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   ▪ BUSD Universal Consent for School-Based Services Form
   ▪ BUSD Universal Consent for School-Based Services Form (Spanish)
   ▪ BUSD Information Release/Exchange of Information Form (for ULSS teams)
I. Definition of a Universal Learning Support System

The Universal Learning Supports System (ULSS, pronounced “Ulysses”) is a practice under implementation in the Berkeley schools to more effectively and universally address barriers to learning experienced by students. **Under ULSS, all students shall receive appropriate learning supports, regardless of educational designation**, when challenges first become apparent, in the least restrictive environment.

- **Learning Supports**, according to the California Department of Education are “the collection of resources (school, home, community), strategies and practices, and environmental and cultural factors in and extending beyond the regular classroom curriculum that together provide the physical, emotional and intellectual support that every child and youth needs to achieve high quality learning.”

- The phrase “**all students**” refers to any student in need of assistance beyond traditional classroom instruction and enrichment to support learning regardless of unique designations, circumstances, or diagnoses.

- The phrase “**appropriate learning supports**” signifies the use of interventions that target the specific challenges a student is facing.

- The phrase “**when challenges first become apparent**” refers to intervening as early as possible to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes and to prevent the escalation of student challenges.

- The phrase “**least restrictive environment**” means that, to the maximum extent appropriate: 1) all students are educated within the general educational environment at a school they are zoned to attend, and 2) special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the general educational environment occurs only when the student’s learning needs cannot be satisfactorily met through the use of supplementary aids and services within the general education classroom.

ULSS works to ensure that students who are having difficulties getting their learning needs met within the general classroom environment are identified and provided with appropriate support so they become successful. With an emphasis on supporting the **whole child**, ULSS calls for developing student support systems to address academic, behavioral, social-emotional, health-related, and environmental difficulties. In coordinating and providing effective supports for students, schools draw from a combination of four sources: 1) site owned or site developed services such as specialized reading, math, or mentoring programs, 2) interventions provided by special education staff members for students without IEPs, 3) school-based or school-linked services such as mental health, public health nursing or other school-agency collaborations, and

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1 i.e. a student with an IEP, or a student who qualifies for Title 1 services
4) the development and implementation of concrete strategies for classroom teachers and staff to utilize in the classroom to support a student or group of students.

II. ULSS Rationale

ULSS was created in response to conditions in BUSD that triggered an escalated need for intensive intervention services, without sufficient support systems in place to prevent student problems or address them early on. Such conditions are contrary to a substantial body of research which confirms that prevention and early intervention are far more effective in meeting student learning needs than intervention at the intensive level. The more intensive a student’s learning needs are, the more resources it takes to meet those needs, and the less likely the student will successfully exit the intervention program. For many years BUSD has placed the majority of its intervention resources at the intensive end of the scale, and has experienced limited success with this approach.

For example, prior to ULSS, the most relied upon source of student learning supports was special education. In the absence of sufficient or appropriate learning support resources in general education for early intervention, many students who struggled fell significantly behind, yet continued to be served inadequately. This scenario contributed to a cultural pattern within the district of encouraging special education assessment and designation in order to get students help. While students must meet the legal criteria for special education designation, the lack of appropriate resources to intervene early within the general education program allowed the conditions for qualification to arise over time. This pattern led to a high percentage of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs); many of whom would have significantly benefited from the availability of effective interventions when they first began to struggle. The vast majority of these students have not exited special education.

Furthermore, the majority of intervention services prior to ULSS did not take the whole child into account; prioritizing traditionally delivered, academic supports, even when difficulties were rooted in social-emotional, health-related, cultural, and/or environmental causes. Frequently, for instance, students whose learning was challenged by behavioral or emotional difficulties received academic support in the absence of sufficient mental health or behavioral support.

Under ULSS, resources are being gradually shifted to enhance BUSD’s capacity for providing prevention and early intervention services in a variety of areas to improve outcomes for students. This is a system-wide change process in which BUSD is engaged on several fronts, including: 1) developing a concrete infrastructure and service delivery framework through which ULSS can operate, 2) implementing a staffing model that allows special educators to support students who do not have or qualify for IEPs, 3) creating a new administrative office charged with building and coordinating school-community partnerships to support the whole child, 4) providing on-going staff development to strengthen the system, and 5) adding a ULSS component to school-wide plans for student achievement. Each of these elements of ULSS are described in Section IV, ULSS Implementation Components.
III. ULSS Outcomes, Guiding Principles, and Indicators of Success

The purpose of developing and implementing ULSS is to improve student outcomes district wide. ULSS was developed as an effort by BUSD to achieve the following key outcomes:

1. Children are healthy and ready to succeed in school.
2. All students have early access to quality learning supports when they are needed.
3. Students are engaged and feel safe and supported in school.
4. Schools are able to support the learning needs of all students.
5. The school system values and leverages family-school-community partnerships for student success.

With these outcomes in mind, ULSS was developed on the premise of the following guiding principles. Under ULSS, we believe:

- That school, home, and community resources together provide the Universal Learning Supports necessary to promote healthy development and address barriers to student learning.
- That a continuum of learning supports includes prevention, early intervention and intensive intervention when needed.
- In an integrated and seamless system of learning supports and services.
- That the continuum of services and service systems should be based upon and adapted from proven models.
- That all children, youth and families should have equal access to services and resources in proportion to their needs.
- That cultural competence must be integrated in all aspects of the system.
- In supporting student learning needs through an ecological approach that considers the interaction of family, community, school, economics, public systems, and biology on the well being of the child or youth.
- In taking an asset-based approach that builds on the skills, talents, strengths and resources of students and their families.
- That partnerships based on trust between schools and community service providers form the foundation of successful school communities.
- In a system that is outcome driven and where all key stakeholders are responsible and accountable for results.
Finally, the following indicators will help inform the success of ULSS implementation:

1. Improved student academic performance
2. Enhanced collaborative teaching and consultation between professionals of diverse educational backgrounds
3. Reduction in special education referrals
4. A continuum of learning support services (prevention, early intervention, and intensive intervention) available in the schools and district for all students regardless of educational designation.

IV. ULSS Implementation Components
Each of the following activities contributes to the systems change process that constitutes ULSS.

IV. A ULSS Infrastructure and Service Delivery Framework

_BUSD staff lead: Lisa Warhuus, Manager of Integrated Resources_

The ULSS infrastructure relies upon the creation of ULSS Teams at each site, and a ULSS Council convened by the district for purposes of training, oversight, and continuity across the system. The ULSS team is an anchoring point for ensuring the equitable distribution of learning supports for students as well as a critical point of contact for community agencies providing school-based and/or school-linked services. The ULSS Council is an entity through which the district and community organizations can disseminate information about new programs and services to ULSS team members, as well as obtain updated information about the support needs of BUSD students.

**ULSS Teams**
The ULSS Team is an interdisciplinary group of professionals who work at the sites and convene regularly to: 1) facilitate an annual or biannual screening of the learning status of all students, 2) develop the continuum of learning support resources to best meet the needs of the student population, 3) review universal referral forms and make decisions/recommendations regarding the assignment of learning supports to students, and 4) ensure that there is appropriate follow-up on student progress. Put simply, the ULSS team serves as a mechanism for ensuring that students who have learning needs that are difficult to address in the typical classroom setting are provided with the resources they need to be successful.

ULSS team members typically consist of a site administrator, special education teacher(s), one or more general education teachers, a student and family support coordinator (mental health person), and the SST coordinator. Public Health nurses from the City of Berkeley attend elementary school ULSS team meetings on a rotating basis. Depending upon existing positions, sites may also include the school counselor, psychologist, afterschool program coordinator, and parent liaison as ULSS team members. Depending on staffing and the use of screening methods
to identify students with learning support needs, sites vary with regards to the frequency and content of ULSS team meetings.

The ULSS team may recommend concrete strategies or educational programs for a student’s classroom teachers or staff to employ in the general education environment. The team may also refer students to resources generated from one or more of the following sources: site owned or site developed services such as specialized reading or math programs; special education resources now open to students on a pre-referral basis as part of the inclusive education model; school-based or school-linked services such as mental health, public health nursing or other school-agency collaborations that are coordinated through the Office of Integrated Resources. The ULSS team is a critical connecting point for special educators and community providers to link in to the general education environment, thereby ensuring that their resources are allocated to students who need them the most. For this reason, community mental health providers are now required to participate on site ULSS teams as a critical component of their contracts.

The ULSS team coordination process is a pre-SST process (see “Student Success Team” below), designed to ensure that students are provided with needed support as soon as their difficulties become apparent. When utilized as intended, this proactive approach to providing learning supports reduces the total number of SSTs that a school site holds each year. It reserves that process for circumstances where a student’s difficulties are ambiguous, and require a more intensive, collaborative brainstorm with the parent and others involved in order to develop a meaningful action plan to support the student.

ULSS Council
The ULSS Council consists of representatives from site ULSS teams, and is convened by the Office of Integrated Resources two to three times per year to assess learning support needs at school sites, provide technical assistance and training, identify system improvements needs, coordinate funding, and reflect on outcomes. Additional ULSS Council participants may include principals, Student Services and Ed Services staff, and representatives from community agencies providing school-based or school-linked services.

ULSS Service Delivery Flowchart
Figure A (following page) illustrates the delivery of learning supports to students under ULSS. What follows is an explanation of components displayed in bold.²

Universal, Data-Driven, Screening
The function of universal screenings is to identify the unique learning needs of students and to ensure that students in need of learning supports are identified and provided with appropriate services. Some of the screening methods being implemented in the schools include the following:

² ULSS Team has already been described above.
• **Assessment walls tracking student progress.** Individual student assessment data is posted in a common area (with disguised identifying information) where teachers can view it regularly. Regular meetings are scheduled in which teachers update and discuss student progress, and assign/design appropriate interventions.

• **Snapshot meetings.** Class-by-class discussions of the academic and developmental standing of each individual student. Participants in snapshot meetings will generally include the classroom teacher, learning support staff, and principal (a rotating sub may cover classrooms on screening days).

• **Grade level meetings oriented to review student progress.** Teachers meet in grade level groups to review the progress of students, with a focus on identifying intervention strategies that can be applied in the classroom. Students in need of more substantial learning supports are referred to the ULSS team, which then provides feedback to the grade level team and/or classroom teacher.

**Universal Referral**

Universal referral is a process whereby teachers, staff, or a parent/guardian refers a student who appears to need learning supports beyond what is feasible within the general classroom environment to the ULSS team. Referrals are made using a referral form that informs the ULSS team about the concerns, student strengths, and suggested support options. The referral form asks users to reference any number of potential barriers to learning, including academic, emotional, social, environmental, and/or health. The ULSS team uses the information provided on the referral form to make a determination about the most suitable learning support for the student. Additionally, in aggregate, the referral forms help the ULSS team determine how learning supports may be best distributed within the school.

**Student Success Team**

The Student Success Team (SST, see also BUSD SST Manual) is a regular education, problem-solving, group process that is employed when a student is having difficulties in school, and when initial efforts by teachers, support staff, and/or parents to provide support have not made a sufficient impact. The SST is based on the assumption that the school, home, and community must work collectively, through a focus on the student’s strengths, to eliminate barriers to learning. While the ULSS team is the first point of contact for referring students in need of enhanced support, an SST is a more critical intervention that is warranted when the ULSS team does not have sufficient information or experience with the child to create a meaningful service plan.

In the SST meeting, information about the student’s strengths, difficulties, and responsiveness are exchanged. This exchange is followed by the development of one or more specific goals for the student, and an action plan with strategies that will support the student in meeting these goals. The SST follows up by ensuring that the action plan is implemented, monitoring the student’s progress, and developing additional interventions if needed.
Standards-based, culturally competent instruction & enrichment in a safe and nurturing school environment for all students

ULSS Team facilitates
universal, data-driven screenings of all students with classroom teachers and school administration

Meeting student’s needs?

yes Continue delivery and on-going assessment

no ULSS Team determines early intervention needs and groups students according to need

Meeting student’s needs?

yes Continue delivery and on-going assessment

no Universal referral

Meeting student’s needs?

no ULSS Team facilitates follow up with classroom teacher/intervention provider to review student’s progress

Meeting student’s needs?

yes Continue delivery and on-going assessment

no SST creates/amends strengths-based, individualized service plan

Meeting student’s needs?

no ULSS Team facilitates follow up with SST team and all relevant parties to review student’s progress

Meeting student’s needs?

yes Continue delivery and on-going assessment

no
IV. B. Special Education Reorganization

**BUSD staff lead: Elaine Eger, Manager of Special Education**

Special education is currently reorganizing its service delivery model. Rather than operating as a separate program, focusing on an exclusive and often segregated group of students, special education service providers will systematically integrate students into general education classrooms, offering specialized supports to any child who needs them at the time the student needs them. This reorganization of service delivery is guided by the following parameters.

1. Students are members of chronologically age-appropriate general education classrooms in their zone schools of attendance, or in schools of choice, participating in the same process as all other students for assignment in a zone.

2. Students move with peers to subsequent grades in school, as indicated by their IEPs.

3. Special classes exist in so far as they present ideal enrichment or intervention opportunities to meet unique student needs as determined by an SST or IEP team, and such classes continuously support a flow of students in need of its services in and out of its parameters.

4. SST and IEP facilitators, as well as the professional participants, are trained and practice an approach that recognizes the legitimacy of the parents’ perspective as valid and critical to the development of a successful SST or IEP plan.

5. Disability label or severity of disability does not preclude involvement in inclusive schools.

6. The staff-to-student ratios for special education teachers and paraprofessionals are based on student needs and are at least equivalent to the ratios used previously in special classes or other segregated arrangements.

7. The special education and general education teachers collaborate to ensure:

8. the students’ natural participation as a regular member of the class,

9. the systematic instruction of the students’ IEP objectives,

10. the differentiation and adaptation of core curriculum and materials to facilitate all students’ participation and learning of standards-referenced goals and objectives as well as other critical skills (social, communicative), and

11. development and implementation of positive behavioral interventions to support students with challenging behaviors.

12. Supplemental instructional services (e.g., for communication, mobility skills, adapted PE) are provided to students in classrooms and community settings through a transdisciplinary team approach.

13. Regularly scheduled collaborative planning meetings are held with general education staff, special education staff, families and related service staff in attendance as indicated, in order
to support initial and ongoing program development and monitoring.

14. Plans are developed for the transition of students to subsequent grades and schools of attendance.

15. Effective instructional strategies (e.g., differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, teaching to multiple intelligences, employing universal design principles, infusing technology) are supported and fostered in the general education classroom.

16. Classrooms promote student responsibility for learning through strategies such as student-led conferences, classroom meetings, student involvement in IEPs and planning meetings.

17. Ability awareness education is provided to staff, students and families at the school site through formal or informal means.

18. Natural peer supports are facilitated among students, as are instructional arrangements that decrease reliance on paraprofessionals.

19. Ongoing personnel development needs for all members of the school community are identified and addressed.

A goal of all educators is success. Identified success in a unified school district setting is graduation from high school with skills that will enable students to become productive members of the adult world in whatever capacity suits the individual. When students are educated with peers the evolution to independence is supported. As the focus moves towards supporting students and assisting them in recognizing personal strengths and weaknesses, a system of self-advocacy can be developed that will give all students a life-long skill. Recognition of needs, learning styles and self-advocacy will build self-confidence and foster independence. Furthermore, this recognition will encourage an appreciation for others’ differences, and promote a community of learners and a fellowship of support. As such, all students can be expected to benefit from an authentic and rich educational experience in a truly diverse classroom.

IV. C. Office of Integrated Resources

BUSD staff lead: Lisa Warhuus, Manager of Integrated Resources

The Office of Integrated Resources (OIR) was formed in Fall 2005 to enhance the availability and delivery of learning supports in the schools through community partnerships. The OIR is working specifically to: 1) build interagency and community partnerships to expand learning support resources, and 2) manage specific, district-owned programs that provide or enhance learning supports in the schools (parent outreach, 504 system, SST process, ULSS infrastructure development).

Based on a thorough assessment of learning support resources and the needs of students in the schools, the OIR is presently emphasizing the development of school-community partnerships to enhance ULSS case coordination, mental health services (prevention, early intervention, and
intensive intervention), public health services, and parent and family support. By expanding and improving these services, particularly at the levels of prevention and early intervention, a broader array of supports are becoming available to meet student needs.

IV. D. Staff Development

*BUSD staff lead: Sharon Friedman, Coordinator of Staff Development and Assessment*

Implementing ULSS requires significant changes to school culture and teaching practices. Schools need support in their efforts to embody a more inclusive and prevention/early intervention oriented approach to addressing student learning needs. Initial ULSS trainings facilitated by the Office of Integrated Resources focused on the development of the ULSS system at the sites, assessing student needs and organizing resources accordingly, and integrating mental health and health into ULSS work. The Inclusive Education Advisory panel (see below), has developed several ULSS training modules which they deliver to school sites that request them. These modules address such issues as differentiation of instruction, Positive Behavioral Supports, and collaborative teaching practices. A critical staff development need that is emerging involves helping schools to effectively utilize research-based programs and practices that have the proven ability to meet specific learning needs. BUSD is initiating work in this area in the current school year by developing a district-wide inventory of research-based learning support programs currently available in the schools.

IV. E. School Site Plans for Academic Achievement

*BUSD staff lead: Neil Smith, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services*

Every site’s School Governance Council develops a school plan under the leadership of the principal. The document outlines instructional goals, strategies, and provides justification for site resource allocation. Since Spring 2006, BUSD has asked the K-8 schools to address three specific goals in their plans. One of these goals, implement interventions that address barriers to learning, was designed specifically to ensure that schools would work toward the implementation of various components of ULSS. As such, on an annual basis, each School Governance Council (SGC) now reviews or develops objectives pertaining to how their ULSS systems are operating, ensuring that ULSS enhancements are implemented over time.

V. ULSS Community Advisory Partnerships

While ULSS provides a general framework for the management and delivery of learning supports, there are specific content areas that must be addressed more thoroughly to ensure that student learning needs are properly addressed. Presently, there are two community advisory groups, the Inclusive Education Advisory Panel and the Schools Mental Health Partnership, that are working to develop a more comprehensive framework for specific elements of ULSS. The work of these advisory groups is described in greater detail below. Their
relationship to the overall development of ULSS is illustrated in Figure C (following page). As ULSS evolves, there are likely to be new groups forming to address various content areas. ³

V.A. The Inclusive Education Advisory Panel

The Inclusive Education Advisory Panel is an advisory group to the Superintendent that makes recommendations specific to the re-organization of special education, to ensure that students are provided high quality, preventive, early and intensive interventions, in the least restrictive environment. Panel members include parents, teachers, site and district administrators, and educational specialists. The panel is currently working on developing concrete modules describing various aspects of ULSS as they relate to special education, to help educate and inform BUSD administrators, teachers, parents and the community.

V.B. The Berkeley Schools Mental Health Partnership

The Berkeley Schools Mental Health Partnership (SMHP) is an interagency collaboration committed to building a comprehensive system of school-based and school-linked mental health care, for the purpose of ensuring that all Berkeley students have access to the social and emotional support they need for healthy development and school success. Critical to this mission is a focus on building positive social and emotional supports for all students by creating school environments in which students and staff can thrive. Current SMHP partners include BUSD, the Berkeley Alliance, City of Berkeley Mental Health, City of Berkeley Public Health, the Zero to Five Action Team of the Berkeley Integrated Resources Initiative, and school-based mental health providers. The SMHP is facilitated through the Office of Integrated Resources. The SMHP has recently completed a comprehensive strategic plan for a school mental health system that is well-aligned with the principles of ULSS. Implementation is currently under implementation.

VI. ULSS Implementation Goals: 2007-2008 School Year

Schools

The schools are at different levels of readiness regarding ULSS implementation. While some schools have already phased in various elements of ULSS, others are just getting started. The following goals for the schools are designed flexibly, such that schools can create their priorities based upon their available resources and degree of readiness. District support will be given for each item.

- Identify and implement feasible, school-year objectives to better meet the diverse needs and capabilities of students within the general education environment.

³ Examples of ULSS relevant issues that might be addressed more in depth include health, wellness and nutrition supports, afterschool programming, and youth employment and development.
• Strengthen the capacity of the ULSS Team to effectively: 1) utilize a universal screening process, 2) implement a universal referral system, and 3) provide meaningful feedback to teachers and parents.

• Develop capacity to effectively utilize research-based programs and practices that have the proven ability to meet specific learning needs. BUSD is initiating work in this area in the current school year by developing an inventory of research-based programs and practices currently in use at the schools.

**District**

BUSD’s central office will support the school-site initiatives and the overall implementation of ULSS in the following ways.

• Sustain special education staffing in the schools with lowered caseloads such that teachers can better collaborate with classroom teachers, provide services in the general education environment, and help support the coordination of services efforts (lead: Elaine Eger, Felton Owens).

• Develop a district-wide inventory of research-based learning support programs currently available in the schools (lead: Educational Services Team).

• Provide technical assistance to the schools on developing and implementing school-year objectives for improving the effectiveness of ULSS teams and learning support resource delivery (lead: Lisa Warhuus).

• Convene the ULSS Council to address training needs and support continuity across the system. (lead: Lisa Warhuus).

• Enhance the availability and use of mental health and public health services to support ULSS (lead: Lisa Warhuus).

• Expand participation of community mental health providers on ULSS Teams and SSTs to support case management and provide service linkages (lead: Lisa Warhuus).

• Enhance staff development to the schools to strengthen ULSS implementation (lead: Sharon Friedman).

• Evaluate progress of school plans as they pertain to implementation of ULSS relevant items (lead: Neil Smith)
VII. ULSS Toolkit

This section contains documents to be used in the ULSS process. Most of these documents are intended to be photocopied on both sides of a page.

- School-Site ULSS Implementation Checklist, 2007-2008
- BUSD Elementary School Screening Summary
- BUSD Middle School Screening Summary
- ULSS Referral Form
- SST Summary Form and Brainstorm Sheet (See also BUSD SST manual)
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