

BOARD OF EDUCATION • SEPTEMBER 15, 2026

Insights and Next Steps from the WestEd Special Education System Review

There is no separate vision for special education. There is one vision for the entire learning system.

Corrie Buckmaster, Executive Director, School Support
Dr. Travis Collier, Executive Director, School Support

Purpose of tonight's presentation

01

Share what we learned

Discuss the outcomes of the WestEd study and what they mean for our students, staff, and families.

02

Describe our response

Explain how the District intends to answer WestEd's recommendations — as one system, not one department.

03

Preview October 6

Introduce the concepts under consideration that staff will bring back for additional Board discussion at our next meeting.

04

Receive your input

Hear what resonates with you and what you want to understand more deeply.

A CONTINUING CONVERSATION

Tonight continues a series of work and presentations that began in the 2025–26 school year.

April 7, 2026 — state and local special education trends, the rationale for the study, and preliminary findings. April 21, 2026 — a comprehensive review of our special education programming. July 2026 — the full WestEd report was posted to the District website.

With appreciation

We asked for this review of our own system. Participation was voluntary, and the findings are public.

The Board of Education

WestEd

Students and families

Our staff

Community partners

Every participant

WHY WE DID THIS

Our engagement in this study is rooted in our Core Values and our commitment to improving outcomes for every student, staff member, and family.

This work is grounded in our Learning Vision and Core Values

EGUSD LEARNING VISION
Every student learning in every classroom, in every subject, every day — to prepare college-, career- and life-ready graduates.



Fiscal stewardship and operational excellence	Fiscal stability, safe and well-maintained facilities, and a high-quality workforce.
High-quality curriculum, instruction and assessment	To promote college, career and life readiness and close achievement and opportunity gaps.
Targeted supports and interventions	Services that leverage students’ assets, affirm their identities, and address their needs — with particular emphasis on our targeted student groups.
Wellness	An equitable, culturally responsive, physically and emotionally healthy and safe environment.
Family and community engagement	Programs and services designed to inform and engage family and community partners.

Three questions anchored the work

01

Programs and services

Are the programs and services of the District appropriately designed to maximize outcomes for students receiving special education services, including dually identified students who are multilingual learners?

02

Processes and structures

Are the District's processes and organizational structures designed for effectiveness, efficiency and fiscal sustainability in improving results for students receiving special education and related services?

03

Staffing and fiscal management

Are the District's staffing and fiscal management structures designed for effectiveness, efficiency and fiscal sustainability in improving results for students receiving special education services?

WHAT WESTED FOUND WHEN IT ANSWERED THEM

The answers were not confined to special education. They described the whole system.

How the study was conducted

PARTICIPATION

37

individual interviews across a cross-section of staff

160

focus group participants across 28 groups

1,302

survey respondents — school staff, parents, and administrators

25

participants from various district and site roles

EVIDENCE REVIEWED

94

classroom observations across nine sites selected for diversity of programs, ages, and regions

38

IEP reviews — a representative sample across disabilities, grade levels, and program types

6 years

of enrollment, demographic, attendance, achievement, graduation, dropout, and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) data

5

peer districts plus the state average used for comparison

All five essential elements were rated Emerging

Essential element	Rating	Key improvement needed
System Integration	Emerging	Aligned Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), teaming, and district support
Policies and Procedures	Emerging	Consistent guidance, data use, and role clarity
Learning Environments	Emerging	Increased inclusive access and instructional supports
Human Resources and Fiscal Responsibility	Emerging	Capacity, training, and resource-alignment development
Family and Community Partnerships	Emerging	Increase outreach and engagement, particularly with diverse groups

WestEd's four implementation ratings: Not Implementing • EMERGING • Implementing • Exemplary

WHAT EMERGING MEANS

Inconsistent evidence of implementation across the system.

Not an absence of effort, and not an absence of good practice. Emerging describes practice that exists in some ways and not in others. That is the finding, and it is a systems finding.

WestEd also found strengths to build on

PEOPLE

Staff repeatedly described as dedicated and caring, going above and beyond for students. A high level of expertise and passion for working with students with diverse needs.

SYSTEMS

Genuine investment in MTSS, and the development of systems that promote inclusive practice at both the school and district level.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration between general education and special education staff is increasing, improving student outcomes and fostering inclusivity.

FAMILIES

Most parents reported understanding the IEP process, felt their students were making progress, and trusted their school teams.

HOLDING BOTH TRUTHS

We recognize these strengths while acknowledging areas for improvement and the need to strengthen coherence systemwide.

Naming what is working is not softening the findings. It is the evidence that the capability exists and that the need is for a more coherent structure.

District actions are already producing measurable progress

Workforce

University partnerships building special education teacher pipelines; reduced vacancies and reduced reliance on substitutes and short-term staff permits.

Staffing

Increased EGUSD paraeducator hiring and reduced use of non-public agency paraeducators.

Student access

Progress toward more inclusive practice at sites, including co-teaching; more students attending neighborhood or regional schools.

Scheduling

Increased examples of site master schedule changes that prioritize access to MTSS and inclusion for students with disabilities.

Student opportunity

Expanded career technical education pathways and strong adult transition planning practices.

Compliance

Strong procedural and legal IEP compliance.

SECTION TWO

What our own student data tells us

WestEd confirmed from the outside what our data has been telling us from the inside.

We are above average — and we have the widest gap

Percentage of students meeting or exceeding standard, CAASPP English language arts, 2024–25

System	All students	Students with disabilities	Gap
Elk Grove Unified	54.4%	19.3%	35.1 pts
San Francisco USD	53.2%	20.4%	32.8 pts
Riverside USD	47.3%	15.4%	31.9 pts
California state average	48.8%	17.0%	31.8 pts
Long Beach USD	51.7%	21.1%	30.6 pts
Sacramento City USD	40.5%	17.0%	23.5 pts

BOTH OF THESE ARE TRUE

Our students with disabilities outperform the state average. And our internal gap is the widest of the state and every peer district.

A district average can be strong precisely because it averages all student performance data. In mathematics our gap is 27.5 points — second widest among these systems. This is not a reason for discouragement. It is a precise description of where our system has opportunity to improve.

Need is growing, and needs arrive in combination

+20.2%

increase in students with disabilities since 2019–20 while total enrollment declined 0.4% — one of the largest increases among peer districts

+175%

increase in students experiencing homelessness since 2018–19, from 439 to 1,208

43%

of our foster youth had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in 2024–25 — roughly three times the districtwide rate

23%

of students experiencing homelessness also had an IEP

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR OUR RESPONSE

The same students appear in more than one of our student groups — and today they are served by more than one area in our system.

A student may be a foster youth, an English learner, a student with a disability, and chronically absent at the same time. Each of those areas is currently the responsibility of a different department, with different teams planning in different meetings. WestEd's finding about coordination is not abstract. It describes what happens in the system.

Students cannot learn if they are not in school

Chronic absenteeism and English language arts achievement, by student group, 2025–26.

Student group	Chronically absent	CAASPP ELA proficient or advanced
District	21.8%	54%
Students experiencing homelessness	49.8%	26%
Foster youth	38.0%	21%
Pacific Islander	37.8%	46%
Black/African American	33.5%	36%
Students with disabilities	32.2%	19%
Long-term English learners	22.5%	17%

ATTENDANCE GATES EVERYTHING ELSE

Interventions can’t help a student who is not in the building.

Half of our students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent last year, and 26 percent met the English language arts standard. Districtwide those figures are 21.8 percent and 54 percent. Absenteeism is shared today across several roles — which means systemwide coherence is essential to maximize our service efforts.

SECTION THREE

Our response

WestEd describes a system problem, not a stand-alone special education problem.

Our response must address the whole system

01

WestEd describes a system problem

This is not a stand-alone special education problem. A systemic response is therefore required.

02

The answers lie as much outside special education as within it

Tier 1 instruction, attendance, language development, behavior, and family partnership all shape outcomes for students with disabilities.

03

No single department is responsible for this

It will require strong inter-departmental responsibility and collaboration across the whole system.

04

MTSS is the vehicle

Meeting this opportunity requires intentional focus on our multi-tiered system of supports as a whole.

CENTRAL MESSAGE

There is no separate vision for special education. There is one vision for the entire learning system.

We embrace WestEd's recommendations

Continue MTSS work

With a focus on consistency and alignment across the system — clarifying expectations for Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3.

Build an inclusive districtwide vision

Anchored explicitly in MTSS, articulating how all students access high-quality core instruction and appropriate support.

Develop protocols for programs and adult support

Clarifying roles, responsibilities, and expectations — developed with input from both staff and families.

Strengthen district-level support for sites

Enhance ongoing guidance, coaching, and access to resources for sites.

OUR COMMITMENT

Accept the findings. Act across the District. Make progress visible.

Improve access, instruction, service coordination, and communication. Better coordinate general education, special education, and student support within MTSS. Clarify expectations, engage those affected, and report evidence of improvement.

Elements 1–3 — what WestEd found, and what we will do

All five essential elements were rated **EMERGING**.

Element	What WestEd found	Why it matters	What we will do
1. System Integration	MTSS is a clear District priority, but tiered practice, guidance to sites, and progress monitoring need to be strengthened.	MTSS practice exists in some ways and not in others (Emerging rating), calling for the opportunity to better align our efforts.	Common tier definitions and intervention menus, student-support cycles, and named ownership at site, regional, and district levels.
2. Policies and Procedures	IEPs meet compliance requirements but could benefit from improved instructional coherence. Identification and exit guidance should be clarified, and language needs more clearly documented.	Practice can vary by interpretation, and English learners with IEPs require coordinated support.	Consistent identification and exit guidance, common progress data, integrated language and disability services, and clarified roles districtwide.
3. Learning Environments	Inclusive opportunities vary. Classrooms are well run but need more rigor and engagement. Inclusion needs additional support, and the paraeducator role is over relied upon and lacks clarity.	Clearly defined roles and evidence-based adult support improves inclusive practices and student outcomes.	Inclusive opportunity as a universal goal with supports and training attached, and a defined scope of service for every adult support role.



Elements 4–5 — what WestEd found, and what we will do

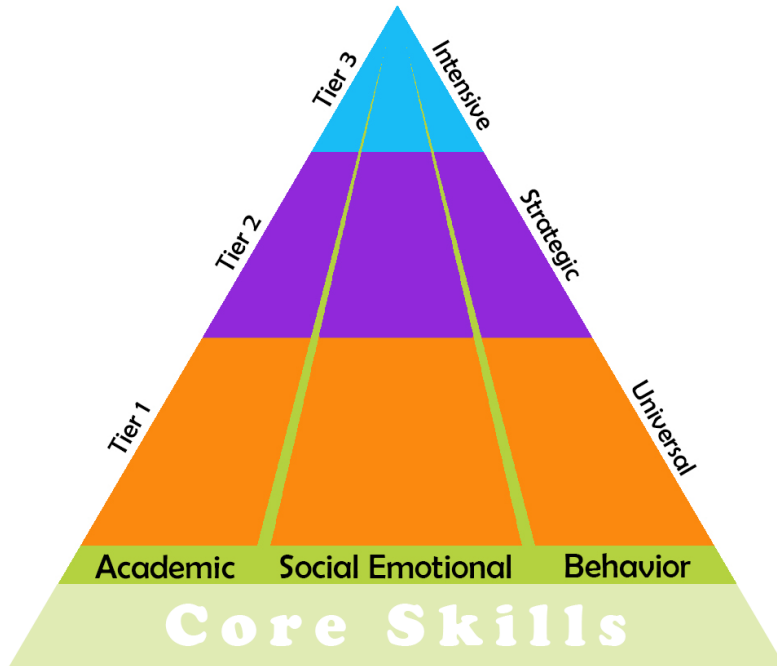
Element	What WestEd found	Why it matters	What we will do
4. Human Resources and Fiscal Responsibility	Some positions remain hard to fill and turnover is high in some roles. Staff need more professional learning. There is a need to strengthen the additional adult support and staffing process.	Highly qualified and trained staff improves student outcomes. Resources are maximized with strong operating systems that are aligned to current and prospective needs.	Data-based allocation before the school year starts, a defined decision system for adult support with independence plans, and increased cross-departmental monitoring of how funds align to need.
5. Family and Community Partnerships	Most families understand the IEP process, feel their students are progressing, and trust school teams, but want more consistency in service delivery, and deeper communication about progress and transitions.	Families are essential educational partners, and strong home-school connection has lasting positive impacts on student outcomes.	Expanded conversations designed with families, stronger multilingual communication, and improved preschool-to-kindergarten transitions.

THE NEXT PHASE ACROSS ALL FIVE ELEMENTS

Creating systemwide consistency and coherence so that every student receives timely, equitable support.

Monitoring: audit access to the least restrictive environment (LRE) across IEPs; measure need through screening and early warning systems; assess how sites respond in Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3; examine disparities in referral rates among student groups; and track student-reported connection and belonging.

MTSS tiers describe intensity of support — not places or labels



TIER 1 • Universal

High-quality first instruction and school-wide supports for every student.

TIER 2 • Strategic

Additional, focused support for an identified skill or need, reviewed on a planned schedule.

TIER 3 • Intensive

More individualized, intensive support guided by frequent evidence of the student's response.

Intensity can differ by domain. The same student may need Tier 1 in mathematics, Tier 2 in reading, and Tier 3 in behavior at the same time.

TWO CLARIFICATIONS THAT MATTER

Students with and without disabilities may need Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3 support. An IEP is not a tier — and neither MTSS nor special education is a place a student goes. All students are general education students first.

The IEP as an instructional tool

We are strong on technical IEP compliance. Our next step is strengthening instructional coherence.

FROM THE WESTED STUDY

“A lack of coherence weakens the golden thread that should connect all components of the IEP and support a cohesive, individualized plan for each student.”

What WestEd found

A significant percentage of IEPs reviewed would benefit from improved baseline data, including those for English Learners. Alignment between identified needs, goals, and services could be strengthened.

Why it matters

Without clearly defined baselines, IEPs risk becoming compliance-driven documents rather than instructional tools that guide decision making and support student growth.

What we are saying

An IEP is an instructional plan. It should tell any teacher who opens it what this student can do today, what they are working toward, and what instruction or support services will get them there.

What it means to use the IEP as an instructional tool

Four things staff should be able to do with the document in front of them:

01

See where the student is today

Present levels written with measurable baselines that describe what the student can currently do.

02

Follow the golden thread to the service

A clear connection from the identified need, to the goal, to the specially designed instruction, accommodations, modifications, and supports provided.

03

Adjust instruction from the evidence

Progress data used to change teaching during the year — not only to report at the annual meeting.

04

Plan language and disability together

For English learners with IEPs, language development and disability-related services designed as one plan versus two.

WHOSE WORK THIS IS

Improving this practice is instructional work shared by general education and special education staff together.

Staff need clarity, time, and support

Clear responsibilities

Clarify who delivers, who coordinates, who supervises, and who reviews each support — so that dedicated people are not left with different understandings of the process.

Time

Protected time to plan instruction, collaborate across roles, assess, and document. Collaboration that has no time allocated to it does not happen.

Sustained learning

Consistent onboarding, coaching, and role-specific training for all staff — general education, special education, classified, and support providers alike.

Practical tools

Shared guidance, data systems and tools that support daily practice.

AND ONE COMMITMENT ABOUT HOW

Design the approach with staff, labor partners, and families — not for them.

Ninety-four percent of our staff say their school emphasizes helping students academically when they need it. Seventy percent report close professional relationships with colleagues. Commitment is not our constraint. Structure is — and structure is something we can change together.

Role clarity is what makes impact measurable

We cannot measure the impact of a position unless we have defined what that position is responsible for delivering.

01 Define scope of services

For each role that serves students: what services it provides, to whom, under what supervision, and to what standard.

02 Reduce the overlap

Several positions overlap in scope, and staffing resources are not always allocated in the most effective and efficient way.

03 Register what is delivered

Which student, which provider, which intervention, at what amount, for how long, with what review date.

04 Measure the effect

Was there improvement for the student based on the instruction or services provided? What are the next steps based on the outcome? This is a cycle of continuous review.

TWO THINGS THIS IS NOT

This is not just about counting staff, and an over-reliance on paraeducators is not a statement about how many we employ.

WestEd's finding is about needing clarity in the scope of services being provided by staff and to define what those services mean. Lack of clarity in roles leads to inefficiency that impacts the system, and improving this is work we will do with our labor partners and our community.

How we will make progress visible

OUR SIX HIGH-IMPACT INDICATORS

- ELA distance from standard increases
- Mathematics distance from standard increases
- Percentage of students suspended one or more times decreases
- Average student ratings of overall climate increase
- Average student ratings of SEL competencies increase
- Percentage of students chronically absent decreases

Reported disaggregated for Black/African American students, English learners, students with disabilities, foster youth, students experiencing homelessness, and Native American students. Districtwide movement will not be reported as success if the gap did not close.

Other interim measures will also be utilized and are under development

A few examples being considered:

- Fidelity of Implementation of Tier 1 across academic, behavioral, and social-emotional domains
- Time from a request for assistance to the start of a support plan
- Response time after a referral

This is illustrative. These are not finalized, and more will be considered.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF ACCOUNTABILITY

In partnership with Research and Evaluation, we will measure not only how programs are implemented, but whether the services are associated with improved outcomes.

A coordinated support concept is being explored

“Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets.” — W. Edwards Deming
How would ours need to be designed to implement MTSS at the Exemplary rating level?



ALIGNED IN BOTH DIRECTIONS

Information and responsibility flow up as much as they flow down.

The composition of these teams would be built at every level so that the same lenses — instruction, literacy and mathematics, special education, multilingual education, behavior and mental health, physical health, attendance, safety, equity, family engagement, and pathways — are represented wherever a decision about a student is made. Each level resolves what it can and escalates only what genuinely requires added authority, expertise, or capacity.

Next steps

OCTOBER 6, 2026

The next step is an introduction to one vision for the entire learning system.

Why it follows from tonight

WestEd studied special education but identified needs in the whole system. The response must address the whole system, providing one learning vision for every student — including every targeted group: Black/African American students, Native American students, foster youth, students experiencing homelessness, English learners, and students with disabilities. This is not one size fits all; this is one coherent and inclusive system for all students.

How we will go about it

Incrementally and inclusively, with parents, staff, labor partners, students, and the community involved in the design rather than informed of the result.

What you can expect from us

Transparency about what we are considering, and a regular cadence of updates as the vision develops.

Setting our intentions: We can do a lot of things — but not everything at once.

BOARD DISCUSSION AND INPUT

What resonated with you?

What questions do you have?

There is no separate vision for special education. There is one vision for the entire learning system.