



Newport-Mesa Unified School District District State Study Team Brief Overview

March 2025

Background

LEAs and CCEE, alongside Statewide System of Support partners, work together to enhance outcomes for students with disabilities. This collaboration provides LEAs with access to specialized supports and resources within the system. This proactive approach, which offers both universal and targeted tools, empowers and connects LEAs, aiding them in their improvement efforts. Traditionally, this level of support was only available to districts in Differentiated Assistance and/or Intensive Compliance Improvement Monitoring.

In October 2023, the Superintendent of the Newport-Mesa Unified School District (NMUSD) in Orange County, along with CCEE and System Improvement Leads, began a collaborative effort to evaluate the district's support for students with disabilities. NMUSD serves 17,816 students with a 15% identification rate for students with disabilities.

This link [FINAL Newport-Mesa System of Support District Study Team](#) includes, in more depth, the processes, journey map and summary, and recommendations resulting from the District State Study Team process with NMUSD.

Key Relationships

District Team (NMUSD)

- Wes Smith, Superintendent
- Sara Jocham, Assistant Superintendent, Special Services
- Juliana Sauvao, Director, Special Education Dispute Resolution/SELPA
- Elsie Briseno Simonovski, Administrative Director, Special Education
- Socorro Shields, Assistant Superintendent, Continuous Improvement
- Leona Olson, Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources

System of Support Team (CCEE/SIL)

- Mindy Fattig, Senior Advisor, CCEE
- Heidi Hata, Director, System Improvement Leads
- Lisa Gilbert, Deputy Superintendent, Kern County Superintendent of Schools
- Chris Hartley, Deputy Executive Director, CCEE
- Jasmine Hennessy, Program Specialist, CCEE

Process

Once key relationships and partner roles were identified, the teams engaged in an intake process to develop an initial understanding of NMUSD's areas of strength and need. The System of Support team subsequently engaged in a preliminary data analysis to orient to available data.

The district provided the following documents for data review:

- Special Education Handbook
- Special Education Task Force Notes
- NMUSD PBIS Overview
- Demographics (Special Education by the Numbers)
- LCAP
- Annual Determination Letter

Following the initial intake and data review, the teams engaged in a root cause analysis to gain the perspective of educators, families, and students in the district to better understand the cause of district outcomes. The root cause analysis included focus groups, empathy interviews, district walkthroughs, additional data analysis, and process mapping. Our guiding questions for this work were as follows:

- What is working well in the district in serving students with disabilities?
- What are the opportunities for improvement?
- What outcomes would you like to see within the district in 1 year, 3 years, and 5 years?

From the root cause analysis process,

☐ Copy of Summary & Recommendations NMUSD SSOS Collaboration Slide Deck

were shared. From there, three focus areas were collectively identified:

- Professional development for all staff
- Clarity of staff roles and responsibilities
- Inclusive practices and shifting mindsets

Within the three focus areas, the System of Support and district teams proceeded with strategic [action planning](#) with the Special Education Department and subsequent implementation. Some of the action items included:

- Clarify the Coordinator's role and define job duties in more detail to ensure consistency and common expectations amongst all staff at all school sites. Update all written communication regarding the Coordinator role, including the district IEP Handbook,
- Create an organizational chart that includes an internal communication infrastructure.
- Participate in Compliance Improvement Monitoring (CIM).

Support Provided/Impact

The District State Study Team (DSST) process was over a 16-month collaboration between CCEE, Systems Improvement Lead (SIL), and Newport-Mesa Unified School District (NMUSD) and Newport-Mesa Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA). The goal of this partnership was to proactively analyze the district's system and services for students with disabilities. The collaboration focused on identifying and connecting to SSOS universal resources and expertise, strengthening leadership continuous improvement approaches, and discovering future partnership opportunities between SSOS initiatives and NMUSD to leverage the work for sustainability and continuous improvement. Below is a summary of action taken based on synthesis of input from NMUSD and the DSST process;

Quick Wins

CCEE leverages the system of support to provide resources for a few low effort, high impact actions (e.g., professional development, independence plans in IEPs, post-secondary transition follow-up) **ACHIEVED/ONGOING**

ACTION

- CCEE connected NMUSD to the HQ IEP Special Education Lead for Best Practices in IEP Participation, Development, and Monitoring.
- Collaborated with Newport-Mesa SELPA and NMUSD, sharing Independence Handbook and forms/processes from Humboldt-Del Norte SELPA.
- Connected NMUSD to SIL Resources for Post-Secondary transition best practices and guides.
- Continues to be a resource for connections across the SSOS as needed

NMUSD

- a. Create a communication plan to share the vision statement widely and return to it regularly **ACHIEVED**
- b. Create a comprehensive organization chart with roles & responsibilities. Clarify supervision. **ACHIEVED**
- c. Begin reframing for all staff:
Special education is a service, not a place **ACHIEVED**
- d. Focus on student-centered, high-quality IEPs
 - i. Implement independence plans
 - ii. Utilize post-secondary resources provided **ACHIEVED/PROGRESS MONITOR**
- e. Complete a thorough CIM process and plan integrated with LCAP goals; PD needed to achieve goals **ACHIEVED**
- f. Utilize person-first language **ACHIEVED/PROGRESS MONITOR**
- g. Senior leaders model use of "one team" **ACHIEVED/ PROGRESS MONITOR**
- h. Develop & utilize talking points (e.g., "All our students are all *our* students) **ACHIEVED**

Strengthen Leadership continuous improvement approach

WITH CCEE/SIL SUPPORT:

- a. Regular consultation w/ district leadership **ACHIEVED/PROGRESS CHECKS AS NEEDED**
- b. Opportunities for cabinet to refine routines and habits that support the use of continuous improvement. Model and spread these strategies to other district leaders **IN PROGRESS/ONGOING**

ACTIONS:

- CCEE/SIL has monthly check in meetings with the Superintendent and Asst. Superintendent of Special Education as a thought-partner and connector to resources in SSOS through 24-25 school year.
- CCEE/SIL collaborated with Asst. Superintendent of Human Resources as a thought partner in creating Cabinet agendas and processes/procedures for Executive Leadership.

Connection to identified SSOS initiative to further drive the improvement work

- a. Select 1 problem area to focus on, aligned with priorities **ACHIEVED**
- b. Form a site-based improvement team and work toward improved outcomes **CIM Team**
- c. Provide updates to cabinet regularly, cabinet celebrates and spreads the word about improvement happening

ACTION:

- In order to increase inclusive best practices throughout the district, CCEE/SIL connected NMUSD Leadership to Supporting Inclusive Practices (SIP), an initiative in the SSOS.
- NMUSD has scheduled visits to model demonstration sites for inclusive practices and will become a SIP grantee beginning July 1, 2025. The district will receive ongoing support to further its work on identified areas of inclusion and mindset.

The transition to Supporting Inclusive Practices (SIP) will continue to progress forward and begin to address some of the long-term recommendations identified through the DSST process found below:

Long Term Investment

- Audit areas of settlement agreements and create proactive next steps; identify areas of ongoing PD (in areas of LRE in particular)
- Identify 1-2 pilot sites for co-teaching. Update master schedule and staffing as needed. Provide ongoing coaching to ensure implementation
- District-wide culture surveys
- Regular town halls or listening sessions for families to have a voice
- Strategic plan integrating CIM and LCAP goals
- Senior leadership coaching
- MTSS and UDL implementation
- Visit model sites for inclusive practices
- CIM and site-level ongoing data analysis for continuous improvement

Next Steps

The District State Study Team collaboration was originally intended to last 1-2 years. The goal of this collaboration was to gather diverse input, identify goals and strategic actions, and recommend both quick wins and longer-term system improvements. These recommendations would then be connected to the CA SSOS for more in-depth implementation.

Currently, CCEE/SIL continues to meet monthly with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of Special Education throughout the 24-25 school year. These meetings serve as a platform for thought partnership and connection to SSOS resources and support.

Beginning in the 2025-26 school year, CCEE/SIL will transition to a SSOS lead initiative, Supporting Inclusive Practices, to continue the work to further implement the work of the DSST process in improving outcomes for all students in Newport-Mesa Unified School District.

Conclusion

The Newport-Mesa Unified School District (NMUSD) and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) District State Study Team (DSST) process was a successful collaboration that resulted in valuable insights and recommendations for improving the district's system and services for students with disabilities. The process was guided by a shared commitment to continuous improvement and a belief that all students can succeed when given the right opportunities and support.

The DSST process identified three key focus areas for improvement:

1. Professional development for all staff
2. Clarity of staff roles and responsibilities
3. Inclusive practices and shifting mindsets

Within these focus areas, the DSST team and NMUSD developed a comprehensive action plan that outlines specific steps to address the identified needs. The action

plan includes strategies for providing targeted support to staff, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and promoting inclusive practices throughout the district.

The district has already begun implementing the recommendations from the action plan, and it is committed to continuing to work to monitor progress and make further improvements with the support and partnership of SSOS initiatives in particular Supporting Inclusive Practices. . The DSST process has also strengthened the partnership between NMUSD and CCEE, and it is anticipated that this collaboration will continue to benefit the district and its students for years to come.

CCEE Charge

As the statewide agency solely charged with assisting LEAs in need of support, CCEE provides universal, targeted, and intensive supports and resources for local educational agencies (LEAs). CCEE staff engaged with Newport-Mesa Unified School District as aligned with its statutory obligation to advise and assist LEAs to build capacity that address systemic inequities. For more information about CCEE, please visit <https://ccee-ca.org/> or request assistance at <https://ccee-ca.org/request-assistance/>.