

Oakland Special Education Community Advisory Committee Letter
04/04/11

To: Oakland Schools Superintendent Tony Smith & the Board of Education
From: The Oakland Community Advisory Committee for Special Education

Re: Need for hiring, training & support to ensure the most highly qualified teachers for special education

The Community Advisory Council (CAC) has a state mandated advisory responsibility. The purpose of this letter is to alert and advise the Oakland Unified School District of the need to improve hiring, training, support & retention of special education teachers serving OUSD students with special needs.

The Issue: The CAC frequently hears concerns by parents, guardians and educators about the District's current practice of placing inexperienced interns into special education classrooms and settings with our most at-risk students. The shortage of Special Education teachers is an ongoing concern to the CAC. Yet OUSD has failed/refused to take advantage of credentialed educators interested in special education careers, in fact barring teachers with general education credentials from access to the District's Special Education credentialing program, Oakland Teacher Practitioner Program (OTPT). OUSD also fails to provide adequate training and mentoring to new, inexperienced hires. We are aware that under current interpretation, Intern Credentials are considered "Highly Qualified", but we question why OUSD not only accepts, but endorses the minimal allowed standard. We find a bachelor's degree and six-week summer training program inadequate to meet the demands of this population. New teachers attend our meetings frustrated by lack of support and training. Turnover is high and Special Education teachers appear to leave at a higher rate than other teachers.

Why this is important: Special Education students are among the lowest achieving and most at-risk students in the District. OUSD's current practices contribute to the problem by placing the students with the greatest need with teachers with the least training.

CAC Advisory Notice to OUSD:

- Hiring priority must be given to fully credentialed teachers. **Recommendation:** *Teachers with Special Education Credentials should be given priority in the hiring process. Teachers with General Education Credentials should have priority for acceptance into OTPT, which currently has hiring priority for all placements. Multiple sources for hiring must be used.*
- Special Education teachers in OUSD leave at an alarming rate. **Recommendation:** *Teacher retention must be a top priority and strategies such as continuing education, mentoring, manageable caseloads, etc. should be implemented as retention supports.*
- Currently OUSD appears to have a much higher percentage of Special Education Teachers working under an Intern Credential than neighboring school districts. **Recommendation:** *OUSD must set aggressive goals to decrease the percentage of Special Education Teachers who are working under an Intern credential by at least 20% each year for the following five years with data supplied to show progress.*
- The CAC requested data from the District in January/February 2011 including the number of credentialed Special Education teachers, number working under an Intern Credential, and retention rates for new hires. This information has not been provided despite numerous requests. **Recommendation:** *This data must be made public immediately.*
- **Recommendation:** *Meaningful, measurable strategies for hiring, supporting and retaining excellent Special Education staff must be incorporated into the District's new 5-Year plan.*