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Overview of Special Education in California

LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

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Hon. Marty Block, Chair





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" (FAPE).

About 10 Percent of California Students Have Disabilities Affecting Their Education

2013-14

	Students With Disabilities ^a		Percent of Total K-12 Population
	Number	Percent	
Specific learning disability ^b	281,882	40%	4.0%
Speech or language impairment	159,477	23	2.0
Autism	84,665	12	1.0
Other health impairment ^c	69,887	10	1.0
Intellectual disability	43,075	6	1.0
Emotional disturbance	24,438	3	0.4
Orthopedic impairment	12,356	2	0.2
Hard of hearing	8,918	1	0.1
Multiple disability	5,944	1	0.1
Visual impairment	3,744	1	0.1
Deaf	3,412	— ^d	— ^e
Traumatic brain injury	1,680	— ^d	— ^e
Deaf-blindness	22	— ^d	— ^e
Totals	699,500	100%	10.2%

^a Reflects students with disabilities ages 3 to 22 receiving special education services.

^b Includes disorders resulting in difficulties with listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, or doing mathematical calculations.

^c Includes having chronic or acute health problems (such as a heart condition, asthma, epilepsy, or diabetes) that adversely affect educational performance.

^d Less than 0.5 percent.

^e Less than 0.05 percent.



Special Education Services and Settings

- An Individualized Education Program (IEP) Defines a Student's Special Education Services**

- Extra Academic Support in a Classroom Setting Is The Most Commonly Provided Special Education Service**
 - Other commonly provided services include speech and language assistance, various types of therapies for physical and psychological needs, and services to help older students transition to adulthood.

- Federal Law Encourages Schools to Educate Students With Disabilities in Mainstream Settings . . .**
 - Students must be educated in the "Least Restrictive Environment" (LRE).

- . . . Yet Many Students with Disabilities in California Receive Special Education Services Outside the Regular Classroom**
 - Only about half of students with disabilities spend the bulk of their instructional time in the mainstream classroom (compared to 60 percent nationwide).
 - Many students with disabilities receive services in separate classrooms (either through part-day "pull-out" services or on-site "special day" classrooms) or at off-site locations such as therapists' offices. About 4 percent are educated at a separate school or residential facility.



Special Education Funding

- State Uses Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA) to Allocate Funding and Coordinate Services**
- Special Education Services Are Supported by Federal, State, and Local Funds**
- Dedicated Special Education Funds Are Intended to Support the “Excess Costs” of Educating Students With Disabilities**
- State Special Education Funds Total About \$4 Billion Annually**
 - State funds are distributed based on the total number of students attending schools within the SELPA, via the “AB 602” formula. State per-pupil funding rates average \$530, but vary across SELPAs from \$480 to \$925 based on historical factors.
- Local Budgets Are Covering an Increasing Share of Special Education Expenditures**



Outcomes for Students With Disabilities



Performance of Students With Disabilities Lags Behind Peers

- For the class of 2012-13, 62 percent of students with disabilities graduated high school, compared to 80 percent of students without identified disabilities.
- In 2013-14, about one-quarter of third graders with disabilities scored proficient or advanced on the state's English Language Arts assessments, compared to 45 percent of students without identified disabilities.



California's Performance Also Lags Behind Other States

- State's performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress is below the national average both for students with and without disabilities.



Federal Government Considering Additional Intervention in California Due to Low Performance



State in Process of Revising Assessments for Students with Disabilities

- The state has replaced the California Modified Assessment with the adaptive Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, and is replacing the California Alternate Performance Assessment with a new test for students who have severe cognitive disabilities.



State Special Schools (SSS)

- State Operates Two Schools for the Deaf (in Riverside and Fremont) and One School for the Blind (in Fremont)**
 - Additionally, the state operates three diagnostic centers (located in Fremont, Fresno, and Los Angeles) that identify students' disabilities and offer related training to families and school districts.

- SSS Serve Small Share of State's Deaf and Blind Students**
 - Districts, parents, and SSS staff work together as part of the IEP process to determine whether a student would benefit from attending one of the SSS.

Enrollment at the State Special Schools

2013-14

	Enrollment	Percent Residential	Percent of State's Deaf or Blind Students
School for the Deaf—Fremont	459	59%	3% ^a
School for the Deaf—Riverside	410	36	3 ^a
School for the Blind	85	80	2 ^b
Totals	869	48	5%

^a Reflects share of statewide population of students who have been identified as deaf, hard of hearing, or blind-deaf.
^b Reflects share of statewide population of students who have been identified as visually impaired.

- SSS and Diagnostic Centers Funded by Direct State Appropriation, Overseen by California Department of Education**
 - Budget is around \$95 million annually. About half is funded by Proposition 98, and about half is funded by non-Proposition 98 state General Fund.
 - Annual per-pupil funding rates for the SSS average about \$85,000 per student.