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Overview of Special Education in California

LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

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Hon. Kevin McCarty, 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.