other staff who are charged with implementing inclusion (i.e. education of special education students in general education settings).

Create a Comprehensive Staff Development Plan that is Directly Linked to Individual Staff Needs

Although the district is moving toward greater inclusion of special education students into general education settings, during interviews and focus groups with administrators, teachers, and parents, as well as during campus visits, it was consistently expressed that there is need for more staff development. Leander ISD has recently added several instructional coaches whose job responsibilities include providing on-going, "on-the-job" professional development for teachers and staff. These positions are supported by federal stimulus funds and are funded for two years. Despite the addition of these new positions, there is a need for additional training not just among special education teachers and administrators, but particularly among general education teachers who are tasked with including special education students in their general education classrooms. It was noted during interviews that staff often do not have the level of training needed or knowledge to effectively differentiate instruction for these students. Results from parent surveys listed staff training as the third greatest area of need for the district, behind concerns over communication and staff quality (which is closely related to training needs).

Specific topics frequently mentioned for additional focused training in teacher and administrator focus groups, and interviews, and through parent surveys include:

- Detailed training on specific disabilities and the needs of students with those disabilities
- Instructional strategies for differentiating instruction
- Methods of planning and documenting effective accommodations

- Strategies and effective methods and/or models of co-teaching
- Reading and math instruction for special education teachers
- Effective utilization of instructional assistants (aides)
- Effective methods for teaching special education students in general education classrooms

While professional development is offered in the summer for teachers on some of these topics, these staff development sessions are optional, not required. Interviews indicated that general education teachers often choose training covering general education topics, as this is their primary staff development opportunity. There needs to be additional training related to special education specifically for general education teachers that does not replace their general education staff development. The two-day staff development conference on special education topics that is currently offered is viewed as helpful, but has not kept up with teachers' needs, either in topics or in the content of the presentations.

The district's special education department has provided comprehensive staff development, ensuring that at least one special education teacher on each campus has been trained in the same intensive, research-based reading instruction strategies as the general education teachers. This represents a positive framework for continued development for providing special education teachers with high quality instructional staff development and ensuring that their instructional skills are on par with general education teachers in specific content areas and methodologies used throughout the district. Similar steps should be taken with other content areas.

Clarify the District's Vision for Co-teaching

The review team learned, through conversations with teachers (both special education and general education) as well as through classroom observations, that there is confusion regarding expectations for how to apply co-teaching in inclusion settings. Some schools have strong co-teaching models, with experienced teachers who work well together and help to mentor other staff. Other schools are aware that they should be using co-teaching strategies, but stated that they did not know how to do so effectively. And still other schools are attempting to use co-teaching, but are experiencing difficulties, due to differing teacher work styles and/or lack of execution. In addition to this variation across schools, variation within schools also exists in the extent to which co-teaching is done well.

During interviews, some teachers indicated that they plan together, while others indicated that they do not engage in shared planning and instead walk into general education classrooms for 15 minute intervals seeking ways to assist the classroom teacher. In some cases where teachers implement a co-teaching model, both teachers walk around the classroom helping every student, while in other classrooms special education teachers only help special education students.

While there are a variety of ways that co-teaching can be modeled, Leander ISD should communicate a consistent approach, or a framework of multiple approaches, regarding how co-teaching should be implemented in classrooms across the district. While there are various obstacles to implementing a consistent co-teaching model across the district (e.g., sheer numbers of staff to execute co-teaching as

needed, different management styles across campuses that dictate how inclusion teachers spend their time), Leander ISD needs to provide additional guidance and oversight to ensure that the value of co-teaching is maximized.

Create a Position in the Special Education Department Responsible for Staff Development and Coordination of Instructional Initiatives with General Education

Because of the importance and complexity of professional development in the special education program, Leander ISD should designate a coordinator position to oversee special education training for staff inside and outside the Special Education Department. The person who fills such a position should have a strong set of skills, including knowledge and experience in curriculum and instruction, with both vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment. This position will also require someone who can work closely with staff development personnel in general education and who has credibility related to best practice curriculum strategies. In addition, the position will require a person experienced in planning, coordination, and resource management, with strong supervisory skills.

This position should also be responsible for ensuring that data from a professional development tracking system that monitors which staff have participated in which staff development sessions is utilized by the Special Education Department. While the district does a good job of offering staff development, there is no way to quickly report in real-time which teachers have received which trainings, or to identify campuses with specific training needs.

Implementation Steps

In order to develop an appropriate staff development plan, create a district vision for co-teaching, and implement a tracking system, the following steps should be taken:

1. Continuously update professional development needs assessments, including identifying the specific needs articulated by general education and special education teachers who teach special education students. Identify specific skills and/or topics that should be addressed.
2. Complete a similar needs assessment among campus administrators. Again, identify specific skills and/or topics that should be addressed.
3. Create a comprehensive three-year staff development plan that directly targets specific skills and articulates specific goals and objectives.
4. Consider making special education training to general education staff mandatory.
5. Develop a schedule that rotates topics and objectives over the three-year time period.
6. Consolidate the tracking and reporting of all special education training through the district's existing training information system. Reports should be developed that address specific individuals, topics, grade levels, and content areas, so that each campus has immediate access to training information pertinent to their student and faculty populations, regardless of the nature (e.g., SAMA) or source (e.g., Region XIII) of that training.

Recommendation 2-2: Implement strategies to reduce the over representation of economically disadvantaged students in special education.

IDEA describes 13 specific disability categories in special education. The incidence and prevalence of most of these disabilities should be consistent across ethnic, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic sub-populations. Some of the disability definitions, including the Specific Learning Disability definition, specifically prohibits educators from including students whose academic progress has been limited by social or cultural factors. This prohibition is intended to prevent unwarranted diagnoses and placements of children into special education who, because of economic disadvantage, lack of opportunity, or language status, face academic challenges.

The federal *NCLB* act has specifically addressed diagnoses and placement issues as well. When states report students' progress as measured by mandated tests, the progress of specific sub-groups is reported as a measure of how well schools meet the needs of poor children, second language learners, and students with disabilities. Districts in Texas are monitored through the PBMAS to ensure their compliance with both the *IDEA* and *NCLB*. In Leander ISD, the number of economically disadvantaged students receiving special education services is disproportionate to the number of economically disadvantaged students served in the general education population (not identified as special education) in the district **Table 2-5** illustrates that while 21.2 percent of non special education students are economically disadvantaged, 37.0 percent of students in special education are economically disadvantaged, a difference of 15.8 percentage points.

Table 2-5. Economically Disadvantaged Students in Special Education and Non-Special Education Populations, 2009

Population	Total Number	Economically Disadvantaged Number	Economically Disadvantaged Percent
Special Education	2,799	1,036	37.0
Non-Special Education	27,661	5,860	21.2
Difference			15.8

Source: Leander ISD fall 2009

To examine this issue more closely, the gap between the percent of economically disadvantaged students in the non-special education and special education populations was calculated for each campus. The size of the difference was then rank ordered separately within elementary, middle, and high schools to determine which campuses have the highest over-representation of economically disadvantaged students. Two elementary campuses, Winkley and River Ridge, have a gap of over 20 percentage points between the proportion of economically disadvantaged students in the special education program and those students in the general population. Among the secondary schools, the gap is more than 15 percentage points at Cedar Park and Running Brushy Middle Schools, over 20 points at Leander High School and greater than 15 percentage points at Rouse and Vista Ridge High Schools. **Table**

2-6 presents the number of schools where economically disadvantaged students are over-represented in special education by more than 10 percentage points, between 5 and 10 percentage points, and where the gap is either smaller than 5 percentage points or there is no over-representation of economically disadvantaged students. *Appendix C* contains the calculated difference for each campus.

Table 2-6. Over-representation of Economically Disadvantaged Students in Special Education, 2009

School Type	Over-representation of Economically Disadvantaged Students		
	Greater than 10%	<i>Between 5% and 10%</i>	<i>Under 5% or no over-representation</i>
Elementary Schools	9	6	8
Middle Schools	5	1	0
High Schools	5	1	0
Total	19	8	8

Source: Leander ISD fall 2009

As can be seen, the average gap of 15.8 percentage points is distributed across the district, with over-representation of economically disadvantaged students being a significant issue at 19 of the 35 campuses.

It is important to note that many special programs in Leander ISD, including ICAP, TASC, SCSS, etc. are not offered at all campuses (see *Appendix D* for program acronyms and descriptions). The district has an open enrollment policy which allows students to attend whichever school they choose, and for special education students needing one of these special programs, this often means that students do not attend the campus to which they are zoned. Because of this, not all students attending a particular campus were initially identified for special education at that campus. Consequently, a campus may have a large gap between the percentage of economically disadvantaged students in special education versus non-special education populations, but this gap may not be reflecting the actual demographics of that particular campus.

Despite this limitation, it is clear that the over-representation of economically disadvantaged students served in the special education population in Leander ISD needs to be addressed. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are protected by language in both *IDEA* and in *NCLB* precisely because their potential lower levels of academic preparedness and potential higher rates of at-risk status can lead them to be identified as needing special education services, when in fact they have no disabilities per se, but need more intensive academic acceleration and remediation.

Identifying and implementing strategies that ensure academic and behavioral success for *all* students, including those who are economically disadvantaged, is a universal goal of public educators throughout the nation. The federal government has long recognized the special challenges that face low income students and has responded with a wide variety of actions, from providing financial resources in the

Title I program to requiring academic progress monitoring for the economically disadvantaged sub-population in *NCLB*. Through research, educators have learned that the implementation of specific “best practices” can have a positive impact on economically disadvantaged students. Among these practices is the use of RTI models and ongoing targeted professional development.

A district RTI model is a mechanism for ensuring that economically disadvantaged students, or any demographic sub-population for that matter, are not over-represented in the special education population. The use of RTI models is also suggested in the *IDEA* and is structured to offer three tiers of intervention aimed at providing early intervention to struggling students. Tier One interventions are large group interventions, Tier Two interventions are designed for small groups of students, and Tier Three interventions are delivered to individual students and are similar to those provided in special education. This tiered intervention model is designed and implemented such that if one level of intervention is not successful, the student progresses to the next level of intervention. If all three levels are attempted and the student is still struggling, then a special education referral is made. This structured approach to interventions, along with screening and progress monitoring, is designed to prevent referrals to special education, dyslexia services, or other special programs, when students can, in fact, succeed without such referrals and placement. In Leander ISD, the RTI model includes a fourth tier of intervention. Each campus has a RTI team, and special education personnel are included on the RTI teams.

The over-representation of economically disadvantaged students in special education suggests that some campuses are not sufficiently addressing these students’ needs through the regular education program. While RTI is not part of the district’s special education program and accordingly was not evaluated as part of this study, the district should look to see if this program is being applied consistently district wide. Providing targeted professional development to teachers is another mechanism for ensuring all students receive the necessary support to enable academic success. Topics pertinent to economically disadvantaged students include understanding a culture of poverty, increasing student engagement, and building family and community partnerships. Among the providers of this type of staff development is the aha!Process, Inc. (www.ahaprocess.com) led by Dr. Ruby Payne. The district should also evaluate its use of differentiated instruction, which has already been discussed relative to students in special education.

Implementation Steps

The district should implement strategies to reduce the over-representation of economically disadvantaged students served in special education by taking the following steps:

1. Ensure that academic and behavioral screening from campus to campus is systematic and consistent throughout the district. A consistent screening model will ensure that all students are identified for additional tiered services as needed. Using systematic and consistent measurement, guidelines, and processes will ensure high expectations for all students across all campuses. As a result, intervention and referral determinations will be made based on individual need, not relative to other students on a particular campus.

2. Collect and review referral data by campus to determine whether any sub-populations are being referred to special education at higher than average rates.
3. Target the campuses that have the most significant over-representation of economically disadvantaged students. Review the RTI records and meeting minutes to ensure thorough provision of interventions.
4. Identify specific curricula for Tiers Two through Four that have research related to economically disadvantaged students focusing specifically on reading and math. Focus training efforts on academic and behavioral interventions that meet the specific needs of students who are economically disadvantaged.
5. Examine Blue Ribbon Schools and exemplary Title 1 schools in Texas and across the nation to identify additional practices to increase student achievement. Review curricula, instructional practices, campus leadership, parent involvement, and support programs such as mentoring, Communities in Schools, and after school programs.
6. Standardize tiered interventions throughout the district to ensure that all campuses have consistent and effective interventions in place.
7. Standardize documentation of tiered interventions provided to all students district wide, and ensure all documentation is consistent across campuses.
8. Continuously analyze referral patterns on each campus. If students who are economically disadvantaged are referred at higher rates, then the problem may be resolved through effective execution of a RTI process, which should be reviewed and addressed at the referring campus.

Because students often are not dismissed from special education once they have been referred, addressing issues of over-representation of subpopulations at the referral phase should have a cascading impact over time.

Recommendation 2-3: Require school administrators to attend ARD meetings, and eliminate existing ARD facilitator positions.

Leander ISD has created a position called the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Facilitator. The primary roles of the ARD facilitator, as described in the job description, are to coordinate data for ARD committees, complete paperwork, schedule meetings, maintain the calendar, conduct folder reviews, and fill the role of local education agency (LEA) representative in the ARD, freeing campus administrators to devote more time to their primary role as campus instructional leaders.

Currently in Leander ISD, there are 10 ARD facilitators at the elementary level. These individuals have no other duties and rotate among campuses. At middle schools, there are a total of six ARD facilitators, each of whom are assigned half-time as ARD facilitator and half time as a campus team leader or are assigned instructional responsibilities (which can include department chair responsibilities). There are three full-time high school ARD facilitators who have no other duties and two ARD facilitators at the two new high school campuses who are half-time ARD facilitators and half-time campus team leads. This is a

total of 13 full time ARD facilitators and 8 half-time ARD facilitators, which represents 17 full time teaching equivalent (FTE) positions.

Because the ARD facilitators fill the role of administrators in many ARD meetings, campus administrators often do not attend these meetings. Currently, the decision to have campus administrators participate in ARD meetings is left to the discretion of the principal. There is a great degree of variance in the extent to which campus administrators across the district attend ARD meetings along with the ARD facilitators. While staff development materials provided by the district validated that attendance by campus administrators is encouraged, during interviews some principals indicated that either the principal or an assistant principal attends the ARD meetings on their campus, while other principals relied on the ARD facilitators for the majority of ARDs unless it was a unique or “high profile” ARD meeting.

An internal review the district conducted during the 2007-08 school year found that the rate of compliance for meeting ARD timelines improved from 98.6 percent to 99.99 percent after implementing the ARD facilitator position. District-conducted surveys of parents and teachers during this review found overall satisfaction with the use of ARD facilitators. However, there are negative consequences to relying on the ARD facilitator position so heavily. First, the absence of a campus administrator could be detrimental to positive parent relationships and to the making and enforcing of decisions. Second, the district is not making the most efficient use of these 17 full-time positions, all of who are certified teachers. Both of these issues are explored further below.

Presence of Campus Administrator

The presence of a campus administrator at an ARD meeting is not only a common practice, and a recommended practice, but also fulfills the requirements articulated by specific regulations. According to the Texas Administrative Code (19 TAC 89.1050(a); 34 C.F.R. 300.116(a), 300.321 (a)), each ARD committee meeting must include all of the following¹:

1. “The parents of a child with a disability
2. At least one regular education teacher of the child (if the child is, or may be, participating in the regular education environment)
3. At least one special education teacher, or, if appropriate, at least one special education provider of the child
4. A representative of the District who:
 - a. Is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of specifically designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities
 - b. Is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum
 - c. Is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the district
5. An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results, who may be a member of the ARD committee (who may be a member of the committee listed in items 2-5)

6. The child, if appropriate
7. Other individuals who have knowledge of special expertise regarding the child at the discretion of the District or the parent”

¹*There are additional members of the ARD committee for specific disabilities or situations that are described in items 8-11 of the code, which are not relevant to this discussion.*

Campus administrators meet the intent of the language for the district because they typically supervise the provision of instruction on their campuses, are knowledgeable about the general education curriculum, and are knowledgeable about the availability of resources in the district. In addition, campus principals and assistant principals usually know the students on their campuses, as well as their parents, have supervisory responsibility for the teachers on the campus, and have the authority to allocate resources, make instructional decisions, and intervene in challenging situations.

Though the utilization of ARD facilitators reduces the time that administrators are required to spend in ARD meetings, and the training ARD facilitators receive through the district has proven to be an effective way of increasing compliance for meeting timelines, there are several disadvantages to this practice. Disadvantages include:

- *Lack of familiarity with students:* Because ARD facilitators often serve more than one campus and attend ARD meetings for many students, they often do not know the student whose ARD meeting they are attending. In some cases, the ARD facilitators have never met the student whose meeting they are conducting.
- *Limited authority:* Because the job description of the ARD facilitators indicates that they are teachers and not administrators, they have limited authority and cannot make decisions about personnel, schedules, or curriculum. Nor can they respond with administrative authority if a teacher lacks knowledge about specific student issues or has not completed required paperwork.
- *Limited knowledge and no supervisory responsibilities:* While a special education teacher who serves as an ARD facilitator may, in fact, have knowledge of the general education curriculum, this knowledge is not as broad as that of a campus principal and does not include the power to supervise the provision of instruction.
- *Missed opportunity to build parent relationships:* The lack of an administrator at the ARD meetings may also inadvertently communicate a lack of commitment to the parent-school relationship that is so vital to student success and parent satisfaction. On campuses where administrators do attend ARD meetings, it was apparent from conversations with principals, and from focus groups with parents, that administrators have more knowledge about the students in special education, their families, the programs, and thus are more able to build positive parent relationships.

Several campuses in Leander ISD do not use ARD Facilitators to a significant degree. Their approach is more in line with the recommended practice of school administrators participating in ARD meetings, and avoids the issues stated above. Other campuses should replicate this model. As evidenced at these campuses, the additional time for participating in ARD meetings should not represent an undue burden for Leander ISD school administrators. For elementary campuses, the number of special education students ranges from 31 to 93. Because there is both a principal and an assistant principal on each campus, one of the two administrators would attend between 16 to 47 annual review ARD meetings per year, which translates into a low of one ARD every other week, to a high of one to two ARD meetings per week over the course of the 36-week school year. At the secondary level, there are higher numbers of special education students, but also more administrators to cover the ARD meetings.

While there will always be additional ARD meetings taking place due to admissions and some dismissals, there are situations when a regular ARD meeting is not required. For example, according to current guidelines, minor Individualized Education Program (IEP) revisions, such as schedule changes, do not require full ARD meetings. It would still be possible for an administrator to designate someone else to attend and facilitate the ARD meeting, which would be acceptable when there is no assessment to be discussed or under other special circumstances. However this should be the exception, not the rule.

Efficient Use of 17 FTE ARD Facilitator positions

The job description for ARD facilitators, provided by the district's human resources department, indicates that this position must have a valid Texas teaching certificate in special education or in a related field. In addition, the position requires knowledge of the general education curriculum resources available in the school district, the ARD process and paperwork, the *IDEA* and other legal requirements, as well as organizational, communication, and interpersonal skills.

Currently these highly skilled instructors are not using their skills and knowledge in the classroom, but instead are spending the majority of their time on administrative tasks. Additionally, given their heavy caseloads, ARD facilitators often do not have the opportunity to become familiar with the students whose ARDs they are conducting. While special education teachers are pleased to have the ARD facilitators manage scheduling and paperwork on their behalf, it is an inefficient use of skilled staff. One of the primary complaints expressed by special education teachers, general education teachers, campus team leads, and parents is that there are not enough special education teachers to provide the services they need to provide, particularly in an inclusionary setting.

Eliminating the ARD facilitator positions will allow Leander ISD to make other position changes recommended in this report, and be able to add special education teacher positions for inclusion, support co-teaching, and other instructional support. Four FTE itinerant compliance specialist positions (or a larger number of part-time positions) should be added to support the clerical needs for ARD meetings.

While special education teachers and school administrators will need to take on additional responsibilities for scheduling ARD meetings and completing paperwork, it is estimated that any one

teacher would be responsible for one annual ARD meeting approximately every other week. Implementing this recommendation will transfer valuable teaching resources from largely administrative to instructional positions, without additional cost to the district.

Implementation Steps

The district should phase out the use of ARD facilitators in conducting ARD meetings and take steps to improve training to campus administrators on legal compliance issues and provide campuses with clerical support if needed. The following steps are related to this recommendation:

1. Provide additional training and support to campus administrators so that they can knowledgeably and effectively conduct ARD meetings on their campuses, including procedural and compliance information.
2. Provide additional training and support to teachers and department chairs, including procedural and compliance information, so that they can reliably support administrators.
3. Provide clarification and update training regarding possible IEP changes that can occur without ARD meetings.
4. Provide clerical support for scheduling and compiling non-confidential paperwork on campuses with the highest number of special education students per administrator and for campuses with the highest number of special education students in special programs.

Recommendation 2-4: Replicate district practices for ARD meetings at all campuses.

Several campuses have taken steps on their own to improve communication and build strong personal relationships with the parents or caregivers of their special education students through the ARD process. During campus interviews, it was noted that some campuses conduct ARD meetings via telephone when parents are unable to attend the meeting in person. While communicating by telephone is certainly better than no communication at all (and this option is available to parents as required by law), this type of meeting does not meet recommended practice standards. Telephone ARDs are not as effective in building parent-school relationships and does not promote equity because parents are not engaged in face-to-face representation and advocacy for their children.

Below are some practices currently employed within Leander ISD which should be replicated at other campuses. These suggestions also relate to ARD committee procedures:

1. *Send proposed goals and objectives for parent review in advance of ARD meeting, along with an information packet.* Some parents stated during focus groups and parent surveys that they do not understand the ARD paperwork, they do not receive goals and objectives in advance for review, and they feel that the meetings occur too quickly to fully grasp the decisions that are made. Parents whose campuses successfully send information in advance were more satisfied with ARD processes than those that did not. In addition to ensuring that parents have time to review the information in advance, sending informational packets that contain an acronym

glossary, definitions of legal terminology, and an overview of what to expect and how to best be prepared for the meeting will go a long way in helping to make the ARD experience a positive one. Schools should also consider conducting pre-meetings with parents for ARDs that may be considering complicated issues.

2. *Ensure that input regarding the ARD process is obtained from parents/caregivers at the end of the ARD meetings.* Currently Leander ISD provides a parent/caregiver survey at the end of ARD meetings in some instances. According to parent focus group input, post-ARD surveys are not being provided at all campuses. Many districts use a small pre-addressed, stamped post card with 5-10 questions and a response format that is quick and easy to complete. Questions about their comfort level, their understanding of the process, and their satisfaction with their child's IEP are all addressed. Parents can mail the card directly to someone in the special education department anonymously. Leander ISD should ensure the card also includes contact information for someone in the central special education office who is available to answer additional questions.
3. *Ensure that everyone on the IEP team knows the child and the names of his or her parents or caregivers and that they are greeted by name by the office staff.* Many businesses model this type of communication with clients, and schools can do the same. The ARD process can be very intimidating for parents and caregivers, especially those who are not comfortable in school settings, are new to the special education process, or have limited English skills.
4. *Use "telephone ARDs" in very extreme situations or when parents formally request it.* During interviews with staff, it was communicated that on some campuses are conducting "telephone ARDs" instead of face to face meetings particularly with parents of economically disadvantaged students. While the district should continue to provide the option of telephone ARDs for parents unable to attend in person, the district should track the frequency of this practice. Unless specifically requested by the parent, telephone ARDs should only be conducted in extreme situations and should not be encouraged over face to face meetings with parents and students.

Recommendation 2-5: Re-organize and improve the Assistive Technology service delivery system.

Assistive Technology (AT) services are addressed in several federal and state statutes and regulations, including *IDEA*, Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act*, the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*, the Texas Education Code § 30.0015 and Title 19 Texas Administrative Code § 89.1056. According to the *IDEA*, assistive technology needs must be considered, and if necessary, an AT evaluation must be performed. If required in the child's IEP, AT services must be provided. Under Section 504, assistive technology is considered a "related aid or service" and under the *ADA*, assistive technology is defined as an "auxiliary aid or service" which must be provided when...necessary to afford an individual an equal opportunity to participate."

An AT device is defined in the *IDEA*, Section 300.6, as "Any item, piece of equipment, or product system...that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability." An AT service is defined as "Any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the

selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.” This definition also includes several specific actions, including:

- A functional evaluation of the child in the child’s customary environment.
- Coordinating usage of other therapies, interventions or services with AT devices.
- Training or technical assistance for a child with a disability or, if appropriate, that child’s family.
- Training or technical assistance for professionals, including educators.

According to the Texas Assistive Technology Network (TATN), established by the Texas Education Agency, school districts should follow a four-step process when considering AT needs within the IEP process:

1. Review present levels of performance and evaluation data.
2. Develop goals and objectives.
3. Determine if any tasks are difficult or impossible for the student.
4. Decide whether or not AT devices and services are required and document decisions.

While AT is required for some students, only “appropriate” and not the “best” technology is required. Some of the issues identified by TATN related to AT services are determining whether an AT evaluation is warranted, the timelines for AT evaluations are met, or the AT evaluators have sufficient credentials. The TATN has articulated as a quality indicator that AT assessments should be conducted by a multidisciplinary team that actively involves the student and family or caregivers.

Once AT needs have been determined, implementation of the IEP that includes AT services and devices are expected. The focus of AT implementation is to promote student achievement, especially in key functional areas such as reading, writing, math, problem solving, communication, recreation, daily organization, seating/positioning, hearing, seeing, self-care, mobility, behavior, and specific task-related skills. An implementation plan developed collaboratively should be in place. Implementation also requires an evaluation of the effectiveness of AT.

In addition, the *IDEA 2004* reauthorization included requirements for accessible instructional materials in the regulations at 34 DRF § 300.172. Because of this new requirement, core instructional materials must be provided in a timely manner in specialized formats when needed by students with disabilities. Alternate formats include Braille, large print, digital (electronic text), and audio books. The National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) is a standard file format for textbooks and required of states in the *IDEA* requirements. The NIMAS was established as a national repository for publishers’ electronic files of textbooks and core related instructional materials in the NIMAS file format. The NIMAS files can be downloaded free of charge by authorized users for eligible students. Included among eligible persons are students who are blind/visually disabled and students with a reading disability who cannot read printed material in a normal manner. There are accessible media producers (AMPs) who convert NIMAS files into student-ready accessible formats.

The Leander ISD Special Education Department has one central office position for AT. The job title for the position is “Assistive Technology Facilitator.” The job description requires a “degree, current certification, and/or state license...in the area of special education.” The major responsibilities and duties of the position include:

- Training staff on the processes concerning referrals, evaluations, reports and follow-ups.
- Coordinate district AT system from referral, training, implementation and follow-up.
- Order and update inventory pertaining to Assistive Technology, Adaptive Physical Education, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Visually Impaired and Hard-of-Hearing.
- Maintain check out system, inventory and dispensing equipment.
- Maintain AT devices for good working condition.
- Have working knowledge of AT devices and equipment for application of the student.
- Attend staffing and ARDs when necessary.
- Provide services as a resource for district personnel.
- Represent district on a variety of meetings both in and out of district.

The *Leander ISD Special Education Operating Guidelines* state that each campus has an assistive technology team that is lead by the Speech Language Pathologist (SLP), who is supported by the occupational therapist, physical therapist, and a teacher. Referrals are to be made to the SLP, who contacts other members of the team to initiate the assessment process.

During interviews, focus groups, and campus visits with special education personnel, campus principals, teachers, parents, and others, the review team heard numerous complaints, and heard contradictory information revealing the lack of clarity surrounding AT processes. On some campuses, the AT team could not be defined. On other campuses the leadership of the AT team was uncertain. In other instances there were individuals listed as members or leaders who were unaware of their intended involvement.

Principals expressed concerns that students who might need services had not been considered or evaluated and that they had been waiting for extended periods of time for requested AT equipment. Concerns were also expressed that central AT services were hampered by a lack of broad knowledge in several areas, especially communication. Concerns from principals, teachers, and parents –were shared that students have not received AT services when those services seem necessary and that there were delays in receiving AT devices. Further, while Leander ISD does track their AT devices in an Excel spreadsheet, there is no electronic inventory process (i.e., scanning, bar coding, etc) for the AT devices in storage, preventing the availability of real-time data on what equipment is available, where it is located, and whether or not the device needs servicing. The lack of electronic inventory can also prevent the district from identifying potential theft of expensive equipment and from forecasting student equipment needs.

While some parents seemed satisfied with the AT services or equipment their students were provided with, others noted, both during focus groups and through the parent survey that:

- Students often do not have access to things that parents know exist and would like access to (e.g., eye-gaze equipment, writing tools, and spelling tools such as a reading pen).
- AT evaluations are not occurring consistently, and in some cases parents of students needing AT services were not familiar with the AT evaluation process.
- Parents do not always keep track of the latest and most innovative technologies in education and in assistive devices, which progresses at a very fast pace, and may not know what to request or advocate for their children. Instead, they would prefer to rely on the expertise of the school staff to know what current assistive technologies are available to help their children.
- There were instances reported by parents of extended delays in receiving the equipment.

Many parents were satisfied with the technologies their children have, but were unaware of what the AT possibilities were, (for example, what options exist).

In addition to parent input, the review team reviewed several IEPs and related documentation for students receiving AT services. The majority of the student files reviewed indicated that students were receiving AT services, but none of those files contained a formal AT evaluation conducted by Leander ISD. Several of the files contained AT evaluations developed by previous school districts attended by the students. The general ARD documentation included brief references to AT services, but did not contain any evaluative elements. Without formal AT evaluations occurring on a periodic basis, district staff and parents may be limited in their ability to evaluate and select appropriate current AT equipment for special education students.

Implementation Steps

Leader ISD should reorganize and improve the AT service delivery system by taking the following steps:

1. Create a Special Education Assistive Technology Lead position and upgrade the qualifications for that position to include expertise in organization, communication, and management. The key responsibilities for this position will be to create and manage a well coordinated system of AT for special education students that meets the criteria and guidelines mentioned above.
2. Create two technology specialist positions so that between the two, they have knowledge of all of the key functional areas mentioned above (reading, writing, math, problem solving, communication, recreation, daily organization, seating/positioning, hearing, seeing, self-care, mobility, behavior, and specific task related skills).
3. Create a high-level district-wide AT team that includes, at minimum, a representative from the district's IT department, one or more speech-language pathologist, a physical therapist, an occupational therapist, an expert in learning disabilities, and an IT expert from the special education department. This team should have responsibilities for AT evaluations throughout the

district as well as provide staff training related to the use of AT devices. This team should also oversee the evaluation of student progress with AT services and devices. In addition, this high-level team should be the primary resource when possible disagreements related to the use and dissemination of AT devices arise so that any potential escalation of issues can be avoided.

4. Revise the “Flow Chart for AT Referrals” to ensure that students who require more sophisticated AT services receive an evaluation from a more highly skilled district-level AT team.
5. Establish an AT lab for special education and general education personnel. Ensure that the lab is open after school hours and at least some days on some weekends each month. This lab can be used to create visual systems, low tech interventions, and some simple devices like switches. The lab can also be used for training throughout the school year.
6. Review a random sample of IEP folders of students in special education (stratified by disability type and age group) to examine ARD meeting minutes to determine whether AT was specifically discussed, regardless of whether AT services were provided, to ensure consideration of services. After the review, write an action plan for improvement.
7. Ensure that each campus has an established AT team and AT team leader and that everyone knows who those people are. Train all special education staff on each campus on the AT team procedures, legal requirements, and available technology.
8. Fully implement the recommended SETT Framework (Student/Environment/Tasks/Tools) to guide evaluations.
9. Focus on low tech solutions commonly available for many students, reading and writing technology for students in the learning disability category, and using the NIMAS files of materials for students who are visually impaired or are in the specific learning disability category.
10. Institute an electronic inventory control system for AT equipment. This electronic inventory control system should include bar coding and scanning into a centralized tracking system for all AT devices throughout the district. At minimum, the district should begin to code, scan, and track new items purchased and/or used as of a specific implementation target date. The district should expand the coding, scanning and tracking of existing devices as they are brought to the district for repair or replaced for the student altogether. Ultimately, the district should be able to determine where a device is at any time, which student it is attached to, and which adult is responsible for the device on the campus.

Recommendation 2-6: Modify the Training for Academic Success in the Classroom program for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Two-hundred nineteen students, approximately 8 percent of all special education students in the district, are identified in the Emotional Disturbance (ED) category. While not all students identified in the ED category are served in special classes, many attend programs specifically geared towards behavior and social skills, including ten TASC (Training for Academic Success in the Classroom)

classrooms, a BEST classroom, the Systematic Training for Educational Progress (STEP) program, consisting of a SPACE, a ZONE, and a Project Achieve classroom. These programs all share similar characteristics, although not all are exactly the same.

The TASC program for students with behavioral disabilities has several components. Many of the practices included in the TASC program are similar to other inclusionary programs in the sense that students are included in general education classes for much of their school day, with support from special education teachers and paraprofessionals. Students in the TASC program also attend a social skills class taught by the TASC teacher for part of the day. Students who misbehave in class are required to go to the TASC classroom for a “tune up,” a compliance form of intervention. Students sort or assemble items, perform physical tasks such as squats or sit ups, and perform other tasks that are not related to their academic work but are designed for compliance with adult requests. If students fail to complete assignments in class, they can be kept after school to complete work, not for a specified period of time, but rather until the work is completed. As indicated by staff, TASC teachers often stay in the TASC classroom and their primary role is to implement the tune ups, teach the social skills classes, and determine when and if students are ready to return to their classrooms. Tune ups can last anywhere from part of a class period to two or three days. Parents of the students in the TASC program are required to sign a special form that indicates their agreement with these and other practices the district uses for TASC students.

Many parents are satisfied with the TASC program, which was voiced during parent focus groups, on the parent survey, and noted by principals and campus leads. Many Leander ISD administrators and teachers also believe that the TASC program is effective and that many students have experienced success while in this program. Some of the components of the TASC program appear to be highly effective and meet the current standards for positive behavior support. The review team conducted a literature review and found no evidence-based support for the use of “compliance” type interventions with students who have emotional/behavioral disabilities. While there is some limited research related to the use of “over correction” procedures with students who were identified as Mentally Retarded, the review team found that research did not support many of the techniques used in the TASC program.

Some of the practices included in the TASC program seem to be loosely based on a program implemented in some central Texas school districts several years ago called “compliance training.” When similar classes were established in other districts in the past, and similar practices used, some abuses of teacher authority occurred, with serious legal consequences for the school districts. Since that time, other more positive and inclusive programs for students have been implemented in many school districts. Some of these, called *BEST*, *FOCUS*, and *Re-Direction*, are familiar to personnel at the Education Service Center, Region XIII.

Although one of the key tenets of the TASC program is for students to recognize and comply with adult control and authority, there is no research to support: (1) the use of physical interventions with students to improve behavior (e.g., sit-ups), or (2) requiring students to demonstrate compliance through actions such as controlling their eye gaze (e.g., not looking at adults until allowed); both of which were observed

during site visits. These types of control-oriented interventions could result in counter-control attempts by some students.

While rote assembly and sorting activities may be effective methods of “cool-down” for agitated students, there is no evidence that the extensive continuation of these tasks is necessarily any more effective than requiring students to complete academic work, although the academic work seems more appropriate in a school setting. Time spent engaged in over-correction and/or “compliance” tasks could be spent teaching positive replacement behavior. When rote assembly or other strategies to ensure compliance are used, opportunities to help these students learn better ways of managing their behavior are missed.

While the inclusion of students with emotional/behavioral disabilities into general education with support from special education staff and the provision of social skills instruction is good practice, some of the intervention methods may expose the district to risks because they have limited demonstrated effectiveness and may be construed as demeaning or overly controlling as opposed to educational. Special caution and specific procedural guidance should be evident in any interventions requiring physical actions, and the general approach to addressing behavioral issues at Leander ISD should be changed to reflect a research-based approach.

Implementation Steps

The district should implement the following steps to modify the TASC program for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

1. Continue to serve students in general education with special education support. However, when students demonstrate difficulties and are removed to the special education classroom, teach and implement techniques such as self control strategies, problem solving, practice of previously taught social skills, and self evaluation. If work is provided, ensure that it is academic work, not rote tasks unrelated to the curriculum.
2. Work with the consultants at Education Service Center Region XIII to identify programs in other districts that have positive interventions that do not include compliance-oriented strategies.
3. Utilize the TASC teacher as additional support in the general education classrooms. If effective communication systems are in place, then the teacher can provide inclusion support for students, which is a consistent need across all campuses, and return to the TASC classroom only as necessary or for social skills lessons.
4. Establish a team of special education administrators, Licensed Specialists in School Psychology (LSSPs), and teachers to re-write the TASC guidelines and to train all teachers in practices that are fully supported by research, including school wide positive behavior support (PBS).

Recommendation 2-7: Implement strategies to reduce the number of restraints of students in special education.

The use of restraints and seclusion with special education students has become a national issue. In May 2009, the General Accounting Office (GAO) presented testimony before the Committee on Education and Labor in the House of Representatives. The testimony reported on a study that the GAO conducted, which reviewed federal and states laws and abuse allegations from advocacy groups, parents, and the media from the past two decades. The GAO examined documents related to closed cases, including police and autopsy reports and school policies. The GAO also interviewed parents, attorneys, and school officials and conducted searches to determine the current employment status of staff involved in some cases. There are currently no federal regulations related to seclusions and restraints. In Texas, there are such regulations.

The TEC § 37.0021 defines seclusion and TEC § 89.1053 describes the circumstances in which restraint can be used: “School personnel may only use restraint in an emergency in which a student’s behavior poses a threat of imminent, serious physical harm to the student or others or imminent, serious property destruction. Restraint shall be limited to reasonable force as is necessary to address the emergency, shall be discontinued when the emergency no longer exists, shall be implemented as to protect the health and safety of the students, and shall not deprive the student of basic human necessities.” In addition, “A core team of school personnel must be trained in the use of restraint and must include special education personnel likely to use restraint. Personnel who have not received training must receive training within 30 days following the use of restraint. Training must include prevention and de-escalation techniques. Each incident must be documented, and parents must be notified the same day.” The TEC also defines time-out and the conditions under which it can be used with students.

The U.S. Secretary of Education has asked officials to design common state standards to “make sure the unique needs of students with disabilities are considered.” (edweek.org/speced/2009/08). In addition, the Secretary has committed to new policies and reforms related to seclusion and restraint. Already, the Department of Education is seeking comments on proposed information collection requests (Federal Register, Volume 74, No. 175 dated September 11, 2009). When approved, the requests will modify the Annual Mandatory Collection of Elementary and Secondary Education Data for ED Facts to include incident tables for *IDEA* students, Section 504 students, ADA students and non-*IDEA* students. Among the responses to the Department of Education’s request for comments is a letter from the American Federation of Teachers, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, The Nation Education Association, and the National School Boards Association. This letter urges deferment of the data collection until formal definitions of terms are developed and agreed upon. It seems extremely likely, however, that new regulations related to the use of restraints and seclusion will be in place relatively soon.

Leander ISD records indicate that during the 2007-08 school year there were 1,638 restraints of students with disabilities in Leander ISD (this translates to a ratio of approximately 62 restraint incidents per 100

special education students). During 2008-09, the number of restraints reported to TEA declined to 725 (approximately 27 restraint incidents per 100 special education students. For comparison purposes, **Table 2-7** presents restraint data for peer districts, and illustrates that Leander ISD's 2008-09 restraint numbers are still very high.

Table 2-7. Number of Restraints per 100 Students, 2007-08

District Name	Total Special Education Students	Total Number of Students Restrained	Total Number of Restraints	Restraints per 100 students
Leander ISD (2008-09)	2,695	58	725	26.9
Leander ISD	2,640	70	1,638	62.0
Austin ISD	8,238	200	1,007	12.2
Pflugerville ISD	1,941	71	432	22.3
McKinney	2,104	28	183	8.7
Mansfield	2,717	28	160	5.9
Humble	3,038	20	103	3.4
Frisco	2,329	22	78	3.3
Lamar Consolidated	2,317	19	62	2.7
Denton	2,356	20	54	2.3
Keller	2,152	10	44	2.0

Source: Texas Education Agency 2007-08; Many Eyes; Leander ISD, 2008-09, 2009-10

Further analysis of the 2008-09 restraint data by disability type and grade level (**Table 2-8**) shows that the highest number of restraints occurred among students in the ED category. While students in the ED category represent only about 7.8 percent of all students with disabilities, they were restrained 237 times, accounting for 32.7 percent of all restraints of special education students. The next two categories of disability represented by high numbers of restraints were Other Health Impaired, which typically includes a high number of students with Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder, and Autism. Students in these two special education categories were restrained 202 times and 199 times, respectively.

Table 2-8. Number of Restraints by Disability Type and Grade Range, 2008-09

Disability Type	Early Education	Kindergarten to Grade 5	Grades 6 to 8	Grades 9 to 12	Total
Other Health Impairment	72	126	4	0	202
Mental Retardation	0	5	2	0	7
Emotional Disturbance	80	154	3	0	237
Learning Disabled	0	4	0	0	4
Speech Impairment	3	50	0	0	53
Autism	1	198	0	0	199
Traumatic Brain Injury	0	21	0	0	21
Non- Categorical Early Childhood	2	0	0	0	2
Total	158	558	9	0	725

Source: TEA Public Education Information Management System, July 2009

Table 2-8 also illustrates that restraints are occurring most often in the youngest grades, with over 21 percent of all restraints occurring in the early education classrooms and 77 percent occurring in elementary schools. There are no restraints occurring, or reported, in high schools (this is typical as restraints are not used as students get older).

Because the numbers of restraints are high, and because they are disproportionate with respect to the population of ED students, restraint data by campus was analyzed to identify the campuses with the most incidents of restraints (**Table 2-9**). Three elementary campuses in the district accounted for 86.4 percent of the restraints of special education students: Mason (46.9%), Faubion (24.1%), and Pleasant Hill (15.4%) elementary Schools.

Table 2-9. Leander ISD Restraint Incidents by Campus, 2008-09

Campus ¹	Number of Restraint Incidents	Percent of Restraint Incidents (%)
Bagdad	3	0.4
Block House Creek	2	0.3
Laura W. Bush	17	2.3
Cox	1	0.1
Faubion	175	24.1
Giddens	14	1.9
Grandview Hills	9	1.2
Mason	340	46.9
Plain	40	5.5
Pleasant Hill	112	15.4
Whitestone	1	0.1
Winkley	2	0.3
Henry	3	0.4
Leander MS	6	0.8
Total	725	100.0

Source: TEA Public Education Information Management System, July 2009

¹Schools not represented had no restraints reported.

Within the three higher incidence schools, many of the restraints were in the same grade level, among the same disability category, and with the same students. Whether or not the large number of restraints is concentrated among a few students or spread among many students, neither situation is a desirable outcome.

Leander ISD management asserts that they may have over-reported restraint incidents relative to how other districts report. The review team did not observe any restraint incidents and could not conclude on this matter. However, if this information had been tracked and reported more frequently, potential problems could have been recognized and acted on more quickly.

During campus visits, interviews, and focus group sessions, the use of seclusion time-outs and restraints was discussed. Little evidence of the systematic use of time-outs was discussed or observed. The review team inquired about required training for the core team on campuses that respond to emergencies requiring restraints and was consistently told that team members are trained in SAMA (Satori

Alternatives to Managing Aggression) techniques, that their training is updated consistently, and that staff are comfortable with the level of training and expertise related to the use of restraints. The district has a designated staff member responsible for ensuring that all campus core team members are up to date in their SAMA training.

When SAMA training data were requested, a printed list of over 500 individuals who have received SAMA training since 2002 was produced. For many of these individuals, there are additional dates indicating that they participated in “refresher” training. However, it is not clear from these data how many of these individuals are still working in the district, what campuses they work on, whether they are still on a core team, or if they are currently up to date in their SAMA training. Therefore, the tracking tool being used at the district level is not sufficient to efficiently monitor current staff training.

The number of restraints of students with disabilities in Leander ISD is excessive. It is also likely that if the number of restraints of students with disabilities remains at such a high level, it is likely to be problematic for the district when federal reporting requirements are enacted and new regulations take effect.

Implementation Steps

The district should take specific actions to reduce the number of reported restraints of students with disabilities.

1. Improve the record keeping system related to core teams on campuses and their SAMA training so that adherence to state regulations can be verified at any time.
2. Develop a system of training that provides initial training and refresher training on a rotating schedule and require attendance of campus team members and special education personnel likely to need the training.
3. Require monthly reports from campuses to the lead LSSP on the number of restraints of students with disabilities. Develop a “red flag” system that triggers a review when a student has been restrained more than a targeted number of times. This target should be set very low.
4. Review students’ Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs) when they are restrained frequently. Revise the plans as needed.
5. Ensure accountability by setting up a system in which the Special Education Director is provided campus restraint reports for review.
6. Provide additional training to special education staff and others who are involved in repeated restraints (based on the data mentioned above).

Recommendation 2-8: Review staffing patterns and responsibilities for the district's LSSPs. Add more specific responsibilities and objectives related to campus behavioral support.

Licensed Specialists in School Psychology (LSSPs) are an important support for campuses. Leander ISD's job description for the LSSP position lists the first responsibility as planning and administering comprehensive psychological assessments, with additional responsibilities including providing consultation and counseling, emergency intervention in crisis situations, and other responsibilities related to behavioral support. LSSPs typically work closely with diagnosticians who are primarily responsible for academic and intellectual assessments, and the interpretation of these assessments at ARD meetings. LSSPs conduct psychological assessment (which are primarily provided to students in the ED category), and in Leander ISD are supposed to have an active role in behavior support and consultation.

Leander ISD has a high number of LSSP positions and diagnosticians compared to most peer districts, with 20 LSSP full-time equivalent (FTE) positions and 22 diagnostician FTE positions (in the 2007-08 school year) to serve 2,555 special education students (resulting in a low ratio of 1 LSSP/Diagnostician to 60.83 special education students). As can be seen in **Table 2-10**, Leander ISD's ratio is the third lowest ratio to special education students, as well as the third lowest ratio to the general enrollment population out of all of its peer districts. It is important to note that the low ratio in Leander ISD is driven more by the number of LSSP positions than diagnostician positions, as many of the peer campuses have similarly high numbers of diagnostician positions, but most have fewer numbers of LSSP positions. It should be noted that while other districts may have behavior specialists or behavior consultants, Leander ISD only has one such position – LSSPs fill this role for the district.

Table 2-10. LSSP/Diagnostician to Student Ratios, Leander ISD and Peer Districts, 2007-08

District	LSSP FTE Positions ¹	Diagnostician FTE Positions ¹	Ratio to Special Education Students ² (x:1)	Ratio to General Enrollment ² (x:1)
Denton ISD	17.43	26.50	52.54	474.07
Humble ISD	32.40	20.96	55.25	614.77
Leander ISD	20.00	22.00	60.83	629.60
Frisco ISD	9.63	22.91	66.81	837.62
Pflugerville ISD	20.00	7.00	71.30	766.93
Keller ISD	26.05	0.00	79.81	1,127.02
McKinney ISD	8.50	16.10	80.33	905.53
Mansfield ISD	3.00	20.80	110.88	1,244.33
Lamar CISD	5.50	15.00	113.41	1,063.12

Source: ¹Academic Excellence Indicator System (2007-08 data) ²Texas Education Agency Staff FTE Counts and Salary Report, 2008

In addition to this low staffing ratio, the percentage of students in the ED category, especially at the elementary level, is also low (5.2% of SPED students at elementary and 10.3% at secondary). In fact, with the low ratios of skilled LSSP staff to students and low numbers of ED students, LSSPs should be able to positively influence the following issues:

- The number of discretionary District Alternative Education Placements (DAEP), (i.e., those placements that are not mandatory due to substance abuse, weapons, serious property damage, etc., which all students are held accountable for regardless of disability status)
- The number of In-School-Suspension (ISS) placements
- The number of non-qualifying special education referrals
- Restraint incidents, particularly those occurring within the same small subset of students
- The lack of consistent implementation of a PBS model

DAEP and ISS Placements

Compared to the three peer districts with the most similar staffing LSSP/Diagnostician ratios, Denton, Humble, and Frisco, Leander ISD has the biggest discrepancy in the proportion of DAEP and ISS placements occurring within the special education population as compared to the general population (**Table 2-11**). In other words, while DAEP and ISS placements tend to occur more frequently among the special education population, the discrepancy is larger in Leander ISD than in any of its peer districts.

Table 2-11. Special Education Discretionary DAEP and ISS Placements, 2007-08

District	Special Education Students Enrolled ¹	Discretionary DAEP Placements ²		Discretionary ISS Placements ²	
	Special Education %	Special Education %	Difference	Special Education %	Difference
Leander	10.0	24.1	14.1	21.6	11.6
Denton	11.1	24.1	13.0	20.8	9.7
Frisco	8.0	22.1	14.1	18.7	10.7
Humble	9.0	18.0	9.0	18.4	9.4

Source: ¹TEA Academic Excellence Indicator System, 2007-08; ²TEA Performance – Based Monitoring System, 2009

Compared to peer districts with similar ratios of LSSPs per student, the proportion of discretionary DAEP placements and discretionary ISS placement that are made up of special education students is disproportionate to the percentage of special education students enrolled in Leander ISD (24.1 percent or 14.1 percentage points for DAEP and 21.6 percent or 11.6 percentage points for ISS). As can be seen in **Table 2-11**, the difference in DAEP placements is greater than two of the three peer districts, and the difference for ISS placements is greater than all three peers. While LSSPs alone cannot eliminate these

issues, they should be implementing a PBS model that has the potential to positively impact these outcomes.

Non-Qualifying Special Education Referrals

The district has RTI teams in place at each campus, and LSSPs often provide support for these teams. As discussed previously, the RTI process is designed to provide interventions to students in such a way that ensures all appropriate approaches have been attempted prior to a student being referred to special education. Once referred to special education, testing and assessment occurs that results in either identification with a particular disability, or the student “Did Not Qualify” (DNQ) for special education services, essentially meaning that the student was inappropriately referred, and other interventions or services would be more appropriate.

When the RTI process is working well, there should be very low incidences of non-qualifying referrals, as the majority of students referred and tested for special education should receive an appropriate diagnosis. In Leander ISD, the percentage of students referred who Did Not Qualify range from 0 percent to 66.7 percent, with an average of 22.8 percent of students referred not qualifying for services. **Table 2-12** summarizes this information across the district by campus type. (See *Appendix E* for percent DNQ by school). Two schools in the district have more than 60 percent of referred students not qualifying for services; only one-third of the students referred to special education were found to be in need of a special education services. Two additional schools have almost half of the students referred not qualifying for services, and still 11 other schools have between 21 percent and 40 percent of students referred to special education found not to qualify. It should be noted that the overall referral rates to special education have gone from 463 to 372 (decreased by 20%) in the last four years despite the growth in the district of more than 6,100 students. Campuses noted with high rates of DNQ had relatively small numbers of students referred and were from the same geographic region of the district.

Table 2-12. Percentage of Leander ISD Special Education Referrals that Did Not Qualify for Services, 2008-09

Campus Type	0%-20%	21%-40%	41%-60%	61%-80%	81%-100%
Elementary Schools	8	9	2	1*	0
Middle Schools	4	1	0	1*	0
High Schools	4	0	0	0	0

Source: Leander ISD, fall 2009

*Represent <10 students

These high rates of DNQ are possible evidence of a weak RTI process at some campuses. If a campus has a high percent of non-qualifying referrals, their RTI team should closely review its interventions and other factors that may be contributing the high rates and ensure that all tiers of intervention are appropriate and effectively provided before initiating referrals.

Restraints

As discussed previously the number of restraints occurring on Leander ISD campuses is exceedingly high. As displayed in **Table 2-8**, the majority of restraints are occurring among students identified as Emotionally Disturbed; a group of students with whom LSSPs generally play a large role in supporting. Additionally, the majority of restraints occur at elementary campuses, where LSSPs can be staffed at higher rates. As suggested in the section on restraints, assigning LSSPs the role of compiling and reporting monthly restraint incidents will impact their awareness of incidents and lead to targeted training should those needs arise.

Inconsistent Implementation of PBS Model

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is an empirically validated approach to reducing students' challenging behaviors and replacing them with positive, pro-social replacement behaviors. The systematic and consistent use of PBS decreases the need for more intrusive or aversive interventions. Similar terminology is used to describe School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBS). The use of a school-wide system provides a framework that should help educators as they select and implement scientifically based academic and behavior practices designed to improve behaviors of all students. In general, school wide systems include four key elements: (1) use data for decision making, (2) articulate measurable outcomes that are supported by data, (2) include evidence based practices, and (4) function as systems that efficiently and effectively support the implementation of these practices.

During site visits, observations, focus groups, and interviews, the review team asked about positive behavior support initiatives and the existence of school wide behavior systems. There was a range of implementation of a system, (in some cases, CHAMPS) but it had not been updated or used consistently, to the extent in which there was evidence of systematic implementation. While campuses should always develop programs that meet the specific needs of their population of students, the use of PBS across the district would help ensure that some consistent standards could be expected on all campuses. This would also allow the RTI teams to set screening standards for the district.

There are many resources to assist school districts with the implementation of PBS, including the Office of Special Education Programs Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (www.pbis.org) and the Texas Behavior Support Initiative. PBIS provides numerous resources, including a self-assessment and blueprint for implementation and the National Association of School Psychologists has a fact sheet and a link to PBIS on its website. In addition, there are several publications and programs that school districts can purchase. Among those most commonly used is *CHAMPS: A Proactive and Positive Approach to Classroom Management* from Safe and Civil Schools.

Using federal stimulus funds, Leander ISD created its first dedicated behavioral specialist position for the district at the beginning of the 2009-10 school year. Current processes are underway to identify training needs for staff. Adding a behavioral specialist position in the district is a positive step and will be integral in implementing a district-wide PBS model.

Role of LSSPs

Because the behavioral issues facing campuses are numerous and serious, the additional support of the LSSPs is highly valued. A review of the data above provides examples of areas where the expanded or more focused role of LSSPs can have a great impact. LSSPs have expertise that help to build positive behavioral support programs, particularly on campuses that have not implemented school wide systems like CHAMPS. Through counseling students, supporting and training school staff, and demonstrating leadership, LSSPs have the potential to positively impact, both directly and indirectly, the number of inappropriate special education referrals (through their influence on the Response to Intervention process), incidents of restraints (through PBS programs), the quality of behavioral programs, as well as the emotional and psychological environments of the school campus. LSSPs can also reach out to families to help provide support to parents of special education students, which was found to be one of the primary areas in which parents are looking for assistance from the district.

Thus, roles for the LSSP position need to be better focused, and clear objectives are needed for the behavioral support function of these positions. While LSSPs alone cannot solve these complicated problems, the district's staffing in this area, particularly among elementary campuses, provides an opportunity to more clearly articulate expectations for these positions. With high numbers of diagnosticians as well, roles and responsibilities between the two positions should be clearly defined to ensure that both positions are being used most effectively.

Implementation Steps

The special education department should review staffing patterns and revise responsibilities for the district's LSSPs. This would include these steps:

1. Examine case loads for evaluations, special education counseling, and RTI support for all LSSPs on each campus.
2. Determine whether the staffing patterns are proportionate and equitable, especially considering the numbers of students in the ED category on each campus.
3. Review, and if necessary, reiterate specific objectives for reducing:
 - The percent of discretionary DAEP placements of special education students
 - The percent of discretionary ISS placements of special education students
 - The number of restraints of students in special education.
4. Write specific responsibilities and objectives related to these issues, including having LSSPs review students' BIPs and revise them proactively if needed.
5. Write additional responsibilities and objectives related to providing assistance to campus RTI teams, especially those campuses with high DNQ rates. Review and consider increasing the role of LSSPs on RFP teams. For individual students, seek legal guidance for designing procedures that allow such support within the framework of professional licensing guidelines.

6. Consider additional services to support families. For example, Denton ISD has a program in which LSSPs provide a limited amount of free family counseling for students who are economically disadvantaged.

Recommendation 2-9: Assign two social worker positions directly to the special education department.

Surveys of parents revealed that the number one area in which parents want to learn more about is ways to find additional support and information from the district. The types of support and information parents want is connection to support groups, information on how to work with their children at home, tools and strategies for helping their child with their disability or with their school work, methods of communication, parent workshops, information on specific disabilities, behavior management, navigating the special education system, and assistance with the emotional and physical challenges of raising a special education student. Leander ISD currently has four social worker positions in the district, but none are dedicated specifically to the Special Education Department.

The district has a parent liaison position that is responsible for facilitating family-school communication, providing information about Early Intervention Services, providing opportunities to interact with parents with similar interests, making referrals to community agencies, encouraging family involvement in schools, and other similar duties. These skill sets are different from that of a social worker, and fill different parent needs. Most school districts the size of Leander ISD have social workers dedicated to special education to meet the needs described above.

The district should consider assigning two social worker positions directly to the special education department that would be responsible for filling some gaps in services both for families and for school personnel. For example, the position's responsibilities could include:

- Coordination of services for families with children whose disabilities likely qualify them for additional community or governmental agency services.
- Creation and provision of a resource manual for parents with information about: agencies and non-profits; local physicians, psychologists, and other professionals; therapists; child care providers, financial planning services; legal and advocacy services; and other relevant care providers and disability related services.
- Coordination with local physicians and psychologists, including weekly communication systems for children whose medical conditions or medication regimens require information from school personnel.
- Coordination of transition services for children entering or returning to the district from residential treatment facilities, hospitals, or other therapeutic settings.
- Arranging for transportation for parents who are unable to attend ARD meetings because of a lack of transportation.

- Communicating with parents before ARD meetings to ensure that families understand the purpose of the meeting and have the opportunity to express any concerns before the meeting occurs.
- Coordination of services with other agencies and making arrangements for interested parties to attend the ARD meetings, especially when students are receiving services from community agencies.
- Providing an initial contact, including a home visit, with parents when their children are first identified for special education services in the district. This visit should provide parents with contact names and numbers, a dictionary of special education terms in both Spanish and English, and the name of a district liaison or ombudsman to whom the parents can talk if they are dissatisfied or lack understanding of their child's program.

Implementation Steps

The special education department should create and assign two social worker positions within the special education department. Qualifications for the position should include:

1. Experience in public schools
2. Clinical experience
3. Proven ability to work with a variety of individuals, including parents and families.
4. Knowledge of local resources
5. Knowledge of state, federal, and local agencies and their associated procedures for receiving support services

Chapter 3 – Program Organization and Management

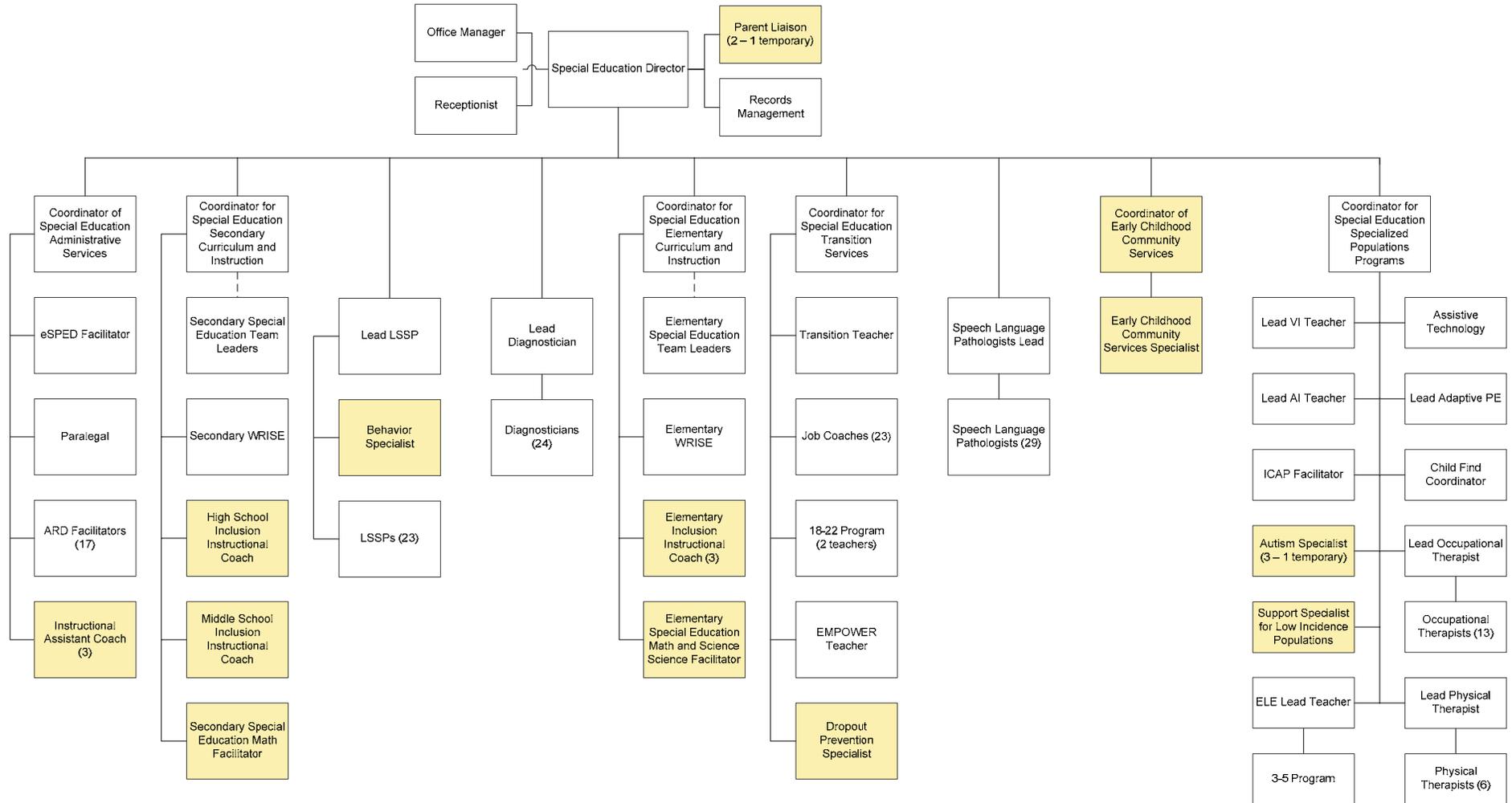
This section presents recommendations for Leander ISD’s special education program related to three aspects of program organization and management: (1) organization structure, (2) financial management, and (3) data security.

Organization and Structure

Figure 3-1 depicts the current organization structure of Leander ISD’s special education program. This structure has been in place for approximately six years. The prior structure was organized by grade level groupings, and was perceived to be contributing to duplication of effort. The reorganization of six years ago incorporated several new functions, added a parent liaison position, and identified special education instructional leaders on each campus. An accountability/analyst position was also added, but this position has since been moved to a district-level position. The shaded boxes in **Figure 3-1** represent new positions funded by federal stimulus funds (federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act – ARRA funds) and whose focus is primarily on instructional coaching.

The organization is led by a Director of Special Education. As depicted in **Figure 3-1**, thirteen positions report directly to the Director, six of which are coordinator positions. Currently, according to the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, the special education positions funded by ARRA stimulus funds are under contract and will exist for a two-year period, when stimulus funding will end.

Figure 3-1. Leander ISD Special Education Current Organization Structure



New positions that have been added to Leander ISD's organization as a result of ARRA stimulus funding include:

- One (1) additional Parent Liaison (part-time)
- Three (3) Assistant Instructional Coaches
- One (1) High School Inclusion Instructional Coach
- One (1) Middle School Inclusion Instructional Coach
- One (1) Secondary Special Education Math Facilitator
- One (1) Behavior Specialist
- Three (3) Elementary Inclusion Instructional Coaches
- One (1) Elementary Special Education Math and Science Facilitator
- One (1) Dropout Prevention Specialist for special education
- One (1) Coordinator of Early Childhood Community Services
- One (1) Early Childhood Community Services Specialist
- One (1) additional Autism Specialist
- One (1) Support Specialist for Low Incidence Populations

Recommendation 3-1: Modify Leander ISD's special education organization structure to better support accountability and internal communications.

Leander ISD's special education organization structure was evaluated by the review team in terms of its logical alignment of functions, span of control, and the ability to support effective communication and accountability.

Organizing a special education program is very difficult because of the many programmatic elements and demands that exist, including:

- School type (early childhood, elementary, middle school, high school)
- Vertical alignment and communication (alignment of schools under a high school feeder system)
- Program type/Instructional Setting (e.g., Inclusion, Resource Room, ICAP, Transition Services)
- Disability types and specialization (e.g., Autism, Visually Impaired, Learning Disabled)
- Student need (low to high needs that may cross program and school types, and are not necessarily the same for a particular disability type)
- Function (program delivery, support services, professional development, administration)

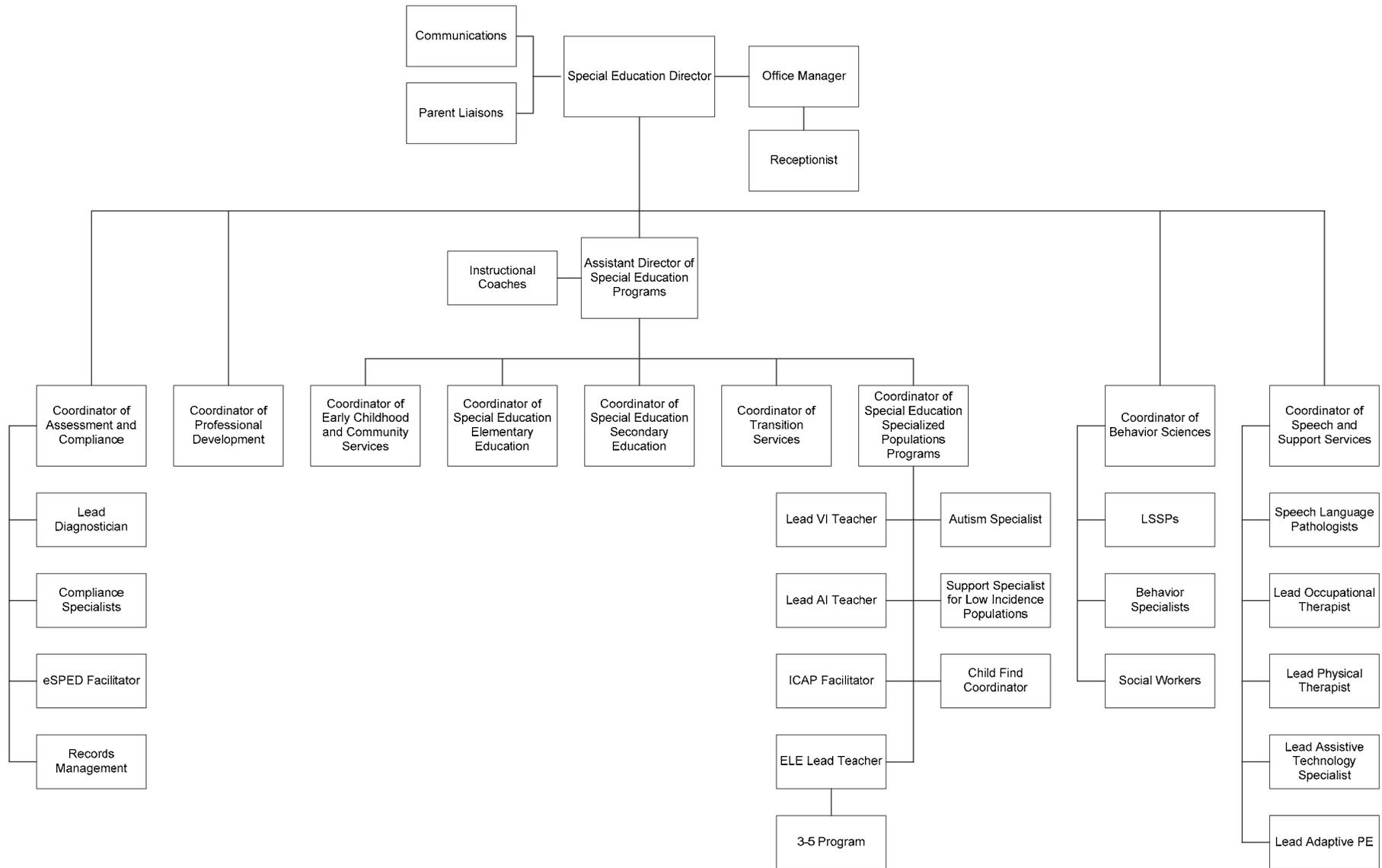
In analyzing Leander ISD's organization structure, two observations were noted. First, there are two instances where positions are overloaded with direct reports – the Director of Special Education and the Coordinator for Special Education Specialized Populations Programs, with 13 and 14 direct position reports respectively. A more reasonable span of control should be in the range of 6 to 9 direct reports. Second, the current organization structure disburses accountability for student performance across a large number of positions. The nature of special education requires many disciplines to be involved in

the design and delivery of a student's educational program, but the organization structure should support accountability for academic and non-academic results.

Figure 3-2 presents a proposed organization structure for Leander ISD's special education department. This chart incorporates recommendations for position changes made in other chapters of this report as well as minor realignment and reclassification suggestions.



Figure 3-2. Proposed Organization Structure



Note: Positions currently in the organization chart that are not listed, and not placed elsewhere, report to the existing coordinator position.

New positions recommended:

1. Assistant Director of Programs (1 FTE) – this position was added to relieve the Director of Special Education of excessive direct reports, and improves the accountability for student performance as well as the management and oversight of academic programs.
2. Coordinator of Professional Development (1 FTE) – this is an area of identified need in special education.
3. Compliance Specialists (4 FTEs) – these positions will fulfill the clerical and support responsibilities for ARD meetings.
4. Social Worker (2 FTEs) – while there are 4 FTE social workers in the district, none are designated specifically for special education. This is an identified area of need.
5. Assistive Technology (2 FTEs) – this was an identified area of need. Currently 1 FTE supports the entire district for Assistive Technology.
6. Communications Specialist (1 FTE) – the addition of this position with specific skills in communications was identified as an area of need.
7. New special education teacher positions (7 FTEs) – the addition of this position was identified as an area of need.

Total new FTE positions = 18

Positions recommended for elimination or conversion:

1. ARD Facilitators (16 FTEs) – these responsibilities will be assumed by school administrators with support from the new compliance specialist positions described above. Staff currently filling ARD Facilitator positions may apply for the new special education teacher positions above or apply for existing vacant teacher positions. The transition of these positions can occur over a two to three year period.
2. ARD Facilitator Lead (1 FTE) – Once the ARD Facilitator positions have been phased out, the ARD Facilitator Lead can be converted in a method similar to that described above for ARD Facilitators.
3. Paralegal (1 FTE) – this position will be eligible to apply for one of the compliance specialist positions, or the position can be converted to a district-wide administrative position. The special education department should not include a legal or paralegal function. All academic programs, including special education, are responsible for complying with legal requirements. All legal functions should be conducted independently through the Superintendent’s Office and/or the Board of Trustees.

Total eliminated/converted positions = 18

The net fiscal impact, once all of the above changes are made, is expected to be fiscally neutral. If not, the number of new teacher positions can be used as the balancing variable to achieve fiscal neutrality. As the district implements the new approach to ARD support, it may find that the actual number of positions needed may be different than projected.

In addition to the position changes, several alignment changes and position upgrades are recommended:

- All special education programs (Early Childhood, Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Transition Services, and a newly defined Specialized Populations unit) are aligned under an Assistant Director of Programs position, centralizing accountability and oversight for special education program management.
- Specialized populations are differentiated from speech and support services in the proposed organization structure. Seven specialized programs will report to the Coordinator for Specialized Populations. The Speech Language Pathologist Lead position will be upgraded and expanded to a Coordinator of Speech and Support Services. This position will oversee speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, assistive technology, and adaptive physical education. This recommendation results in more reasonable spans of control (number of direct reports) for the two coordinator positions.
- Administrative Services has been renamed Assessment and Compliance to more accurately reflect the function and purpose of this organizational unit, and includes diagnosticians and other functions currently reporting directly to the Director of Special Education. Instructional coaches previously reporting to Administrative Services will report to the Assistant Director of Programs.
- The Lead LSSP position will be upgraded and expanded to a Coordinator of Behavior Sciences, and oversee all LSSPs, the Behavior Specialist, and the new Social Worker positions.

Leander ISD should establish this structure as a target and develop a migration strategy to implement the changes over the next three years. Positions should be eliminated or converted through attrition where possible.

Implementation Steps

Below are several implementation strategies that should be employed in the district's migration to the proposed organization structure:

1. Evaluate position level (coordinator, specialist, etc.) based on degree of responsibility, priority of function relative to other functions, and budget authority. The proposed organization chart depicts a functional alignment – the district will need to map its current positions to the target structure.

2. Develop or refine job descriptions based on position changes.
3. Determine the timing of changes based on expected turnover, retirements, promotions, or other anticipated employee changes. The district should develop interim organization charts with the goal of full migration to the target organization within three years.
4. Evaluate the fiscal impact of changes, with the goal of balancing position reductions with additions over the three year period in order to obtain a fiscally neutral impact of implementing the proposed organizational changes.
5. Modify budget codes and reports to support reporting that matches the new responsibility centers.

Recommendation 3-2: Extend ARRA planning process to include specific outcome measures and program level transition plans.

The federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 provided Leander ISD with additional financial resources, often referred to as stimulus funding, for its special education program. During the 2009-10 and 2010-11 fiscal years, the district will receive approximately \$5.3 million in additional stimulus funding. After considering various options for utilizing these funds, the district decided to add staff positions/members to the organization, even though the contract term of these positions is two years. The district has added 29 positions to date although several remain vacant. Eleven of these positions are teaching positions and the remaining 17 are instructional coaches, disability specialists, instructional facilitators, early childhood staff, a behavior specialist, and a part-time parent liaison position. Under this approach, the district plans to spend its stimulus funding evenly over the two year period, or just under \$2.7 million a year.

These stimulus-funded positions are providing additional teaching positions, instructional support, professional development, and many other needed services. The district developed detailed plans to direct these different activities. Separate goals, objectives and responsibilities were identified for 15 different program areas. However, there are very few specific, measurable performance outcomes that can be used to determine whether or not these efforts were: (1) effective, and (2) resulted in achieving higher performance targets than what might have been expected without the stimulus funds. Below are examples of specific performance measures or targets in the district's ARRA planning documents:

- "Increase the number of students remaining in their educational setting by decreasing discretionary removals for persistent misconduct to DAEP by 2% as measured by referral rates to DAEP by grading period."
- "Outreach to 90% of registered preschools/registered homes through mail outs/surveys."

Other outcome measures are adequately described in the planning documents but no performance targets have been established:

- “Reduce the number of behavioral incidents that result in loss of instructional time by using inclusive, research-based strategies.”
- “Reduce the number of restraints in the district.”
- “Decrease the dropout rate of Special Education students in LISD from 15.3% in 2009 to ***** “
- “Improve TAKS Math and Science Performance.”

Most goals, objectives and targets outlined in the district’s ARRA planning documents are actually activities the district plans to engage in, such as:

- “Collaborate with other ARRA coaches and facilitators . . .”
- “Plan for and establish expectations for inclusive elementary school learning environments.”
- “Align values and expectations for inclusive elementary school practices with middle and high schools.”
- “To provide intensive training for Instructional Assistants K-12, job coaches, and vocational teachers and to increase self determination in the Special education students.”

Most items listed as “measures” in the district’s ARRA planning documents are not performance outcome measures but rather documentation that may provide evidence of successful implementation. These implementation “rubrics” are effective in monitoring implementation efforts, but are distinguishable from performance outcomes. For example, 100 percent attendance at a reading training program can be “proven up” by reviewing the attendance documentation (such as training sign in logs). The actual impact on reading test scores would be the outcome measure that shows whether or not the program was effective. There does not need to be a measurable outcome for each program activity. However, the combination of ARRA funded programs related to reading should have an impact on student outcomes in reading, beyond what was anticipated before the ARRA funds became available. The district should expand its ARRA planning efforts to ensure that the stimulus-funded positions and other resources achieve specific, measurable outcomes.

In addition to the planning documents, the district has begun the process of planning the transition after the ARRA funds are expended. A global transition strategy has been developed that addresses knowledge transfer and the search for possible replacement funding. The district should extend its transition plan to each program area to ensure that knowledge and responsibility of ARRA funded temporary staff is transferred to named, permanent Leander ISD staff. Also, transition timetables and activities for each program area should be developed. The transition plan should ensure that performance results will be sustainable in the future with or without continued stimulus funding. During these extended planning processes, the district may learn that it needs to make adjustments in how it is utilizing staff resources.

Implementation Steps

Below are implementation strategies that should guide Leander ISD in maximizing the effectiveness of its stimulus funding:

1. Identify interim and long-term outcome measures for stimulus-funded activities.
2. Review mix of stimulus-funded services to ensure that the current approach will achieve expected outcomes.
3. Expand transition planning to the program level.
4. Develop “what if” scenarios based on funding after 2010-11.
5. Develop an organizational migration strategy to sustain results after the stimulus funding period expires.

Recommendation 3-3: Develop “Early Warning System” reporting framework for Special Education.

In recent years, Leander ISD has developed a performance reporting “dashboard” for special education as well as other programs based on templates provided by Education Service Center Region XIII. The dashboard (which is still under development) measures annual district performance against established objectives, and also provides out-year targets to support the program planning process. Currently, the dashboard is maintained in an Excel spreadsheet. **Figure 3-3** provides an example of a dashboard report developed by Leander ISD for 2009 TAKS results. The results are color coded, signifying the level of performance achieved. Green and white squares indicate higher performance, while yellow and red reflect lower performance. This allows readers to quickly identify potential problem areas without having to decipher what the numbers mean. Dashboards are an effective way to communicate results in a format that is easy for many audiences to understand. This performance data is used to support a well documented planning process at Leander ISD, including the development of action plans in annual district and campus improvement planning documents.

Figure 3-3. Sample Leander ISD TAKS Results Dashboard

2009 TAKS Results Panel LISD District Preliminary

Cumulative Test Administrations English Version

READING/ELA	GR. 3	GR. 4	GR. 5	GR 6	GR 7	GR 8	GR 9	GR 10	GR 11
All Students	98	92	96	98	94	99	94	93	97
African American	94	85	94	97	84	100	85	84	94
Hispanic	94	87	91	95	89	98	91	91	95
White	98	93	98	98	95	100	96	94	98
Economically Disadvantaged	92	82	91	94	83	98	88	85	93
*Limited English Proficient	91	63	64	81	47	76	56	73	63
*Special Education	85	74	82	87	63	96	65	63	79

WRITING	GR. 4	GR 7
All Students	94	97
African American	93	94
Hispanic	91	95
White	94	98
Economically Disadvantaged	87	93
*Limited English Proficient	81	79
*Special Education	69	73



MATH	GR. 3	GR. 4	GR. 5	GR 6	GR 7	GR 8	GR 9	GR10	GR11
All Students	90	91	96	93	90	95	82	74	88
African American	74	83	90	85	80	87	64	53	72
Hispanic	85	87	94	87	85	90	72	66	81
White	92	93	97	94	92	97	86	77	91
Economically Disadvantaged	76	80	90	84	78	88	68	59	75
*Limited English Proficient	83	74	78	73	67	62	43	40	71
*Special Education	67	71	84	64	57	79	47	32	51

SCIENCE	GR. 5	GR 8	GR 10	GR 11
All Students	90	88	80	93
African American	80	82	54	83
Hispanic	83	78	67	87
White	93	91	86	95
Economically Disadvantaged	80	76	62	82
*Limited English Proficient	49	39	33	56
*Special Education	70	65	46	63

SOCIAL STUDIES	GR 8	GR 10	GR 11
All Students	97	94	99
African American	99	88	98
Hispanic	95	89	98
White	98	97	99
Economically Disadvantaged	94	85	95
*Limited English Proficient	53	50	82
*Special Education	88	70	89

Accountability Absolute Performance Standard (rating based on sum of grades 3-11 accountability subset)		>=90% Exemplary		
		>=75% Recognized	R/ELA	>=70%
		Academically Acceptable	W, SS	>=70%
		Academically Unacceptable	Mathematics	>=55%
			Science	>=50%

* =counted for AYP, but not State Accountability rating

6/5/2009

Note: Format provided by Education Service Center Region XIII

In the district's regular education programming, additional performance monitoring exists that is closer to real-time. Information from benchmark testing and classroom walkthroughs is available soon after the results are known. This allows decisions to be made more quickly with real-time data. While many special education students receive services in the general education setting that have access to this information, the data collection instruments are not geared toward special education.

While Leander ISD is tracking performance on a regular basis, other areas are not tracked as frequently. For example, district discipline data, specifically special education student restraint data, is not tracked/reported on a real-time basis. As discussed separately in *Chapter 2 – Program Service Delivery* of this report, the number of restraints at Leander ISD has been greater than other peer districts as well as the state. Had more frequent tracking and reporting of restraints occurred, the district may have been able to act on the information more quickly and take the necessary steps to prevent unnecessary restraints. The district should develop an "Early Warning System" for special education to identify issues requiring action to be taken more quickly. Key information should be reported monthly, weekly, or in some cases daily, to support decision making.

Implementation Steps

The following implementation strategies should be considered:

1. Identify information requirements for more frequent special education reporting, such as:
 - a. Benchmark tests, or other interim results of special education student academic and social performance.
 - b. Classroom walkthrough instruments designed for special education instruction (including comparison of IEPs to actual classroom activities) and student engagement.
 - c. Special education student discipline transactions, including restraints.
 - d. Special education student discipline referral transactions.
2. Determine sources of existing data that support requirements and identify gaps.
3. Develop or refine data collection instruments to support special education information needs.
4. Collect and evaluate data on a pilot basis. Validate data integrity.
5. Roll out reporting structure district-wide.

Financial Management

In 2008-09, Leander ISD supported its special education program with an investment of \$27 million. This resource commitment served 2,695 special education students. Over the past five years, special education enrollment numbers have increased, but not at the same rate as overall student enrollment. As a result, the special education student population represents a smaller percentage of total district enrollment. This trend reflects the district's success in increasingly serving special education through other programs. **Table 3-1** shows enrollment and staffing trends over the past five years. Special

education enrollment has decreased from 11.6 percent of total enrollment to 9.5 percent from 2004-05 to 2008-09 (a decrease of 18.1 percentage points).

Table 3-1. Special Education Student and Staffing Trends, 2004-05 to 2008-09

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	5 Year % Change
Special Education Student Enrollment	2,309	2,466	2,617	2,642	2,695	16.7%
Student Enrollment (SpEd) as % of Total Enrollment	11.6%	11.2%	10.8%	10.0%	9.5%	-18.1%
Student FTEs (SpEd) ¹	NA	787.6	763.0	759.4	759.4	-3.6%
Teacher FTEs (SpEd)	158.9	195.1	201.6	223.2	220.0	38.5%
Instructional Aide (SpEd)	164.0	174.0	202.0	234.0	260.0	58.5%

Source: Texas Education Agency Fall Snapshot Reports, Leander ISD fall 2009, Texas Education Agency Summary of Finances

¹Student FTEs are not available for the 2004-05 school year. The percentage change reflects a four-year change.

The district has been able to increase its staff support of special education through a more distributed program that provides more instruction in the general education classroom. Teacher FTEs have increased approximately 38.5 percent since 2004-05, while enrollment in special education has increased 16.7 percent. Instructional aides have increased 58.5 percent during this same time period.

Expenditure levels reflect this staffing increase. Between 2004-05 and 2008-09, special education expenditures have increased from \$17.1 million to \$27.3 million, with the largest increase in payroll related expenditures (59.9%). **Table 3-2** presents expenditure trends from 2004-05 to 2008-09.

Table 3-2. Special Education Expenditure Trends, 2004-05 to 2008-09

Object Description	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	5-Year % Change
Payroll Cost	\$ 16,221,467	\$ 18,301,508	\$ 22,079,032	\$ 23,672,738	\$ 25,931,105	59.9%
Professional and Contracted Services	\$ 318,785	\$ 396,084	\$ 519,963	\$ 504,637	\$ 508,657	59.6%
Supplies and Materials	\$ 469,190	\$ 333,578	\$ 331,190	\$ 368,276	\$ 641,887	36.8%
Other Operating Costs	\$ 163,299	\$ 199,691	\$ 199,291	\$ 165,467	\$ 234,054	43.3%
Capital Outlay ¹	\$ -	\$ 147,540	\$ 159,056	\$ -	\$ -	0.0%
Total	\$ 17,172,741	\$ 19,378,401	\$ 23,288,532	\$ 24,711,118	\$ 27,315,703	59.1%

Source: Leander ISD, fall 2009

¹Includes Land, Buildings and Equipment

On a per special education student served basis, Leander ISD expenditures have increased from \$7,643 to \$10,136 since 2004-05 as shown in **Table 3-3**. This reflects an increased commitment primarily in staff resources as well as inflationary growth.

Table 3-3. Special Education Expenditures per Student, 2004-05 to 2008-09

Object Description	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	5-Year % Change
Payroll Cost	\$ 7,219.17	\$ 7,421.54	\$ 8,436.77	\$ 8,960.16	\$ 9,621.93	33.3%
Professional and Contracted Services	\$ 141.87	\$ 160.62	\$ 198.69	\$ 191.01	\$ 188.74	33.0%
Supplies and Materials	\$ 208.81	\$ 135.27	\$ 126.55	\$ 139.39	\$ 238.18	14.1%
Other Operating Costs	\$ 72.67	\$ 80.98	\$ 76.15	\$ 62.63	\$ 86.85	19.5%
Capital Outlay ¹	\$ -	\$ 59.83	\$ 60.78	\$ -	\$ -	0.0%
Total	\$ 7,642.52	\$ 7,858.24	\$ 8,898.94	\$ 9,353.19	\$ 10,135.70	32.6%

Source: Leander ISD, fall 2009

¹ Includes Land, Buildings and Equipment

In addition to increased payroll costs, supplies and materials increased substantially from 2004-05 to 2008-09 and represents the second largest district expenditure. Upon reviewing the trend analysis in more detail, it was determined that the largest portion of the increase in 2008-09 was in the general supplies related to federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – B* formula funding.

During the review, Gibson compared the program formulas in the “Special Education Staffing Formulas” to actual staffing patterns to determine the degree to which actual staffing mirrored intended staffing according to the formulas. Staffing formulas exist for certain instructional settings, then were adjusted based on campus needs. The results of this comparison are presented in **Table 3-4** by school level (i.e., elementary school, middle school, and high school). Overall, actual staffing numbers exceed formula staffing in 19 schools. Four schools reflected lower actual staff levels, and eleven schools showed staffing consistent with the established formula.

Table 3-4. Special Education Staffing Formula Comparison to Actual Staffing

CMC/Inc/Resource Formula Comparison Results	ES	MS	HS	Total
Campuses within staffing formula range	9	1	1	11
Campuses outside of staffing formula range	14	5	4	23
Campuses with higher actual staffing	11	4	4	19
Campuses with lower actual staffing	3	1	0	4

Source: Leander ISD, fall 2009

This analysis highlights the difficulties in applying staffing formulas for special education. During focus groups, Leander ISD teachers also noted that the formulas do not take into consideration each child's level of need. Staffing needs are identified through the ARD process for each student, culminating in the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Based on interviews with Leander ISD staff, special education staffing at the schools is first reviewed and established based on the formulas set in place by the district. A second step includes a school visit from district staff to ensure that the needs of the students are being met based on the number of teachers suggested by the formula. A form, "Campus Teacher and Student Count List", is used at each campus visit and includes verification of the actual student and teacher numbers in each school's program, and enrollment in specific instructional arrangements. Staffing adjustments are then made based on the particular needs of each school. Staffing formulas are reviewed periodically by district management to determine whether formula and/or staffing adjustments need to be made.

In addition to analyzing trends over time, the review team compared Leander ISD expenditure and staffing patterns to peer districts (identified by Leander ISD as those districts they would most like to emulate). In comparing per student expenditures, Leander ISD invests more financial resources in its special education program than all of its peer districts. The district also supports its special education program with a higher percentage of General Funds than its peers. In 2007-08 – the most recent year audited expenditure data are available – Leander ISD spent \$12,664 per student (see **Table 3-5**). Peer district amounts ranged from \$9,699 to \$12,629 per student.

Table 3-5. Peer District Profile, Special Education Expenditures per Student (Headcount), 2007-08

Expenditure ¹	Leander	Denton	Frisco	Humble	Keller	Lamar	Mansfield	McKinney	Pflugerville
Payroll Cost	\$ 12,096	\$ 10,870	\$ 9,974	\$ 11,678	\$ 9,904	\$ 8,147	\$ 9,110	\$ 10,060	\$ 10,684
Professional and Contracted Services	\$ 212	\$ 243	\$ 257	\$ 388	\$ 224	\$ 646	\$ 200	\$ 1,400	\$ 1,303
Supplies and Materials	\$ 256	\$ 416	\$ 348	\$ 163	\$ 440	\$ 220	\$ 150	\$ 332	\$ 486
Other Operating Costs	\$ 99	\$ 204	\$ 123	\$ 81	\$ 78	\$ 325	\$ 114	\$ 85	\$ 82
Capital Outlay ²	\$ 1	\$ 19	\$ 66	\$ 149	\$ 29	\$ 361	\$ 411	\$ -	\$ 75
Special Education Expenditures	\$ 12,664	\$ 11,752	\$ 10,768	\$ 12,460	\$ 10,676	\$ 9,699	\$ 9,985	\$ 11,877	\$ 12,629

Source: eFACTS+, fall 2009

¹The special education expenditures provided through the state's information system include an allocation by the Texas Education Agency of certain expenditures not charged to the Special Education Program Intent Code. This is done for all school districts. As a result, Leander ISD's expenditure data is higher than what the district shows internally for Special Education. The state performs this allocation to support greater comparability and consistency among school districts.

²Includes Land, Buildings and Equipment

As shown in **Table 3-6**, Leander ISD supported 61 percent of its special education program through the General Fund. Peer district General Fund support ranged from 41.5 percent to 56.6 percent. Part of this variance is due to a one-time occurrence in 2007-08 where Leander carried forward a portion of its federal *IDEA-B* funds. Leander ISD's percentage of *IDEA-B* funding (7.3 percent) is lower than other district percentages (range from 11.3 percent to 15.8 percent). Based on interviews with district leadership, *IDEA-B* funds were carried over because of a district decision on a one-time allocation of certain payroll related costs between the General Fund and *IDEA-B*. A review of prior year *IDEA-B* expenditures showed that *IDEA-B* funded expenditure levels were within the range of its peer districts. Leander ISD has since revised its planning processes to avoid any future need to carry over any significant levels of *IDEA-B* funding.

Table 3-6. Peer District Profile – Special Education Expenditures per Student (Headcount), 2007-08

Revenue Source	Leander	Denton	Frisco	Humble	Keller	Lamar	Mansfield	McKinney	Pflugerville
Block Grant Paid by State Share of Tier I ¹	6.4%	7.5%	-0.3%	13.4%	10.1%	13.7%	19.0%	7.4%	11.9%
Block Grant Paid by Local Share of Tier I ¹	24.6%	26.7%	34.0%	15.7%	21.8%	28.5%	20.1%	23.0%	20.9%
Idea B Formula	7.3%	11.7%	15.8%	11.3%	13.1%	15.5%	15.2%	13.8%	15.3%
SHARS/MAC Revenues	0.5%	1.7%	0.0%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	2.3%	1.2%	1.1%
Shared Service Arrangements	0.0%	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other sources	0.2%	-1.1%	0.7%	2.9%	0.0%	0.6%	-1.9%	-0.8%	-0.4%
From General Fund	61.1%	48.4%	49.8%	56.6%	54.8%	41.5%	45.3%	55.3%	51.2%
Total	100%								

Source: eFACTS+, fall 2009

¹The special education block grant on the Texas Education Agency Summary of Finances is broken down into the portion actually funded by the state versus the district's local share. The amount on the Summary of Finances presents only the gross amount of the block grant. However, based on the district's property wealth, this funding may be reduced. To provide meaningful comparisons, the ratio of total state appropriations, after property wealth adjustment, was applied to the special education block grant to estimate the amount of state funds actually received for special education.

Tables 3-7 and **3-8** present comparisons of Leander ISD special education staffing and student profiles to eight peer districts for 2007-08, the most recent year peer data were available through state data sources.

As shown in **Table 3-7**, Leander ISD has the second lowest pupil-teacher ratio (11.45) and the second lowest pupil-aide ratio (10.89), indicating that it has higher staff levels relative to its peer districts. This is a contributing factor to Leander ISD having higher expenditure levels relative to the peer districts, as the student populations of the peer districts are served through similar instructional arrangements. **Table 3-8** shows the variance in instructional setting placement for special education students at Leander ISD and its peer districts (percentages are rounded to the nearest percentage point). These data show consistent assignments of students to instructional settings with only one exception – Leander ISD has a substantially higher number of students in the Mainstream instructional setting than most of its peers (624.08), being second only to Humble ISD (995.60). It should be noted that Humble ISD has the largest special education student population of the peer group. By equalizing for special education enrollment, Leander’s percentage of Mainstream Average Daily Attendance (ADA) to total special education enrollment is 24 percent; Humble ISD’s percentage is 34 percent.

Table 3-7 Peer District Profile, Students and Staffing, 2007-08

Data	Leander	Denton	Frisco	Humble	Keller	Lamar	Mansfield	McKinney	Pflugerville
<i>General Data:</i>									
Pupil Enrollment	2,555	2,308	2,174	2,948	2,079	2,325	2,639	1,976	1,925
Pupil Weighted FTE	2,296	2,149	2,095	1,987	1,461	2,400	2,441	1,595	2,027
Pupil FTE	759	744	667	638	463	796	823	532	696
Teachers	223	173	198	242	156	141	163	169	139
Educational Aides	235	185	182	*	179	154	178	114	193
<i>Enrolled:</i>									
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	11.45	13.36	10.97	12.20	13.30	16.44	16.20	11.71	13.83
Pupil/Educational Aide Ratio	10.89	12.45	11.94	*	11.59	15.12	14.81	17.36	9.96

Source: eFACTS+, fall 2009

*Humble ISD's reported educational aides are inconsistent with that of Leander ISD and the other peer districts. These numbers have been excluded from this analysis.

Table 3-8. Peer District Profile – Instructional Settings, 2007-08

Instructional Arrangements	Leander	Denton	Frisco	Humble	Keller	Lamar	Mansfield	McKinney	Pflugerville
Homebound FTEs	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Hospital Class FTEs	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Speech Therapy FTEs	5%	5%	8%	8%	8%	6%	5%	6%	4%
Resource Room FTEs	70%	70%	71%	51%	57%	73%	61%	60%	67%
Self Contained MM Regular Camp FTEs	19%	18%	19%	35%	33%	15%	28%	25%	14%
Off Home Campus FTEs	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Vocational Adjustment Class	4%	1%	2%	5%	1%	1%	1%	5%	11%
Non- Public Contracts FTEs	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Residential Care and Treatment	1%	6%	0%	1%	0%	3%	4%	3%	3%
Sp Ed FTE	100%								
Mainstream ADA ¹	624.08	350.08	242.97	995.60	588.22	238.97	414.44	426.92	244.55

Source: eFACTS+, 2009

¹Based on how instructional setting data is provided by the Texas Education Agency in the Summary of Finances Report, Mainstream ADA counts are shown separately and not part of the student count for other instructional settings that are subject to a different state funding formula.

Recommendation 3-4: Develop long range expenditure and funding plan for special education.

In addition to the stimulus funding transition plan recommended separately in this chapter, the district should develop a five-year revenue and expenditure projection for special education under different funding scenarios. Because the district supports the special education program with a significant investment from the General Fund, and because the district is facing projected annual budget deficits in this fund, additional planning should be conducted to ensure that special education program services are not adversely affected by future budget shortfalls.

Implementation Steps

The district should consider both the amount and nature of its spending in special education under various funding scenarios by applying the following implementation strategies:

1. Consider increased use of contracted services instead of permanent positions.
2. Revisit balance of teaching versus non-teaching staff in special education.
3. Evaluate the impact of Leander ISD's efforts, such as Response to Intervention and reading programs, on special education referral and placement rates.

Recommendation 3-5: Apply for Rider 47 (high cost reimbursement) funds.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has a program (High Cost Funds) to reimburse districts for certain costs associated with educating high need students with disabilities. These funds are available when the cost of direct special education and related services exceeds \$25,000 for any student. The program is described in Rider 47 (appropriated by the 81st Texas Legislature) and allows districts to submit an on-line application annually for reimbursement of all costs related to students for which the total annual costs for each student exceeds \$25,000.

Costs that can be submitted for reimbursement include the costs of teachers, aides, related services and program costs, and certain transportation expenditures. In general, any direct cost is eligible and costs can be prorated among students when teachers or aides are not assigned one-on-one. Beginning in 2007-08, most transportation costs are excluded; however, special equipment for transporting special education students (ramps, lifts, and adapted buses) can be included. For purposes of determining eligibility, (i.e., whether the total for an individual student exceeds \$25,000), all costs are included. Actual reimbursements are made for this total cost less related reimbursements for School Health and Related Services (SHARS) and the annual Adjusted Allotment (AA).

In 2007-08, Leander applied for more than \$500,000 of reimbursement funding, but because of the total program dollar cap, received \$136,000. In 2008-09 the district did not apply for any High Cost Funds reimbursements. The district should apply for these funds annually going forward. There is no cost to apply unless an outside contractor is used, and since the district previously applied, information collected in prior years could support future applications.

Data Security

Leander ISD uses several technologies and software products to provide special education programs in an efficient manner, to support internal and external communications, and to obtain information to support decision making. Many of the technologies benefitting the special education program, such as a general student information system, human resource and finance systems, email systems, web sites and pages, and spreadsheet and database software, support all district academic and departmental programs. Some software applications, such as eSPED, are exclusive to special education. eSPED supports the district's ARD process by providing the necessary documentation to support compliance with federal and state requirements, including the IEP. Leander ISD diagnosticians, ARD facilitators, special education management, and other staff can access eSPED through a web site on a laptop, providing an efficient way to enter data.

Recommendation 3-6: Establish district-wide application security policies and procedures.

Currently, Leander ISD does not have application security policies and procedures in place and must rely on each vendor's individual application security standards and procedures. This causes the district's technology department to support multiple, varying, and often inconsistent, security standards. This practice leaves the district susceptible to potential security issues and/or risks because a vendor's security standards may be too weak, and may not meet industry standards. As a result, sensitive district data could be compromised.

District technology leadership acknowledges the need for enhanced district application security policies and procedures, and is planning to create a position within the technology department that, among other responsibilities, will include developing and implementing district-wide technology security policies and procedures. The district is working on reorganizing existing staff to fill this need. The position will also be responsible for reviewing existing and future online and in-house applications from a security point of view in order to ensure they comply with the district's newly developed application security policies and procedures. The result will be that the district and campuses will not be able to acquire technologies that do not fit within the established application security policies and procedures. While the district has intentions for hiring this position, which would be a great benefit to the organization, this position has not yet been funded or filled.

The application security policies and procedures that the district creates should include recommended practices for distributing usernames and passwords to a large group of users. When creating an initial user password, the district should either email users, through a confirmed email address, randomly generated initial passwords or passwords that are a combination of several pieces of information that is not easy to guess (e.g., employee ID, birthday, *and* last four digits of their social security number). Good password policies include having more than 6 to 8 characters in passwords, usage of special characters, usage of a combination of numbers and lower and upper cases. The district should also ensure that all selected software forces users to change their initial password at the first log-in.

Recommendation 3-7: Create a consistent policy for storing and transmitting secure data and train all staff regarding this policy.

According to written procedures, special education Records Management employees save sensitive data files to their local hard drive. This practice was validated during interviews with district staff. This is neither a prudent nor a safe practice in terms of security as there is a risk of data being lost if a hard drive fails. Further, if staff members are using a laptop and it does not have proper encryption and security controls, anyone can access the saved data. All secure data should be stored on a shared district network that has proper security. As the district purchases new laptops, the district should purchase laptops with inexpensive biometric fingerprint scanners for those users that have sensitive data on their laptops to ensure data safety if the laptop is lost.

The technology department should create updated processes and documentation for the storage and transmission of secure data. Once this documentation has been created, the technology department should provide training to all staff that use sensitive data. Training should include information on saving data to a local drive versus a network drive, adding passwords to zip files, email safety, encrypting data, file transfers between entities, and proper utilization of flash drives.

Recommendation 3-8: Limit eSPED export functionality.

Currently the district's eSPED application has an export functionality which allows users to export data to Excel or as a csv file. Since eSPED is a web-based application, it is possible for users to access the application on computers that are outside of the district such as a home computer. Should a user export sensitive eSPED data to their local drive or a computer outside of the district network, a potential security risk arises for the district. Individuals other than district staff could gain access to the data if the home computer, or other computer outside of the district network, is donated, recycled, or stolen with those data intact. These data would then be compromised.

The district should work with the eSPED vendor to limit export functionality based on the district's Internet Protocol (IP) address(es) (i.e., users only use export feature when on a computer with a district IP address) and lock other non-district IP addresses. Therefore, if a user attempts to export data from eSPED using an IP address other than the districts, the user is then locked out of the system. Limiting export functionality according to IP address should also be included in the security policies as requirement for future vendors.

Chapter 4 – Communication

This chapter presents recommendations for improved communication in Leander ISD’s special education program. Both external communications (primarily with parents) and internal communications were analyzed. Recommendations for improvements to communication are presented separately for each of these areas.

Communication between School Personnel and Parents/Families

Currently, Leander ISD hosts parent summits – one during the fall semester and one during the spring semester. Various topics are covered during these summits including the ARD process, communication strategies, as well as updates on occupational and physical therapy strategies. While pre-registration is required, Leander ISD does not charge a fee to attend and also provides child care during the summit. The district also hosts a family support network in both the North and South areas of the district. As with the summits, the district provides childcare for parents during family support network meetings.

While these efforts of Leander ISD are good practices, parent surveys and focus groups revealed that some parents would like to have more support and information than what they currently receive from the district. Parents who raised issues about district support noted a desire for increased assistance getting connected to additional resources for their students. Despite parents’ overall satisfaction with services, a consistent message that emerged from data collected from parents was a desire for more communication at both the district and campus levels.

Recommendation 4-1: Update district special education website to include parent communication tools and other pertinent information.

Leander ISD has recently updated its special education website. The previous site included information regarding the special education program and services available to students. The recent upgrade includes additional links to:

- Evaluation Services (includes a description of the placement and assessment process)
- Transition Services (includes booklets, pamphlets, and other resources, including names of agencies to contact and transition tools)
- Eligibility Categories (includes legal descriptions of each special education disability type from the Texas Education Code)
- Parent information (includes agency contacts, ARD process guide, and support network calendar)
- Special Education Services (includes program descriptions)
- Child Find (includes a brief description of the Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities)
- Information related to Title 1 Parent Involvement (includes procedures guiding Title 1 parental involvement)

While these upgrades represent a significant improvement, the district's website presents additional opportunities to communicate with parents and families.

Though not all of the parent concerns were directed at the website, the types of information and support that parents are looking for can realistically be provided through innovations and updates to the current capacity of the district's website. By harnessing current technologies, the district can use the internet to provide additional opportunities for connecting parents with information – by creating additional support networks, referring additional resources (including experts and specialists), and providing a means for helping parents stay in communication with teachers and other school staff.

In addition to the changes already implemented by the district, and those changes that are still in process, Gibson is recommending additional strategies to further enhance the district's communication with special education parents through its website.

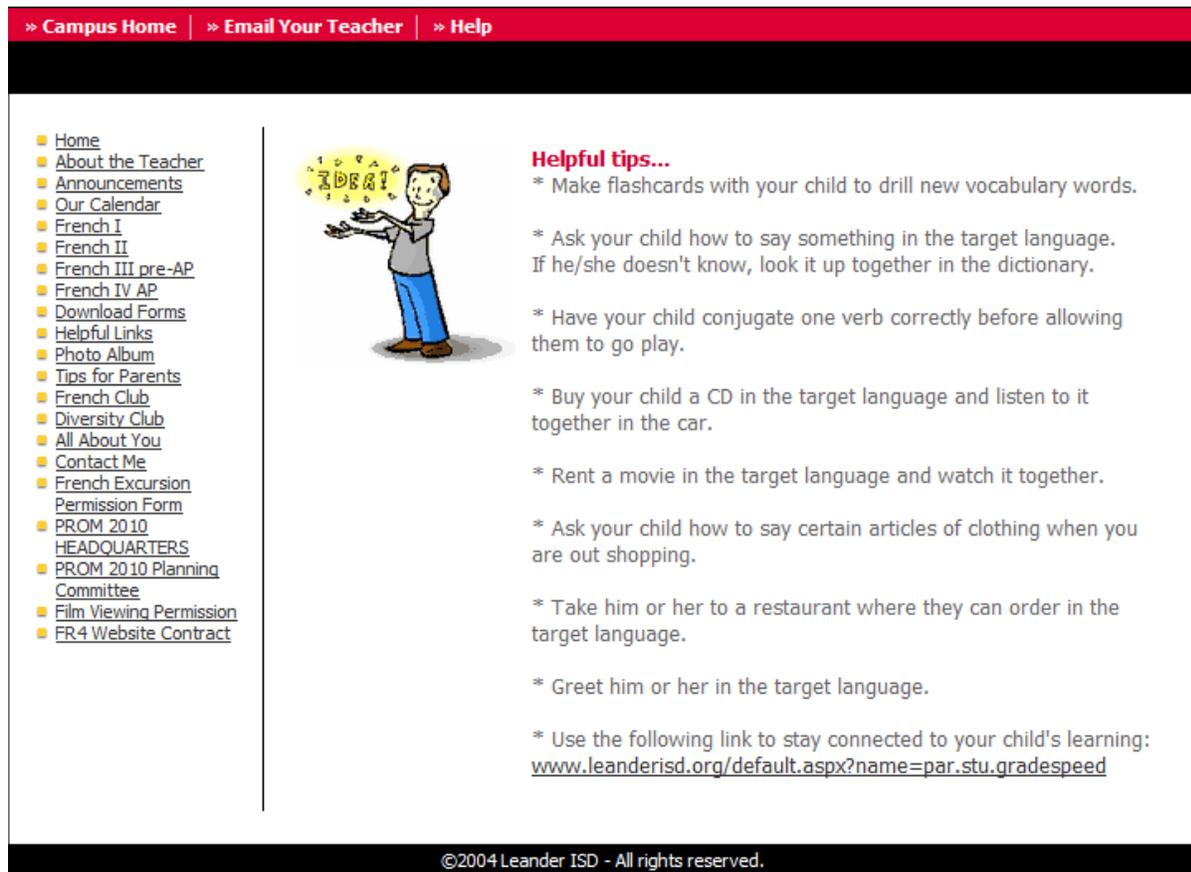
1. *Create and moderate discussion boards.* Enabling parents of special education students to participate in discussion boards housed on the district website would give parents a central location to share experiences, post questions, share resources, and demonstrate to parents the district's willingness to facilitate parent communication and collaboration. One staff member should be designated to check the discussion board at least twice weekly, to facilitate conversation, respond to questions that are posed that require answers from district personnel, ensure that responses do not misrepresent district policies or procedures, and monitor for inappropriate content.
2. *Expand the parent information section of the website:* Information included in the parent information section of the website needs to be streamlined, and other information should be added. Some suggestions include:
 - a. Revise the Leander Family Support Network calendar to read more like an actual calendar. Include dates for the network meetings for the entire school year. If registration for a parent event is required, embed a link in the event date on the calendar to direct parents to the appropriate piece of information. Include topics to be addressed in each meeting and the names of guest speakers attending the event.
 - b. Add a "feature" or "highlight" section to the website that includes photos and/or video of student participating in activities. This would be an opportunity to share things that are going well with parents and the community.
 - c. Update the "services" area for each grade level to include more than just program descriptions. For example, under the preschool services link include information such as transitioning into kindergarten, what parents should expect at each stage of development, as well as a summary of the types of services available for preschool-aged children.

- d. Include a section on the website about assistive technology including what it is, types of technologies available, steps for initiating an evaluation, and training opportunities for parents to assist their child in using any assistive technology the district has provided.
 - e. Post common special education forms and documents (e.g., notice of procedural safeguards, blank IEP document, etc.) so that parents can have commonly referenced/used documents easily accessible.
 - f. Include information about the role of the Parent Liaisons and Social Workers and explain how they can help parents connect with the district.
 - g. Include a link to the special education site under the “Departments” tab on the district’s homepage.
3. *Create a special education parent handbook and post an electronic version on the website.* Leander ISD should create a comprehensive parent handbook that includes information regarding the referral and evaluation process, what to expect in ARD meetings, a glossary of special education acronyms, information regarding developing and updating student IEPs, parent resources, and other pertinent information. This handbook should be updated annually (at minimum) and should be sent to parents prior to the first ARD meeting of every year.
4. *Expand the Child Find section of the website.* Expand the description of the program to include information on how the program works, what staff members do to seek out children needing special education services, and other pertinent information. This will be especially useful for parents who have been visited by the Child Find team to help answer any questions that may arise after the visit.

Recommendation 4-2: Set expectations for use of teacher websites.

Every Leander ISD teacher has a web page dedicated to their class that serves as a vehicle to provide students and parents with valuable information and resources. However, many teachers are not using their websites to the fullest extent, and some are not using them at all. A review of several special education teachers’ websites at each campus in the district revealed that the majority of teacher web pages that exist have links on the side navigation bar, but no content populated within the pages. However, **Figure 4-1** is an example of a teacher’s website in Leander ISD that provides helpful information for both students and parents.

Figure 4-1. Example Leander ISD teacher website



» Campus Home | » Email Your Teacher | » Help

- Home
- About the Teacher
- Announcements
- Our Calendar
- French I
- French II
- French III pre-AP
- French IV AP
- Download Forms
- Helpful Links
- Photo Album
- Tips for Parents
- French Club
- Diversity Club
- All About You
- Contact Me
- French Excursion Permission Form
- PROM 2010 HEADQUARTERS
- PROM 2010 Planning Committee
- Film Viewing Permission
- FR4 Website Contract

Helpful tips...

- * Make flashcards with your child to drill new vocabulary words.
- * Ask your child how to say something in the target language. If he/she doesn't know, look it up together in the dictionary.
- * Have your child conjugate one verb correctly before allowing them to go play.
- * Buy your child a CD in the target language and listen to it together in the car.
- * Rent a movie in the target language and watch it together.
- * Ask your child how to say certain articles of clothing when you are out shopping.
- * Take him or her to a restaurant where they can order in the target language.
- * Greet him or her in the target language.
- * Use the following link to stay connected to your child's learning: www.leanderisd.org/default.aspx?name=par.stu.gradespeed

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As parents and students are becoming more dependent on electronic communications, campuses and teachers should increasingly take advantage of the opportunity to stay connected to their students and parents.

1. Set expectations for all teachers to use their designated websites and frequently update the information on the site. Integrate review of teacher websites into performance evaluations and hold teachers accountable for efforts to stay in touch with parents and families. Types of information that should be posted on teacher web pages include:

- Daily schedule
- Daily or weekly homework assignments
- Homework tools
- Links to additional activities
- News and announcements (including report card and progress report dates)
- Newsletter or recent events
- Parent resources
- Supplies needed for class
- Teacher contact information (email (hyperlinked for quick access) and phone numbers)
- Teacher conference period

- Tutoring times
2. Provide technical support and program support to teachers to facilitate enhanced use of teacher web pages.
 3. Provide advice and information to parents on ways to help students at home with academic assignments.
 4. Monitor and report on teacher web page enhancements.

Consistently using teacher web pages for resources, information, and communication will help to ensure that parents have the information they need to help their student succeed. This practice can also provide additional enrichment for students and help to bridge any gaps between school learning and home.

Recommendation 4-3: Clarify district policy and procedures regarding the use of email communications.

Leander ISD has a policy called “Electronic Communication and Data Management – Acceptable Use Policy.” This policy primarily relates to basic security issues such as keeping passwords secure and the inappropriate use of the internet. Based on a word search applied against Leander ISD’s on-line policy manual, there are no policies that address the use of email as a communication device for internal communications or with parents.

During school visits, the review team learned that some principals informed teachers that they were not to use email to communicate with parents. Other principals prohibited the use of email for internal communications. On other campuses email was used extensively to support both internal and parent communications.

Email communications, particularly with parents, should be consistently applied and used across the district. However, there are risks associated with using email as a communications vehicle. For example, the tone of email communications may often be perceived differently by the writer and reader of the email. Also, a written response to a parent question via email could be perceived as a district policy or practice, which may or may not be the case. Email is a very efficient form of communication, but the district should take steps to ensure that the communication risks are minimized. By establishing guidelines for how to effectively use email, teachers and other Leander ISD staff can take advantage of an efficient way to meet parent desires for additional communication. In implementing email guidelines, the following elements should be considered:

1. The general types of communications that are conducive to emails, such as sharing factual information, as opposed to informing of or discussing a decision. There are some communications that should occur in face to face meetings or over the phone. Email should be used to communicate relatively simple messages containing factual information.

2. Phrases, words or abbreviations that should be avoided because they can be easily misinterpreted or misunderstood.
3. Appropriate use of mass emails or email “blasts.”
4. Frequency of email use. Overuse of email as a communication device may work against effective communication.
5. A statement that makes it clear to Leander ISD staff and parents that email communications reside on Leander ISD servers and are the ownership of Leander ISD.

Recommendation 4-4: Improve communication with parents by consistently updating parent email addresses in the enterprise system.

For administration of the parent survey, Leander ISD provided a list of all parents of special education students. This list included parents with and without email addresses. Of the 2,566 unduplicated parents, 2,026 (79%) had an email address listed and 540 (21%) parents did not have an email address. Twenty-one of the email addresses provided had some type of data entry error that could not be reasonably corrected (i.e., missing required characters and exchanges). For the survey, 2,005 email invitations to participate in the survey were sent. However, 133 (6.6%) were returned as undeliverable due to the email address no longer existing. Therefore, the district currently has 1,872 valid email addresses with which to communicate with parents.

Currently, many parents of special education students are missing communications the district sends out via email. Twenty-one percent of special education parents do not have an email address on file with the district. While many of these parents may not have access to the internet or have an established email address, many of the parents listed as not having an email address may have obtained one at any point in time. As email communications become more common place, and expected, for parents, Leander ISD should continually update the email addresses for all parents district-wide. In order to keep parent contact information current, the district should:

1. Implement a practice of updating parent contact information during all parent-teacher conferences or ARD meetings.
2. Continue to send out a form or postcard at the beginning of each school that includes all contact information for parents. For non-respondents, follow up with phone calls to obtain email and other contact information. The district should ensure that the information provided in the form/postcard is entered promptly after they have been returned.

Communication Within and Between Schools

Recommendation 4-5: Improve communication between school personnel to ensure general education teachers are aware of, and follow, student IEPs and BIPs.

Many special education students are in general education classrooms for academic work. During parent focus groups, and on open-ended comment questions on the parent survey, parents perceive that

general education teachers were unaware that their student was identified as special education and receiving services, and did not know the student had an IEP on file. Generally, these parents indicated that the teachers would become aware only once the student started to struggle and fall behind.

Communication throughout the schools needs to be improved to ensure that all staff are aware of students' IEPs and/or BIPs so accommodations and modifications can be incorporated as appropriate. In addition, many high-need special education students have difficult social and behavioral problems that prior-year teachers become very familiar with. That child's experience will be greatly improved if the knowledge is shared among teachers, so that general education teachers are more prepared and can be more successful with these students. The district should:

1. Conduct coordination meetings *prior to the start of the school year* for general education teachers to review IEPs for special education students on their roster. These meetings should be conducted vertically so that prior year teachers can share their knowledge and expertise with newly assigned teachers. Ensure that IEPs and BIPs are reviewed early, as the first six weeks of the school year are critical.
2. Clarify the role of tracking teachers at the secondary level. Set expectations and communicate these expectations to general education teachers and to parents. Ensure that tracking teachers are responsible for ensuring that general education teachers are aware of IEPs and BIPs and are appropriately modifying instruction and/or providing accommodations.

Recommendation 4-6: Improve communication between personnel from one school to another when special education students are transitioning.

Through the parent survey and focus groups, parents expressed concerns regarding transition from elementary to middle school, and from middle to high school. Some parents perceived that the education process was starting over, in terms of educating school staff on their child's disability and the history with the district. During focus groups, and on parent surveys, parents spoke of requesting transition meetings prior to the end of one school year, but not actually meeting until well into the start of the new school year.

While this could create problems for any student, it is a particularly difficult issue for students with significant needs. During the first few weeks of school, when physical spaces, routines, and adults are all new to students, lack of consistency can create difficult moments for students, particularly students identified as Emotionally Disturbed or Autistic. Waiting until the beginning of the school year to begin educating staff on students' needs puts those students at risk of falling behind and of suffering the consequences of poor transitions.

Leander ISD should improve its facilitation of meetings before school releases for the summer when a student is transitioning to a new school. Tracking teachers can play a significant role in this process in secondary grades. Tracking teachers should have explicit responsibility to play a role in easing transitions for special education students. Additionally, the district should consider keeping tracking teachers consistent from year-to-year as special education student's progress in grade levels. This would ensure

at least one source of consistency in an environment where consistency is needed by students, but rarely available.



Appendix A – Parent Survey Administration and Results, Narrative



Appendix A – Parent Survey Administration and Results, Narrative

Overview

Surveys were administered to parents of Leander ISD special education students to measure overall satisfaction with the district’s services (Quality of Services Scale) and the extent to which schools make efforts to work together and partner with parents (Schools’ Efforts to Partner with Parents Scale). This appendix details the content of the survey, the survey data analyses, and the detailed results. Highlights of the results include:

- Overall, parents were satisfied with both the district’s quality of services and schools’ efforts to partner with parents. Overall mean scores measured on a scale of 1 (“Very Strongly Disagree”) to 6 (“Very Strongly Agree”) were 4.35 and 4.21, respectively (between “Agree” and “Strongly Agree”).
- Parents’ feelings about special education services and schools’ efforts to partner with parents did not differ by family socio-economic status or by student race/ethnicity.
- While parents overall were satisfied with the district’s quality of special education services, parents of students identified as Other Health Impairment (mean = 4.01, SD¹ = 1.18) were significantly less satisfied than parents of students identified as Speech or Language Impairment (mean = 4.62, SD = 1.07). There were no other significant differences between parents of different primary disability subcategories.
- Parents of early childhood through pre-kindergarten-aged children were significantly more satisfied with the district’s quality of services than parents of elementary, middle, or high school students, who did not differ from each other.
- There were no differences in parents’ feelings about schools’ efforts to partner with parents based on any parent or student characteristic. In other words, parents of all special education students, across all primary disability types, age ranges, ethnicities and socio-economic statuses, felt similarly positive about schools’ efforts to involve parents in their child’s educational decisions.
- Among parents who chose to answer the open-ended questions, the most commonly mentioned district strengths included delivery of needed services, staff quality, positive impacts of the district’s services, and the quality of specific programs. The most common areas needing improvement or the most frequent parent complaints included poor communication, low staff quality, training needs, lack of parent supports and information, and lack of Individualized Education Program (IEP) execution. In response to areas parents would like to learn more about, above anything else parents want more support and information from the district.

¹ SD refers to the standard deviation

Parent Survey Content and Administration

To measure parent satisfaction with special education services, two rating scales developed by the National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring (NCSEAM) were used. The NCSEAM rating scales underwent a two-year development process to ensure reliability and validity, and have been used extensively at the national level for accountability purposes (National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring. (2008). *Questions and Answers about the NCEAM Surveys* [FAQ]. Retrieved from http://www.accountabilitydata.org/parent_family_involvement.htm). These two rating scales, the Quality of Services Scale (QOSS) and the Schools' Efforts to Partner with Parents Scale (SEPPS) were combined with basic demographic questions and open-ended comment questions to create the parent survey.

The parent survey included demographic questions regarding students' race/ethnicity, grade the student was enrolled in during the 2008-09 school year, students' age at referral to Special Education, and the student's primary disability, as well as open-ended questions asking for feedback on the district's strengths, areas for improvement, and areas parents would like to learn more about. The QOSS and the SEPPS measures each consisted of 50 individual items rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("Very Strongly Disagree") to 6 ("Very Strongly Agree"). A response option of "Not Applicable" was also available for each item. The 25 QOSS items were designed to measure feelings about the quality of the special education program, staff, and services provided to students, with items about IEPs, inclusion, assessment, teacher quality, accommodations and modifications, school climate, etc. The 25 SEPPS items were designed to measure the extent to which parents perceive that schools have facilitated parent involvement in their child's education, and include questions about parent input, communication, decision making, parent training, access to information, etc. (see *Appendix B* for all individual survey items).

A letter announcing the survey was mailed to homes of all of Leander ISD's special education students. Parents were informed of the study's purpose, notified that survey invitations would be sent via email, and provided instructions for contacting the Gibson team to request an alternative means for completing the survey, if so desired (e.g., if they did not have an email address or access to a computer). Following this mailing, a parent survey was emailed to one parent of every special education student who had a parent email address on file with the district (in the event that multiple email addresses were on file, only one email address was selected). Surveys were available in both Spanish and English. Seventy-eight percent of the district's special education students had at least one parent email address on file. A total of 2,005 surveys were sent electronically. Of these, 133 were undeliverable (i.e., email address was no longer a working address). Of the 1,872 that were successfully delivered, 580 were completed and returned, for a response rate of 31%.²

² Successful delivery is defined as an email address being valid, and that the email itself was "delivered". It is unknown what percentage of these emails were filtered into SPAM folders, delivered to unused email accounts, or simply unread.

The remainder of this section is presented in two parts; the first describes analysis and results of the quantitative survey data, while the second describes analysis and results of the open-ended survey data.

Part I: Quantitative Survey Results

Data Analysis

Prior to exploring the survey data, data diagnostics were conducted to properly clean the data and ensure that only the appropriate respondents were included in analyses. Of the 580 survey respondents, 20 indicated that their child had not been enrolled in Leander ISD during the 2008-09 school year and thus were excluded from all further analyses and reporting. One parent indicated that their student was enrolled in multiple grades during the 2008-09 school year, and four parents indicated a grade that was not able to be categorized (e.g., SLE classroom). These parent responses were included in analyses when possible, but may have been excluded when grade-level analyses were conducted. All remaining respondents were included in all analyses.

Reliability analyses were conducted to ensure that the psychometric properties of the two NCSEAM scales were replicated in this parent sample. As expected, the 25 QOSS items appropriately measured one underlying construct (Chronbach's $\alpha = .99$)³, and the 25 SEPPS items appropriately measured one underlying construct (Chronbach's $\alpha = .99$). Thus, the data analyses that follow were conducted on these two ratings scales (rather than on individual items). *Appendix B* contains item-level frequency distributions, illustrating the percentage of respondents who indicated each response category for every individual question.

The QOSS and SEPPS scores were calculated by creating a mean score of each of the 25 questions comprising each scale score. Responses of "Not Applicable" were not included in the computation of mean scores. Mean scores were then used to examine overall satisfaction by various demographic groups or primary disability types, and inferential statistical analyses were conducted to determine whether significant differences existed in parents feelings about quality of services or schools' efforts to partner with parents depending upon demographic category or disability type.

Survey Results

Respondent Characteristics

Table A1-1 illustrates the demographic composition of survey respondents' special education students. The majority of responding parents' special education students were White (72%), with 14% Hispanic or Latino. The survey offered the option of responding that their student was multi-racial, and 7% of respondents chose that category. Fewer than 4% of respondents' students were Black or African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, or American Indian or Alaskan Native. This demographic breakdown is

³ Cronbach's α measures how well a set of items are correlated, measuring a single, unidimensional latent construct. The closer the value is to 1.0, the better the items "hang together".

similar to the district's overall special education demographics, with 67% of special education students identified as White, 22% Hispanic or Latino, approximately 8% Black or African American and fewer than 3% Asian/Pacific Islander or American Indian or Alaskan Native. Overall, these respondent characteristics are a good representation of the demographic composition of the district's special education population.

Though the district reports approximately 35 percent of its special education students are eligible for the federal free and reduced lunch program based on their household income level, only 17 percent of survey respondents indicated that their student was eligible for the free and reduced lunch program. An additional 9% indicated that they did not know whether their student was eligible for the program or not. Thus, the survey responses may somewhat under-represent the opinions or attitudes of the district's economically disadvantaged population.

By primary disability category, the majority of survey respondents indicated that their student was identified as having a Specific Learning Disability (25%), Autism (20.3%), Speech or Language Impairment (20%), and Other Health Impairment (10.5%). Across the district, the majority of students are identified as these same four disability types, though more students are identified as having a Specific Learning Disability (36%) and Other Health Impairment (19%), and fewer are identified as having a Speech or Language Impairment (16%) and Autism (13%) as represented in the survey data. All less frequently occurring primary disability types were represented in the survey responses comparably to their presence in the district population.

Seventeen percent of survey respondents indicated that their students are in early childhood or pre-kindergarten programs, while only 6 percent of the district's special education students are in that grade range, thus these parents are somewhat over-represented in the data. Elementary and middle school respondents were proportionate to the population, but parents of high school students are somewhat under-represented, with only 18 percent of survey respondents indicating their students were in this grade range compared to 29 percent of the district's special education students falling into this grade range.

Table A1-1. Race/Ethnicity of Responding Parents' Special Education Students

Sample Characteristics		Survey Responses	
		Number	Percent
Race/Ethnicity	White	418	72.1%
	Black or African American	23	4.0%
	Hispanic or Latino	81	14.0%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	13	2.2%
	American Indian or Alaskan Native	4	0.7%
	Multi-Racial	41	7.1%
Total		580	
Free/Reduced Lunch	Yes	101	17.4%
	No	427	73.6%
	Don't Know	52	9.0%
Total		580	
Sample Characteristics		Survey Responses	
		Number	Percent
Primary Disability	Autism	118	20.3%
	Deafness or Hearing Impaired	8	1.4%
	Developmental Delay	52	9.0%
	Emotional Disturbance	32	5.5%
	Mental Retardation	15	2.6%
	Multiple Disabilities	14	2.4%
	Orthopedic Impairment	4	0.7%
	Other Health Impairment	61	10.5%

	Specific Learning Disability	145	25.0%
	Speech or Language Impairment	116	20.0%
	Traumatic Brain Injury	11	1.9%
	Visual Impairment Including Blindness	4	0.7%
	Total	580	
Grade Range	Age 3 through Pre-Kindergarten	96	16.6%
	Elementary (K – 5)	252	43.4%
	Middle (6 - 8)	117	20.2%
	High (9 – 12)	104	17.9%
	18-22 year old	6	1.0%
	Other	5	0.9%
	Total	580	

Quality of Services and Schools' Efforts to Partner with Parents Scales Results

Overall, Leander ISD parents of special education students were satisfied with the quality of special education services. On a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being “Very Strongly Disagree” and 6 being “Very Strongly Agree” mean scores across each of the 25 QOSS items was 4.35 (SD = 1.07), and across each of the 25 SEPPS items was 4.21 (SD = 1.07). These mean scores place parents overall responses between the “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” points on the survey scales.⁴

Inferential statistical tests were conducted to determine whether mean scores on the QOSS and the SEPPS varied by parent or student characteristics.⁵ Importantly, there were no differences in parents’ attitudes towards quality of services or towards schools’ efforts to partner with parents based on race/ethnicity, or by their student’s eligibility to receive free or reduced lunch. **Table A1-2** presents mean scores on the QOSS and SEPPS broken out by students’ primary disability type.

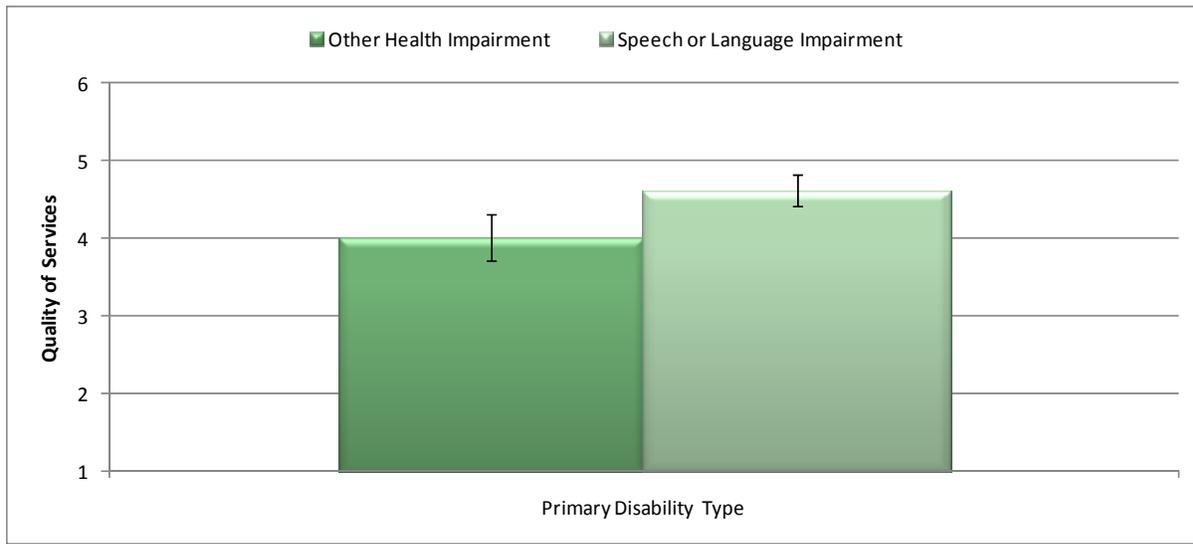
⁴ Ninety survey respondents (15.5%) were employees of Leander ISD. Independent samples t-tests confirmed that scores on the QOSS and the SEPPS did not differ between parents employed and parents not employed by Leander ISD, therefore all parents were included in subsequent analyses.

⁵ One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests with post-hoc comparisons using the Bonferonni correction were conducted to examine whether parent groups had significantly different mean scores on the QOSS and SPEES, and if so, to identify which groups differed from each other.

Table A1-2. Mean QOSS and SEPPS Scores by Disability Type

Disability Type	Number of Parent Surveys	Quality of Services		Schools' Efforts to Partner with Parents	
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Autism	116	4.44	0.98	4.32	1.01
Deafness or Hearing Impaired	7	4.16	0.96	4.07	0.85
Developmental Delay	49	4.34	1.27	4.15	1.33
Emotional Disturbance	31	4.45	1.01	4.28	1.02
Mental Retardation	14	3.94	1.35	4.15	1.14
Multiple Disabilities	13	4.76	1.12	4.60	1.11
Orthopedic Impairment	4	4.27	0.84	3.92	1.06
Other Health Impairment	61	4.01	1.18	3.97	1.16
Specific Learning Disability	144	4.23	0.96	4.12	0.94
Speech or Language Impairment	102	4.62	1.07	4.35	1.08
Traumatic Brain Injury	11	4.49	0.88	4.34	0.98
Visual Impairment Incl. Blindness	4	3.50	1.80	3.61	1.98
Total	556	4.35	1.07	4.21	1.07

There were no significant differences on the SEPPS measure by student disability type, however, on the QOSS measure, parents of students identified as Other Health Impaired were significantly less satisfied with quality of services than parents of students identified as Speech or Language Impairment (see **Figure A1-1**), who were the most consistently satisfied group of all.

Figure A1-1. Differences in QOSS Mean Scores by Student Disability Type

Note: Error bars illustrate the 95% confidence interval around the sample mean, illustrating how stable the estimate of the mean is for each group represented. Larger samples typically result in more robust estimates (i.e., narrower error bars), while small sample sizes typically result in more unstable estimates (i.e., wider error bars).

Parents of all other primary disability types felt similarly positively towards the district's quality of services, or had too few responses to determine stable estimates of the sample mean for that subgroup.

Parents' satisfaction with services also varied by the grade range of the responding parent's child. **Table A1-3** presents the average QOSS and SEPPS scores by student grade range.

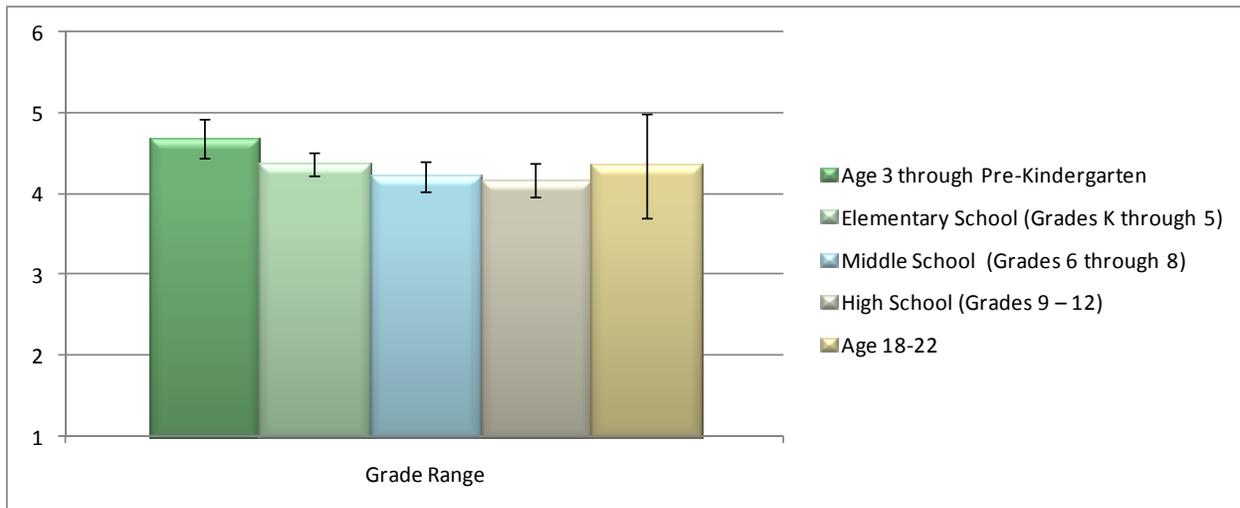
Table A1-3. Mean QOSS and SEPPS scale scores by student grade range

Grade Range	Number of Parent Surveys	Quality of Services		Schools' Efforts to Partner with Parents	
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Age 3 through Pre-Kindergarten	76	4.69	1.07	4.41	1.15
Elementary School (Grades K through 5)	252	4.37	1.09	4.20	1.08
Middle School (Grades 6 through 8)	117	4.22	1.03	4.15	1.02
High School (Grades 9 – 12)	104	4.17	1.05	4.14	1.05
18-22 year old	6	4.35	0.81	4.53	0.75

Grade Range	Number of Parent Surveys	Quality of Services		Schools' Efforts to Partner with Parents	
Total	555	4.35	1.07	4.21	1.07

Again, inferential statistical tests were conducted to determine whether these mean scores varied significantly from each other. While there were no differences in feelings about schools' efforts to partner with parents across the different grade ranges, parents of students in the early childhood program (ages 3 through pre-kindergarten) were significantly more satisfied with the quality of the special education services than parents of elementary, middle, and high school students (see **Figure A1-2**), whose attitudes did not differ from each other.

Figure A1-2. Differences in QOSS Mean Scores by Student Grade Range



Note: Error bars illustrate the 95% confidence interval around the sample mean, illustrating how stable the estimate of the mean is for each group represented. Larger samples typically result in more robust estimates (i.e., narrower error bars), while small sample sizes typically result in more unstable estimates (i.e., wider error bars).

Implications

These findings form a consistent pattern, namely that parents are satisfied with the quality of special education services in the district and with schools' efforts to partner with parents, and this satisfaction is consistent across demographic subgroups. The few significant differences that existed highlight a need to further review the quality of services provided to students identified as Other Health Impairment, as these were the least satisfied parents. Also, it may benefit the district to review the services provided to students in the age 3 through pre-kindergarten grade range, those parents who were the most satisfied, to reveal best practices that might be shared or scaled-up to students in higher grades.

Part II: Open-Ended Survey Results

Data Analysis

In addition to scoring their satisfaction with the district’s services and partnering efforts, parents were also given an opportunity to articulate their opinions and experiences in an open-ended format. Specifically, questions were posed asking parents to provide input about the best ways the district helps their child, ways in which the district can improve its services to their child, and areas they would like to learn more about. Responses to questions were analyzed using common qualitative data analysis techniques: First, responses were grouped by whether the comment noted was a strength, a weakness, or an area to learn more about. Next, within each of these main groupings, common themes drove the creation of mutually exclusive categories. Finally, each response was coded to one of these categories. This content coding enabled identification of the most frequently reported strengths, weaknesses, and areas to learn more about, as well as examination of whether differences existed by various parent subgroups.

Survey Results

378 of the parent respondents provided an answer to the question about the “best ways Leander helps my child”, 320 responded to the question about “ways Leander ISD can improve its services to my child”, and 201 parents responded to the question regarding “things I would like to learn more about.” Response details for each of these questions are presented below.

One of the best ways Leander helps my child is...

When asked about the best ways that Leander ISD helps their children, 378 parents (65%) offered a total of 626 district strengths. The most frequently reported strengths fell into the following five categories: (1) the delivery of needed services (21%), (2) staff quality (20%), (3) general commendations (10%), (4) positive impacts of district services (i.e., observed results) (7%), and (5) the quality of specific programs (6%). Delivery of services and staff quality were the most frequently reported strengths, and were noted more than twice as frequently as the next most commonly noted strength. **Table A1-4** presents all categories developed, the frequency count of the number of parents whose comments were coded in each category (unduplicated), and the percentage of all comments that category accounts for.

Table A1-4. Frequency of Comments Related to District Strengths

One of the best ways Leander helps my child is...	Number of parents commenting	Percent of all comments
Providing needed services	133	21%
Staff Quality	125	20%
General Commendations	62	10%

One of the best ways Leander helps my child is...	Number of parents commenting	Percent of all comments
Positive impacts of services (i.e., observed results)	43	7%
Quality of specific programs (e.g., ELE, SLE, SCSS, etc.)	37	6%
Caring/understanding/warmth towards child	36	6%
Socialization and character development	24	4%
Inclusion-related issues	23	4%
Meeting child's needs	21	3%
Goal setting and tracking progress	19	3%
Supportive to parent or child	16	3%
Issues related to identification and evaluation of needs	13	2%
ARD meeting issues	13	2%
General positive interactions with staff	11	2%
Positive environment	8	1%
Routine and consistency	6	1%
Being aware of students' strengths	5	1%
Preparing student for outside world	2	<1%
Management of staff	2	<1%
Miscellaneous (no item commented on more than one time)	27	4%

Of the 378 parents who offered examples of district strengths, 35 percent discussed the district's provision of needed services. Examples included providing speech therapy, offering and following through with accommodations and modifications, assistance with work programs, psychological services, help with emotional and behavioral problems, getting one-on-one time with teachers, use of the resource room, CMC, and learning lab spaces, and general comments about offering needed help.

Across all 580 responding parents, approximately 20 to 30 percent of parents of students in each primary disability type commented positively about the district's provision of needed services, with the exception of students identified as Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities (7% of each of these responding parents commented positively in this area), and no parents of Visually Impaired students commented positively about the provision of needed services. Across different age ranges, parents were similarly likely to comment on the provision of needed services, with 17 to 29 percent of parents in each grade range listing this as a district strength.

Thirty-three percent of the comments related to district strengths focused on staff quality and often lauded individual special education teachers, discussed strengths of certain tracking teachers, general education teachers, other staff such as principals, speech therapists, psychologists, etc., and commented on staff's training, knowledge, impact on students' growth and learning, and openness to trying new things to help their child learn. Additionally, there were also a sizeable number of comments made about the extent to which school staff care about the child, are nurturing, loving, patient, understanding, and warm. Putting these two categories together, the extent to which parents are happy with the quality and caring nature of the district's staff was the strongest theme expressed in the strengths area.

Comments about staff quality were most common among parents of students identified as Visual Impairment including Blindness (3 of the 4 respondent parents commented on staff quality), Mental Retardation (7 of the 15 respondent parents), and parents of students identified as Emotional Disturbance or Autistic (31% and 30%, respectively). There were parents of all disability types that commented on staff quality, with the exception of parents of students identified as Deafness or Hearing Impaired or Orthopedic Impairment. Looking across grade ranges, between 16 and 22 percent of all responding parents of students age 3 through pre-kindergarten, elementary and middle grades commented freely about high staff quality, while 30percent of parents of high school students and 50percent of responding parents of students 18-22 chose to list this as a district strength.

One way Leander ISD can improve its services to my child is...

While parents expressed overall satisfaction with special education services and communication with parents, when asked about one area that can be improved 338 parents (58%) shared 729 ways in which the district can improve its services. The most frequently reported areas of improvement fell into the following five categories: (1) communication (12%), (2) staff quality (10%), (3) training needs (8%), (4) parent supports and information (8%), and (5) consistency in IEP execution (7%). Unlike the strengths category, there was no particular area that stood out among the others; rather there were many areas that were similarly commented on by parents. **Table A1-5** presents all categories developed, the frequency count of the number of comments in each category, and the percentage of all comments accounted for by that category.

Table A1-5. Frequency of Comments Related to Ways to Improve Services

One way Leander ISD can improve its services to my child is...	Number of parents commenting	Percent of all comments
Communication	88	12%
Staff quality	70	10%
Training needs	56	8%
Parent supports and information	55	8%

One way Leander ISD can improve its services to my child is...	Number of parents commenting	Percent of all comments
IEP execution	53	7%
Insufficient amount or quality of services	49	7%
Identification, placement or service decisions	46	6%
Management issues	32	4%
Parent involvement	31	4%
Inconsistency of staff or in services	29	4%
Inappropriate goals or expectations for students	26	4%
ARD meeting complaints, issues, or recommendations for improvement	22	3%
General negativity	22	3%
Environment concerns	19	3%
Problems related to inclusion	17	2%
Need for new programs	15	2%
Need for awareness/sensitivity training for general education students	13	2%
Inappropriate one-size fits all/cookie-cutter approach	10	1%
Lack of emphasis on academics	9	1%
Lack of tracking progress	9	1%
Lacking resources	6	1%
Issues with ICAP	6	1%
Discipline problems	5	1%
Accusations of abuse	3	<1%
Misc. complaints (no item commented on more than one time)	22	3%
Misc. recommendations (no item commented on more than one time)	16	2%

Among the 58 percent of parents who commented on areas for improvement, 26 percent indicated that communication was the number one area needing improvement. Almost all of these parents commented specifically that communication needed to be improved between the school and the parent. Complaints included lack of contact with teachers, phone calls and emails going unreturned, a lack of additional communication beyond quarterly progress reports and during ARD meetings, insufficient updates on services their child is receiving, and insufficient communication regarding their

child's progress. Additionally, 20 percent of the comments about poor communication indicated that there was a need for communication to be improved within the school, for example between general education teachers and special education teachers, with special education teachers helping all involved general education teachers to understand their specific student's disability, their related needs, and helping them execute their IEPs. Parents also expressed that communication within the school could be improved by getting all staff on the same page, working as a team, and improving communication with the tracking teacher in the upper grades.

Comments about communication were consistently dispersed across parents of most primary disability types. No parents of students identified as having Traumatic Brain Injury or Visual Impairment indicated communication was an area for improvement, while fewer than 10 percent of responding parents with students identified as having Multiple Disabilities and Developmental Delay indicated poor communication as a concern. Thirteen to 25 percent of parents across all other disability types commented on communication. Parents of students in elementary school were most likely to mention communication as a district weakness (19% of all responding elementary parents), but across all other grade ranges, between 11 percent and 17 percent of parents also commented on communication problems.

Though staff quality was commonly mentioned as one of the best ways the district helps students, it was also commonly mentioned as one of the ways in which Leander ISD needs to improve (21% of the 58% of responding parents who answered the question). Comments about staff quality typically mentioned that the district needed to hire better trained, or more experienced staff. Approximately one-third of the comments about staff quality indicated that expectations of staff need to be higher, for example, that staff need to be more sensitive to children's needs, be more proactive in helping students with known issues, develop better relationships with students, try new methods when it is determined that one is not working, search for new ways to reach students, and better understand the extent to which a disability affects a student's entire school experience both academically, socially, and behaviorally. Another one-third of the comments in this category were complaints about specific staff members at specific schools.

Concerns about staff quality were most common among parents of students identified as having a Visual Impairment, Other Health Impairment, and Mental Retardation, though it was mentioned as a concern by parents across all disability categories with the exception of parents of students identified as Deafness or Hearing Impaired, or having an Orthopedic Impairment. Staff quality was also relatively consistently remarked upon across parents of students in all grade ranges, with between 11 percent and 20 percent of all parent respondents in each grade range including staff quality as a concern, with the exception of parents of students aged 3 through pre-kindergarten. Only 5 percent of these parents indicated low staff quality as the district's primary weakness.

Training needs was another consistently expressed area for improvement. Many of these comments included a need for staff to be trained in specific disabilities, such as autism or oppositional defiant disorder, or learning disabilities, or generally stated that staff needed to be trained in the needs of their

own child's specific disability. Another large proportion of these comments stated that training was needed for the general education teachers, who do not have the training or knowledge to effectively teach special education students in their general education classrooms. Thirty-three percent of responding parents of students identified as having Mental Retardation mentioned staff training as the primary area needing improvement, followed by 21 percent of parents of Autistic children. No other disability group had more than 10 percent of parents providing input related to training. Similar to comments about staff quality, parents of students age 3 through pre-kindergarten were substantially less likely to be concerned about training, with only 3 percent of those parents listing training as an issue, compared to 10 to 17 percent of parents among all other grade ranges.

Lack of parent supports and information was another commonly stated area of weakness among the 58 percent of parents who provided an area needing improvement. Parents stated desire to have access to more information, particularly related to special education services available to them and to their student at their school as well as throughout the district, and ways they can help their children at home. Parents also expressed a desire for more support from the district, help navigating and deciphering the system, support with the emotional and physical demands of their students' disabilities, more informational workshops or other parent forums, and to have a supportive school environment. This theme also emerged as the most common thing that parents would like to learn more about, thus the next section contains more detailed information on this area.

Finally, 16 percent of parents responding to this question indicated dissatisfaction with the extent to which their students' IEP's are being followed. In most cases provided, this involved lack of follow-through with accommodations or modifications, or general education teachers not being aware of the students' disability or IEP until the student had begun to fall behind. Many of these 53 parents voiced a desire for general education teachers to review student files or conduct meetings with special education teachers prior to the start of the school year so that they will be fully informed and prepared to help their students from day one. Lack of follow-through of IEP's was most commonly mentioned by parents of students identified as Deafness or Hearing Impaired, Emotional Disturbance, Multiple Disabilities, Other Health Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, and Autism. Failure to follow-through with IEPs is solely an issue among students in middle and high school. No parents of age 3 through prekindergarten, elementary, or 18-22 year olds mentioned this as an issue.

Though not one of the top five categories in the areas of improvements, it is important to note that two additional categories were also common. Parents responding to the question about district improvement expressed a desire for students to receive more or improved services, such as additional therapy hours, more social skills supports, more one-on-one instruction, additional tutoring or academic labs, help with organization and execution of projects, etc. It was also common for parents to mention problems with the district's process of identifying and determining placement or services for their student, with comments explaining discontent with the length of time it takes for students to get help, the district's placement or service decisions, and the need to advocate for services.

One thing I would like to learn more about is...

When asked about one thing they would like to learn more about, 201 parents (35% of all responding parents) offered suggestions. The single most common theme in this area was that parents are looking for more support and information. **Table A1-6** presents all categories developed, along with the frequency count of the number of parents who commented in each category, and the percentage of all comments accounted for by that category.

Table A1-6. Frequency of Comments Related to Areas to Learn More About

One thing I would like to learn more about is...	Number of comments	Percent of all comments
Parent supports and information	62	28%
Transitional issues (grade to grade and school to school)	19	9%
Other district special education programs	19	9%
Services available outside of school	17	8%
Services available when student leaves school	17	8%
Legal issues surrounding parent and student rights	13	6%
College-related issues	11	5%
Grading and testing	10	5%
Child's progress	10	5%
Methods and curriculum used in school	9	4%
Additional help available	6	3%
District spending	4	2%
Teacher training	3	1%
Future plans for the special education department	3	1%
Exiting the special education program	2	1%
Information about modifications and accommodations	2	1%
Miscellaneous (no item commented on more than one time)	15	7%

While the district does currently have parent supports in place, such as parent support groups, among the parents who responded to this survey and who answered this question, over one-quarter of all comments were related to a desire for more parent supports and information (such as support groups), information on how to work with their child at home, tools and strategies for helping their child with their disability or with their school work, methods of communication, parenting workshops, information

on specific disabilities, behavior management, and generally more and better ways that they can help their child succeed. A desire for this type of support and information from the district was most common among parents of students identified as having Multiple Disabilities (36%), and was also mentioned by between 10 percent and 20 percent of parents with students identified as Visual Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, Speech or Language Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Mental Retardation and Autism. Fewer than 10 percent of responding parents of students identified as Deafness or Hearing Impaired, Emotional Disturbance, Orthopedic Impairment and Other Health Impairment mentioned something in this category. Interestingly, parents' desire for more supports and information seems to taper off as their children get older, as 10 and 13 percent of parents of early education and elementary students commented on parent support and information, while 9 percent of parents of middle school students and 7 percent of parents of high school students commented in this area.

While parent supports and information was the most common request by responding parents, other common themes that emerged included wanting to know more about transition issues (e.g., how accommodations will be met in upper grades, how middle school programs differ from elementary school programs, how inclusion works in upper schools, how to plan for transitions), about all of the other special education programs or services in the district that might be available to their child, about additional services outside of the school district that might be available to help their child currently, as well as services available once their child exits the school system.

Summary of Survey Data

Overall, parents are satisfied with district services and with schools' efforts to partner with parents. Despite this high level of satisfaction, when asked whether there was room for improvement, parents offered various suggestions. Staff quality is recognized as both one of the district's greatest strengths, and also as one of the areas needing improvement, suggesting that much variability exists across the district. Findings from the parent survey support findings throughout this report that training is an area of need for the district, and that improved communication with parents is desired. Ranking highly in both the district weakness and the areas to learn more about, providing additional supports and information to parents has the potential to positively impact the district's relationships with parents, the students' experiences at school, as well as the families' experiences at home.

Appendix B – Parent Survey Frequency Tables



Appendix B

Frequency Distributions for Each Item on the QOSS and SEPPS Rating Scales

The following tables present the percentage of parent respondents who indicated each response option for each item on the Quality of Services Scale and the Schools' Efforts to Partner with Parents Scale. While the main body of this report analyzes mean scores on these two scales, frequency distributions are useful for examining the amount of variability present in the data. For example, while the average satisfaction score across all parents was between "Agree" and "Strongly Agree", frequency tables display the percentage of parents who were particularly dissatisfied or particularly satisfied with various aspects of the district's services. Responses marked "Not Applicable" to any survey question were not factored in to the calculation of percentages across the response scale (i.e., response categories 1 through 6 should always total 100%).

Quality of Services Scale (QOSS)

	1 = Very Strongly Disagree	2 = Strongly Disagree	3 = Disagree	4 = Agree	5 = Strongly Agree	6 = Very Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
My child's IEP covers all appropriate aspects of my child's development.	2.7%	3.8%	12.6%	39.6%	24.8%	16.4%	0.9%
My child's IEP tells how progress towards goals will be measured.	3.5%	2.6%	8.6%	42.7%	23.9%	18.8%	0.7%
My child is taught in general classes, with supports, to the maximum extent appropriate.	4.2%	4.2%	11.9%	31.4%	22.4%	25.9%	5.8%
My child's participation on district and statewide assessments is appropriate.	3.9%	3.7%	9.5%	42.1%	21.6%	19.2%	12.1%
Services are provided to help students become self-sufficient after high school.	7.1%	3.7%	16.4%	39.5%	16.9%	16.4%	35.1%
Teachers are knowledgeable and professional.	3.6%	1.5%	5.6%	37.8%	22.7%	28.7%	--

	1 = Very Strongly Disagree	2 = Strongly Disagree	3 = Disagree	4 = Agree	5 = Strongly Agree	6 = Very Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
Teachers understand my child's needs.	4.9%	4.5%	12.7%	32.8%	21.4%	23.6%	--
Teachers understand their role in implementing my child's IEP.	5.5%	3.5%	11.7%	35.6%	20.8%	22.9%	0.7%
Teachers show a willingness to learn more about my child's needs.	5.3%	4.5%	14.0%	31.6%	18.4%	26.2%	0.4%
Teachers set appropriate goals for my child.	4.4%	2.4%	11.2%	38.4%	20.8%	22.8%	0.7%
Teachers expect my child to succeed.	4.0%	1.6%	5.9%	37.4%	22.0%	29.1%	0.2%
Special Education teachers make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my child's IEP.	3.5%	2.7%	4.9%	35.0%	23.1%	30.9%	6.1%
General Education teachers make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my child's IEP.	3.9%	4.3%	15.3%	35.2%	20.4%	20.8%	7.6%
General Education and Special Education teachers work together to assure that my child's IEP is being implemented.	6.1%	4.9%	12.5%	36.5%	19.2%	20.8%	7.4%
Instruction provided to students is appropriate for their age.	4.2%	0.9%	5.8%	43.1%	21.9%	24.1%	0.9%
The principal sets a positive and welcoming tone in the school.	4.1%	2.1%	3.7%	38.3%	22.8%	29.0%	2.9%
Administrators at my child's school ensure that students with disabilities have the same opportunities to learn	3.9%	2.3%	7.1%	39.7%	20.9%	26.1%	3.2%

	1 = Very Strongly Disagree	2 = Strongly Disagree	3 = Disagree	4 = Agree	5 = Strongly Agree	6 = Very Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
and participate in school programs as students without disabilities.							
The school or district evaluates whether special education services are effective.	6.2%	4.0%	12.7%	40.7%	18.7%	17.9%	7.7%
The school is a friendly place.	2.7%	1.6%	4.0%	39.3%	21.1%	31.1%	0.4%
The school provides services to my child in a timely way.	5.9%	3.3%	11.6%	37.1%	18.9%	23.3%	0.5%
The school provides my child with all the services documented on my child's IEP.	5.3%	3.1%	9.7%	41.0%	19.4%	21.4%	0.9%
The school regularly evaluates whether my child's program continues to meet his/her needs.	5.5%	4.0%	12.6%	37.5%	17.9%	22.3%	1.3%
The school provides teachers and staff with training on the needs of children with disabilities and their families	7.7%	5.3%	16.5%	37.4%	15.2%	17.9%	9.5%
The school offers students without disabilities, and their families, opportunities to learn about students with disabilities.	10.2%	6.1%	26.4%	34.6%	11.5%	11.1%	14.2%
The school ensures that afterschool and extracurricular activities are accessible to students with disabilities	6.8%	4.7%	12.4%	45.6%	15.0%	15.7%	21.4

Schools' Efforts to Partner with Parents Scale (SEPPS)

	Very Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
Teachers and administrators seek out parent input.	6.0%	3.6%	18.4%	35.0%	14.9%	22.0%	0.5%
The school provides information on agencies that can assist my child in the transition from school upon graduation.	9.9%	7.6%	22.0%	34.7%	9.6%	16.2%	42.6%
At the IEP meeting, we discussed how my child would participate in statewide assessments.	3.3%	3.1%	16.0%	45.4%	15.4%	16.9%	16.9%
At the IEP meeting, we discussed accommodations and modifications that my child would need.	2.7%	1.7%	4.0%	47.2%	19.2%	25.1%	5.2%
I feel I can disagree with my child's special education program or services without negative consequences for me or my child.	3.9%	4.3%	11.5%	42.0%	15.2%	23.1%	2.2%
The school explains what options parents have if they disagree with a decision of the school.	5.7%	2.9%	20.1%	41.6%	12.5%	17.2%	7.6%
I was given information about organizations that offer support for parents of students with disabilities.	8.2%	3.5%	23.5%	35.4%	12.6%	16.7%	7.2%
I have been asked for my opinion about how well special education services are meeting my child's needs.	8.6%	5.6%	20.1%	37.9%	11.2%	16.6%	3.4%
My child's evaluation report is written in terms I understand.	3.3%	2.2%	11.2%	47.3%	16.5%	19.6%	1.1%
Written information I receive is written in an understandable way.	2.9%	2.2%	8.5%	49.9%	16.7%	19.8%	.09%

	Very Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
Teachers are available to speak with me.	2.5%	1.4%	5.6%	44.6%	16.7%	29.2%	0.5%
Teachers treat me as a team member.	4.4%	2.6%	8.8%	38.8%	16.5%	29.1%	0.7%
Teachers and administrators seek out parent input.	5.7%	3.5%	17.3%	39.1%	14.8%	19.6%	0.4%
Teachers and administrators show sensitivity to the needs of students with disabilities and their families.	4.4%	3.7%	10.8%	39.0%	19.1%	23.0%	1.4%
Teachers and administrators encourage me to participate in the decision-making process.	4.2%	2.6%	10.1%	42%	17.6%	23.6%	0.5%
Teachers and administrators respect my cultural heritage.	2.6%	1.0%	1.3%	53.4%	13.8%	27.9%	29.7%
Teachers and administrators ensure that I have fully understood the Procedural Safeguards [the rules in federal law that protect the rights of parents].	4.1%	2.0%	8.7%	45.7%	14.6%	25.0%	1.4%
The school has a person on staff who is available to answer parents' questions.	4.2%	1.6%	7.9%	51.4%	13.9%	21.0%	1.1%
The school communicates regularly with me regarding my child's progress on IEP goals.	7.0%	4.9%	17.8%	41.0%	13.2%	16.1%	1.3%
The school gives me options with regard to services that address my child's needs.	6.3%	5.4%	22.3%	38.4%	12.9%	14.8%	5.2%
The school offers parents training about special education issues.	6.6%	5.4%	22.0%	42.4%	9.8%	13.8%	8.5%

	Very Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
The school offers parents a variety of ways to communicate with teachers.	3.3%	2.2%	7.7%	48.1%	16.3%	22.5%	0.7%
The school gives parents the help they may need to play an active role in their child's education.	4.6%	3.5%	16.5%	42.4%	12.5%	20.4%	2.2%
The school provides information on agencies that can assist my child in the transition from school.	9.4%	5.3%	25.8%	35.6%	10.0%	13.9%	34.0%
The school explains what options parents have if they disagree with a decision of the school.	5.7%	4.9%	22.3%	41.0%	11.6%	14.4%	7.9%

Appendix C – Economically Disadvantaged Students by Campus

Appendix C

Difference in Percent of Economically Disadvantaged Students in Special Education versus in General Education, by Campus, 2009

Campus	Percent Difference ¹
Elementary	
Winkley	27.1
River Ridge	23.2
Plain	19.9
Whitestone	16.6
Bagdad	14.7
Parkside	14.2
Knowles	13.5
Block House	12.8
Cox	12.6
Faubion	9.6
Reagan	9.3
Westside	9.1
Pleasant Hill	9.0
Deer Creek	8.5
Steiner Ranch	5.5
Giddens	4.4
Cypress	4.1
Grandview Hills	3.4
Mason	0.7
Bush	0.6
Rutledge	0.1
Naumann	-1.5
River Place	-3.3
Middle School	
Cedar Park	18.3
Running Brushy	17.7
Henry	14.0
Leander	12.9
Wiley	12.4
Canyon Ridge	5.6
High School²	
Leander	23.6
New Hope	18.8

Campus	Percent Difference ¹
Rouse	18.2
Vista Ridge	16.8
Vandegrift	11.4
Cedar Park	9.5

Source: Leander ISD fall 2009

¹Calculated by subtracting percent of general education students from percent of special education students (a positive number indicates that there are more economically disadvantaged students in the special education population than in the general population; a negative score indicates that there are more economically disadvantaged students in the general population than in the special education population)

²Very few students are served at Williamson Co and it is not included in the table.

Appendix D – Special Education Program Descriptions

Appendix D – Special Education Program Descriptions by Level

PPCD

(Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities 3 – 5 Year Old Services)

ELE	Early Learning Environment	This setting is a self-contained language rich classroom that stresses skills in the areas of communication, pre-academics, gross and fine motor, self-help, and behavioral/social for students ages 3 – 5 years old. The ARD committee determines the amount of time the child needs in order to meet his/her individual goals and objectives. Family involvement is an integral part of this program. District personnel are available to collaborate with the family, outside therapists, area childcare facilities, etc. to promote continuity for the child. In all of the ELE classes there is also a reverse mainstreaming component where typically developing role models are included into the class.
PSLP	Preschool Speech and Language Program	This service is designed to meet the needs of children ages 3-5 years old that qualify as Speech Impaired. This class meets two days a week for 4 hours at a time. Activities provide an intensive intervention in the areas of phonological processing as well as expressive and receptive language.
LEIP	Language Enrichment Intervention Program	This is a service for children with moderate language delays but little if any concerns exists in other areas. Class meets everyday for 2 hours and pairs with PreK for typically developing peers enrichment and modeling. This class is taught by a Speech and Language Pathologist and has a low student to adult ratio. The ARD committee determines special education program site selection.
Itinerant “Visiting Teacher” Model		The purpose of this service is to serve special education 3 and 4 year olds in their least restrictive environment (at home or in an area childcare center). The children eligible for this program must be eligible for special education under the Federal IDEA requirements. This model provides consultation or a minimal amount of direct support in the areas of behavioral/social and fine/gross motor, cognitive skills should be commensurate with age level, and/or language delays. An ARD committee determines the appropriateness of this service and the amount of time necessary to meet the child’s individual education plan.

Elementary School Services

BASE	Behavior Academic and Social Education	This service is a special education setting designed for students who have significant behavior problems. Students are placed in BASE only by an ARD committee decision involving the LSSP and after less restrictive behavioral interventions have not met the student's needs. Direct instruction in all core subjects maybe provided in the BASE classroom setting. Students transition to a general education classroom setting as they make progress toward their IEP goals. The classroom is structured so students can experience behavioral and academic success before being mainstreamed into a less restrictive environment.
CMC/LL	Content Mastery Center/ Learning Lab	CMC/Learning Labs are available for students who need extra assistance/support with independent work, tests, preteaching or reteaching of a concept.
ESY	Extended School Year	ESY is the individualized instructional program that continues beyond the regular school. This service is for student enrolled in Leander ISD special education program, and who exhibit severe or substantial regression that cannot be recouped within a reasonable time period (not to exceed 8 weeks) in one or more of the critical skills addressed in the current IEP objectives. The decision to provide ESY is determined by the ARD committee.
ICAP	Individual Community Academic Program (Life Skills for Students with Developmental Delays)	ICAP is a service which focuses on skills in the areas of academic and developmentally appropriate functional skills. This service stresses functional academic skills through hands on learning and the use of researched based strategies to meet the needs of individual students. This structured setting has a lower student to staff ratio than found in the resource setting.
INC	Inclusion/In-Class Support	Inclusion services are available to meet the individual needs of students in general education settings. Students receive consultative, direct and indirect support from special education staff within the general education classroom.

RES	Resource	Resource services are available for eligible students who need special education instruction in a setting other than regular education for less than 50% of the student's day.
SCSS	Social Communication Supports and Services	This service supports students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and/or other social communication disorders. This service is most appropriate for students who are functioning on or near grade level academically and require behavior and social skills support.
SLE	Structure Learning Environment	This service is designed for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder who have intensive communication needs. This classroom provides a highly structured environment with a low staff-to-student ratio where a variety of research-based methodologies are used to meet the needs of students. Students are included in less restrictive environments per individual plans.
TASC	Training for Academic Success in the Classroom	This service is designed to support students with significant behavioral problems in the general education classroom setting. Students are placed in TASC only by an ARD committee decision involving the LSSP and after less restrictive behavioral interventions have not met the student's needs. Students' behaviors in the general education settings are monitored daily in conjunction with social skills instruction.

Middle School Services

BASE	Behavior Academic and Social Education	The BASE setting is designed for students who have significant behavior problems in a special education setting. Students are placed in BASE only by an ARD committee decision involving the LSSP and after less restrictive behavioral interventions have not met the student's needs. Direct instruction in all core subjects maybe provided in the BASE classroom setting. Students transition to a general education classroom setting as they make progress toward their IEP goals. The classroom is structured so students can experience behavioral and academic success before being mainstreamed into a less restrictive environment.
CMC/LL	Content Mastery Center/ Learning Lab	CMC/Learning Labs are available for students who need extra assistance/support with independent work, tests, preteaching or reteaching of a concept.
ESY	Extended School Year	ESY is the individualized instructional program that continues beyond the regular school. This service is for students who are enrolled in Leander ISD special education program, and who exhibit severe or substantial regression that cannot be recouped within a reasonable time period (not to exceed 8 weeks) in one or more of the critical skills addressed in the current IEP objectives. The decision to provide ESY is determined by the ARD committee.
ICAP	Individual Community Academic Program (Life Skills for Students with Developmental Delays)	ICAP is a service which focuses on skills in the areas of academic and developmentally appropriate functional skills. This service stresses functional academic skills through hands on learning and the use of researched based strategies to meet the needs of individual students. This structured setting has a lower student to staff ratio than found in the resource setting. Some students may begin exploring the work environment through task assignments on the campus.
INC	Inclusion/In-Class Support	Inclusion services are available to meet the individual needs of students in general education settings. Students receive consultative, direct and indirect support from special education staff within the general education classroom

RES	Resource	Resource services are available for eligible students who need special education instruction in a setting other than regular education for less than 50% of the student's day.
SCSS	Social Communication Supports and Services	This is a service that supports students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and/or other social communication disorders. This service is most appropriate for students who are functioning on or near grade level academically and require behavior and social skills support.

High School Services

BEST	Behavioral Education & Skills Training	The BEST setting is designed for students who have significant behavior problems in a special education setting. Students are placed in BEST only by an ARD committee decision involving the LSSP and after less restrictive behavioral interventions have not met the student's needs. Direct instruction in all core subjects may be provided in the BEST classroom setting. Students transition to a general education classroom setting as they make progress toward their IEP goals. The classroom is structured so students can experience behavioral and academic success before being mainstreamed into a less restrictive environment.
CMC/LL	Content Mastery Center/ Learning Lab	CMC/Learning Labs are available for students who need extra assistance/support with independent work, tests, preteaching or reteaching of a concept.
EMPOWER	Employment Motivates Positive Outcomes With Empowering Results (18-22 At Risk)	EMPOWER provides an age and situation-appropriate setting for students who need support transitioning into adulthood while still fulfilling the requirements for a high school diploma through the Option II graduation plan. This transition service is designed for students in special education who are ages 18-22 with significant transition needs.
ESY	Extended School Year	ESY is the individualized instructional program that continues beyond the regular school. This service is for students who are enrolled in Leander ISD special education program, and who exhibit severe or substantial regression that cannot be recouped within a reasonable time period (not to exceed 8 weeks) in one or more of the critical skills addressed in the current IEP objectives. The decision to provide ESY is determined by the ARD committee.

ICAP	Individual Community Academic Program (Life Skills for Students with Developmental Delays)	ICAP is a service which focuses on skills in the areas of academic and developmentally appropriate functional skills. This service stresses functional academic skills through hands on learning and the use of researched based strategies to meet the needs of individual students. This structured setting has a lower student to staff ratio than found in the resource setting. Some students may begin exploring the work environment through task assignments on the campus.
INC	Inclusion/In-Class Support	Inclusion services are available to meet the individual needs of students in general education settings. Students receive consultative, direct and indirect support from special education staff within the general education classroom.
RES	Resource	Resource services are available for eligible students who need special education instruction in a setting other than regular education for less than 50% of the student's day.

SCSS	Social Communication Supports and Services	This is a service that supports students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and/or other social communication disorders. This service is most appropriate for students who are functioning on or near grade level academically and require behavior and social skills support.
SELF	Skills for Employment and Lifelong Fulfillment (18+ Transition Service)	This service is for students who are 18 to 22 years of age. The students have completed all of the necessary high school credits, yet the ARD committee determines that the student has significant transition needs based on Functional Performance and Transition Assessments and continues to have a need for Specially Designed Instruction. This service has a community based curriculum and is accessed through the ARD process.
SUCCESS	Students Understanding Choices and Consequences in Educational and Social Setting	A service for students with severe behavior problems that require a self contained, highly structured setting. Direct instruction in all core subjects may be provided in the SUCCESS classroom setting; students may transition to general education classroom settings as they make progress on their IEP goals. The classroom is structured so students can experience behavioral and academic success before being mainstreamed into a less restrictive environment.
Supported Employment	VAC (see below) w/ Job Coach Support	Eligible students participate in paid off campus jobs with support from district staff. Students usually are enrolled in a VAC lab class. Students may have a paid job from 1 to 20 hours per week in supported employment. School support staff targets "fading" from the job site as a primary goal. Usually, the students are at job sites within the school day. This course is a block of time for three hours every other day.
STEP (Project Achieve – LHS; Zone – CPHS; SPACE – VRHS)	Systematic Training for Educational Progress	This service is designed to support students with significant behavioral problems in the general education classroom. Students are placed in the behavioral program only by an ARD committee decision involving the LSSP and after less restrictive behavioral interventions have failed. Students' behaviors in the general education settings are monitored daily in conjunction with social skills instruction.

VAC	Vocational Adjustment Class	The VAC service is designed to instruct students in job related skills. Students learn functional skills to be successful in a job situation and maintain paid employment in a part time or full time job. Students typically attend school for $\frac{3}{4}$ of the day and work.
WBL	Work-Based Learning	Eligible students participate in non-paid job training opportunities in the district or community, as appropriate, for career exploration and vocational skill building. A school district employee is on-site to supervise students at all times. Students also participate in a WBL Lab class that includes instruction in vocational skills, social skill and adult living and functional academics.

Appendix E – Did Not Qualify Rates by Campus

Appendix E

Percent of Students Referred to Special Education who Did Not Qualify (DNQ)

Campus	Number of Referrals	Number Did Not Qualify	Percent Did Not Qualify
Elementary			
Naumann	No Data	No Data	No Data
Steiner Ranch	11	7	63.6%
River Place	10	6	60.0%
Laura W. Bush	12	5	41.7%
Grandview Hills	14	5	35.7%
Cypress	20	7	35.0%
Deer Creek	15	5	33.3%
Parkside	12	4	33.3%
Pleasant Hill	20	6	30.0%
Plain	15	4	26.7%
Cox	23	6	26.1%
Whitestone	14	3	21.4%
Faubion	10	2	20.0%
Giddens	15	3	20.0%
Westside	16	3	18.80%
Block House	17	3	17.6%
Rutledge	17	2	11.8%
Winkley	27	3	11.1%
Knowles	23	2	8.7%
Bagdad	17	1	5.9%
Mason	16	0	0.0%
Middle Schools			
Cedar Park MS	6	4	66.7%

Campus	Number of Referrals	Number Did Not Qualify	Percent Did Not Qualify
Leander MS	3	1	33.3%
Wiley MS	10	1	10.0%
Canyon Ridge MS	3	0	0.0%
Henry MS	12	0	0.0%
Running Brushy MS	18	0	0.0%
High Schools			
New Hope HS	No Data	No Data	No Data
Rouse HS	11	2	18.2%
Cedar Park HS	8	1	12.5%
Leander HS	8	1	12.5%
Vista Ridge HS	9	1	11.1%
Leander ISD	412	88	22.8