

Statewide Special Education Task Force Report

The Task Force recommendations will lay out a blueprint for a new, more effective, evidence-based approach to serving the needs of all students, but especially those with disabilities. The work of the Task Force included looking at as many of the complex details of special education and their final recommendations will focus on six specific areas: Early Learning, Evidence-Based Practices, Parent and Family needs, Educator Preparation, Assessment and Accountability, and Fiscal considerations relative to the implementation of recommendations.

Early Learning – For children from birth to age 5 with disabilities, the Task Force believes that the state needs to improve access, update funding formulas, create program standards to be used by all providers, establish a set of competencies for early childhood educators and tap into federal funds that could expand medical services available.

Evidence Based Practices & the creation of 11 Implementation Centers – Teachers and schools need to make a major shift toward using evidence-based practices that provide students the services and support they need earlier and more effectively. This will require significant changes in local policies as well as extensive support from the Department of Education. In order to achieve statewide the standards of practice, the creation of 11 Implementation Centers will be proposed by the Task Force.

The Task Force will be recommending that the CDE and SBE develop a single coherent system that includes effective first teaching, Universal Design for Learning, progress monitoring, data driven decision making, and research-based approaches that include the use of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, Response to Instruction and Intervention methods, and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. It should also create incentives for local education agencies to implement the model. The Task Force will recommend allocating the money through the Local Control Funding Formula to support the implementation of a coherent system model.

Parent and Family needs—The Task Force will recommend fully funding Family Empowerment Centers (FEC) statewide. Currently only 14 FECs are funded (there are 32 FEC regions statewide).

Educator Preparation – The Task Force believes that special education teachers must be better prepared to teach the general education curriculum; general education teachers and principals must be expected to learn much more about special education pedagogy and theory. This will require the redesign of educator preparation programs and changes in credentialing and authorizations by the CTC. The Task Force will also propose a state-led effort to provide professional learning opportunities to teachers already working in schools.

Assessment and Accountability – The Task Force believes that new assessments must be developed and accountability policies changed as California moves to further update State Standards and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium tests. The Task Force will provide suggested implementation timelines.

Financial Recommendations—The Task Force believes that special education finance needs an overhaul similar in scope to the changes made to education finance when the state adopted the Local Control Funding Formula in 2013. The recommendations will focus on bringing SELPAs up to a new statewide target rate for funding, equalization of SELPAs within 5 years, address low incidence disabilities and fund Special education as an continuous appropriation.

Establishment of a Cross-agency policy team—The Task Force will be recommending the formation of a cross-agency policy team to map out the specific steps necessary to make the vision for a new system for meeting the needs of students with disabilities a reality. The Implementation and Accountability Team should include representatives from the Governor's office, the SBE, CDE, CTC, the Legislature, the statewide Departments of Developmental Services, Health, Social Services, Health and Managed Care, and Department of Finance.