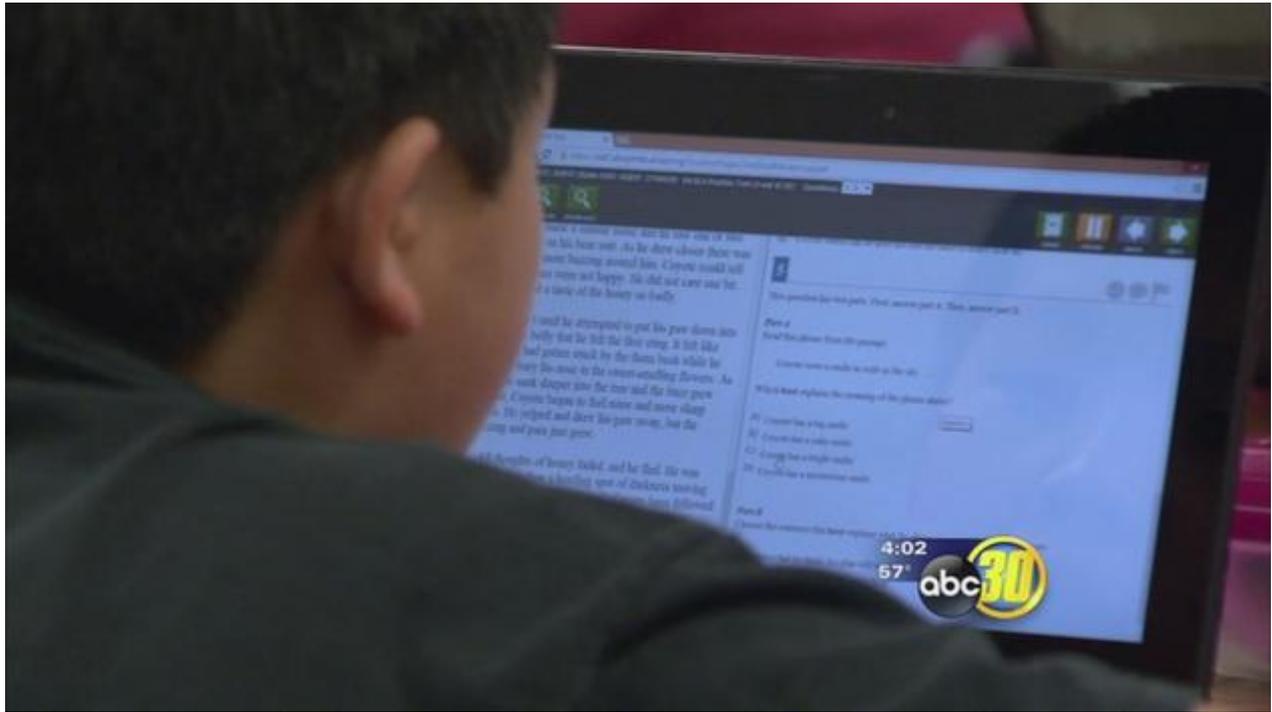


# Report: Fresno Unified violating laws for students in need

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## EDUCATION



A new report shows some of Fresno Unified School District's most vulnerable students are not getting the services they need.

FRESNO, Calif. (KFSN) --

A new report shows some of Fresno Unified School District's most vulnerable students are not getting the services they need. The California Department of Education has cited the district for being out of compliance on a number of issues relating to speech therapy for special needs students and is breaking the law.



Jayline Morris, 16, has Rett's Syndrome, which her mother says is like having Parkinson's, autism and cerebral palsy all at the same time. Jayline's mother, Anita Morris, says "Speech language is very important to her because she is not able to speak and she's also not able to use her hands very well."

As part of her individualized education plan or I-E-P, Jayline was ordered to see a speech language pathologist three times a week. The requirement is mandated by law but she hasn't seen the therapist once this school year. Anita Morris says she is frustrated and despite trying to communicate with teachers and the principal at Rata, the Fresno Unified special needs school Jayline attends, there's been no services provided to her child. Morris says, "This year I can see the regression at home as well as at school. And she's not moving forward in any of the goals in her IEP."

After fielding numerous complaints from parents and some of the district's speech language pathologists, the Fresno Teacher's Association filed a formal complaint with the state Department of Education. This week a report was issued to Fresno Unified showing it was out of compliance on every issue brought forth. The report revealed 509 special needs students are not getting the speech therapy as required by law.

Tish Rice, President of the Fresno Teacher's Association, says "I think it's really important that the district address this issue so students receive the best education possible so they can go on to graduate and have options after high school."

Rice says there are 20 of Fresno Unified's schools that don't even have speech language pathologists available for students. One of the district's speech therapists says the treatment is crucial towards a special needs student's progression and retention of educational materials.

Fresno Unified speech language pathologist Xena Wickliffe says "There is a wide range of need as far as the student's abilities."

For Anita Morris, she just hopes the report from the state pushes Fresno Unified School District to hire the 14 additional speech therapists that are lacking, and for Jayline to get the care and education she needs. Morris says, "I want the district to be on notice that the parents care about their children, especially while they're at the school that six hours. They care about what's going on."

There are more than 4,000 special needs students enrolled at Fresno Unified School District.

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**In response to this report, the Fresno Unified School District issued the following statement:**

*"For more than ten years there has been a critical nationwide shortage of speech language pathologists (SLPs), particularly in the educational sector. In an effort to minimize the effects on students who attend school sites without assigned SLPs and whose IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) require speech and language services, the District has offered students speech and language services after school or during the summer. However, not all families have opted to utilize these services.*

*"Qualified SLPs are crucial to the District's commitment to meet the needs of our students who require speech and language services. The District engages in long-term and ongoing efforts to recruit qualified SLPs to provide services to students during the school day, as well as meet all IEP team meeting requirements. Those efforts include aggressively pursuing independent contractors, and evaluating SLP retention strategies. In meeting this long-standing challenge, the District is reviewing and analyzing the current caseloads of its 72 in-house SLPs.*

*"The District continues to work with the CDE to enhance speech and language services to our students, including providing training on the areas jointly identified in the report. "*

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