



PRESS RELEASE: GUEST COMMENTARY

March 9, 2020

A Special Education Update from Dr. Slavensky

When I first arrived to serve our schools in October 2016, I made this commitment: “Students first.” This continues to be my commitment. Whenever I’m faced with a challenging situation or a difficult decision, I ask myself and my team, “What will be best for our students?” Our Board of Trustees strives to do the same, and recently they did just that.

On February 12, 2020, in a regularly scheduled Board of Trustees meeting, a historic decision was made. 23 years after the Tricounty Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) disbanded and Amador County became its own SELPA, the Board unanimously took action to direct and authorize the District to plan and support the negotiations process with labor leaders for the transfer of the following from Amador County Office of Education to Amador County Unified School District: (1) the SELPA and related Administrative Unit, the Transportation Department, and all classified and administrative staff which serve students with mild to moderate learning disabilities, effective July 1, 2020; and (2) all mild to moderate credentialed teachers, effective October 31, 2020. These Board actions include oversight and support by a representative steering committee. The Special Education Community Advisory Committee will be actively involved as well.

So what does this really mean for our students? Not a lot will change at the school and classroom levels. Students will continue to receive quality instructional support and services from our excellent teachers and staff, in both Special Education and General Education environments. We will work together as one system to strengthen our multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) for all students who need academic, social-emotional and/or behavioral interventions. This includes students who have an individualized education program (IEP) with Special Education supports and those who do not. At the school level, teams will continue to collaboratively explore and implement best practices to support the least restrictive environment possible for all students. This may mean a little less pull-out of the classroom and a little more push-in support to make sure students are not missing their standards-aligned, grade level, core instruction.

Some important changes will happen in our administrative offices. There will be less duplication of effort and better use of staff time in the Business Office. Paychecks for employees who transfer from ACOE to ACUSD will receive their paycheck from ACUSD. There will be one Transportation Department allowing all of our wonderful bus drivers to have the same job opportunities and receive the same support. Streamlining bus routes will help capture more cost savings. All students who currently ride the bus will continue to have transportation provided for them.

The almost \$6 million contribution that ACUSD annually pays to ACOE will decrease significantly because ACUSD will provide its own Special Education services for the majority of our students with disabilities. This captures funds for both ACOE and ACUSD. The Board’s decision will allow us to keep current staffing levels such as kindergarten aides, assistant principals at the junior high

schools, and all of our school counselors. We will be able to continue allocating significant funds to each school so principals, teachers and parent leaders can make site-based decisions to better support their students and families.

Students must always come first when making difficult decisions. In order to make this happen, we must also make sure our teachers and staff are a top priority. They then will be better able to take care of our students, providing the best possible educational experience in every school and every classroom. The Board's decision helps us to be more fiscally efficient, also freeing up much-needed dollars to better compensate our wonderful employees and better provide them the resources and tools they need. We are confident this is the right decision to support all students now and for many years to come.

So how does all of this help our students and keep them first? There are two key ways. It more effectively allows each school to work as one system supporting all students at the school, and it frees up dollars to better support all of our students.

For more information about MTSS, check out Mr. Sean Snider's report from the January 22, 2020 Board of Trustees meeting. To access that report, the February 12, 2020 Special Education Study Team Board Presentation, and ten related attachments, you may go to <https://amadorcoe.org/minutes-agendas/>.

Thank you for your continued support of our schools and students. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at (209) 257-5353 or aslavensky@acusd.org.

Sincerely,

Dr. Amy L. Slavensky
ACUSD Superintendent of Schools