

The California Advisory Commission on Special Education

Overview from the Chair

The first California Advisory Commission on Special Education (ACSE) meeting of the year is not unlike the first episode of the popular television program *Lost*: strangers from across the state find themselves grouped together in a room bound by a common purpose. But with the gracious assistance of Special Education Director Mary Hudler and her team and of State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell and his staff, the ACSE did better than survive. And its commissioners were never actually lost. They studied, listened, observed, and advised—all in the interest of California's students with disabilities.

This year, ACSE commissioners discovered the truth in John Muir's words that "going out . . . was really going in." With the help of Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) directors and under the leadership of their SELPA Association Chair John LaLonde, the commissioners spent a great deal of time out of their meeting room, observing and studying programs that deliver a

*"I only went out for
a walk and finally
concluded to stay out
until sundown, for
going out, I found,
was really going in."*

—John Muir

impressive array of special education services throughout California. The commissioners left these visitations amazed at the dedication and creativity of teachers, administrators, and classified staff. They were consistently impressed by the perseverance of students. These visits have helped inspire and inform the commission's efforts.



ACSE Annual Report

As it works to support the broad continuum of services that comprise special education, the ACSE is grateful for the many great minds that also help to keep its commissioners focused on the prize: positive outcomes for students with disabilities. These generous and collaborative stakeholders include Ellen Gervase, K.C. Walsh, and Woody Moynahan from the California Teachers Association (CTA); Linda Nimer from the California Association of Resource Specialists and Special Education Teachers (CARS+); Julie Redmond from the California Congress of Parents, Teachers, and Students, Inc. (PTA); Robert Powell from the California Speech-Language-Hearing Association (CSHA); Mary Beth Phillips from the Family Empowerment Centers; and Jan Mangini from the California School Employees Association. All of these individuals diligently and regularly helped commissioners sift through the many facets of their work and provided valuable input from the field.

Kudos to Chris Drouin for bringing the State Performance Plan to life and to Ron Kadish for consistently educating the ACSE on the unique challenges facing the state schools that serve California students who are deaf and blind. A special thanks goes to Anthony Sotelo and

Kathleen Smith from the Special Education Division for organizing all details that contribute to the success of ACSE meetings.

State Board Member Yvonne Chan deserves a special ACSE honor all her own. She works diligently and energetically to create a bridge between the ACSE and the State Board of Education, and she consistently engages the ACSE in important dialogue around current issues facing special education.

Finally, the ACSE would like to thank the M.I.N.D. Institute's Dr. Robin Hansen and Dr. Blythe Corbett for hosting our February meeting and enlightening us about their research on autism spectrum disorders. Thanks also to our many impressive guest speakers throughout the year: Martin Cavanaugh and Tim Taylor (Sacramento County Office of Education), Paul Navarro (California Office of the Governor), Jan Jones-Wadsworth (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing), Bonnie Mintun (Communication Technology Education Center), Vicki Barber (El Dorado SELPA), Don Shalvey (Aspire Public Schools), and many others. We are also grateful to those members of the public who came forward to tell their stories and share valuable information.

—Kristin Wright

Legislative Overview

Legislation creates programs, sets up studies, and establishes the parameters of regulations. It is where “the rubber meets the road” and things get done. In ordinary times, the formula for getting well-crafted laws passed in support of students with disabilities is neither simple nor easy, but it is possible. These, however, are not ordinary times. With California's budget deficits, the new formula has become unfortunately simplified: if it costs money, forget it.

Nevertheless, ACSE is ready with a modified legislative platform and the support of individuals and organizations also interested in taking action when the financial picture brightens. This platform focuses on seven critical areas: adequate funding for special education, highly qualified educators, reduction in class sizes and

caseloads, career and technical education opportunities, rational accountability measures, effective delivery of services in charter schools, and better postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. The ACSE is eager to resume its efforts to actively advise on legislation that improves education for children with disabilities in California.

Liaisons and Coalitions

The ACSE maintains its commitment to sustaining and expanding its positive working relationships with organizations and agencies that are active in the education of students with disabilities. In addition to regularly attending the meetings of these other groups, ACSE commissioners share agendas and coordinate activities with them. Among these organizations are the State Board of Education and the

Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC). The ACSE also continues to provide liaison with the Pupil Services Coalition—a multi-disciplinary organization of nurses, counselors, teachers and special educators, social workers, and psychologists—which seeks to work cooperatively with professional organizations on legislative and agenda items of common interest. Additionally, at each of its meetings the ACSE welcomes input from diverse individuals and organizations, with special recognition to CTA, CARS+, PTA, CSHA, SELPA, and SEACO (Special Education Administrators of County Offices)—groups that regularly appear before the commission and provide valuable information.

In April the ACSE launched a new initiative, tentatively called the “Special Education Collaborative.” This group consists of representatives from

various organizations who regularly attend ACSE meetings and who have expressed interest in working with the ACSE on legislative agendas and initiatives in an effort to provide a fresh perspective and impetus to efforts related to special education. The collaborative and the ACSE are united in their commitment to providing quality educational opportunities for students with disabilities.

Programs and Policy

Despite the serious economic challenges facing the state and the impact the economy has on education, the ACSE had been able to expand its efforts in a number of directions during its 2008–09 year: by rewarding programs in California that are creating positive outcomes for students with special needs, by visiting and observing a variety of educational entities, and by collaborating and sharing work with other organizations. The ACSE



spent the year offering guidance to stakeholders in the areas of transition, information dissemination, and teacher recruitment and retention. These and other topics are discussed in detail below.

In addition, the ACSE is in the process of developing position papers for future consideration by the State

Board of Education, legislators, and other stakeholders. The commission's current focus is on transition, especially the need for a seamless transition for students after high school. This includes adequate funding for research on postsecondary outcomes, the importance of sharing accurate and timely information with all stakeholders, and the need for access to appropriate training programs and assistive technology—all of which can help to ensure that students with special needs, upon entering adulthood, have every opportunity to become as independent and self-supporting as possible. It is toward this end that the ACSE's programs and policy efforts are directed.

Autism

ACSE commissioners are deeply concerned about the dramatic increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism in California. The commissioners are also mindful of the challenges that special education teachers and resource specialists face in their efforts to appropriately serve and support this growing population. Therefore, all members of the ACSE will closely follow and support the efforts of the CDE as it applies for a professional development grant from the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders (NPCD-ASD), funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. This grant would provide funds and technical support from the NPCD-ASD to collaborate with California state personnel to develop a system of professional development and technical assistance. This system would be designed to promote the use of evidence-based practices for individuals with autism spectrum disorders and the early identification of these disorders.

Assistive Technology

Legitimate and conflicting arguments come to bear on the question of how assistive technology devices are funded in California and the manner in which students are allowed—and not allowed—to keep devices after their



transition out of high school and into adult life. The ACSE sees this issue as a complicated one that bears careful attention and study.

Meanwhile, an international commitment to the fundamental human right of universal access is growing. The ACSE looks forward to learning about and endorsing efforts in the state—whether low-tech or high—that enhance independence and the access to education for all individuals with disabilities.

Many students and families face challenges in their efforts to find the right assistive technology for their child and the funds to pay for it. The ACSE believes that collaborative work among organizations is critical for the success of these efforts.

California High School Exit Exam

Students with disabilities continue to struggle to meet the state-mandated requirement to pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in order to receive their high school

diplomas. Equally troubling are the reports from the field that, because students are spending time in CAHSEE remediation courses, they are missing opportunities to acquire many of the tangible life and job skills required for postsecondary success.

In response, lawmakers have added the following language to California's Education Code: "The Superintendent shall recommend, and the state board shall select, members of



a panel that will convene to make recommendations regarding alternative means for eligible pupils with disabilities to demonstrate that they have achieved the same level of academic achievement in the content standards in English language arts or mathematics, or both, required for passage of the high school exit examination." This AB 2040 panel is thus charged with finding solutions that address the challenge students face to graduation. The ACSE will continue to monitor any new developments related to the CAHSEE and looks forward to continued public input on this issue.

A special thanks to Ed Amundsen and his C.K. McClatchy High School students who reported this year to the ACSE on their progress and successes in taking the CAHSEE. Some of these students were attending their fifth year of high school in hopes of passing the exit exam.

California Commission on Teacher Credentialing

During the past three years the ACSE has participated with the Commission on Teaching Credentialing in the restructuring of the Education Specialist Credential, the redesign of the credential standards, and the development of added authorizations, which would add expertise in areas of special education that were not part of the original credential authorizations. The ACSE supports the proposed new credential structure, standards, and added authorizations because they are designed to promote and sustain high quality in the preparation and performance of professional special educators. The ACSE has always been committed to promoting educational excellence and ensuring that students with disabilities are taught by high-quality professionals. The ACSE will continue to advocate for all efforts to ensure that quality.

California Modified Assessment

The California Department of Education, responding in part to federal regulations, has developed and begun implementing a modified assessment for students with disabilities. This assessment is based on the California content standards and modified achievement standards for children who have an individualized education program (IEP).

An ACSE commissioner has been a member of the Assessment Review Panel (ARP) for the California Modified Assessment (CMA) since 2005 and is involved in developing new assessments for the state. The ARP is made up of curriculum experts, educators, and assessment specialists. A new assessment for students in grades three through six is in its second year of operation and has received an over-

whelmingly positive response from special educators and students with disabilities. The number of students participating in the assessment has also increased: this year alone approximately 20,000 students at each of the above grade levels took the CMA. The assessment currently is available for students in grades three through eight for English/language arts, in grades three through seven for mathematics, and in grades five and eight for science.

The CMA effort is in its final phase, with assessments for high school students being currently developed. Full roll-out is expected by 2011. However, getting the information out to the field about the CMA as a test option for students with disabilities remains a challenge. For more information, please go to www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/cmastar.asp.



Charter Schools

California's public education system is grappling with changes in its landscape—particularly those related to the increased number of students with disabilities served by charter schools. In light of these changes, the ACSE recognizes that the current model of delivering special education services through traditional public schools must be reevaluated in order for students with disabilities to have equal access to the array of educational choice offered by charters.

To that end, the California Department of Education's (CDE) Special Education Division, along with the Charter Schools Division, convened a charter workgroup to examine, discuss, and propose solutions to critical issues related to charter schools and special education. This workgroup is currently awaiting early results of the State Board of Education Charter Pilot Project, which was designed to assist the CDE in examining alternative approaches to effectively serving students with disabilities who are enrolled in charter schools. These alternatives would allow a SELPA to be responsible for services to children who attend charters but who are outside of the geographic area of that SELPA. The ACSE is greatly interested in the results of this pilot and will continue its ongoing commitment to studying and advising on all issues related to the education of students with disabilities in public charter schools.



Kristin Ludovico of C.L.O.U.D.S. receives the GOAL Award from Special Education Director Mary Hudler and ACSE Chair Kristin Wright at the GOAL Award ceremony.

The GOAL Award

The California Advisory Commission on Special Education created the GOAL Award in 2005–06. GOAL—Grazer Outstanding Achievement in Learning—is named after film pro-

ducer Brian Grazer who has donated \$100,000 over a ten-year period to recognize programs with exemplary practices in special education and to celebrate both the programs that serve California youth with disabilities and the professionals who provide these services. This year ACSE presented the GOAL award to a preschool program called Creating Learning Opportunities and Understanding Differences in Students (C.L.O.U.D.S.), located at Perdue Elementary School in San Bernardino County.

In 2003, Kristin Ludovico, a speech-language pathologist, and Dr. Samantha Pellitteri, lead district psychologist, teamed up to reevaluate the programs and services offered to the Etiwanda Elementary School District's preschool special education students. This effort resulted in the creation of C.L.O.U.D.S., an inclusive preschool program with clearly defined goals: (1) to meet the needs of individual students and promote the district's mission of excellence in education within a safe, positive, and inclusive learning environment, free from discrimination; (2) to educate preschool students through a collaborative team approach that includes staff, students, parents, and community members; and (3) to prepare each student for the transition to kindergarten and beyond.

C.L.O.U.D.S. offers a three-hour preschool program that addresses pre-academic, social-emotional, motor, self-help, and language skills using differentiated instruction designed to meet the unique needs of all students. C.L.O.U.D.S. staff includes speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, vision therapists, therapists for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, specialists in orientation and mobility, and adapted physical education therapists, in col-

laboration with highly qualified teachers and instructional aides.

The ACSE is proud to recognize and award C.L.O.U.D.S. for its fine work. The commission is also grateful to Brian Grazer for making this award possible. For more information, about C.L.O.U.D.S., visit www.etiwanda.k12.ca.us/preschool/default.asp.



David Long, Sharon Coffield, and Kristin Ludovico of C.L.O.U.D.S.; Special Education Director Mary Hudler; Samantha Pellitteri and Sylvia Kordich of C.L.O.U.D.S.; and ACSE Chair Kristin Wright at the GOAL Award Ceremony

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RtI) is defined as a general education approach to supporting students with academic and behavioral challenges. It does not officially "belong" to special education. However, for good reason the ACSE has closely followed its development and implementation in the state. More than half of all students identified with disabilities have a learning disability. Since RtI is an approach to delivering early intervention services for students at the earliest signs of problems in the classroom, it offers great promise as a way of preventing students from falling so far behind their peers academically that they are not able to catch up—and thus end up being identified to receive special education services.

Students who are placed in the court school system are particularly vulnerable to this “fail first” pattern, especially in the areas of reading and math. The ACSE was pleased to learn of the work of Martin Cavanaugh, Deputy Superintendent of the Sacramento County Office of Education,



and Tim Taylor, Assistant Superintendent. Together they have developed the LINKS/Response to Intervention approach for their court schools. This model is based on assessments that help schools identify the specific strengths, needs, and weaknesses of the students. A student’s skills are then matched to an appropriate curriculum and program in technology-rich classrooms that are designed to help students overcome their academic deficits, particularly in reading. Student work is monitored to ensure the effectiveness of the instruction, and the teacher and student meet regularly to evaluate the student’s progress.

In general, LINK/RtI delivers services at the earliest signs of problems, thus enhancing student learning experiences, intensifying support services, and surrounding students with accelerated learning opportunities within the mainstream

of general education. This is an approach that everyone—ACSE included—can support.

State Performance Plan

On January 29, 2009, the California Department of Education submitted its Federal Fiscal Year 2007 (2007–08) State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR). The SPP contained information about only two indicators—Indicator 7, Early Childhood Assessment, and Indicator 14, Post-School Outcomes. The APR summarized data and discussed improvement or slippage for the remaining 18 indicators.

In 2007–08, California made improvements in most areas, but the state struggled to meet the majority of benchmarks. The APR demonstrated strengths in the timeliness and accuracy of data, as well as in the state’s timely correction of more than 40,000 findings of noncompliance.

Of particular note was the extensive study and data collection related to disproportionality by race and ethnicity of students in the state identified for special education services. In the APR for the 2007 fiscal year, California reviewed data and practices for the previous three years and conducted a sweeping evaluation of formulas used across the country to identify and assess disproportionality. As a result of this work, the California Department of Education will be working with parents, experts, and school administrators to redesign the ways that the department identifies, examines, and corrects problems related to disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity.

The ACSE follows the SPP with great interest, as the plan and its reports reflect the progress the state is

making in effectively serving students with disabilities

Transition

The ACSE strongly believes that a seamless transition, paired with a strong person-centered plan, is fundamental to better outcomes for students with disabilities; and moreover, that this approach to transition directly leads to functional citizenship. It is ACSE’s position that seamless transitions within the educational system are a precondition to effective transitions into the world of work and to a quality life in general. Perhaps most crucially, the ACSE contends that students with disabilities must be given access to the same training and programs as those given to their general education counterparts. To



this end, the ACSE formally adopted a legislative platform that includes the universal design, support, development, and expansion of career and technical educational programs that provide appropriate training and support for students with disabilities so they are able to effectively transition from school to adult life. As a result, the ACSE is intrigued by the possibilities presented by the Multiple Pathways Project (AB 2648), which may provide a unique opportunity to

advance this approach to transition.

During the 2008–09 year, the ACSE was able to see effective transition in action as it visited the Young Adult Program (YAP) operated by the Mission Valley SELPA. This program matches students' interests and skills to real-world employment settings, thereby respecting and enhancing the talents of students and connecting them to local businesses. The ACSE believes that a replication of private-public partnerships, such as those implemented by the YAP, may be one effective way to prepare students with disabilities for functional citizenship. The ACSE will present a formal white paper that addresses these important issues later this calendar year.

Site Visits

This year the ACSE traded time in the board room for time in the field. Commissioners teamed up with their local SELPA directors to visit special education programs, including programs for early intervention, response to intervention, transition, and autism. The purpose of these visits was to inspire the ACSE to continue its advisory and advocacy work for special education. Local SELPA directors, special education staff, and students deserve credit for the success of these visits, which strengthened the commissioners' admiration for the educators who are persevering through difficult times to deliver quality, innovative special education to the students of California.

One highlight for the ACSE was its visit to the M.I.N.D. Institute. Staff at the institute graciously hosted the entire commission on February 26, 2009. This visit included a tour of state-of-the-art facilities and a presentation about the institute's Social Emotional NeuroScience Endocrinology (SENSE) program. Research from the SENSE lab involves evaluating

the social and emotional functioning of children with autism. The findings are being used to shape treatments for improving peer interactions and play for these children. Given the exponential increase in the number of students in the state who are being diagnosed with autism, the commission is grateful for the work being done at the institute.

The commission plans to continue its community outreach through program visitations. Educators or parents who know of a program that the ACSE should visit are encouraged to inform a commission member.

A Look Forward

The ACSE looks ahead to the 2009–10 school year, and with no commissioners departing, the commission will have the opportunity to build on its current expertise and dive deeper into core issues affecting outcomes for students with disabilities. There are many reasons for optimism: better available data, reported enthusiasm from the field for the implementation of the California Modified Assessment, more districts using response

The ACSE Welcomes Visitors, News, and Feedback

Do you have a program that you would like California's Advisory Commission on Special Education to know about? Do you have an important story to tell related to special education? Or would you simply like to attend an ACSE meeting? ACSE meetings are open to the public, and the commission secures a spot on its agenda at every meeting for public input. Please consider joining us. Question? Call 916-327-3545.

to intervention, and the arrival of the first round of special education federal stimulus monies.

There is also a call for transparency. To this end, the ACSE looks forward to ongoing conversations with the California Department of Education, the State Board of Education, the legislature, the governor, and special education stakeholders.

In the recent past, the energies of the ACSE have focused on such major issues as the state's financial crisis and the controversies over the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). While it will continue to actively seek and support alternatives to the CAHSEE for students with disabilities, as well as monitor the effect of the state's fiscal crisis on education, the ACSE is looking forward to revisiting additional areas of interest. These include access and retention of assistive technology; access for students with disabilities to the core curriculum; measurable post-secondary outcomes, including positive measurable outcomes for students with significant disabilities; special education and charter schools; parent involvement and education; positive behavioral supports and school culture; and universal access to all new and existing career and technical education and postsecondary programs.

The ACSE looks forward with enthusiasm to its 2009–10 year and to exercising its advisory responsibilities, particularly in light of the millions of dollars of available stimulus money. Clearly, the commission's interest will be the degree to which these monies are spent to support services to California's students with disabilities.

All ACSE commissioners take their appointed volunteer positions with the utmost seriousness and sense of responsibility. The entire commission thanks students, parents, policymakers, and educators for this opportunity to serve.

The California Advisory Commission on Special Education is an advisory body mandated by federal and state statutes to provide recommendations and advice to the State Board of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Legislature, and the Governor in new or continuing areas of research, program development, and evaluation in California special education:

“The State has established and maintains an advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the State.

“Such advisory panel shall consist of members appointed by the Governor, or any other official authorized under State law to make such appointments, be representative of the State population, and be composed of individuals involved in, or concerned with, the education of children with disabilities.”

— Public Law 108-446; 20 United States Code (USC) 1412(a)(21) A-D Section 612

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2008–2009

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Commission meeting dates and locations, 2009–2010*

September 10–11, Sacramento

December 10–11, Sacramento

March 18–19, Sacramento

October 22–23, Sacramento

February 18–19, Sacramento

May 27–28, Sacramento

Location: California Department of Education, 1430 “N” Street, Sacramento, CA 95818

* Exact dates may change. Please visit the ACSE Web site (www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sel/as/acse.asp) or contact the commission's secretary for the most current information or to obtain a schedule.