

Formal Written Correspondence to the Board

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* Subject

In Support of the Co-taught Program at Arroyo Seco

* Comments

Dear Board President Prusso and Trustees Bueno, Drouin, Guzman, and Wang,

I am beyond disheartened to hear about the dismantling of the Co-taught model of special education at Arroyo Seco in favor of a Learning Center model. My son has been a student in the Co-taught classes at Arroyo Seco for two years. He had two other school placements before moving to Arroyo Seco and we were happy to try a special education placement that would better meet his needs. We were sold on the program after hearing how the general education teacher and the special education teacher could more easily collaborate and make accommodation decisions on the spot. I have seen this kind of partnership between the teachers to be amazingly beneficial for my child. His interactions with peers also increased as he had a special education teacher with years of experience closeby to help him with these interactions in the classroom. To be fair, my son has needs that are difficult to provide for through any model provided in the district. However, Co-taught was the best chance we had because of the collaboration, creative problem solving, and instant decision making between educators that it provided.

From the information given to families in the email sent on April 17th, 2024, it sounds like students will be receiving less support. Without being given much information about the Learning Centers model, it is difficult understand exactly how a student's services will change. Learning Centers sounds more like a traditional resource program. That wouldn't benefit my son and students like him. His IEP goals are behavioral and a Learning Centers model wouldn't allow the Special Education teacher to support him in the same way he has been supported with fragmented support it provides. There would be a disconnect of information between teachers that had been a weakness in other programs he tried. In the email informing us of the change of models it says, "They will have the option to go to the Learning Center for small group instruction as needed or to receive intervention support based on their IEP goals and individual needs." I don't believe that would be true for my son and other students in his situation.

I would also like to speak to the positive school culture that the Co-taught model of education helps to provide. In my opinion, the Co-taught model is the ultimate model of inclusion. General education and special education students working alongside each other all day is a gift to all students in that classroom. I truly don't know who is in special education and who is in general education in my son's class. The kind of social equity this provides is invaluable. Being pulled out of class to learn in a special small group highlights to everyone that you don't learn the same way as others and that can be difficult for an already-struggling student.

I am also concerned about teacher burn-out. The Learning Center model changes the dynamic and workload for the special education and the general education teacher. I can't imagine that the special education teacher's caseload will remain the same with the Learning Centers model. We are not in a place where we should be adding to the duties and stress of our teachers. I image that they will now be asked to be at a lot of IEP meetings at the end of the year as families prepare for this change that could dramatically change their child's experience. Let us not take for granted how much our teachers do for our students by taking away a program that allows them to teach effectively and efficiently.

I believe this program is worth keeping in our district. Other districts do as well. While I was interning this year in a neighboring district, they spoke about how they are moving toward a Co-taught model because of all the benefits for the students (special education and general education students) and the teachers. They spoke about looking to LVJUSD as an example. If other districts are moving toward a Co-taught model, why are we moving away from it? Was there a needs assessment showing that a Co-taught model wasn't meeting the needs of the students? Is there data to support this change? What problem is this change solving for? These are questions that parents and teachers would like to have answered. I am disappointed that this decision was made and announced without much, if any, input from the people effected by the change. I understand that I don't know every aspect of the decision-making, but that is why communication in situations like these is important.

My family has been working with LVJUSD's special education department for six years. I have advocated for my child and helped other people advocate for theirs. I have always spoken highly of LVJUSD's special education services and department. My son is moving on to middle school and won't be directly effected by this change, but I care enough about the students and teachers in the district that I felt the need to speak out about this change in programming.

Sincerely,
Genoa Sperske