

Office of the Independent Monitor

October 5, 2009

*Study of the Accuracy of District Data on Placement
in the Least Restrictive Environment 2008-09*

Outcome 7A focuses on students with disabilities (SWD) other than specific learning disability (SLD), speech and language impairment (SLI) and other health impaired (OHI). This outcome requires the District to increase the number of SWD in the general education setting to 40% or more of their school day. Since time in the general education setting is maintained within the Welligent system based on the time spent in special education, the findings are presented in two categories: students in the special education setting for 60% or less of the day, and those in the special education setting for more than 60% of their day.

Outcome 7A: Placement of Students with Disabilities (Ages 6-18) with All Other Eligibilities excluding SLI, SLD and OHI. The District will demonstrate a ratio of not less than 51% of students placed in the combined categories of 0-20% and 21-60%, and not more than 49% of students placed in the 61-100% category utilizing instructional minutes as the methodology. In determining whether the District has achieved this outcome, any fraction percentage of .51 or above shall be rounded up to its nearest whole number.

This study validates the accuracy of the District's least restrictive environment (LRE) data for making a determination of the District's progress on Outcome 7A. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Are there discrepancies between the percent of time in special education calculated from information on the IEP and the percent of time in special education calculated from the number of special education minutes in a student's schedule?
2. Do any discrepancies between the percent of time in special education in Welligent and in the student schedule data have any impact on the overall calculation of percent of time in special education for Outcome 7?

Methodology

The methodology was consistent with that utilized during the 2007-2008 study. To summarize, IEP data on the percentage of time in special education were retrieved at the central level for students with all other disabilities in the Welligent system. The Welligent data were verified against the percentage of time found in the students' most current IEP¹ (if different) and classroom schedule detailing the time spent in special education. This information is then matched to determine if any discrepancies between the Welligent system and classroom schedule result in a change between the time categories associated with the this outcome (e.g., more than 60% or less than 60%).

¹ In some instances, students have an IEP in the school file that differs from the Welligent data, which is retrieved at a set point prior to sampling. To accommodate for the timeframe between the sampling and file review, information from the updated IEP is obtained as this may reflect the LRE time more accurately.

Sample Design

During the 2008-2009 school year, the LRE study consisted of two samples drawn in February and April 2009. The samples are representative of students with disabilities eligible with all other disabilities excluding those with SLD, SLI, and OHI by local school district and school level. This year, the study over-sampled students by the percent of time spent in the special education setting. This was done because the 2007-2008 study identified trends that indicated inaccuracies that impacted the performance on this outcome for students with Welligent data showing placement in the special education setting for less than 60% of the day. Further, students that reflect an LRE time primarily in a segregated special education setting (more than 60%) are more likely to have accurate data or inaccuracies that do not impact the outcome. Therefore, the over-sampling allowed more focus on the areas of concern. Tables 1 and 2 show the final distributions of the overall LRE sample (N=658) across local school districts and school type.

Table 1: Distribution of Students with All Other Disabilities in LRE Sample

Local School District	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
1	113	17.2
2	104	15.8
3	78	11.9
4	71	10.8
5	78	11.9
6	56	8.5
7	63	9.6
8	85	12.9
R	10	1.5
Total	658	100.0

Table 2. School Level Distribution of Students with All Other Disabilities in LRE Sample

School Level	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Elementary	326	49.5
Middle	152	23.1
High	125	19.0
Special Centers	55	8.4
Total	658	100.0

Table 3. Proportions of Students by Educational Placement Time

School Level	Study		Population	
	N	%	N	%
Less than 60% in SPED	464	70.52	7,106	46.97
More than 60% in SPED	194	29.48	8,025	53.03
Total	658	100.0	15,131	100.0

Data Collection and Analyses

Data including student demographic information and the percentage of time in the special education setting was uploaded centrally and placed on an instrument developed by the OIM (Attachment A). These data were verified through a review of the student’s most current IEP and the IEP identified at the time of the sampling. Classroom schedules detailing the time spent either in the general or special education setting and a roster of special education teachers also were collected.

Consistent with the previous methodology, data collected were used to create student files. Each file was expected to contain a report on the number of instructional minutes reported by school staff, a completed data collection instrument and the student’s classroom/class or other available schedules. Data from these sources were then analyzed to determine the total number of special education minutes each student received and then were transferred to a data summary sheet (Attachment B). Each student file was reviewed three times by three separate reviewers in order to establish inter-rater reliability and to ensure consistency of schedule and IEP data analyses. This information was then entered into an LRE database and sent to the American Institutes for Research (AIR) for analyses.

Findings

To determine if the LRE data were reliable for determining the District’s performance on this outcome, data were analyzed to examine if inaccuracies found between the Welligent System and students’ class schedules impacted the number of students in each LRE time category. Since the two LRE categories are based on a range of time (e.g., less than 60%) in the special education setting inaccuracies may exist that have no impact on the District’s performance.

The LRE Welligent data were compared to the LRE time reported by the class schedules to determine if exact matches exist. Information of exact data matches presents an overview of the accuracy of the Welligent LRE data. While it may be expected that the Welligent data and classroom schedule have a one-to-one correspondence, there are many variables that limit such correspondence. Overall, the highest levels of exact agreement are noted between the LRE data reported by Welligent data and the most current IEP (64.3%) (Table 4). This finding shows that approximately one-third of the IEPs in the Welligent system had been updated since the time of sampling. This demonstrates the dynamic nature of LRE data and impact of time as IEPs are held daily and the system is constantly updated. Exact matches were considerably lower between the Welligent data and schedule (17.3%) and IEP and schedule (20.5%).

Table 4. Number and Percentages of Students with LRE Time Exact Matches by, Welligent, IEP and School Schedule

Exact Matches	Welligent –IEP		Welligent – Schedule		IEP – Schedule	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Matches	423	64.3	114	17.3	135	20.5%
Non-Matches	235	35.7	544	82.7	523	79.5%
Total N	658	100.0	658	100.0	658	100.0

As noted earlier, matches between the LRE data from the Welligent system and IEPs have considerably lower rates of agreement when compared to classroom schedules. This occurs for two primary reasons. The first is related to minor programming nuances at schools which limit the ability of achieving an exact match. This means that in some cases, LRE time is an estimated fixed percent of time such as 60% that may translate into 58% of time when programming factors are accounted for. As example, secondary schools may have class periods which differ in length (e.g., 54 minutes, 58 minutes, 64 minutes) and an equivalent number of periods during the day (five). However, due to these minor differences, the total number of minutes may not translate exactly into the percentage entered into the Welligent IEP. The second reason is due to non-programmatic inaccuracies between the Welligent IEP data system and the class schedule. This means that schools may enter an LRE percent of time in the Welligent system that varies considerably from the time reported on the class schedule. As example, the Welligent system will report a student in the special education setting for 40% while the class schedule shows that a student is in the special education setting for 80%. This factor is the primary area of focus for determining if the inaccuracies within the Welligent IEP system impact the District’s performance on this Outcome.

To first account for minor programming differences, matches were examined by time categories (less than 60% and more than 60%). When the LRE time data were compared by category, levels of agreement are approximately 50% between IEP and class schedules for both categories (Less than 60%: 49.3% and More than 60%: 49.4%)(Table 5). Levels of agreement are lower between Welligent and Schedule LRE times, which shows the impact of outdated LRE data within the Welligent system at the time of the review (Less than 60%: 44.7% and More than 60%: 39.0%).

Table 5. Number and Percentages of Students with LRE Time Category Matches by, Welligent, IEP and School Schedule

Exact Matches	Welligent –IEP		Welligent – Schedule		IEP – Schedule	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 60%	401	83.3	217	44.7	217	49.3%
More than 60%	177	68.9	172	39.0	218	49.4%

To better identify where the areas of agreement are higher, LRE data were examined using the Federal reporting categories. These categories better show both ends of integration, since students spending time of less than 20%, typically receive minimal supports such as RSP or DIS services. Students in the more than 60% category usually spend the majority of their day in the

special day program classroom. Those students between 20%-60% on their IEPs are students with various levels of integration, as some may receive RSP support while others may be in a special day program with a couple of periods of general education integration.

Table 6 shows that students in the special education setting of less than 20% have higher levels of agreements (over 80%) between the Welligent, IEP and class schedules. This means that the data have higher levels of accuracy for students who spend a significant time in the general education setting. For those students who spend the majority of their day in a special day program, approximately half (49.4%) had time categories that matched their IEP. The lowest levels of agreement were for students with an LRE time between 20 to 60%. This is important since inaccuracies within the data in this range may have a larger impact on the performance of this outcome. Overall, this analysis provides additional insight into where the data inaccuracies result in a shift in category.

Table 6. Number and Percentages of Students in the Federal reporting categories whose placement category by information source

Time	Source				Schedule IEP	
	Welligent IEP		Welligent Schedule			
Less than 20%	98	89.1	93	81.6	95	86.4
Between 20 than 60%	295	77.8	106	27.2	108	31.4
More than 60%	177	68.8	172	39.0	218	49.4

To determine whether the Welligent data on time spent in the special education setting were reliable for making a determination of Outcome 7A, the discrepancies must not result in a shift in category. For example, if data from the Welligent system indicate that a student is in the special education setting for 45% of the instructional time, the student is considered to fall into the 60% or less category. For a shift in category to occur, the same student’s schedule would have to show an additional 15% more time in the special education setting to affect the District’s performance on the outcome. A discrepancy of less than 15% would result in the student remaining in the 60% or less category and thereby have no impact on the performance of the outcome.

Table 7 shows that for students with an LRE time of less than 60%, the Welligent IEP accurately reported approximately half (51.5%) of the students in the sample. This means that out of 464 students in the sample with an LRE time of 60% or less, discrepancies were noted for 239 students that shifted them into the category of more than 60%. Of the 194 students in the sample with Welligent data indicating placement in special education for more than 60% of the day, discrepancies were found for 46 students that shifted them into the 60% or less category. While discrepancies are observed for both categories, the inaccuracies result in a greater movement of students from the less than 60% category into the more than 60% category. This means that the inaccuracies skew the movement between categories to overestimate the number of students in the special education setting for less than 60% of the day. This has considerable implications on the utilization of the LRE data for making a determination based on the Welligent data for the population of students with all other disabilities.

Table 7. Number of Students in Welligent by Category with a Category Change Based on Schedule Information - All Students

Source				
Time	Welligent	Schedule	Difference	Percent Change
Less than 60%	464	239	-225	-48.5
More than 60%	194	419	46	23.7
Total Sample	658	658		

To gauge the effect of these inaccuracies, the findings were weighted to identify estimates by data source. The target of the outcome requires the District to increase the number of students with all other disabilities in the special education setting for less than 60% of the instructional day to not less than 52% of the population. Table 8 shows that the estimates based on the class schedules fall below the 52% target. Since this data source validates the accuracy of the Welligent data, this discrepancy questions the reliability of the Welligent LRE data for determining progress toward the outcome.

Table 8. Population Estimates of Students with All Other Disabilities by LRE Time Category and Data Source

Exact Matches	Welligent	IEP	Schedule
	%	%	%
Less than 60%	70.52	63.53	36.32
Weighted	60.3	56.8	43.2
Confidence Intervals	55.8 - 64.7	52.0 - 61.5	36.9 - 49.4
More than 60%	29.48	36.47	63.68
Weighted	39.7	43.2	56.8
Confidence Intervals	32.9 - 46.6	37.0 - 49.5	52.1 - 61.6

The inaccuracies noted may be due to two primary factors. The first may be attributed to an edit within the Welligent system that prompts schools to acknowledge placements of time in the special education of 60% or more of the day. This edit appears to influence some schools into entering a time of less than 60% to comply with the target of the outcome regardless of the student's schedule. Several students who were reported with an LRE time between 56%-60% actually had schedules that showed higher amounts of time in the special education classroom. This analysis examined the LRE data of students with Welligent times in the range of 50-70% to determine if differences based on their classroom schedule may be an effect of the Welligent edit which prompts schools to acknowledge placements in the special education setting of more than 60%. For example, if the Welligent IEP stated an LRE time of 56% and the classroom schedule reflected 62% in the special education setting, this discrepancy may be attributed to minor programming variables. However, if the same student had a classroom schedule that reflect 82% of the day in the special education setting, this may imply an effect of the Welligent edit.

Of the 235 students whose IEP indicated an LRE time in the range of 56-60% in the special education setting, only 80 (34.0%) had class schedules with a percent of time of less than 63%² (Table 9). The remaining students had schedules that showed time in special education greater than 63%, shifting them into the more than 60% category. Moreover, the schedules of over half of the students (54%) showed time in the special education setting for over 71% of the day. These discrepancies are beyond reasonable and may indicate that schools are entering an LRE time of less than 60% to comply with the target of the outcome.

Table 9. Number and Percentage of Students with a Percent of LRE Time of 59% or Less in the Special Education Setting Reported by Welligent by Percent of LRE Time Reported on Schedule

% time in special education according to schedule												
	60% or less		More than 60% to less than 63%		63% to less than 71%		71% to less than 81%		81% or greater		Total	
% time in special education according to IEP	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
50% to less than 53%	14	53.8	2	7.7	2	7.7	5	19.2	3	11.5	26	100
53% to less than 56%	18	60.0	1	3.3	5	16.7	4	13.3	2	6.7	30	100
56% to 60%	65	27.7	15	6.4	28	11.9	55	23.4	72	30.6	235	100
More than 60% to 70%	17	18.1	6	6.4	20	21.3	17	18.1	34	36.2	94	100
Total	114	29.6	24	6.2	55	14.3	81	21.0	111	28.8	385	100

The second factor that may be resulting in the overestimation of LRE is that schools continue to consider non-instructional time as time spent in general education. For instance, some schools mentioned recess, lunch and common assembly periods as time spent in the general education setting on the summary page of the IEP. While this may meet the Federal definition of LRE time, the MCD specifically calculates time in general education only for instructional time. Therefore, the inclusion of non-instructional activities within the calculation of LRE time may be resulting in discrepancies that shift students into the more than 60% category.

Summary

While the District has made efforts to include more students with other disabilities in the general education setting and appears to be near the 51% target, the accuracy of the Welligent LRE data is not considered reliable for making a determination at this time. During the 2009-2010 school year, the study should expand to further examine the accuracy of the data and the impact of discrepancies on the District's performance.

The District should continue its efforts to increase the capacity of schools and general educators to integrate students with moderate to severe disabilities. The District should provide schools with clarification of the MCD's definition of what constitutes time in the general education setting. Lastly, the District should review the Welligent edit function that appears to influence

² A 63% threshold was used to account for minor programming differences.

schools to enter a percent of time of less than 60%, regardless of the student's actual academic program and participation in the general education setting.

Least Restrictive Environment

Student in LRE

Page 1

District ID#	Last Name	First Name	Birthday	Grade	Current IEP Date	IEP Date if different:
				6	5/21/2008	

Attend School: RICHLAND EL Local District: 3

IEP Meeting Location: _____

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Eligibility: MDO Eligibility if different: _____

Page 5

Performance area	Wk	Freq	Total	Month	Freq	Total	Minutes outside Gen Ed
1 _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	_____
2 _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	_____
3 _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	_____
4 _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	_____
5 _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____	_____

Page 8

Page 8 Missing Welligent Percent of Time:

Gen Ed RSP SDC (Minutes per Week): _____ DIS Gen Ed/Inclusion % of time: _____

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1. # of Weekly District Policy Total School Minutes

2. # of Weekly Total School Minutes School Report

Sample: 5/11/2009

LRE Data Summary Sheet (2008-2009)

Name of Student: _____

Eligibility: _____

Check if different from instrument

School: _____

IEP Date: _____

Check if different from instrument

Grade: _____

If information is not available, please mark N/A

_____ Total # of Instructional Minutes in LAUSD policy for this student

Elementary and Pre-K

_____ Total # of SPED Minutes in IEP	Total # p.5 _____
For SDP Total = p. 8 + p.5 DIS	Total # p.8 _____
	Total # p.12 _____

_____ Total # of SPED Minutes from Schedule	Total # SDP Classroom _____
Total # SPED = SDP Classroom/RSP + DIS	Total # DIS _____
	Total # RSP _____

Secondary – Middle and High School

_____ Total # of SPED Minutes in IEP	Total # p.5 _____
For SDP Total = p. 8 + p.5 DIS	Total # p.8 _____
	Total # p.12 _____

_____ Total # of SPED Minutes from Schedule	Length of Period _____
Total # Minutes = [(# Periods x length of period +	# of Sped periods _____
(Total HR min x 5)]	# Mins Hr x 5 _____
	DIS excluding APE _____

_____ Total # of SPED Minutes in IEP _____ Total# SPED minutes Schedule

_____ Percent SPED time from IEP	_____ Total % SPED Time Schedule
(IEP minutes/Policy minutes)	(Schedule minutes/Policy Minutes)

_____ Total % Welligent (Directly from p. 8 of IEP)