

Office of the Independent Monitor

October 5, 2011

*Study of the Accuracy of District Data on Placement
in the Least Restrictive Environment 2010-2011*

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 the 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 day¹.

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 used to determine 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

IEP data on the percentage of time in special education were retrieved 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 IEP² (if different) and classroom schedules detailing the time spent in special education. This information was then compared to determine if any discrepancies between the Welligent system and classroom schedule result in a change between the time categories associated with this outcome (e.g., more than 60% or less than 60%).

¹ For the purpose of the MCD, time in the LRE is for instructional time only. This differs from both federal and state definitions of LRE time which consist of three time categories (0-20%, 21-60% and 61-100%) and include non-instructional time such as recess and lunch

² 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 study consisted of two samples drawn in November 2010 and April 2011. The samples were stratified by four variables: disability type, LRE time category, local school district and school level. The study over-sampled both for students with a percent of time of less than 60% in special education and those with a time between 56-60%. This was done because previous studies identified increasing trends in the number of students with inaccurate data for students in this category and time 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. It also identified possible patterns of inaccurate LRE time reporting by schools.

Tables 1 and 2 show the final distributions of the overall LRE sample (n=1,136) across local school districts and school type. Tables 3 and 4 show the distribution of schools (n=489) 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	187	16.5
2	154	13.6
3	114	10.0
4	96	8.5
5	85	7.5
6	55	4.8
7	79	7.0
8	124	10.9
NPS	164	14.4
R	44	3.9
T	34	3.0
Total	1,136	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	467	41.1
Middle	192	16.9
High	179	15.8
Special Centers	134	11.8
NPS	164	14.4
Total	1,136	100.0

Table 3: Number of Schools in Analysis by Local District

Local School District	Number of Students	Percentage of Schools
1	76	15.5
2	66	13.5
3	51	10.4
4	50	10.2
5	39	8.0
6	31	6.3
7	35	7.2
8	49	10.0
NPS	42	8.6
R	32	6.5
T	18	3.7
Total	489	100.0

Table 4. Number of Schools in Analysis by School Level

School Level	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Elementary	227	56.7
Middle	85	17.4
High	69	14.1
Special Centers	16	3.3
NPS	42	8.6
Total	489	100.0

Table 5. Proportions of Students in Sample and Population by LRE Placement Category

School Level	Sample		Population	
	N	%	N	%
Less than 60% in SPED	637	56.1	8,964	52.53
More than 60% in SPED	499	43.9	8,101	47.47
Total	1,136	100.0	17,065	100.0

Data Collection and Analysis

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). The 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.

Data collected were used to create student files. Each file contained a report on the number of instructional weekly minutes reported by school staff, a completed data collection instrument and the students’ schedules. Data from these sources were analyzed to determine the total number of special education minutes each student received and then transferred to a data summary sheet (Attachment B). Each student file was reviewed twice by two 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 a 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 demonstrates 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. The highest levels of exact agreement are noted between the LRE data reported by Welligent and the most current IEP (68.3%) (Table 6). This finding shows that approximately one-third of the IEPs in the Welligent system were updated since the time of sampling. This demonstrates the dynamic nature of LRE data and its impact on 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 (36.4%). 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 6. 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	776	68.3	405	27.6	414	36.4
Non-Matches	360	31.7	731	72.4	722	63.6
Total	1,136	100.0	1,136	100.0	1,136	100.0

As noted above, matches between the LRE data from the Welligent system and schedules have lowest rates of exact matches. 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. For example, 60% of time may translate into 58% when programming factors are considered. Secondary schools may have class periods that 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 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% of 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 would have no impact on the performance of the outcome.

To 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, class schedules for both categories show considerable differences for both categories (36.4%, schedules vs. 56.1%, Welligent; less than 60%; and 63.6% schedules vs. 43.9% Welligent, more than 60%) (Table 7). This means that approximately one-third of the students reported by Welligent as being in the special education setting for less than 60% had schedules that placed in the 60% or more category. This finding is indicative of the overall impact the inaccuracies have on utilizing the Welligent LRE data for determining the District’s performance on Outcome 7A.

Table 7. Number and Percentages of Students in Two Reporting Categories by Information Source

Exact Matches	Welligent		IEP		Schedule	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 60%	637	56.1	616	54.2	414	36.4
More than 60%	499	43.9	520	45.8	722	63.6
Total	1,136	100.0	1,136	100.0	1,136	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. 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 8 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 296 students in the sample with an LRE time in this category, 279 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 223 (45%) 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 341 students in the sample showing Welligent time in this category, only 135 (11.9%) 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 shows that the majority of data inaccuracies exist within the 20-60% time category.

Table 8. Number and Percentages of Students in the Federal Reporting LRE Categories by Information Source

Time	Source					
	Welligent		IEP		Schedule	
Less than 20%	296	26.1	304	26.8	279	24.6
Between 20 than 60%	341	30.0	312	27.5	135	11.9
More than 60%	499	43.9	520	45.8	722	63.6
Total	1,136	100.0	1,136	100.0	1,136	100.0

To gain insight into the data inaccuracies by school level, the data were analyzed to compare elementary, middle and high schools (Table 9). This analysis excluded students attending non-public schools and special education centers to focus on students with opportunities for integration in the general education setting. The data show that Welligent reported higher levels of integration (60% or less) for high (81.0%) and middle (76.6%) school students compared to elementary (72.3%) students. However, students in elementary schools had a higher rate of schedules that showed placement in special education settings for 60% or more of the day than middle and high school students (elementary 55.7% vs. 44.8% middle and 43.6% high school). However, these findings also show that school levels have similar rates (approximately 100% increase) of discrepancies between Welligent and schedules for students in the 60% or more category (Elementary - 27.6% vs. 55.7% schedules; Middle – 23.4% vs. 44.8%; High – 19.0% vs.43.6%). Despite similar rates of inaccuracies, these findings provide insight into programming differences and reporting practices of LRE time by school level. This suggests that secondary schools tend to over-report student integration; however, programming differences such as specific class periods may lead to better possibilities for integration, whereas a flexible structure (open schedules) in the elementary schools may result in less integration for students.

Table 9. Number and Percentages of Students in Two Reporting Categories By Information Source

Exact Matches	Elementary		Middle		High	
	Welligent	Schedule	Welligent	Schedule	Welligent	Schedule
Less than 60%	338	207	147	106	145	101
More than 60%	129	260	45	86	34	78
Total N	467	467	192	192	179	179
Less than 60%	72.4%	44.3%	76.6%	55.2%	81.0%	56.4%
More than 60%	27.6%	55.7%	23.4%	44.8%	19.0%	43.6%
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The inaccuracies noted may be due to two primary factors. The first may be attributed to schools simply entering an LRE time to meet this outcome. In past years, one contributing factor was the statement within the Welligent system that required IEP teams to acknowledge when a student's LRE time exceeded 60% or more in special education. While this statement has now been removed, the study continues to find evidence that schools report LRE times within the 56%-60% range while student schedules showed higher amounts of time in the special education classroom. Table 9 examined the LRE data of students with Welligent times in the range of 56-60% to determine if these practices continued to exist or if these discrepancies were due to minor programming factors. 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 inaccurate reporting.

Of the 236 students whose IEP indicated an LRE time in the range of 56-60% in the special education setting, only 58 (24.6%) had class schedules with a percent of time of less than 60%, while an additional 8 students (3.4%) had times between 60-63%³. 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 (60.2%) 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, 178 students (75.6%) with Welligent times between 56-60% had discrepancies large enough to place them in the more restrictive category of more than 60%. These findings are consistent with last year's results and suggest that schools continue to focus on meeting the target of this outcome when entering LRE data as opposed to reporting actual time spent in general education on the student's schedule.

Table 9. Number and Percentage of Students with a Percent of LRE Time of 56-60% 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 Over 60%
56-60% time in special education according to IEP						
N=236	58	8	28	58	84	178
%	24.6	3.4	11.9	24.6	35.6	75.4

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. Schools continue to mention and incorporate 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

³ A 63% threshold was used to account for minor programming differences.

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

Summary

The findings of this validation study continue to show that the Welligent LRE data is unreliable for making a determination for this outcome. Over the past four years, the validation study has noted discrepancies between the Welligent LRE data and students' schedules, indicating that schools are entering inaccurate LRE times to meet the targets of this outcome.

Prior to the release of this report, the District committed to addressing and resolving these data discrepancies as part of its Targeted Strategy Plan. The District has noted it will work with schools to identify all students who demonstrate a discrepancy between the LRE time in their IEP and class schedules, and will require schools to either correctly place them in general education settings or revise IEPs if the LRE time is not appropriate. While correcting these discrepancies may present a considerable challenge to schools as many will be required to find appropriate classes for integration, the District should consider revising the IEP to better document the instructional classes where students will be in the general education setting. This improved documentation may assist schools to better implement this part of the IEP when students change schools or begin a new school year.

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 (2010-2011)

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)