



Special Education Review Executive Summary Natomas Unified School District

Revised October 2026

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Section A: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Scope of Work:

The Ascendancy Solutions, Inc. (ASI) educational consultant team was selected to conduct a special education review for the Natomas Unified School District. Planning for the review was initiated in Fall 2025, parallel to the ASI team's work with the district to develop the NUSD 2025 Compliance and Improvement Monitoring (CIM) for Significant Disproportionality (Sig Dis) Plan. NUSD staff followed up with Dr. Mildred Browne, ASI Educational Consultant, to initiate a comprehensive assessment of the NUSD Special Education services.

Subsequently, Dr. Browne and Dr. Robyn Castillo, NUSD Superintendent, met to discuss the parameters for the review. It was established that the comprehensive review would focus on the district's special education department infrastructure, and its program design as it aligns with the district's systems and structures. Due to the district's disproportionality, related to student discipline, the review would include a Discipline Assessment. The comprehensive review would result in recommendations to assist district efforts to promote positive outcomes for students, particularly positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

Special Education Program Review Scope of Work/Proposal 2025-2026 included:

- Data Analysis General and Special Education Data
- Review of Special Education Organizational Structure
- File Review/Case Study
- Review of compliance complaints, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Due Process
- Develop Implementation plan to support program review recommendations

Preamble

The ASI team would like to acknowledge NUSD's meaningful commitment in launching this comprehensive special education review, and their engagement throughout the process deserves sincere appreciation.

District staff consistently supported the ASI team with timely responses, clear communication and thoughtful collaboration, ensuring that every request for documents or clarification was met with professionalism and care. This review was a courageous and transformative undertaking, one that amplified diverse voices and prioritized space for authentic participation from students, staff, families, and community members. In doing so, NUSD leadership embodied the core values elevated in the LCAP and showed the determination needed to strengthen the district systems and deepen its role as a true partner in serving its diverse community. Their

responsiveness and openness reflect the collegial spirit needed to improve both the processes and the relational presence of the district in its commitment to students, staff, and families.

The overarching focus of the review was to support the NUSD leadership in its vision of a Special Education Department, one that provides school sites with the support necessary to ensure a districtwide continuum of high quality program options for students with disabilities.

While a review of the special education program served as the catalyst for initiating the comprehensive review, it is important to recognize that special education cannot be evaluated in isolation. Special education does not, nor cannot, function as an island. Its effectiveness depends on how well it is integrated into the district's broader instructional systems, including curriculum, staffing, professional development and school wide practices.

Natomas Unified has developed foundational documents intended to support its infrastructure, yet some of the materials appear to be in the final stages of development and implementation. Greater clarification is needed to provide 1) clear delineation of staff roles and assigned responsibilities, 2) a clear outline and process to guide implementation fidelity, and 3) a defined system for monitoring student data to assess student impact. The structural components are present; the addition of explicit guidance on accountability, implementation, and data-driven monitoring will result in stronger documents that support the district's ability to ensure consistent and effective practice across school sites on behalf of all students.

The said, the findings from the special education review are deeply interconnected and related to the structures, expectations, and instructional approaches of the general education program. To fully understand the strengths and challenges identified, it is recommended that the district examine the intersection of general education and special education as they operate together in a unified system, one that serves all students and is consistent with the NUSD Five Primary Objectives and Core Values:

NUSD LCAP Five Primary Objectives and anchors:

1. Student Achievement & Growth: Ensuring all students demonstrate continuous progress.
2. Equity & Access: Closing achievement gaps and removing barriers to learning.
3. Inclusive & Safe Culture: Fostering a welcoming, secure environment.
4. Parent & Family Engagement: Building strong relationships and two-way communication.
5. Quality Staff: Recruiting and retaining highly qualified employees.

NUSD Four Core Values:

- (a) learning and achievement for each of our students,
- (b) families as partners in the education of their students,
- (c) committed, collaborative, caring, and exemplary employees, and

(d) diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Implementing the recommendations outlined in this report will strengthen the district's infrastructure and benefit the students who experience similar challenges in navigating their educational program.

Background Information

District Demographics:

The NUSD website states that NUSD is “proud to be named the Most Diverse School District in California and Second in Nation in two publications. NUSD was named the second most diverse school district in the nation by Niche.com in 2025, 2024 and in a 2016 New York Times study.”

The 2026 draft of the NUSD LCAP states that NUSD “... currently serves students from Pre-Kindergarten through age 22. The major racial/ethnic groups that make up NUSD's student population include Hispanic/Latino (34%), Black/African American (21%), Asian (18%), White (11%), and Multiracial (11%). The remaining 5% consists of Filipino, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students. Approximately 13% of NUSD's students are English Learners with over 50 different home languages/dialects represented among them. Approximately 70% of all students in the district qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch. Annually NUSD serves approximately 50 Foster Youth and 400-500 youth experiencing homelessness. Overall, 72% of NUSD students are identified as Unduplicated Pupils (students identified as English Learners, Free and Reduced Lunch, Foster Youth or youth experiencing homelessness) and approximately 16% of NUSD's population is comprised of Students with Disabilities, who represent a wide range of specific learning needs.”

(Source: [Draft2026-27LCAP6526.pdf](#) pg 5); (Reference: [NUSD2025-26LCAP_BoardApproved62525.pdf](#))

Notably, district and neighborhood schools recognize the importance of being responsive to the diverse cultures, languages, and life experiences of the students and families; however the district's performance data elevates the gaps in academic performance, discipline and the placement of students in special education.

During the assessment process, the ASI Team considered the shifts across the diverse student population and demographics, particularly:

- the increase of Asian students, inclusive of South East Asia and India
- the increase in students who generate Title I federal funding - a support for students from low-income families, that aims to close achievement gaps and provide equal educational opportunities.

African American families began moving to the Natomas area (specifically North Natomas) in great numbers starting in the 2000s and continuing into the 2010s and beyond. The influx of the Black middle-class shifted the demographics of the once-rural, agricultural basin into one of the most diverse and rapidly expanding areas in Sacramento. The boom of suburban sub-divisions in the 2000s offered newly built, relatively affordable homes. North Natomas saw a second, sustained wave of African Americans settling in the area through the 2010s and 2020s.

Since 2014-2015 the African American student population in the district has hovered between a low in 2020-2021 of 19.8% to a high in 2024-2025 of 21.2%. As of census day October 1, 2025. African American students represented 20.9% of NUSD students per the NUSD Data Office. See Table 1 below.

Additionally, the ASI Team examined data regarding students and families from South East Asian, including India. Given the 2026 Sacramento County demographics and ZIP code data, it is reasonable to estimate that Southeast Asian residents make up roughly 5–10% of the Natomas population, with Vietnamese Americans being the largest subgroup. Southeast Asians in Natomas are primarily Vietnamese Americans, with smaller Cambodian, Laotian, and Thai communities. Natomas has a relatively high concentration of East Asian Indian residents compared to California's average.

Table 1

Academic Year	Total	African American	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Filipino	Hispanic or Latino	Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races	Not Reported
2025-26	11,618	20.9%	0.3%	17.3%	3.2%	34.6%	1.4%	11.1%	11.1%	0.0%
2024-25	11,784	21.2%	0.4%	15.9%	3.1%	35.3%	1.6%	11.6%	10.8%	0.0%
2023-24	11,948	21.1%	0.5%	15.8%	3.3%	34.7%	1.5%	12.2%	10.8%	0.0%
2022-23	11,731	20.9%	0.6%	15.4%	3.5%	34.4%	1.7%	12.3%	11.2%	0.0%
2021-22	11,524	20.6%	0.6%	15.2%	3.8%	34.4%	1.8%	12.9%	10.7%	0.0%
2020-21	11,248	19.8%	0.6%	15.0%	4.3%	33.5%	1.9%	14.2%	10.5%	0.1%
2019-20	11,317	19.9%	0.7%	14.3%	4.4%	33.5%	2.0%	15.1%	9.9%	0.2%
2018-19	11,076	20.3%	0.8%	13.9%	4.4%	33.1%	1.8%	15.6%	9.4%	0.6%
2017-18	10,726	20.2%	0.8%	14.0%	4.4%	33.2%	1.9%	16.1%	8.8%	0.6%
2016-17	10,489	20.7%	0.7%	13.0%	4.3%	35.7%	1.9%	14.8%	7.8%	1.1%
2015-16	10,634	20.1%	0.7%	12.8%	4.4%	33.4%	1.8%	14.0%	7.2%	5.6%
2014-15	10,070	19.9%	0.7%	12.4%	5.0%	33.3%	1.9%	14.4%	6.3%	6.0%

Source: NUSD Data Office 9.2026

Approximately 70% of all students in the district qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch which qualifies the district as being eligible for Title I funding. During the assessment process the Title I school status of each school that was visited was discussed with the Principal. Information was gathered that focused on what additional resources, programs, and support were available to bridge educational gaps and promote equity in the educational system.

- Overall, 14.95% of the students were identified as a SWD (student with a disability). Typically, 10-12% of students are identified as SWDs. (QDA 2026)
- The African American students comprised 21.19% of the student enrollment. 28.68% or one in 3.5 of the African American students was identified as an SWD. Other groups with a high percentage of SWDs within the ethnicity included: White (15.03%), Hispanic (15.85%). (QDA 2026)
- The African American students represent more than 20% of the students in each area of disability. Most notably, they represent 30.97% of those with an SLD, 36.70% of those with an OHI, 30.30% of those with an ID and 51.61% of those with an ED. 16.13% of the students with ED were White, compared to 11.64% of the enrollment and 11.70% of SWDs. (QDA 2026)
- Hispanic students comprised more than 1/3 of the student enrollment and 44.94% of the students with SLD, followed by African American students with 30.97% of all with SLD. (QDA 2026)

Our work has revealed that Natomas is standing in the middle of a beautiful paradox: its diversity is its greatest strength and also the very thing that demands the most intentional, systemic work from its educational community.

Diversity however does not automatically produce inclusion. Inclusion is built deliberately through cultural responsive systems, practices and relationships. The goal is to weave relationality across its many cultures and ethnicities — not as an add on but as the backbone of its educational identity.

BRIGHT SPOTS and INFRASTRUCTURE Investments

The district has demonstrated a deliberate and sustained effort to build structures that support student learning and achievement. Significant work has been completed across departments to address student needs and strengthen the systems required to maximize learning outcomes. The examples noted below have been drafted and/or published since the 2024-2025 school year.

- December 2025 Instructional Framework
 -  NUSD Instructional Framework Dec 2025.pdf

- PBIS Handbook Tier 1 25-26
 -  Copy of Copy of NUSD Tier 1 PBIS Handbook Template 25-26
- December 2025 SST Handbook
 -  NUSD SST Handbook.pdf
- Special Education Handbook updated as of July 2025
 -  NUSD Special Education Procedure Manual.pdf
- NUSD 504 Handbook 2026 Draft
 -  NUSD 504 Handbook DRAFT.pdf
- 2025-26 Single District SELPA Local Plan
 - [2026DRAFTLocalPlan2026.pdf](#)

NUSD SELPA Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

The CAC is composed of parents, community members working together to support and strengthen special education in the district. The NUSD CAC met five (5) times during the school year. During the 25-26 school year the CAC participated in developing and reviewing the SELPA Local Plan.

Spotlight Community Awards

Annual Spotlight Awards recognizes people who have contributed tremendously to students and their families, who receive special education services from NUSD. This award ceremony is well attended by the NUSD educational community.

Diverse Future Teachers Program

Originally approved in 2017 by the NUSD Board of Trustees, the Diverse Future Teachers program invests in future teachers that reflect the diversity of the community. In April 2024, NUSD Trustees extended the program for an additional three years. The primary interest of the program is to find former NUSD students who are in the **final stages of earning their bachelor's degree and are considering a career in education**. The program also recruits candidates who meet qualifications, experiences, and are positioned to support a diverse student population, particularly our NUSD classified staff.

Outreach/Communication: Parents and Community Members

NUSD has established two entities to ensure that the district is available, responsive, and timely on behalf of the community it serves. Accessible customer service structures have been elevated to ensure Natomas' diverse educational community can fully participate in the learning experience. The staff members were interviewed and provided information regarding their roles.

1. Constituent & Customer Services - Natomas Unified School District, to respond to concerns and requests from parents, employees and community members, including:

- Public Records Act Requests
- Personnel Complaints
- Request for Information/Service
- Special Education
- Student Textbooks and Materials
- Williams Act
- Uniform Complaint or Complaints
- Other Concerns

The department has an After-Hours Answering Service to receive the following calls:

- Safety/Security Related
- Maintenance and Operations Related
- Urgent Student/Staff News

2. Coordinator II: Family Engagement and Special Populations (Superintendent's Office).

The role of the Coordinator includes:

- Building Trust with Families
 - Provide direct support to families by explaining various processes in the district i.e IEPs, 504 Plans, and eligibility processes, parent rights and procedural safeguards. school policies, enrollment, and services
 - Problem-Solving & Conflict Prevention
 - Resolving parent concerns
 - Acts as a bridge between families and school staff
 - Helps de-escalate emotionally charged situations by providing clarity and support
- Accessibility & Responsiveness
 - Maintains consistent communication with families (calls, emails, meetings)
 - Ensures families had access to accurate and timely information
 - Promotes Parent Empowerment
 - Provides parent support to prepare for IEP meetings including how to ask informed questions and advocate for their children

The creation of both the Constituent & Customer Services team and the introduction of the Coordinator II role demonstrates the district's intentional efforts to strengthen communication and collaboration with staff, parents and educational community. However, per our investigation, through qualitative data, staff, students, and parents consistently report a disconnect that persists among district departments, school sites and families.

While district-level structures and vision are well-defined, certain school sites exemplify this alignment. Variability in implementation and an uncalibrated understanding of expectations may

be contributing to a perception of distrust, organizational fragmentation, and systemic confusion.

Other bright spot areas that have been addressed by the district during review timeframe are:

- Establishment of the Moderate Homerooms Program Option (Fall 2026)
- Design the Special Education Office reorganization
- Drafting of the revised Behavior Matrix

Summary of Prior Special Education Reviews

NUSD shared earlier programmatic reviews that had been conducted to explore effective and cost efficient programs and services for students with disabilities. To honor and leverage these prior investments, ASI reviewed four (4) reports. Two (2) were conducted by School Services in 2011 and 2018; the third was the 2025 Infrastructure Analysis that was completed for the development of the 2025 CIM for Significant Disproportionality CCEIS Plan.

Themes and recommendations are shared among the reports and there is evidence that NUSD has moved on recommendation implementation. The ASI analysis validates the district's efforts to engage a self-reflective process and also finds a throughline of themes and recommendations among the reports. The examination of the prior reports has contributed context for continued work, as well they are key in unpacking and understanding the persistence of the themes surfaced in this special education review.

Below are recommendations from the prior reviews that are consistent with the ASI team findings.

Special Education Reviews: 2011 and 2018

NUSD established two contracts with School Services of California, Inc. to assist with the special education program. The reports included recommendations that continue to be relevant.

1. 2011 Special Education Review: This review was designed to address the quality and fiscal effectiveness of the special education program.
 2. 2018 Special Education Fiscal Analysis and Organizational Capacity Review: This was designed to assist the district with determining if it should consider becoming a single-district SELPA, and whether the district would have the capacity to become its own SELPA.
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Report #1 - School Services of California, Inc.
SPECIAL EDUCATION REVIEW—November 29, 2011
School Services of California, Inc., (SSC)

The purpose of the 2011 review was to “...offer an assessment of and recommendations on how the District can improve the quality and cost effectiveness of its Program.” (pg 1).

The report highlighted that:

“The District should pilot a learning center model that provides for special education and general education intervention support in an efficient and effective manner. The District’s model of having RSP classrooms at every site is effective, but costly. Such an option takes advantage of the resource teacher as a support for SWD that remain on his/her caseload, but also extends their support along with partnering general education teachers and aides to nonidentified students that need extra support. Such an approach would complement the structure already in place of co-teaching and collaboration.

Learning centers offer support to all special education students—RSP and SDC—in one location/setting. In addition, at-risk general education students may also access support from the learning center. Under this approach, most students are included for a large portion of their day in a general education classroom and receive support from the learning center as needed. Key attributes of a learning center include the assignment of staff to the center with case management responsibilities for specific students and aide support assigned to the school rather than a specific classroom.

Such a model could provide for a more efficient and effective use of staff insofar as sites with relatively low numbers of SWD—both RSP and SDC—may be able to provide support to SWD and fill intervention needs that may be funded from restricted resources. Furthermore, this approach may result in greater levels of inclusion in general education settings and present an attractive program option for parents who have sought NPS and/or NPA support.” (pg 19)

“The District should develop and implement a Districtwide structure for intervention that includes, but is not limited to, a structure for using data to inform intervention, consistent and rigorous student SST implementation, related curriculum, and staff development. There are pockets of best practices within schools that the District could build upon to make this a Districtwide initiative. Ideally, efforts to implement an early intervention support structure should be led, managed, and monitored as a general education function with support from the special education. The efforts underway in the District include involvement from general education, but the degree of involvement varies from site to site. Some sites have fully embraced the opportunities for RTI2 and SSTs.” (pg 19)

“Our overriding recommendation is for the District to continue its implementation of a “culture change” so that special education isn’t seen as a separate program that is “someone else’s” responsibility. Many of the disputes with parents stem from inappropriate interactions early in the process. Doing things right the first time and thus eliminating avoidable, costly mistakes will certainly help to control costs for special education in the long run. We believe that implementing a culture change so that all staff are responsible for all students. This implementation is critical to the District’s success.” (pg 31)

Report #2 - School Services of California, Inc.

Special Education Fiscal Analysis and Organizational Capacity Review

October 31, 2018

School Services of California, Inc., (SSC)

The purpose of this analysis was to review the District’s Special Education Program (Program) to *“...offer an assessment of how the District can improve the cost effectiveness of its Program, should the District consider becoming a single-district SELPA, and whether the District would have the capacity to become its own SELPA.” (pg 1)*

“Define the Department organizational structure to internal and external customers. As the Special Education Department evolves, and if the District becomes a single-district SELPA, role clarity will provide a clear understanding of Departmental structure, roles, and Responsibilities. (p 45)

“Develop uniform policies and practices in ensuring student needs are met. The District should ensure it continues to follow consistent policies and procedures for student placement, interventions, and referrals. One area to develop uniform policies and practices is in the area of inclusion. As the District continues to support more inclusive practices for SWDs, guidance in maintaining the inclusive practices model will be important in ensuring student needs are met.” (p 45)

“The District should strongly consider the transition to a single-district SELPA for a number of reasons detailed in the report. Most importantly, the District currently serves almost all SWDs in-house, with the exception of a small number of students served in county regional programs, and the current level of funding received from the Sacramento County SELPA is insufficient to support the continued success of the District’s Special Education

program. Operating as a single-district SELPA will allow the District to directly receive Special Education funding from state and federal sources. The District will then be able to have full control to allocate those funds as it deems appropriate to best serve its SWDs population.” (pg 47)

Report #3 - 2025 Special Education Infrastructure

(Source: Infrastructure Analysis 2025 SUMMARY STATEMENT_.pdf)

The CDE requires completion of the Infrastructure Analysis tool as an activity within Step One of the Compliance and Improvement Monitoring (CIM) process. The activity allows local educational agencies (LEA) to review six basic components of their special education infrastructure and determine the degree to which these components are in place in the system, by determining where components are fully functioning or require improvement. Margaret Farruggio, ASI Consultant facilitated the 2025 Infrastructure analysis with the NUSD Leadership Team. A fuller report is located in the 2025 CIM for CCCEIS Plan.

2025 Infrastructure Analysis Summary Statement:

The infrastructure analysis meeting was convened on October 23, 2025 with five (5) district leaders participating. Each participant completed the survey in advance of the meeting and engaged in thoughtful discussion to collectively agree on whether a sub-component and practice is in place or not in place.

Notes were taken to recognize noted gaps in implementation.

Of the six (6) components, four (4) areas were identified as strengths:

- Mission, Vision, Culture through Collaboration Communication;
- Staffing;
- Data Systems;
- Resource Management.

Two (2) areas were identified as opportunities for improvement:

- Policy and Procedures;
- Instructional Practices.

Several themes surfaced through the captured notes.

Structures and vision are in place at district level however implementation, or a calibrated understanding, appears inconsistent across school sites.

- *“Clearly communicated, but have we ensured staff responsibility?”*
- *“At the level of core values, we do this, but from the school level shared typed norms, we don’t do this. “*
- *“Educational leadership - We don’t consistently communicate - policies; Gap is the vertical articulation and isn’t consistent; Some teams do it better than ever”*

Training structures and content are developed and available; however, structures for mandatory training are limited. Suggest identifying actions to improve structures to ensure general and special education staff are trained to share in the implementation of processes, procedures, and instruction to the benefit of students on IEPs, as well as students on the margins.

- *“Improving our SST process and pre-referral processes are improving, but still an area to work on to inform the process.”*
- *“This happens in pockets, but not overall across the district. We have systems to see if they are being evaluated. The walkthrough form includes these components, but goal setting and self monitoring are not included.”*

The review of these prior reports revealed recommendations that aligned and overlapped with recommendations emerging from the ASI Special Education Review. From the ASI review, it is evident that NUSD has been grappling with its special education program, specifically with how special education intersects and is included as an integral part of the entire district culture.

This historical and holistic view supports taking intentional steps to avoid perpetuating a separate system by examining not just the special education program, but how it interfaces with the entire district system.

This perspective is substantiated in the CDE ONE SYSTEM Task Force Report which promoted and described the benefits of an integrated and inclusive organizational system.

As stated in the 2021 Task Force progress report titled [California's Progress Toward Achieving ONE SYSTEM: Reforming Education to Serve ALL Students](#):

“In 2013, a Statewide Task Force on Special Education, comprised of 34 representatives from key stakeholder groups [including Dr. Mildred Browne] embarked on a study to document the reasons special education was not more successful and what must be changed in both policy and practice to improve services for all children identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as having a disability. ” (pg iii)

“Among the Task Force’s recommendations was an overarching conclusion that California’s special education system would improve if general education and special education worked seamlessly together as one coherent system designed to address the needs of all students.” (pg1)

District Initiatives Following 2011 and 2018 School Services Reports

The nature of the special education review prompted an examination of the service delivery continuum of special education and related services as outlined in IDEA.

We collected quantitative data on student enrollment and placement, and qualitative data as part of the on-site school visits, focus groups, and empathy interviews. The results of the data elevated perceptions and recollections, and revealed a blurring of “institutional memory” when compared to the documentation related to the reasons for the changes that were made to the continuum of services in 2017-2018.

It should be noted that the 2011 report recommended the “inclusive model” and the 2018 report recommended the establishment of the NUSD as a SELPA. These reports are separated by 7 years and over this period, the district took actions to implement the recommendations from both reports. The documentation revealed that the implementation of the inclusive practices model and the dissolution of the Mild/Moderate special day classes preceded the establishment of the SELPA.

And yet, during the 2026 focus group discussions and empathy interviews, majority of the participants indicated that the “closures” of the SDCs was due to the establishment of NUSD as a single district SELPA, but in fact it was a recommendation in the **2011 School Services Fiscal Report**.

*“The District should pilot a learning center model that provides for special education and general education intervention support in an efficient and effective manner. The District’s model of having RSP classrooms at every site is effective, but costly. ... **Learning centers offer support to all special education students—RSP and SDC—in one location/setting.** In addition, at-risk general education students may also access support from the learning center. Under this approach, **most students are included for a large portion of their day in a general education classroom** and receive support from the learning center as needed.” (pg 19)*

The chronology below provides specifics regarding the factual dates for those events.

- 2017-2018 – the Mild/Moderate SDC program was disbanded and the district moved to a “full inclusion” model. Students were served in either general education with Resource Specialist Program support or the Extensive Support Needs (ESN).
- 2019-2020 – Natomas Unified School District was established as a single district SELPA (Special Education Local Plan Area).

The review of the prior reports highlighted the factual events surrounding the closure of the district SDC and the establishment of the NUSD SELPA and supported our recommendation of the development of the Moderate Homeroom.

Professional Development

High-quality Professional Development (PD) ensures educators stay current with research, pedagogy, and policy, ultimately improving teaching effectiveness and student achievement. This aligns with federal priorities and leading institutions’ efforts to support educator growth.

Discussions with staff were held to explore the current structures and practices for implementing professional development in NUSD. NUSD established an Annual Professional Development planning and implementation process that has been spearheaded by the Curriculum and Instruction Department.

PD opportunities were discussed during the focus groups, empathy interviews and behavior assessment. The findings from those discussions are included in the Findings Sections of this Report.

Following the 2011 and 2018 reports the district provided the following professional development opportunities.

2018-2020 Inclusive Practices

Following the disbanding of the SDC in the 2017-2018 school year, NUSD contracted with Stetson and Associates, Inc. The proposal for Comprehensive Professional Development for Inclusive Practices: 2018-2020 School Years was signed on May 1, 2019 of the 2018-2019 school year.

A statement from the superintendent’s office indicated that:

“In continuing our commitment to effectively include students with disabilities in general education classes and instruction, the district contracted with Stetson & Associates. Stetson & Associates provided training, materials and online resources to enhance our

inclusive practices. The goal was to continue to ensure that students are being included appropriately and that staff has access to necessary support to enable students with disabilities to progress and succeed with their non-disabled peers.

Each site administrator determined the focus of the technical assistance support based upon the needs of their site action plan. These focus areas included, but were not limited to, review of current practices and recommendations for the future, staffing and scheduling, staff development and classroom observations. The ultimate goal of this endeavor was to build the capacity of NUSD staff to sustain proven practices that include and support all students.”

The proposal/contract reads in part:

“This proposal is to support the efforts of Natomas Unified School District in promoting quality inclusive practices at a system-wide level with the intent of improved outcomes for all learners. Stetson and Associates, Inc. recommends a comprehensive approach to arrive at systems change that includes a variety of tasks, including observation of current practices, interviews and discussions with key stakeholders, professional development with campus- based teams consisting of the campus leader and general and special education teachers, and follow up technical assistance to schools participating in the training to assist them in their efforts and build the capacity of district staff to sustain the practices.” (Source: May 1, 2019 Stetson and Associates, Inc. pg 1)

Unfortunately, in the 2019-2020 school year, which was the final year of implementation, the Inclusive Practices training stopped in March 2020 due the closure of schools during the COVID epidemic. There is no evidence that the district implemented the professional development for inclusive practices when schools reopened in Spring 2021.

2022 Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning

In 2022 NUSD initiated a comprehensive three-year professional development plan for DEI [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion]. Also, In 2024-25 the district launched the Office of Equity and Excellence (E2) to lead the district’s DEI efforts.

The following statement was provided by the Superintendent’s office.

“As part of NUSD’s comprehensive three-year professional development plan for DEI [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion], all certificated and classified staff were invited to attend an initial four hour anti-racist/anti-bias professional development session with Dr. Sharokky Hollie from the Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning. The training took place at Inderkum High School on August 5, 2022. Dr. Hollie also returned to our district wide professional development day on October 11, 2022, and went deeper into the work on culturally and linguistically relevant classroom management. The district continued work with Dr. Hollie past the 2022-23 school year.”

Per the 2026 draft LCAP (pg 44) [Draft2026-27LCAP6526.pdf](#) NUSD continues to prioritize a culturally responsive curriculum.

“1.11 (Culturally Responsive Curriculum) This action has supported progress toward the overall goal by engaging staff in high-quality professional development opportunities that support integration of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning strategies into curriculum. During the 2025-26 year, a group of NUSD teachers participated in a Culturally Responsive Learning Cohort using strategies from Dr. Sharokky Hollie’s Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning text. This work continues to support the integration and use of district provided texts that include themes and characters representing the diversity of NUSD’s student cultural and linguistic identities.”

The current findings from the focus groups and empathy interviews elevate and reinforce staff’s interest in continuing professional development in the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning.

During the 2026 ASI the focus groups and empathy interviews, participants referenced the district’s work with Dr. Sharokky Hollie and the need to continue to implement the work with fidelity.

Staff Comments:

- *“Dr. Sharokky Hollie provided coaching with principals around culturally responsive instruction, however it was not implemented consistently across the district. There are pockets where it is going well, but most teachers are not consistent with their practices of cultural responsiveness.”*
- *“We tried to address cultural responsiveness with the training from Dr. Sharokky Hollie and the Summer Institutes. Our intentions are good but this is not a “one and done” process; it requires consistent implementation that is sustainable and that is not happening right now.”*
- *We had some professional development with Dr. Sharokky Hollie. As a whole we have a lot to dig into. There’s been a lot of surface level professional development but this is a very complex issue and will take a lot of work. It has not been a constant effort for implementation or sustainability. Dr. Sharokky Hollie’s PD “fell off” from a district level initiative and moved to the school principals who were expected to get a team together of 6-7 people per school. Currently, out of the 15 schools in the district, only 5 have continued to participate.”*

It was noted that 2022 districtwide commitment to this work has decreased to a handful of schools who continue a commitment to work as a district cohort in 2026.

While the district has embraced the value of these initiatives: *Inclusive Practices* and the *Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning*, NUSD appears to struggle with consistent implementation of these critical initiatives, which may be undermining the intended goal of improving outcomes for all students.

Special Education Program

District Annual Determination Letter

Source:  Natomas Unified CIM Status 2025-2026.pdf

The CDE Annual Determination Letter (ADL) issued to districts is a critical tool for measuring a district's compliance with IDEA Part B requirements - providing transparency, accountability, and guidance for improving special education services.

The CDE summarizes Special Education data annually. Natomas Unified School District's Coordinated Interagency Monitoring (CIM) status for the 2025–2026 school year is as follows:

- 2025-2026 Status: Intensive Level 2 for Significant Disproportionality Activity
- Status: CIM Implementation (Step 4 Year 1)
 - Key Compliance Indicators:
 - Significantly Disproportionate: Yes.
 - Timeline Noncompliance Review: Yes.
 - Restraint and Seclusion Ratio Target Met: Yes.
 - Fiscal Monitoring: No.

Below is an excerpt from the 2026 Annual Determination Letter. The indicators help the district analyze program efficacy as well as compliance with federal and state special education requirements, results of current student IEP placements, and its integration with systems of support that are rooted in general education (i.e. dashboard). The ADL indicated that NUSD did not meet targets in the following areas:

NUSD did not meet Dashboard Targets for its special education population in:

- Graduation
- Academic Performance ELA
- Academic Performance Math
- Suspension.

NUSD did not meet the targets on the State Performance Plan Indicators (SPPI) in:

- SPPI 2 - Dropout Percent

- SPPI 5b: Regular class less than 40%
- SPPI 6a: Preschool Regular Class Percent
- SPPI 6b: Preschool Separate Class

Targeted Determination Data Elements

Indicator	Selection Element	Data	Target	Target Met
Dashboard	Graduation Dashboard Result	ORANGE	BLUE, GREEN, or YELLOW	NO
Dashboard	Academic Performance ELA	ORANGE	BLUE, GREEN, or YELLOW	NO
Dashboard	Academic Performance Math	ORANGE	BLUE, GREEN, or YELLOW	NO
Dashboard	Suspension Dashboard Result	RED	BLUE, GREEN, or YELLOW	NO
SPPI 2	Dropout Percent	12.4%	≤7.0%	NO
SPPI 5a	LRE Regular Class 80% or More	70.55%	≥67%	YES
SPPI 5b	LRE Regular Class Less Than 40%	21.78%	≤13.5%	NO
SPPI 5c	LRE Separate Schools Percent	1.9%	≤2.6%	YES
SPPI 6a	Preschool Regular Class Percent	22.6%	≥47%	NO
SPPI 6b	Preschool Separate Class	55.48%	≤25%	NO
SPPI 6c	Preschool Home Setting	0%	≤3.5%	YES
SPPI 8	Parent Involvement Target Met	99.16%	≥97%	YES
SPPI 14a	Post Secondary Higher Ed Percent	65.67%	≥59%	YES
SPPI 14b	Post Secondary competitively Employed Percent	86.57%	≥81%	YES
SPPI 14c	Any Education or Employment Percent	100%	≥89%	YES
--	Child Find Percent	13.79%	≥8.43%	YES

Reference:  Natomas Unified CIM Status 2025-2026.pdf ; [SPP/APR Overview and Feedback - Special Education \(CA Dept of Education\)](#)

Based on 2024-2025 special education data, NUSD is identified by the California Department of Education for the significantly disproportionate representation of African American students with disabilities under the eligibility of Emotional Disabilities with a Risk Ratio of 3.54. As of 2024-2025, Natomas was also identified for the significant disproportionality in the incidence of African American students on IEPs being suspended for more than 10 days with a Risk Ratio of 7.16. The overrepresentation of African American students in those areas is elevated in the

report and are reflected in the findings and recommendations. The current CIM for SigDisp Plan requires implementation through September 30, 2028.

Note: Districts are identified as significantly disproportionate when the risk ratio is 3.0 or above for 3 consecutive years. At that point, 15% of the district's IDEA funds are set aside to fund early intervening services to address the disproportionality by developing a plan to change a district's infrastructure and general education programming so that the district equitably serves all students across its diverse demographics.

Table 2

Area of Significant Disproportionality	Significant Disproportionality Risk Ratio Calculation							
	SigDisp Years	Native	Asian	African American	Hispanic	Multi Ethnic	Pacific Islander	White not Hispanic
Emotional Disturbance	2024-25	NC	NC	3.54	NC	NC	NC	NC
Emotional Disturbance	2023-24	NC	NC	4.64	0.83	NC	NC	NC
Emotional Disturbance	2022-23	NC	NC	4.53	NC	NC	NC	NC
Emotional Disturbance	2021-22	NC	NC	4.77	0.63	NC	NC	NC
Greater Than 10 Days Out of School	2024-25	NC	NC	7.16	NC	NC	NC	NC
Greater Than 10 Days Out of School	2023-24	NC	NC	8.16	NC	NC	NC	NC
Greater Than 10 Days Out of School	2022-23	NC	NC	10.74	NC	NC	NC	NC

Source: [LEA Monitoring Status Search](#)

Indicator 5: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*

Data point for SPPI 5b elevates the % of students with IEPs who participate in the general education program 40% or less of the school day or also meaning **60%** or more outside of the general education program. (see Table 3). Specifically, SPI 5b asks: What percent of our students with disabilities are served inside the regular classroom 40% of the day or less? **This data point is meaningful because it reflects special education program placements.**

The district's forward thinking initiative to move to a full inclusion model was designed to promote students with disabilities access to the general education program. In 2020-2021 the

data showed that NUSD met the state target. It would be important to verify enrollment and placement data so that there is an accurate accounting of LRE going forward.

Table 3

School Year	Total Students Receiving Services	5B. In Regular Classroom less than 40%			
		Total	Percentage	Target	Met Target
2020 - 2021	1379	253	18.35 %	19.50 %	Met
2021 - 2022	1495	328	21.94 %	18.00 %	Not Met
2022 - 2023	1493	349	23.38 %	16.50 %	Not Met
2023 - 2024	1572	331	21.06 %	15.00 %	Not Met
2024 - 2025	1630	355	21.78 %	13.50 %	Not Met

*Indicator 5 measures how often students with disabilities, ages 6–22 and 5-year-old kindergarten/transitional kindergarten (TK), are included in the general education setting with their peers. <https://aprinicators.systemimprovement.org/Indicators/indicator5>

Based on input from district leadership, data gathered from the CDE Annual Determination Letter (ADL), focus groups and empathy interviews, a recommendation was made to the district leadership team to consider creating a Moderate Inclusive Homeroom option for students on IEPs.

Establishing the Moderate Homeroom would increase general education access for some moderate students in the ESN SDC and increase opportunities to provide more intensive, targeted instructional support for students receiving RSP services. The planning for the Moderate Homeroom became a priority to support implementation at selected elementary schools beginning Fall 2026.

2026 Program Development Continuum

During the site visits, principals discussed the need for a continuum of service options for students with disabilities who are in the moderate range.

The 2024-2025 Annual Determination Letter, provided by the CDE to summarize district special education data, indicates that NUSD has not met for the State Performance Indicator (SPPI) 5b elevating that a full service delivery continuum is not in place in the district. NUSD meets the target for 80% in general education (5a)

As data was gathered and the analyses evolved, additional inquiry areas were generated. For example, in February 2026, Dr. Castillo, Superintendent, requested that the ASI Team review the NUSD program continuum options, specifically for students with more “moderate needs”.

The ASI team facilitated meetings to discuss and plan for the Fall Semester as follows:

Round Table Series

Elementary School Teams included Teachers, Principals, Superintendent, Cabinet Officers, Services & Support, Special Education, School Leadership, Educational Services and Natomas USD Teachers’ Association (NTA) President. Two meetings were convened with the elementary group to introduce and calibrate on a Fall Implementation.

- **Part 1: April 16, 2026**
- **Part 2: May 5, 2026**

To ensure full transparency and preview the development of the Moderate Homeroom, meetings were held with the following groups:

- **Secondary Preview: April 29, 2026**
- **Parent Meeting: May 11, 2026**
- **School Psychologists and Behaviorists: June 1, 2026**

Based on the outcomes of the meetings, the district has prepared to open 6 Moderate Inclusive classrooms at three schools beginning in the Fall 2026 semester.

Key Findings

Quantitative Data

Over representation of African American/Black students are significantly disproportionate in special education under eligibility of emotional disabilities and suspensions out of school over 10 days.

CDE Dashboard indicates achievement gaps across student groups.

2026 Annual Determination Letter indicates that Natomas did not meet for its special education population in the following Dashboard areas and State Performance Indicator (SPI) areas

- Graduation
- Academic Performance ELA
- Academic Performance Math

- Suspension
- SPPI 2 - Dropout Percent
- SPPI 5b: Regular class less than 40%
- SPPI 6a: Preschool Regular Class Percent
- SPPI 6b: Preschool Separate Class

A review of the NUSD SELPA Local plan revealed that the SELPA Plan does not reflect an effective use of the IEP Individual Transition Plan (ITP) component to support student connections to post secondary outcomes after graduation.

Policies, Practices, and Procedures

There is inconsistent implementation across the district of established policies, practices and procedures. Additionally, there are significant accountability challenges in the fidelity of implementation of common practices; Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Instructional Framework, Student Study Team (SST), Coordination of Services Team (COST) processes, Section 504, PBIS, the Behavior Matrix, specifically alternatives to suspension.

It should be noted that while the district has Policy 0410 Nondiscrimination in District Programs and Activities (Revised 5/15/24) and BP 0100 (Revised 3/2014) and AR 0100 (Revised 5/12/2021) Theory of Action for Student Success, the district has not adopted the optional Board Policy BP 0415 Equity as recommended by the California School Board Association (CSBA)/Gamut. BP 0415 Equity is a policy that must be reviewed under Continuous Improvement Monitoring (CIM) for districts addressing significant disproportionality.

Special Education Program Continuum: Inclusive Practices and Moderate Program Options

There is a need for written guidelines, professional development and evaluations tied to implementation, and ongoing feedback between sites and central leadership.

There is a need to increase opportunities for students with moderate to severe disabilities (SWDs) to access their academic instruction in the least restrictive environment to mitigate a culture of low expectations.

There is a need to expand the service delivery continuum to include targeted academic support for students in the moderate range who are able to access instruction in general education and need targeted instruction in a special education setting classroom.

Parent Engagement

A total of four parent focus groups were conducted during the months of January and February 2026. Additionally there were five individual interviews with parents who were unable to attend the parent focus groups.

The parents suggested inconsistent processes across the district to thoughtfully engage and support parents in partnering with the school which has resulted in a lack of trust.

The district has a narrow, limited idea about family engagement based only upon the number of attendees at district level meetings rather than implementing strategies to touch the majority of families who need to be more knowledgeable about how to navigate the educational system.

Site Visits

The Site Visit process was used to determine areas of greatest need in terms of classroom practices and program continuum. It highlighted the challenges for further improvement when focusing specifically on the identified student groups i.e students with disabilities and African American/Black.

Multi-disciplinary Student File Review

There is no formal process for students to receive targeted services and support outside of special education if they do not qualify for special education.

There is inconsistent documentation in the district student information management system, Infinite Campus, describing interventions, fidelity of implementation, and the impact of the interventions on students.

Behavior appears to be a significant pathway into Special Education for many African American/Black students.

Due to the inconsistent documentation, it was not possible to determine if students are receiving prereferral interventions through the SST process prior to being referred for an assessment for special education eligibility.

The assessors contributed the over identification or overrepresentation of African American/Black students into special education because staff genuinely want to help students due to the lack of intensive systemic Tier One and Tier Two supports creating a perception that special education services

are the only way for students to get support.

Student Focus Groups

A diverse student group reported they experienced an unwelcoming school climate which impacted their engagement in academic and extra curricular activities.

The students emphasized a perceived lack of fairness in the area of discipline.

A diverse student group reported inconsistent support from teachers who do not provide necessary explanations, communicate about grades, or offer adequate academic support.. The students also expressed a concern about the lack of teachers who reflect the student population.

Students noted a culture of low expectations and an acceptance by staff of minimal performance standards.

Limited counselor availability for non-seniors, created significant structural obstacles to student success and support.

Focus Groups

The following seven role groups were identified as part of the Special Education Review: 1) general education teachers; 2) special education teachers; 3) school psychologists; 4) speech and language pathologists; 5). Instructional assistants 6) general education leadership group; 7) special education leadership group.

Participants from the various role groups voiced their concerns and reported that the special education department is siloed at the district resulting in a disconnect between departments, sites, staff, and services.

Inconsistent interventions were identified as a major challenge, encompassing significant delays in the pre-referral process, a lack of fidelity in implementing interventions, and systemic gaps in the continuum of services particularity for African American students.

Infrequent and/or lack of consistent effective and transparent communication and collaboration across various school sites and departments.

Participants noted the presence of inconsistent practices and implicit bias affecting students with IEPs particularly those students from culturally diverse backgrounds revealing an urgent imperative for sustained equity focused professional development

The teacher mindsets and cultural barriers present in the district, specifically targeting students with IEPs from diverse communities were discussed in light of teacher expectations, and beliefs of ability.

Participants noted concerns regarding trauma-driven student behavior resulting in unsafe environments.

A significant concern regarding the over-reliance on special education was expressed by various focus group participants. Special education appears to be the default solution for academic and behavioral issues stemming from a lack of general education support.

MTSS Framework and Targeted Interventions

The review revealed an insufficiently developed and implemented “MTSS Framework”. While there is a NUSD 2025 Instructional Framework it does not encompass all of the evidenced based components of a well designed MTSS Framework.

All but two schools in the district are identified as PBIS schools. Every PBIS school has a Tier 1 team that reviews data referrals and makes decisions about student support. In addition each of these schools has Tier 2 teams, some sites referred to the Tier 2 Team as COST. PBIS effectiveness depends on strong teacher buy-in and sustained commitment; variability in staff engagement across sites undermines implementation fidelity.

Early intervention supports, and essential de-escalation training for teachers, staff, and Instructional Assistants is critical for improving student engagement in the classroom.

Due to insufficient MTSS Tier 1 and Tier 2 support in general education, staff across the district perceive special education has “the catch all” for addressing student academic and behavioral issues without fully exploring other interventions or support options in general education.

Section 504

Diverse families expressed frustrations with accessing services and supports related to section 504 plan.

There appears to be an under utilization of Section 504 for diverse student groups, and a contributing factor may be due to a belief that Section 504 accommodations are inadequate; resulting in students being recommended for special education.

The district website does not provide resources for parents and directs them to the Section 504 Coordinator at the respective school site.

It appears that Section 504 Plans are not equitably utilized across student demographics.

- 21.6% White students utilize Section 504; they are 12.6% of enrollment
- 23.3% African American Black students utilize Section 504; they are 17.5% of enrollment
- 6.2% Asian Students utilize Section 504 Plans; they are 21% of enrollment

The student information system doesn't collect categorical disabling conditions for Section 504 plans. To collect this data, each plan would need to be read individually.

Behavior Assessment

There is inconsistent utilization of discipline policies, procedures and practices across the district.

Staff interviews and a review of Infinite Campus screens indicate inconsistent documentation.

There is a need for more consistent support around documentation implementing alternatives to suspension and utilizing the behavior matrix.

Lack of adequate behavioral supports, suspensions, and inconsistent discipline practices, disrupt instruction.

An assessment of eighteen (18) site administrators regarding the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) revealed significant inconsistencies in district-wide application. While 44.4% (8) reported active implementation, a combined 55.6% indicated either a total absence or an uncertainty regarding PBIS protocols at their respective sites.

Lack of restorative practices for re-entry results in the shifting of students with severe problems to different schools or placements.

Professional Development

While Educational Services holds an annual professional development calendar meeting, it has not been a practice for district level SpEd Department staff to participate in the annual planning meeting.

The focus groups and empathy interview participants reported that special education staff were not regularly included in all PD sessions.

The focus group with the Instructional Aides, included a self-identified union representative. The group emphasized a need for professional development sessions specific to instructional assistants assigned to the special education department.

Some of the ideas shared included: a consistent onboarding process for new hires, ongoing training to certify job effectiveness, and opportunities to promote the Career Ladder to become a credentialed teacher.

The district has an expectation for all teachers to participate in site-based general education Professional Learning Communities (PLC) as well as other district level training. It should be noted that the NUSD labor association contract has a provision that any PD that is provided after school hours cannot be considered mandatory.

The focus groups, empathy interviews, and behavior assessment revealed that there is a need to equip staff to recognize the influence of unconscious associations on student outcomes.

Data collection revealed that there is a need for recurring professional development focused on:

- Implicit Bias
- Trauma-Informed Practices
- Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices across educational settings
- Use of the Behavior Matrix as a standardized decision-making tool for all disciplinary matters

Key Recommendations

The following list of recommendations are an outcome of the discovery process - a collection of quantitative and qualitative sources gathered by the ASI Team. The recommendations build on earlier reports and go deeper based on the updated data collection. The recommendations address the multi-faceted challenges faced by the district and will require District Leadership to collaborate and align its priorities and expectations.

The recommendations are designed to help identify and address student needs early by providing effective interventions that will positively affect student outcomes.

The recommendations below are based on common themes that emerged from the multiple reports, elevating the convergence of throughlines and patterns.

MTSS Framework

It is recommended that NUSD enhance the comprehensive MTSS Framework document that aligns its MTSS framework beyond the development of individual documents.

- Align the 2025 NUSD Instructional Framework with a MTSS Framework, integrate the socio-emotional learning supports (SEL), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) systems, and align the Behavior Matrix with current state mandates, specifically focusing on the statutory requirements for Other Means of Correction (EC 48900.5).
- Develop a MTSS Framework that includes targeted evidence-based Tier 1 district-wide professional development on how to teach using explicit, direct, systematic, and unambiguous instructional methodology (i.e. Early Literacy Initiative).
- Establish a unified MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practices, and SEL framework across all school sites.
- Codify a universal MTSS/PBIS/SEL model to eliminate site-to-site variability. Every school must operate from the NUSD MTSS framework.

The graphic below illustrates the integrated components of an MTSS framework. The MTSS framework addresses the needs of the “whole child” that are supported by the entire system.



Source: Santa Ana Unified School District

Student Engagement

Design learning environments that increase student and teacher engagement by recognizing that barriers to learning are in the environment, not in the learner. This would include the use of

effective implementation of a districtwide approach to address the following practices:

- Culturally Relevant Teaching and Learning
- Social Emotional Learning infrastructures
- Restorative Practices
- Trauma-informed Practices
- Alternative Behavior Interventions utilizing the NUSD Behavior Matrix
- Targeted strategies and support diverse student connections and academic success, specifically for African-American/Black students.

Family and Community Engagement

Expand intentional opportunities for engagement with diverse families and community partners to build trust, increase awareness of available resources and services, and foster a shared commitment to student success in special education.

Develop a CIM for Sig Dis Plan Modification by bringing together a broader group of staff and community members to specially address some of the issues elevated in the ASI Assessment Report that is directly related to disproportionality.

Conduct additional targeted listening sessions with key role groups specifically with African American/Black parents and students and district leaders to gather additional information to assist with a revised CIM Plan to address Sig Disproportionality.

It is recommended that NUSD move forward with the following structures:

- Establish quarterly focus groups with an African American parents and students
- Implement an Alternative Dispute Resolutions (ADR) process
- Increase opportunities for two-way communication to foster positive parent family engagement
- Enhance NUSD website with FAQs anticipating parents' questions and concerns and actively promote the family facing websites across public meetings.
- Identify opportunities for involving members of the CAC with discussions relating to building trust with the parent community.
- Develop parent friendly handbooks for Special Education, Section 504 and SST.

Consistent with the NUSD's core values, the following is recommended:

- Continue the role of the Constituent and Customer Services (CCS) office and the Coordinator II, Family Engagement and Special Populations position in addressing and also initiating parent and community communication opportunities.
- Broaden the definition of parent engagement to include opportunities for intentional outreach to diverse families.

- Develop targeted strategies to improve outreach, better communication, and engagement with diverse parents, caregivers, and families.
- Develop a district-wide process to engage and support a diverse parent population, inclusive of African-American/Black parents, in partnering with the school sites to increase positive parent/family engagement to support the success of diverse students.

In alignment with the NUSD core value “families as partners in the education of their students”, intentional parent training opportunities should continue to be made available to families and community members regarding processes like Student Study Teams (SST), IEP advocacy, Section 504 and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) - Special Education Program Continuum

Implement a plan to provide a continuum of program offerings including:

- Continue to develop and implement the Moderate Special Education Homeroom.
- Continue to refine the program for students with Autism
- Identify and adopt evidence based program options at all levels.
- Address practices that impact ADL SPPI 5 LRE Target Not Met

Professional Development

Professional development (PD) in education encompasses ongoing learning opportunities designed to enhance educators’ skills, knowledge, and effectiveness. The recommendations listed below are based on the findings that were gathered from the focus groups, empathy interviews, and behavior assessment. The recommendations are designed to build upon the PD plans that have been put in place by the Educational Services Department:

- Include the SpED Department leadership staff in the Educational Services annual professional development calendar meeting.
- Continue the expectation for all teachers to participate in site-based general education Professional Learning Communities (PLC) as well as other district level training.
- Communicate expectations that site leadership will include special educators and service providers in all site-level leadership meetings related to curriculum and instruction.
- Continue recurring professional development focused on Trauma-Informed Practices and Classroom Management to increase student engagement and reduce incidences of disruptive student behavior.
- Implement ongoing anti-bias and Cultural Competency training which elevates the district’s foundational beliefs as leaders, an examination of systemic barriers to equitable outcomes and assessment of the district's current position on a culturally competent

continuum. The on-going professional development series should have intersession (between sessions) staff assignments requiring staff to reflect on current successes as well as problematic incidences to allow for the development of specific strategies to address equity related issues. The training sessions should also include modeling and role playing as well as consultancies to talk through and address real district challenges. This training model will allow the district to calibrate as a district team and formulate a plan of action to move the district forward with the implementation of anti-bias and Cultural Competency practices districtwide.

- Implement ongoing training to ensure administrators utilize the Behavior Matrix as a standardized decision-making tool for all disciplinary matters.
- Systematize training for all staff on documenting and utilizing proactive interventions to reduce reliance on out-of-school suspensions.
- Provide aligned training of site staff, safety team staff, instructional assistants and teachers in CPI and in on-going de-escalation strategies.

Professional Development focused on Special Education Instructional Assistants

- Expand the on-boarding/orientation process for newly hired instructional assistants that includes clear expectations, role overview, specific training for special populations, effective student safety interventions and materials and resources
- Develop an instructional assistant handbook that will include role expectations, daily routines, behavior supports and communication protocols.
- Develop monthly training opportunities for instructional assistants to enhance their instructional skills and behavior management.
- Develop accessible annual certification pathways related to their job duties as appropriate.
- Institute “Career Ladder” opportunities in collaboration with the NUSD Human Resources Department to support and encourage high school students to become instructional assistants.
- Enhance the Diverse Future Teachers Program to include recruitment of instructional assistants to consider enrolling in a college program to earn their bachelor’s degree.

Discipline/PBIS

Implement the following recommendations to strengthen the NUSD disciplinary infrastructure to address its disproportionality and build relational trust.

- Prioritize a systemic shift toward equity-centered discipline to address the persistent overrepresentation of specific student subgroups in suspension and expulsion
- Encourage **all** schools to participate in full implementation of PBIS. Facilitate renewal training and school visitations where successful evidence based practices can be

showcased.

- Continue to elevate work with SEL curriculums Second Step and BASE with the intent of delivering SEL across all school sites in all classrooms.
- Refine a district-level student fidelity monitoring system which includes baseline data for each student referral, interventions to support the students, timelines and student contacts and data which supports student impact.
- Utilize the Discipline Matrix as a public-facing guide to inform parents and staff of the NUSD vision for reducing suspensions through evidence-based alternatives.
- Implement structural work as identified in the Behavior Assessment conducted by Felicia Stuckey-Smith for the special education review. Actions are in alignment with District CIM/CCEIS Plan and are related to District Behavior Matrix, Alternatives to Suspension, Behavior Interventions and Responses, PBIS, MTSS Framework, Infinite Campus: Student Information System - and are detailed below:
 - Assist the CCEIS Leadership Team in any requested activities related to implementation of the Behavior Matrix as described in the CCEIS Plan
 - Serve as a consultant to the Leadership Team, school/district administrators and staff in the development for documenting and monitoring Alternatives to Suspension/Behavior Intervention and Responses in Infinite Campus Student Information System

Systems and Structures: Communication, Monitoring, and Accountability

Recommendations under this section elevate the role and responsibility of cross departmental leadership to collaboratively build and refine a unified infrastructure.

- Reinforce intentional and collaborative structures across general and special education at the district office so that each department is knowledgeable of the intersections of their respective areas of support and resources, and that the intersecting collaboration is understood and replicated at the site level.
- Review BP 0415 Equity to determine if BP/AR 0100 Theory of Action for Student Success reflects the anti-bias and discrimination language that is included with BP 0415 Equity. The District will be involved in a 2025 CIM for Sig Dis Plan Modification. The review of the Board Policy can be a task that is completed by the CIM leadership Team.
- Align all school policies, practices, procedures, and inclusion practices to support development of cultural sensitivity to interrupt systems that contribute to a lack of cultural sensitivity.
- Continue to define and finalize the roles and responsibilities of special education leadership; program specialists to provide focused support to school sites, students and families.
- Ensure that the Special Education Department Leadership team is included in strategic

planning, problem-solving, program development meetings and that a special education representative is an active participant in regular ongoing meetings to ensure connected and transparent communications - for example monthly principals' meetings, curriculum and instruction planning, and professional development training.

- Develop strategies to examine the Special Education Annual Determination Letter to determine data quality.
 - Analyze compliance findings in the Annual Determine Letter.
 - Develop activities and timelines to address the non-compliant areas as identified in the Special Education Annual Determination Letter
 - Establish collaboration structures between Education Services, site principals and Special Education district leadership to identify strategies to increase district compliance in meeting the CA Dashboard and SPPI targets for special education.
 - **Section 504**
 - Develop a process for staff to document disabling conditions of Section 504 plans in the student information and intervention systems.
 - Develop a standardized district-wide tool or system for monitoring Section 504 implementation in classrooms, the single most consistently named need that was elevated in focus groups discussions.
 - Establish a coherent elementary-to-middle school Section 504 transition process, mirrored on the structure already used for 8th-to-9th-grade transitions and Individual Learning Program (IEP) handoffs.
 - Implement ongoing Section 504-specific professional development for teachers, not just administrators, differentiated by level (elementary vs. secondary), covering what accommodations look like in practice with classroom contexts of 30+ students.
 - Implement clear, consistent district guidance on the role of the Section 504 Coordinator at each site, the Section 504/Individual Learning Program (IEP) relationship, and which staff member is the proper holder of the work at the site level, with documentation cleanup to follow.
 - **SST - Student Study Team**
 - Implement with fidelity, the district guidance on the Student Study Team (SST) process, evidence-based interventions, student progress monitoring, data collection and accountability.
 - Refine the SST data collection system to ensure all interventions are captured within Infinite Campus, to ensure real-time tracking of proactive supports.
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Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of the comprehensive assessment of the quality of service delivery in the Natomas Unified School District suggests that addressing the needs of diverse students and families, as well as other underserved groups is vital for improving educational outcomes for all.

By implementing the specific recommendations outlined in the report, the Natomas Unified School District can create a more inclusive, equitable, and successful learning environment for students. This requires a collective shift in district systems elevating accountability and a collaborative effort from the educational community including central office administration, site based administration, teachers, parents and community members.

We encourage the district to take the next steps In the development of an Implementation Action Plan to regularly monitor its progress and effectiveness. With commitment, accountability, and collaboration, the Natomas Unified School District can truly make a difference in the lives of all students and their families.