

NOVEMBER 16, 2023

Overview of Special Education in California

PRESENTED TO:

Select Committee on Serving Students with Disabilities
Hon. Dawn Addis, Chair



LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

Overview of Special Education

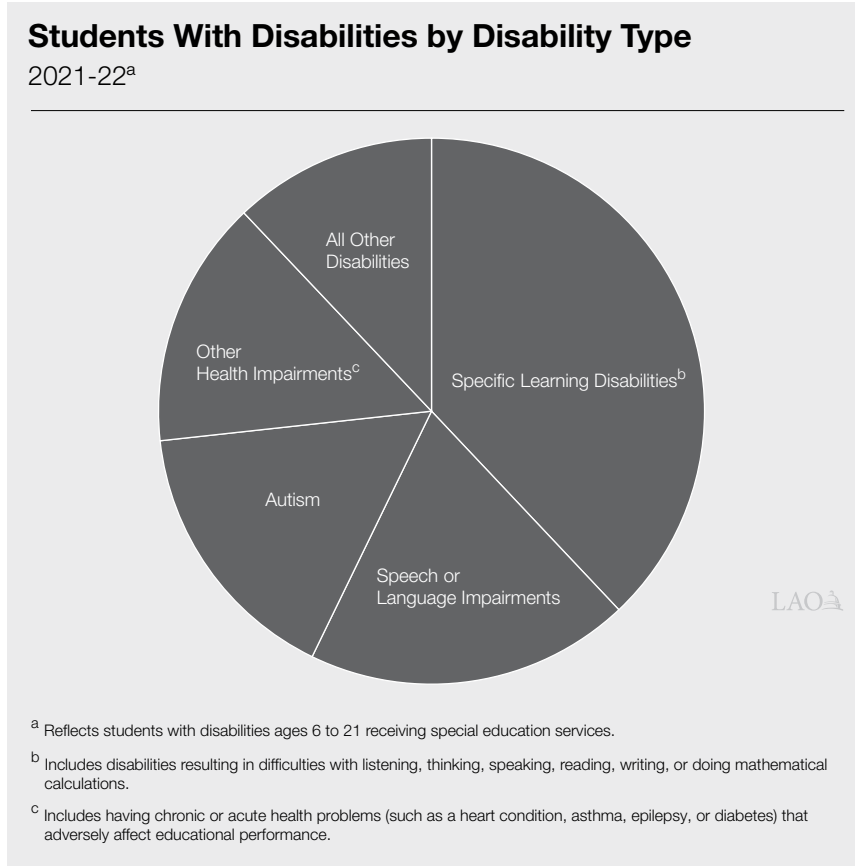
Schools First Must Try to Meet All Students' Needs Within the General Education Program

Public Schools Must Provide Special Supports for Students With Disabilities Who Need Them

- Federal Law requires that schools provide a “free appropriate public education.”

Nearly 13 Percent of California Students Have Disabilities Affecting Their Education

Most California Students Who Qualify for Special Education Have a Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairment, or Autism



Special Education Services and Settings

An Individualized Education Program Defines a Student’s Special Education Services

School Districts Offer Students With Disabilities Specialized Instruction and Services

- Services provided will differ depending on disability.
- The most common service provided is specialized academic instruction.
- For students with speech or language impairments, the most common service provided is speech therapy.

Federal Law Encourages Schools to Educate Students With Disabilities in Settings With Non-Disabled Peers

- Students must be educated in the “least restrictive environment.”
- In 2021-22, 61 percent of California students with disabilities were educated in a general education classroom 80 percent or more of the school day.



Special Education Funding

State Uses Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA) to Coordinate Services and Allocate Funding

Dedicated Special Education Funds Intended to Support the “Excess Costs” of Educating Students With Disabilities

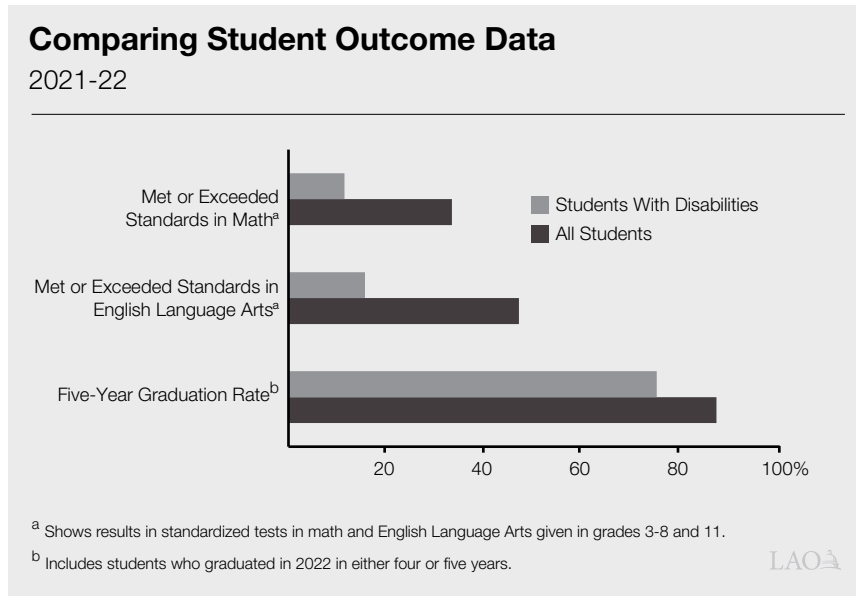
Special Education Services Supported by Federal, State, and Local Funds

- The state provided \$5.4 billion in state funds and \$1.5 billion in federal funds in 2023-24.



Outcomes for Students With Disabilities

Performance of Students With Disabilities Lags Behind Peers



Statewide Accountability System Identifies Districts and County Offices of Education (COEs) in Need of Differentiated Assistance

- Identification based on the performance of student subgroups.
- In 2022, the most common student group for which districts and COEs were identified was students with disabilities (84 percent of districts and COEs identified).



Report for California's Statewide Task Force on Special Education

In 2015, the Report for California's Statewide Task Force on Special Education Was Released

Notable State Actions Aligned With Report Recommendations

- Increase in per-student funding allocated to SELPAs for special education.
- Expansion of alternative dispute resolution resources, supports, and services throughout the state.
- Outcomes-based accountability framework that is aligned with the rest of the K-12 system.
- Establishment of requirements for general and special education preparation programs related to mastery of content standards, evidence-based strategies, pedagogy, intervention strategies, and collaboration among teachers and across assignments.

Topics Not Yet Addressed

- Purposefully integrated professional learning opportunities for educators in both special and general education.
- Access to comprehensive and effective transition services and programs.

