



OAKLAND UNIFIED  
SCHOOL DISTRICT

*Community Schools, Thriving Students*

**Together, We Are Building**

a full-service community school district that serves the whole child,  
eliminates inequity and provides each child with an excellent teacher, every day.

## **Special Education Strategic Planning**

### **Community Engagement**

**Focus Group Discussions for Parents, Teachers, &  
Principals**

**9th-12th Grade**

**Tuesday, March 12, 2013**

**5 pm – 6:30 pm**

**McClymonds High School**

**2607 Myrtle St**

**&**

**PreK-12th Grade**

**Saturday, March 23, 2013**

**10:30am – 12pm**

**Elmhurst Community Prep**

**1800 98th Ave**

**Light Refreshments, Childcare, & Translation Provided with RSVP to  
[phyllis.copes@ousd.k12.ca.us](mailto:phyllis.copes@ousd.k12.ca.us) 510-273-1580**



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## Special Education Strategic Planning Community Engagement Calendar

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Audience</b>
Dec 15th	ICS/TCN 2825 International Blvd	10:30am- 12pm & 12:10- 1:40pm	PreK-12th	Spanish Speaking Parents
Jan 10th	Lafayette Elementary 1700 Market Street	5-630pm	PreK-5th	Parents, Teachers, Principals
Jan 15th	Burbank Elementary 3550 64 <sup>th</sup> Ave	5-630pm	PreK-5th	Parents, Teachers, Principals
Feb 12th	United for Success 2101 35 <sup>th</sup> Ave	5-630pm	6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	Parents, Teachers, Principals
Feb 14th	Edna Brewer 3748 13 <sup>th</sup> Ave	5-630pm	6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	Parents, Teachers, Principals
Feb 23rd	La Escuelita 1050 2 <sup>nd</sup> Ave	10:30am- 12pm	PreK-12th	All Parents
March 12th	McClymonds High 2607 Myrtle St	5-630pm	9 <sup>th</sup> -12th	Parents, Teachers, Principals
March 23rd	Elmhurst Community Prep 1800 98 <sup>th</sup> Ave	10:30am- 12pm	PreK-12th	All Parents



## School district hosts conversations on improving special education

By [Lauren Kawana \(http://oaklandnorth.net/author/lauren-kawana/\)](http://oaklandnorth.net/author/lauren-kawana/)

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In the quiet of La Escuelita Elementary's cafeteria on Saturday morning, one by one, parents took turns telling stories of their frustrations with special education in Oakland public schools. Sitting at lunch tables arranged in a square, more than 20 parents listened to each other over pastries and coffee, nodding solemnly in agreement as words like "disappointing" and "unacceptable" were uttered in reference to the school district's treatment of their special needs children.

Many spoke through a Spanish translator, with one mother remarking that her wheelchair-bound daughter and another wheelchair-bound classmate were not taken along on a recent field trip. Another said the school district refused to provide services for her son even when outside doctors diagnosed him with Asperger's syndrome; she added that she is considering legal action.

Saturday's meeting was the sixth of eight community meetings Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has held since December. Open to parents, teachers and principals, the meetings are meant to advise the district about unresolved issues with its special education program, or Programs for Exceptional Children (PEC).

PEC director Karen Mates, who was hired last summer, is drafting a new strategic plan for the department and will present it to the Oakland school board by the end of this school year. In response to last year's protests over budget cuts, staffing changes and an overall lack of communication, the board mandated that administrators meet with members of the community to inform the new plan.

Raquel Jimenez of OUSD's Family and Community Engagement department, who has facilitated all community engagement meetings to date, listened calmly to parents' concerns Saturday. Her staff members took notes on all remarks and after nearly two hours of discussion elapsed, Jimenez wrapped up by saying, "I don't believe that it's right or just what is happening to your children."

"Something has to be done, something will be done," Jimenez said. "Your voice matters and that's why we're here today."

Jimenez said notes from all of the meetings are being compiled and will be presented to a 12-person task force of parents, teachers and community members, which will then make preliminary recommendations to Mates.

Jimenez said themes that have recurred during meetings include lack of communication between teachers, support staff and parents; disparities between special education programs across the district; denial of services and lack of follow-through on "Individualized Education Plans," which

are mandated by law for every special needs student and outline what services their school is required to provide to meet the student's educational goals.

"I was aware of some of these issues but I was not aware of the severity," Jimenez said. "Many parents have actually gone through the process of putting in complaints and the issue is still not resolved. And then it escalates into a lawsuit. Various parents here said, 'Our only option is to seek legal counsel,' so that's what I mean by the severity."

Not every attendee was unhappy with the PEC. Erika Santiago has a 4-year-old son with autism at Burkhalter Elementary and said Saturday was her first meeting. "I want to learn and listen to the experiences of the other parents," she said. "For me, my son now has a good education. I like the teacher and the people helping him."

Ray Wu, whose 10-year-old daughter is autistic, said he came to the meeting to "find out information and see what's going on." His daughter, who attends Thornhill Elementary, has had a "generally good" experience throughout her seven years in the PEC, he said. "Teachers are cooperative and my daughter has had at least three or four teachers so far," he said. "There's always a minor issue, but eventually it has to work out."

One recommendation Wu did offer was a need for case managers to ensure oversight when students change schools. "Next year [my daughter] will be going to a different school. No one has any experience with my daughter and what happened to her. It's like starting from scratch," he said. "If there's a case manager, they have to follow up and oversee the teachers and schools and make sure they're giving what the students need."

Two more community meetings are scheduled for March, after which Mates will be expected to create a draft version of the strategic plan. A final meeting in April will be open to all district parents, principals and teachers, where Mates will present the draft and receive feedback. A date and time are yet to be set.

Jimenez said that the process is taking longer than expected and though Mates had hoped to present a final plan to the board by April or May, Mates is aiming instead to present by the end of the school year in mid-June.

"My hope is that every parent who has taken the time out of their evening or their weekend to share their experience and who have requested a follow-up need—that we actually respond to their issues," Jimenez said. "It's in that follow-through that we demonstrate that we're in relationships with parents and we care about their concerns. It doesn't mean anything to say we're sorry and not actually follow through."

The final two special education community engagement meetings will be held as follows:

Tuesday, March 12 at McClymonds High, 5:00 p.m.- 6:30 p.m. for 9-12 grade parents, teachers and principals

Saturday, March 23 at Elmhurst Community Prep, 10:30 a.m.-12 p.m. for parents of all grade levels, PreK -12

For more information on the district's Programs for Exceptional Children, click [here](#)