The Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative recently sponsored/initiated several noteworthy events related to standards-based reform and students with disabilities in urban centers. This issue has become a central focus of the Collaborative as members design and implement policies that allow for greater participation of students with disabilities in their districts’ newly-adopted curriculum standards and accountability systems.

Through a technical assistance agreement with the Northeast Regional Resource Center, the Collaborative planned and facilitated an invitational symposium this past February entitled “Education Reform and Special Education.” Invited to participate were the general and special education leaders of those urban school districts that have embarked on significant reform efforts. The symposium was held in Washington, D.C., and attendees included the following Collaborative members: Judith Rizzo, Francine Goldstein, and David Noriega of the New York City Board of Education; Susan Erber of NYC District 75; Sue Gamm and Lula Ford of the Chicago Public Schools; and, Audrey Potter of the Milwaukee Public Schools. General and special education leadership of the Philadelphia Public Schools and the Houston Independent School District also participated. In addition, leadership personnel from the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), including Director Thomas Hehir, several state department of education special education directors, and officials from the regional resource center network were in attendance.

The purpose of the meeting was to explore how general education reform efforts were impacting on special education, and vice versa. Participants came to learn what strategies for systemic change have been employed by their urban school district colleagues, and to what end. School district leaders provided an overview of their respective district’s reform plan, initiatives, challenges, and concerns; and, shared with each other how they are attempting to ensure that special education is an integral part of the reform agenda.

Several common themes emerged from the detailed case studies. These included:

- Decentralization of special education services, staffing, and budgets that reinforces increased responsibility and accountability of building principals for their schools to educate all students
- Revamping of federal and state special education funding policies to eliminate incentives to placing students with disabilities in more restrictive settings
- Decategorization of special education programs and services to reduce fragmentation and provide flexibility in resource allocation
- Prospective positive and negative impacts of standards and high stakes assessment on students with disabilities as well as non-disabled students in urban school districts
- Need to focus on special education as a service, not a program

In this Issue:

- Inclusion Language in Teacher Contracts
- Systems Unification: Aurora, CO
- Harvard Institute: July 21-25
The Collaborative's FaxBack information service provides feedback on issues that are critical to member special education leaders. One recent FaxBack survey, conducted at the request of Member Pia Durkin of Providence, Rhode Island, asked members to share any language that had been negotiated for insertion into their teacher contracts regarding inclusion. Seventeen school districts responded to the FaxBack request. At the time of the survey, four member districts stated that they did have negotiated language related to inclusion, mainstreaming, or Least Restrictive Environment in their teacher contracts. The chart below delineates the information from each of these four member districts.

This is only one example of a summary of information received from the FaxBack service. Other FaxBack topics have included surveys on IEP Team procedures (who fills the role of chair of the team, when are meetings held, etc.); and, physical restraint and school-sponsored residential treatment programs.

The Collaborative's website, currently under construction, will provide members with a “paperless” vehicle for sharing such information and data. In the meantime, members are encouraged to use the FaxBack information service when immediate information or feedback is needed on a critical issue.

### Faxback Summary: Negotiated Contract Language re Inclusion

**by Ingrid Draper, Associate Collaborative Director**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District/ Sp. Ed. Director</th>
<th>Specific Contract Language</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flint, Michigan</strong></td>
<td>I. In buildings that offer inclusion Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) education options, a written plan for the delivery of special education services for its students will be developed. The following will be included in those plans:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Sherry Goodwin</td>
<td>1. A school-based committee is established to facilitate the IEP's of special education students. The committee shall be a composite of regular education staff, special education staff and the principal or designee;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Provide time during the school day for regular staff and special education staff for collaboration;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Provide on-going professional development that will be facilitated by the district, Special Education Department, or the Professional Development Committee at the building site;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. The plan should not have a negative effect on class size; and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Annual assessment of the plan should be included as part of the school improvement report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Bedford, Massachusetts</strong></td>
<td>I. Notification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. William Marginson</td>
<td>A. By March 1, Principals shall meet with all teachers in the building to discuss the inclusion plan for the next school year.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Teachers shall be notified by March 15 if their building is going to be an Inclusionary school for the next school year.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Placement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Principal shall meet with Special Education teachers in buildings by the end of the school year to discuss their placement.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Principals will discuss with Special Education teachers their assignments for the following school year no later than five (5) school days prior to the last workday in June.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. In order to ensure that staff are included in the “formation and planning and not just the implementation of the least restrictive environment, an informal inclusion discussion group will be established where regular, special education and support staff can discuss issues and concerns relative to inclusion. Speech and Language Pathologists’ Issues and other issues will also be discussed. This discussion group will meet at least quarterly and will be scheduled by the Assistant Superintendent, or his designee, for special services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newton, Massachusetts</strong></td>
<td>Article XXXVIII - Inclusion of Specifically Designated Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Carol Daynard</td>
<td>A. Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Committee, in the attempt to achieve the goals hereinafter provided in reference to certain specifically designated students, as determined by the Superintendent, acknowledges the need for the Superintendent, or his designee/s, to examine issues around the following concerning said specifically designated students:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. The involvement, if and when feasible, of the receiving teacher in the preplacement decision making process.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Adequate and appropriate training of the receiving teacher.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. The balance, where appropriate, in student assignments and grade/class placement.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Physical transportation of handicapped students in emergency situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. To foster for certain specifically designated students, as determined by the Superintendent, an appropriate learning environment when they are placed in the regular education classroom environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. To foster, when said designated students are so placed, an appropriate learning environment for all other students in the regular education classroom environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. To foster for the teaching Unit B member (“receiving teacher”) while said designated students are so placed in his/her classroom, an appropriate teaching environment.</td>
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Systems Unification: 
The Case of Aurora Public Schools

by David Wood, Executive Director of Student Services

Systems unification, an organizational philosophy and strategy long promoted by the Collaborative’s leadership, is a term that has been defined and enacted in various ways throughout the country.

In some school districts, a particular individual is given the title of “Coordinator of Systems Unification” for as long as necessary to carry out related tasks. In other districts, this process drives many initiatives, which are carried out by staff in addition to their ongoing tasks. In Aurora (CO) Public Schools, it has been a natural outgrowth of the restructuring of decision making and resource allocation. Systems unification has grown out of the ongoing district initiatives of shared decision making and content standards for all students.

Aurora is an eastern suburb of Denver. The district’s public schools serve 27,500 students. Students attend one of 41 schools, not including various alternative and preschool centers. As recently as 1995-96, the Department of Student Services managed special education and support services with a highly top-down decision making model, led by a team of nine administrators. What follows is a brief description of changes enacted to bring about greater systems unification, which resulted in dramatically moving away from the previous model of decision making.

Under a previous organizational structure, the Executive Director of the Department of Student Services reported to a cabinet member whose role and functions were fairly removed from instructional services. To bring about greater and more regular collaboration, special education leadership was reassigned so that the Executive Director of Student Services would report to the same cabinet member to whom school principals reported in the Division of Effective Schools. This change proved important because as decisions are made relative to where and when special needs students are served, principals and special education leadership now work within a common hierarchical framework.

Aurora Public Schools, as with the state of Colorado, have a long history of serving all students in regular schools. This did not mean, however, that all students attended neighborhood schools. As part of the restructuring, special education services programs have been reallocated through a feeder/articulation system model, to enable most students with special needs to attend schools much closer to their homes, reducing transportation needs in the process.

The number of disabled students transported by school bus has been reduced by 50 percent through the feeder delivery model.

Special education managers previously served the entire district on a disability-driven model. For example, one coordinator supervised programs for the learning disabled, another for the emotionally disturbed, etc., perpetuating a very fragmented model in the eyes of building principals. These management functions were revised two years ago. Coordinators now direct services within a feeder system (e.g., schools grouped geographically whose students progress from elementary to middle to high school within a common area), thereby creating a single point of contact for both professionals and parents with the Department of Student Services. Coupled with this change was a voluntary one-third reduction in the size of the special education administrative team. To be losing site administrators during an era of downsizing demonstrated the commitment of the special education leadership to build capacity of schools - not central office staff.

Preschools throughout the District were once highly separate and isolated. There were classes for disabled students, classes for bilingual students, etc. This has been changed to a totally inclusive preschool model such that, regardless of location in the district, all students attend classes comprised of youngsters with and without disabilities.

Child Study Teams have become the norm in buildings where they were once the exception. These teams, comprised largely of general educators, explore options for working with students prior to making a referral to special education. Coupled with this has been a major initiative permitting special educators to work directly with nondisabled students along with their disabled peers.

Restrictive state and federal funding models may no longer be used as an excuse to restrict special educators to work only with disabled students.

IEPs used to be driven more by legal and process considerations than by the instructional needs of the children. In the main, staffing committees worried about who would deliver what service when. While legal issues remain a concern, primary attention has now shifted toward helping students achieve district-adopted performance standards and proficiencies. A totally new IEP lists the adopted standards in abbreviated format, indicating which proficiencies are a priority for a given year, the appropriate benchmark at which the student will demonstrate achievement, whether standards will be modified or adapted, and whether accommodations, modifications, or alternatives will be utilized in standardized testing. Adjusted and alternative curricula are available to staff and parents to assist in working through this

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Standards-Based Reform

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- Benefits of increased collaboration among all categorically-funded educational programs, such as bilingual and Title I
- Challenges of blending district leadership roles and responsibilities

This symposium was the first time that the general and special education leadership of major U.S. cities were brought together to share common issues and concerns related to standards-based reform. All participants noted the value of this dialogue, particularly with OSEP leadership present, and expressed an interest in convening again. (A proceedings document is currently being drafted and, when complete, will be made available to Collaborative members.)

In December of 1996, the Collaborative sponsored a day-long seminar on the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based reform, with particular emphasis on grade promotion and graduation policies. Guest presenter/facilitator was Dr. Margaret McLaughlin, Associate Director of the Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children and Youth, in the Department of Special Education, University of Maryland at College Park.

For several years, Dr. McLaughlin has provided leadership in researching the policy implications of school-site restructuring, outcome assessments, and alternative educational programming for students with disabilities. Dr. McLaughlin has also led a partnership effort between the University of Maryland and the Baltimore City Public Schools, called the Center for Urban Special Education. The Center’s particular focus is on students within special education and those at-risk of school failure.

The December seminar, held at EDC headquarters in Newton, Massachusetts, was attended by Collaborative members from both the Boston Public Schools and New York City Community School District 2. One major goal of the seminar was to share information on how school districts are designing promotion and graduation regulations for students with special needs. A second goal was for participants to gain an overall perspective of the standards movement, and specifically how this initiative relates to students with disabilities. Topics addressed during the course of the seminar included the national context of standards-based reform and special education restructuring; the challenges reform presents to general and special education; professional development and leadership issues; referral and personnel issues; and, the critical importance of improving coordination and collaboration across administrative units, programs, and services. (A transcript of the seminar will be posted on the Collaborative’s website, currently under construction.)

The Collaborative will continue its focus on standards-based reform at its Spring and Fall 1997 meetings. In May, the programmatic emphasis will be on middle grades reform and special education while the Fall meeting will be devoted to high school level reform initiatives and special education.

C. In the effort to enhance the fulfillment of the District’s efforts to fulfill its goals and to enhance the “examination” of the Superintendent or his/her designee of the aforementioned issues, the Committee will establish the following procedure to consider concerns of the receiving teacher:

1. The receiving teacher discusses his/her concerns with the Principal. If not resolved,
2. The receiving teacher discusses his/her concerns with the Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Services or his/her designee and/or the appropriate Associate Superintendent of Elementary or Secondary Education. If not resolved,
3. The receiving teacher discusses his/her concerns with the Superintendent.

In addition, the following procedure shall be established:

1. The Superintendent and appropriate administrative staff agree to meet with the Association to discuss any specific concerns.
2. The concerns will be reviewed in depth by the Superintendent and other appropriate administrative staff.
3. The Superintendent and/or other appropriate administrative staff will then hold a follow-up meeting with the Association.

Finally, in order to receive direct input from the faculty, the Superintendent agrees to either the Association assigning more members to the Superintendent’s Inclusion Committee or to create a Mutual Concerns Inclusion Committee, which will meet quarterly to review the Association’s concerns.

D. This article is subject to the terms and conditions of M.G.L. Chapter 71B, the Chapter 766 Regulations of the Department of Education, including without limitation, rules of confidentiality and privacy, and other applicable state and federal laws.

E. The parties agree that either side has the right to terminate this Article on or after August 30, 1997 upon giving at least sixty (60) days written notice prior to the termination date, and if requested, meeting during said notice period to examine and evaluate the effectiveness of this Article.

Tucson Unified
Dr. Betsy Bounds
Why Not Treat All Students Like They Have IDEA Protections?

by Pia Durkin, Director of Special Education, Providence, RI Public Schools and John Verre, Former Co-Director of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative

Could a unified approach to discipline help make schools safer for all students? No one disputes that there are two systems of discipline for students in public school: One applies to students with disabilities, and the other to the rest.

On one side of that invisible line, students are provided a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), Stay-Put and behavior management plans incorporated into IEPs. On the other side, if a student messes up, he or she could lose the privilege of a free education.

But that doesn’t have to be the case. As noted at LRP Publications’ New Directions in Special Education conference held in the fall of 1996 in Phoenix, AZ, federal law prevents schools from treating all students like general education students when it comes to discipline, but nothing prevents schools from extending to the rest of the student body the same protections enjoyed by special education students. All students’ needs can be measured along a continuum. Just because a student falls outside the invisible line that delineates special education doesn’t mean that he or she is without unique needs that should be addressed.

Why not couple zero-tolerance policies with zero-reject practices? Schools should have zero tolerance for lost opportunity and achievement, not just for poor behavior. School should go beyond the need to eliminate violence and work on helping all students become more productive. Schools can provide a comprehensive continuum of services to address all social and emotional needs, because students’ needs are diverse, and shouldn’t be divided by special and general education labels.

Furthermore, schools should have a unified standard of behavior, but take different approaches to help different kinds of students meet those standards. Behavior plans should not be limited to students with disabilities. All students should have access to learning such important skills. Progressive behavior management systems could be used to implement behavior standards for every student.

Under the IDEA, special education students can only be suspended for up to 10 days before a variety of deadlines kick in, requiring IEP teams to meet and ensure that they are provided with a Free and Appropriate Public Education. What if schools expanded that protection to all students? The result would be more students whose needs are being met, and none cast aside through suspensions and expulsions, to cope on their own. The way to make it happen would be by expanding regular education alternative school programs. If FAPE and the 10-day limit applied to all students, public support for alternative schools and alternative discipline programs would increase. The 10-day period, roughly 5% of the school year, should be enough time for educators to reconsider any student’s educational program.

Stay-put is often invoked as a last resort in discipline cases by parents who worry the new placement proposed for their student following an incident won’t meet his or her needs. But keeping a child in the classroom in which they exhibited the problem behavior for up to 45 days while due process drags on is probably not meeting his or her needs either. Why not redefine Stay-put as “access to the core curriculum where students can achieve their potential in an equitable fashion?”

Schools can help by providing an intermediate step prior to due process, through a system of “peer review,” something similar to mediation. In the suggested system, a standing board of varied stakeholders, including possibly a mental health worker, parent, and school counselor would review placement changes related to serious discipline issues. The review would proceed in a collaborative manner, with the best interests of the child at the center of the discussion. Parents and school officials would be equal partners in the discussion. The panel would meet within 24 hours of any incident.

Schools first need to find effective ways to offer all students the behavior management and disciplinary systems that will make up the continuum of services they need. Several programs, culled from a variety of sources around the country, are recommended (see below).
Harvard Institute to Focus on Race, Class, Language/Culture and Special Education

The leadership of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative will once again co-chair the Institute on Critical Issues in Urban Special Education at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education this summer. The institute, which will take place from July 21 - 25, will focus on race, class, language, culture, and special education.

Faculty will include Norma Cantu (Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education); Beth Harry (Associate Professor, Department of Teaching and Learning, School of Education, University of Miami); Thomas Hehir (Director, Office of Special Education Programs, U. S. Department of Education); Asa G. Hilliard III (Fuller Callaway Professor of Urban Education, Georgia State University); John Ogbu (Alumni Professor of Urban Education, Georgia State University); John Verre, former Co-Director of the Collaborative and, currently, Director of Consulting Services, COMPASS, Inc., Boston, MA. Ingrid Draper, Collaborative Associate Director, and several Collaborative members will be serving as Institute facilitators.

The Institute will provide an opportunity for participants, in the company of some of the nation’s leading researchers and practitioners, to discuss the challenges of race, class, language, and culture from a number of important perspectives:

• The history of the relationship between special education and regular education
• The intersection of race and special education
• Language, culture, and placement in special education
• Class as a key to special education eligibility
• The federal role and legal implications

Several key questions will anchor the dialogue:

1) How is special education used to mediate the effects of race, class, language, and culture on school performance, and to what end?

2) What principles should guide decisions in our schools and districts regarding race, class, language, and culture, and special education?

3) How might we apply these principles in schools and classrooms?

4) What are some powerful approaches to general education and special education that can improve the educational experience and performance of all students?

For registration information, please contact:

Critical Issues in Urban Special Education
339 Gutman Library
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Cambridge, MA 02138
(800) 545-1849

The Case of Aurora Public Schools

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process. More than any other initiative, this act of creating an IEP which directly links student expectations with district-adopted standards has led to the current high degree of systems unification, while reducing the number of parental demands for full inclusion. Parents have indicated that working toward a comprehensive set of student proficiencies, paralleled with general educational outcomes, is what they wanted all along as they were demanding full inclusion.

The feeder system model described previously has shifted the decision-making element of program location to groups referred to as Feeder System Resource Teams. Each feeder area within the district has such a team, comprised of at least one individual from each building. Representatives are selected in conjunction with building principals, and also represent many of the disciplines involved (i.e., a learning disabilities teacher from one site, a psychologist from another, a principal from another). These teams study enrollment trends and student needs, and make recommendations relative to program location, staff development, and professional staff needs. Changing the decision-making process in this way has led to a much higher degree of system and program unification.

Services which once were delivered on a caseload-driven basis are now blended throughout their delivery. Rather than necessitating a particular individual with a specific type of license to serve many schools on an itinerant basis, thereby failing to create a true alliance with any one building, service providers now blend what they do on particular campuses (specialists cross disciplines such that LD teachers provide language instruction, occupational therapists provide direct in-classroom instruction, psychologists and social workers perform some duties from each other’s job descriptions, etc.), necessitating fewer itinerant staff and enabling more individuals to be fully aligned with a campus throughout the entire school day.

While having a highly talented Special Education Advisory Committee at the district level continues to be a strength, priority has shifted toward recruiting special education parents to serve on building accountability committees and other

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Collaborative Grows to 52 Member Districts

Since the beginning of 1997, eight geographically diverse urban school districts have joined the Collaborative, bringing the new membership total to 52 as of the end of April.

The Collaborative welcomes the following new members:

- Boulder, Colorado
  Kathleen Anker, Director of Special Education Services

- Cincinnati, Ohio
  Patricia Carr, Director of Special Education

- Hammond, Indiana
  Leonard Jozwiak, Director of Special Education

- Los Angeles, California
  Steven Mark, Acting Director of Special Education

- New York City Board of Education
  Francine Goldstein, Executive Director of Student Support Services

- New York City District #2
  Liz Gewitzman, Director of Operations

- Memphis, Tennessee
  Genevieve DePriest, Director of Exceptional Children’s Services

- Rockford, Illinois
  Gary Biship, Director of Special Education

The updated list of Collaborative member school districts follows:

- Arizona
  Phoenix
  Tucson

- California
  Los Angeles
  San Diego

- Colorado
  Aurora
  Boulder

- Florida
  Broward County
  Michigan

- Georgia
  Clark County

- Illinois
  Chicago
  Elgin

- Indiana
  Gary
  Hammond
  South Bend

- Massachusetts
  Boston
  Brockton
  Cambridge
  Fall River

- New Mexico
  Albuquerque

- New York
  Binghamton
  NYC District 2
  NYC District 75
  Yonkers

- Ohio
  Cincinnati
  Providence
  Memphis

- Rhode Island
  Fort Bend
  Humble
  Texas City

- Tennessee
  Ann Arbor
  Kalamazoo
  Detroit
  Flint

- Texas
  Austin
  New Bedford
  Newton

- Virginia
  Fairfax County

- Washington
  Seattle
  Vancouver

- Wisconsin
  Madison
  Milwaukee
  Wauwatosa

The Case of Aurora Public Schools

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centralized district-focused committees, unifying parents to improve outcomes for all students.

As with other districts, personnel in the ESL/Literacy, Title 1, and Special Education departments once were pre-occupied with serving only “their own” students. While some attention must still be paid to separate eligibility and funding streams due to federal requirements, these staff members in Aurora Public Schools now co-train, co-plan, and collaborate with one another in student identification and delivery of appropriate instruction.

Underlying this venture into systems division has been the concern for “what’s in it for me.” This has emerged in the district’s dealings with teachers, parents, and building managers. The district has now opened the doors of decision-making to involve as many individuals as is practical on a given topic. It has moved away from a preoccupation with legal issues to one that is deeply rooted in a vision of all students meeting district-adopted standards to the best of their ability. Greater control over utilization of staff development and other funds has been given to the feeder resource teams. More funds are utilized to train all staff as opposed to just those with special licensure or those assigned to a particular department. It’s not good enough to have all students in regular schools; Aurora wants more students in neighborhood schools and spending fewer hours on a bus.

Has the District totally arrived? By no means! Has it witnessed greater student success and client satisfaction on a daily basis? Absolutely! Would Aurora return to a model of decision-making about programs and training and curriculum in isolation? Never! Perhaps the greatest evidence that the district is on the right track comes from the results of a recent survey given to all parents of students with disabilities. Parents are pleased with what is happening with and for their children, particularly in the areas of curricular expectations and adaptations.

For more information, please contact:

David Wood, Ph.D.
Executive Director of Student Services
Aurora Public Schools
15700 East First Ave.
Aurora, CO 80011-9008
If you are the special education director in a city and you are not now a member of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative, please consider joining us.

☐ I want to enroll now. Please send me an enrollment form!

☐ I am interested in knowing more about the Collaborative. Please send me materials and call me.

Name ___________________________________________________
Address ___________________________________________________
Phone _____________________________________________________
Fax _______________________________________________________