

Office of the Independent Monitor

September 29, 2010

*Study of the Accuracy of District Data on Placement
in the Least Restrictive Environment 2009-2010*

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 2008-2009 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

The LRE study consisted of two samples drawn in March and May 2010. The samples are stratified by four variables: disability type, LRE time category, local school district and school level. This year, the study over-sampled students in the special education setting for 60% or more of the day. Within this group, students with a percent of time between 56-60% also were oversampled. This was done because previous studies identified increasing trends in the number of students with an LRE time in this range as reported by Welligent. Therefore, the over-sampling allowed more focus on these areas to better determine the impact on the District’s performance on this outcome. Tables 1 and 2 show the final distributions of the overall LRE sample (N=1,765) across local school districts and school type. Tables 3 and 4 show the distribution of students by school type. Table 5 shows the distribution of students by LRE category.

Table 1: Distribution of Students with All Other Disabilities by Local District

Local School District	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
1	235	13.3
2	233	13.2
3	203	11.5
4	186	10.5
5	168	9.5
6	111	6.3
7	135	7.7
8	181	10.3
NPS	224	12.7
R	41	2.3
S	3	0.2
T	45	2.6
Total	1,765	100.0

Table 2. School Level Distribution of Students with All Other Disabilities by School Level

School Level	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Elementary	764	43.3
Middle	273	15.5
High	325	18.4
Special Centers	179	10.1
NPS	224	12.7
Total	1,765	100.0

Table 3: Number of Schools in Analysis by Local District

Local School District	Number of Students	Percentage of Schools
1	77	13.6
2	75	13.3
3	66	11.7
4	72	12.7
5	51	9.0
6	32	5.7
7	39	6.9
8	56	9.9
NPS	50	8.8
R	29	5.1
S	2	0.4
T	17	3.0
Total	566	100.0

Table 4. Number of Schools in Analysis by School Level

School Level	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Elementary	336	59.4
Middle	90	15.9
High	73	12.9
Special Centers	17	3.0
NPS	50	8.8
Total	566	100.0

Table 5. Proportions of Students by Educational Placement Time

School Level	Study		Population	
	N	%	N	%
Less than 60% in SPED	1,093	61.9	8,657	51.7
More than 60% in SPED	672	38.1	8,082	48.3
Total	1,765	100.0	16,739	100.0

Data Collection and Analyses

Data including student demographic information and the percentage of time in the special education setting were uploaded centrally and placed on an instrument developed by the OIM (Attachment A). These data were verified through a review of the students’ 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 contained a report on the number of instructional minutes reported by school staff, a completed data collection instrument and the students’ 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 analysis.

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 broad 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.

Information of exact data matches presents an overview of the accuracy of the Welligent LRE data. To determine the extent of exact matches, the LRE Welligent data were compared to both the most current IEP and class schedules. While it may be expected that the Welligent data and classroom schedule match, 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 (64.4%) (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 IEP meetings are held daily and the system is constantly updated. Exact matches were considerably lower between the Welligent data and class schedules (27.6%) and IEP and class schedules (31.2%). To clarify, these findings indicate a low level of a one-to-one correspondence with the specific time reported in the Welligent Data and class schedules, and is not indicative of a category match.

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	1,102	64.4	488	27.6	550	31.2
Non-Matches	663	37.6	1,277	72.4	1,215	68.8
Total	1,765	100.0	1,765	100.0	1,765	100.0

As noted above, 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. For example, 60% of time may translate into 58% when programming factors are accounted for. 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). 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. For example, the Welligent system will report a student in the special education setting for 40% of the time while the class schedule shows that a student is in the special education setting for 80% of the time. 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 between the Welligent Data and class schedules for both categories were 31.9% (Less than 60%) and 68.1% (More than 60%) (Table 5). The study found that about half of the students reported as being in the special education classroom for less than 60% of the day were actually in such classes for more than 60% based on their class schedules. This finding is indicative of the impact the inaccuracies have on utilizing the Welligent LRE data for determining the District’s performance on Outcome 7A.

Table 5. Number and Percentages of Students in two reporting categories based on Welligent, IEP and School Schedule

Exact Matches	Welligent		IEP		Schedule	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 60%	1,093	61.9	1,015	57.5	563	31.9
More than 60%	672	38.1	750	42.5	1,202	68.1
Total	1,765	100.0	1,765	100.0	1,765	100.0

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% in the special education setting 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 with between 20%-60% indicated 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 between the Welligent, IEP and class schedules. Of the 333 students in the sample with an LRE time in this category, 312 students had schedules reflecting this level of integration. 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, an additional 530 (79%) students had schedules showing time in the special education setting of more than 60%. The highest levels of inaccuracies were for students with an LRE time between 20 to 60% in the special education setting. Of the 760 students in the sample showing Welligent time in this category, only 251 (33%) had schedules reflecting placement within this range. 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					
	Welligent		IEP		Schedule	
Less than 20%	333	18.9%	377	21.4%	312	17.7%
Between 20 than 60%	760	43.1%	638	36.1%	251	14.2%
More than 60%	672	38.1%	750	42.5%	1,202	68.1%
Total	1,765	100.0%	1,765	100.0%	1,765	100.0%

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 accurately reflected 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

Time	Source			Difference	Percent Change
	Welligent	Schedule			
Less than 60%	1,093	563		-530	-48.5%
More than 60%	672	1,202		+530	78.9%
Total Sample	1,765	1,765			

The inaccuracies noted may be due to two primary factors. The first may be attributed to the statement 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. The past two studies have found an increasing trend in students who were reported with an LRE time between 56%-60% who actually had schedules that showed higher amounts of time in the special education classroom. To examine the extent of this phenomenon, this analysis examined the LRE data of students with Welligent times in the range of 56-60% to determine if differences based on their classroom schedule may be the result of the statement in Welligent that 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 reflected 82% of the day in the special education setting, this may be the result of the Welligent edit.

Of the 643 students whose IEP indicated an LRE time in the range of 56-60% in the special education setting, only 163 (25.4%) had class schedules with a percent of time of less than 60%, while an additional 20 students (3.1%) had times between 60-63%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 (58%) 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. Overall, a total of 480 students (74.6%) with Welligent times between 56-60% had discrepancies large enough to place them in the more restrictive category of more than 60%.

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

Percent of 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
56-60% time in special education according to IEP						
N	163	20	85	150	225	643
%	25.4%	3.1%	13.2%	23.3%	35.0%	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. Therefore, the inclusion of non-instructional activities

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

within the calculation of LRE time may be resulting in discrepancies that shift students into the more than 60% category.

Summary

During the 2009-2010 school year, the Welligent IEP data system indicated that 51.18% of students with all other eligibilities were placed in the general education classroom for 40% or more of the day. The findings of this validation study of the LRE data show that inaccuracies exist between the Welligent data and student schedules that result in many students shifting to the more restrictive category. This suggests that the percentage of students reported by Welligent as being in the special education setting of less than 60% is an overestimation and may be unreliable for making a determination.

Over the past three years, the validation study has noted such discrepancies between the Welligent LRE data and students' schedules and the increase in the number of students with LRE times between 56-60%. The findings of the analysis of students with an LRE within this time range indicate that the statement within Welligent for schools to acknowledge placement of over 60% may be detrimental for maintaining accurate LRE data. The percentage of students with times considerably over 60% suggest that schools enter a time that falsely does not take into account the student's actual instructional program.

Additionally, in March 2010, the District implemented changes to the Welligent IEP system which negatively impacted the overall accuracy of this year's LRE data. Since the roll-out of these changes through the end of the June 2010, more than 42,000 IEP meetings were held. During the file reviews conducted for this study, many IEPs from the sample were found to be missing LRE times due to missing values or incomplete documents (resulting from printing problems), LRE times with negative values (e.g., -15% in special education), or partially reported LRE time. These observations led to discussions with the District and confirmed that the LRE data for many of the IEPs held after the roll-out were unreliable for making a determination.

For the 2010-2011 school year, it is recommended that the District remove the statement within the Welligent system that acknowledges a student's placement in a special education setting for 60% or more of the day. Additionally, the District should continue to clarify to all schools that for the purpose of Outcome 7A, only instructional time is considered time spent 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: _____

Page 4

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 (2009-2010)

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)