

Informing and supporting parents, educators, service providers, and policymakers on topics related to special education

EDgE

Special Education: A Service, Not a Place

by Robert Stodden, PhD, Director of the Center on Disability Studies and Professor of Special Education at the University of Hawaii. During the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997, Dr. Stodden served as a Kennedy Senior Policy Fellow with the Disability Policy Subcommittee in the U.S. Senate.

When I taught Industrial Arts in Orange County California in the early 1970's, my shop was located in back of the campus next to a fenced-off set of buildings, which was a Trainable Mentally Retarded (TMR) Center. One day, one of the TMR center teachers dropped by to borrow a hammer and handsaw. She had been told to start a woodshop in the back of her classroom, using the end of a counter that also served as a kitchen for homemaking for the girls. When I asked what she expected her students to learn from this new effort, she said she wanted them to develop an interest in carpentry and some basic woodworking skills. I told her those were the same expectations I had of my students. But I wondered about the likelihood of this happening when she had so little equipment and knew nothing about carpentry. At that time, I knew little about special education, but I suggested she send some of her students to my class and let them participate as best they could.

My shop was structured in work-table stations, with students randomly assigned. Students worked in mentor-mentee pairs as they progressed through the various tasks of each station, all the while meeting expectations on specific carpentry and related math and reading skills. I assigned my first student

with a disability to the "finish table," which involved patience and precision in sanding (coarse to fine), squaring, and leveling wood to the required dimension. With direction and assistance from his mentor, my new student quickly excelled at sanding and finishing tasks. He responded well to the regimentation and structure of the shop setting and made friends with his peers. Most impressively, he was making progress in the same skills and expectations in carpentry, math, and reading as the other students. This boy loved the class.

Six months later the TMR Center administrator questioned why his students were leaving the fenced-in grounds. Our collaborative venture ended.

Many things have changed in the field of special education since the seventies, but one aspect has been slow to change: Too many decisionmakers still see special education as a placement, often in a special class or school, rather than a continuum of services, supports, or accommodations that a student needs to succeed in general education. Too many people believe, despite research to the contrary, that students with disabilities cannot achieve within the general education curriculum, even when supported with special education services. Those involved in the process of determining

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Letter from the State Director

"We need to re-emphasize special education as a constellation of supports and services primarily designed to assist students' success in general education."



I was recently honored to be elected President of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education at NASDSE's annual business meeting and conference in October. This new leadership role gives me an opportunity to revisit and share what I believe should be the governing principles and priorities for our

work in special education. I believe the following three priorities provide guidance for the next several years as California transitions to a new mechanism for funding education, new standards, and new methods to assess student performance on those standards.

1. Return to the fundamental principles of special education. We need to re-emphasize special education as a constellation of supports and services primarily designed to assist students' success in general education. Special education is not intended to be a separate place, except for those very few students with unique needs. Since special education is defined as "specially designed instruction," we must be clear regarding what is special about it. We have a window of opportunity to work toward aligning the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in support of increasingly larger numbers of students remaining in general education as their least restrictive environment (LRE). While doing so we must emphasize that all students need to access and be successful in the Common Core and be measured appropriately on statewide assessments.

2. Develop and improve partnerships and relationships. At the most basic level, the special education community alone cannot achieve the first priority. It requires the development of a collaborative infrastructure that is built around maintaining student success in the general education classroom as much as possible. To do this, we need to develop a common understanding among the many stakeholders. We must also work with our colleagues in Title I and Title III (programs for students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and students who are English language learners) to ensure that those services continue, even when a student served by these programs is also determined to be eligible for special education. To support success for these students, we must also improve those general education practices and interventions—such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and a multitiered system of supports (MTSS)—that could be used more effectively to maintain LRE.

3. Maintain an effective supervisory system for special education. The work of supervising special education in our state has historically consumed almost all of the Special Education Division's (SED) resources. While working to maintain compliance and ensure quality—without which none of the above priorities could be addressed—the SED also provides statewide technical assistance in numerous ways. It convenes statewide work groups to solve critical issues; provides direct support to parent organizations; and through targeted grants addresses such specific issues as disproportionality, LRE, and middle school reading.

We are leaders in special education at an exciting time. With such dramatic changes on the horizon, I see countless opportunities for us to collectively promote these priorities while driving systemic changes.

—Fred Balcom

Results-Driven Accountability

Changes to Federal Monitoring

Since 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has required each state to have in place a State Performance Plan (SPP) that describes the state's efforts to implement the requirements of IDEA. States submit an Annual Performance Report (APR) to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), which evaluates each state's efforts on the basis of ten OSEP-determined compliance targets and ten performance targets included in this plan to provide and to improve upon a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. States also report annually on the performance of their local educational agencies (LEAs, usually school districts) according to targets that each state sets in its performance plan. These targets are framed through "indicators," which focus states and LEAs on such specific issues as graduation and dropout rates, for example, and the amount of time students with disabilities spend in general education settings.¹

Today, the majority of children with disabilities are included in their neighborhood schools.

Before IDEA, many children with disabilities were denied access to education and opportunities to learn. In 1970, schools in this country educated only one in five children with disabilities, and many states had laws excluding certain students—including those who were deaf, blind, or emotionally

disturbed or who had a cognitive disability. Today the majority of these children are included in their neighborhood schools and in general education classrooms.²

Yet there is still room for improvement. According to the PACER Center, the national dropout rate for students with disabilities "is about 40 percent—more than twice that of their peers without disabilities."³ The current graduation rate for students with disabilities is "unacceptably low" and, for some reason, "slow to improve."⁴

The U.S. Department of Education acknowledges that the educational and functional outcomes for children and youth with disabilities have not improved as much as everyone had hoped, even with increasing federal oversight and funding. In response, OSEP is developing a new way to oversee how special education is provided in schools in order to help create and promote systems that are more successful in improving outcomes for students with disabilities and their families as well as to monitor special education—especially since "there is no data to support that an emphasis on compliance monitoring improves results."⁵

Special Education Flexibility

Key to OSEP's approach is a new Indicator 17, which the office has created for the SPP. This indicator will call for a comprehensive, multiyear plan—a State Systemic Improvement Plan—that will be central to a new focus for the agency, one of "improved educational results and functional outcomes for students with disabilities while considering compliance as it relates to those results and outcomes."⁶ OSEP's plan will change its "emphasis on compliance over results in special education."⁷

(RDA continued on page 4)

Notes & Resources

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2. National Research Center on Learning Disabilities. (n.d.). *Twenty-Five Years of Progress in Educating Children with Disabilities through IDEA*. Retrieved from <http://www.nrcld.org/resources/osep/historyidea.html>
3. PACER Center. (n.d.). Dropout Prevention Project. Retrieved from <http://www.pacer.org/dropout/>
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5. Office of Special Education Programs. (2012). *Getting to Results-Driven Accountability in Special Education*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda-qa.pdf>
6. OSEP. (2013). *RDA Draft Inquiry Guide*. Retrieved from <http://leadership-2013.events.tadnet.org/pages/655>
7. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. RDA Homepage. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda/index.html>

(RDA continued from page 3)

Language in IDEA establishes the foundation for this change, as it states that the primary goal of providing services to individuals with disabilities is to prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.⁸ In essence, a school system's success should be measured by how well students are prepared for their futures.

RDA Overview

OSEP is calling its new plan a Results Driven Accountability (RDA) Model and conceives of it as being

- developed in partnership with stakeholders;
- transparent and understandable to states and the general public, especially individuals with disabilities and their families; and
- responsive to the needs and expectations of the ultimate consumers (i.e., children and youth with disabilities and their families).

In the OSEP vision, the RDA model will

- drive improved outcomes for all children and youth with disabilities, regardless of their age, disability, race, ethnicity, language, gender, socioeconomic status, or location;
- ensure the protection of the individual rights of each child or youth with a disability and his/her family, regardless of his/her age, disability, race, ethnicity, language, gender, socioeconomic status, or location;
- provide differentiated incentives, supports, and interventions based on each state's unique strengths, progress, challenges, and needs;
- encourage states to direct their resources to where they can have the greatest positive impact on outcomes and the protection of individual rights for all children and youth with disabilities; and
- minimize state burden and duplication of effort.⁹

When the RDA was first announced in March 2012, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, "For too long we've been

a compliance-driven bureaucracy when it comes to educating students with disabilities. We have to expect the very best from our students—and tell the truth about student performance—so that we can give all students the supports and services they need. The best way to do that is by focusing on results."¹⁰

Protections and outcomes are both important.

Technical Assistance

This change in OSEP's approach to accountability for states will also include "technical assistance activities that focus on improving State capacity to develop, strengthen, and support improvement at local levels." This new focus could help states and school districts establish collaborative models (e.g., MTSS/RtI) to improve educational results for all students and help OSEP "better align its activities and use of resources to more effectively support States' capacity to drive systems change at the local level."¹¹

OSEP is currently piloting what it is calling a Differentiated Monitoring and Technical Assistance framework with several states. The agency hopes to gain enough information from these pilot efforts to be able to work with all states to address specific needs for improvement. "As a part of this conversation, we will be encouraging States to provide their perspective on how OSEP, through its RDA Monitoring and TA framework, can best provide support to States."¹²

Outcomes and Results

Alexa Posny, Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) when RDA was initially conceived, is very much in favor of a "focus on outcomes. But what results are we looking for?" she asked in a phone interview.

8. IDEA, Sec. 300.43(a)(1).

9. OSERS. RDA Core Principles. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda/core-principles.html>

10. U.S. Department of Education. (2012). Department Announces New Effort to Strengthen Accountability for Students with Disabilities. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/department-announces-new-effort-strengthen-accountability-students-disabilities>

11. OSEP. (2013). *RDA Draft Inquiry Guide*. Retrieved from <http://leadership-2013.events.tadnet.org/pages/655>

12. Ibid.

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“The law doesn’t promise everything, but it does promise benefit—educational benefit. What’s tricky is finding the right indicators to show what benefits have accrued. What should it look like?” In collaboration with the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), OSEP has been working to find specific answers to this question, identifying “measures of student performance that could be used in a RDA-based monitoring approach”¹³ and that would actually reflect whether or not students with disabilities in a state or LEA are realizing academic or functional growth. The seven “framing considerations” the NCEO recommends echo OSEP’s own interest in transparency and clarity; they also focus on integrity, fidelity, and removing unnecessary reporting burdens by relying, when possible, on existing accountability structures. NCEO further recommends reporting students’ reading and math scores separately; reporting on inclusion rates of students with disabilities in state assessments, especially general assessments; and identifying the gap in performance between students with disabilities and their general education counterparts.

Many of the details of the proposed RDA have yet to be hammered out. A strict focus on compliance has not delivered significant improvements in school achievement for students with disabilities. The new plan offers hope for a reasonable balance between protections for students—for their rights to supports and services—and improved academic outcomes. Both are important. ◀

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“services” for a child with a disability often take their own “least restrictive” path by recommending placement in a special education classroom, thus reinforcing the perception that it takes more effort to develop and implement a collaborative plan of services for supporting students in the general education curriculum than what is required for placement in a special education classroom. Finally, parents, teachers, and administrators often see “more,” in terms of specialized services, as “better” and think that a student with a disability will receive more services in a special class. These perceptions are actually fundamental misperceptions.

The Intent of Federal Policy

Educating children with disabilities with their nondisabled peers—and providing the necessary services for making that happen—was a principal objective of Congress in passing P.L. 94-142 in the mid 1970’s. Since reauthorized as the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and then the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), the legislation entitles every eligible child with a disability to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to be provided within the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Congress added rules allowing a child to be placed in special classes only when the child’s education could not be achieved satisfactorily in general education classrooms with the use of supplementary supports and services. While the legislative intent of IDEA has remained consistent over the years, refinements in language and regulations secure the intent of special education as a service. The chart below displays that evolution.

Influencing Factors

Several factors contribute to school officials and parents taking their own “least restrictive” path when making decisions, resulting in special education often being a restrictive classroom

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Initial perspective	2013 Perspective
Education for All Handicapped Children Act: (PL94-142)	IDEA, IDEIA, & ESEA
FAPE, defined as “some educational benefit,” focused on access and compliance.	FAPE, defined as “meaningful educational benefit,” focuses on access to and progress in the general education curriculum and classrooms, to the maximum extent possible; quality, not just the quantity of services or supports, is a relevant factor in determining whether a child is receiving an appropriate education.
LRE is viewed as separate and intensive in dosage. To the extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with other children. Removal occurs only when the nature or the severity of the disability disallows progress in the regular class, even with use of supplementary aids and services.	LRE decisions are made from the perspective of participation within an age-appropriate, general education program of study with use of supplementary services and supports. The focus on “meaningful educational benefit” includes “creating access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible”; “meeting developmental goals”; “the challenging expectations that have been established for all children”; and “preparing children with disabilities to lead productive and independent adult lives, to the maximum extent possible” [IDEIA: 1400 (c)(4)].
	Schools are accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students. The focus is on ensuring college and career readiness for all students.

Adapted from
 K. Cummings, T. Atkins, R. Allison, & C. Cole. (2008). Response to Intervention: Investigating the New Role of Special Educators. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 40(4), 24–31.

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placement rather than a coordinated plan of services and supports:

1. Determination of “eligibility for special education services” is often viewed as a decision for “placement in a setting which is often a special education classroom.” Too often eligibility determination, placement considerations, and the process of planning special education services are separate functions.

The culture and leadership of schools must change.

2. Finances and funding often influence decisions about the types of special education services considered for students with disabilities and frequently place restrictions on how children can be helped before they’re identified as having a learning disability (see article, p. 12).

3. Often districts and schools have entrenched procedures and structures that inhibit flexibility for collaboratively planning services for students with disabilities to achieve in less restrictive environments. These inhibitors are often associated with teacher assignment procedures; course scheduling; and misunderstandings about the implementation of collaboration, co-teaching, and/or tiered support strategies.

4. The historical perception often held by administrators, teachers, and/or parents is that the level of service in restrictive or separate settings is superior to levels and types of services that can be provided in general education courses. This is often accompanied (again) by the perception that “more is better,” and full-time placement in a special education

setting equals more services. Studies have found that when the availability of restrictive (separate, often private) settings is high, more students are placed in them. Also, studies have found that high-density population areas often have a high level (percentage) of placement in special education settings, or in separate classes or facilities.

While these factors continue to influence the perception of special education as a placement rather than a service, recent data raise serious questions about these perceptions. Over the past ten years, data indicate that students with disabilities, typically found in special education classrooms, experience dismal outcomes. Also, students found in other low-performing groups, who are often placed in special education classrooms, are performing poorly:

- Children with disabilities experience disappointing results as they transition into postsecondary education and employment, raising questions about their need for more “meaningful benefit” from the special education services they receive.
- Students of certain ethnic and racial minorities and English language learner (ELL) students are realizing

low achievement scores and poor graduation rates.

- Certain minority groups (ELLs and racial minorities) are increasingly over-represented in special education as they move through the grades. Such students were underrepresented in preschool programs, reflecting a lack of early intervention and in-class supports and services in the early grades and lower expectations of these students.

Necessary Changes

The effort to provide special education primarily as a service requires new and collaborative roles for special educators. The table below illustrates the role shifts required as schools seek to implement special education as a service rather than a place. However, changing roles for special educators is not all that is required. The culture and leadership of schools must adjust, as well, along with the understanding that all teachers in a school teach all students; and everyone has a role in the success of every student. Where special education is implemented as a service, you’ll see the following:

- The entire school is accountable for education that is meaningful, formative, results-oriented, and individualized for all students.

Critical Role Shifts for Special Educators

Domain	Historical Context	Current Context
Assessment:	Starting point is when student is referred to special education.	Starting point is before there are learning problems.
Testing Instruments:	Summative (single-point assessment)	Formative (multiple assessments)
Interventions:	Intensive instruction contingent on student’s eligibility	Differentiated, flexible, and dynamic per student’s needs to learn and progress
Environment:	Segregated from regular classroom and core general education curriculum	Collaborative, co-teaching based on student’s needs to learn and progress in the Common Core State Standards

Adapted from Cummings, Atkins, Allison, & Cole.

- Core curriculum and accompanying standards are used as the basis for instruction to meet Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals for students with disabilities.
- Students with disabilities are dispersed throughout a school, enrolled in general education classes attended by their same-aged peers.
- Special education teachers do not have their own classrooms but are assigned as team members working with general education teachers who have students with and without disabilities in their classes.
- Learning problems are viewed as an opportunity to rethink instructional strategies and services used as supports with students needing assistance (rather than as a reason to send the student elsewhere).
- The principal is a facilitative leader who values collaboration, teamwork, and cooperative learning.
- Authentic assessment data and multiple learning opportunities are part of the instructional context for all teachers.

Special Education: A Service

Several whole-school restructuring approaches for implementing special education as a service have emerged recently: Response to Intervention (RtI), Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS), and Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS). They all share the same core practices of providing high-quality instruction and interventions that are matched to each student's specific learning and behavioral needs and that are informed by the continuous collection and use of teacher/student performance data. Concerted efforts to find the level of service or support at which each student responds to an intervention are central to these approaches, thus helping students with special needs achieve success in curricula

that are appropriate for their age and their grade level. Two of the most critical elements of these structures are the use of a data-based, problem-solving process and the delivery of instruction/intervention in varying levels of intensity across multiple tiers.

The problem-solving process involves four steps and provides a structure that (1) identifies student goals (problem identification), (2) generates data-based reasons why those goals are not being met (problem analysis), (3) develops instruction/interventions, and (4) evaluates the impact of that instruction/intervention on student outcomes (response to instruction/intervention). The second critical element, the delivery of instruction and supports/services across multiple tiers, ensures that all students receive the intensity of instruction (in both focus and time) required to progress in the general education curriculum. It is important to note, however, that no level of intervention is synonymous with special education, and interventions at various levels can be administered both in and outside of the general classroom and for all students.

Many students come to school hungry, didn't go to preschool, don't speak English well, are homeless, or experience any number of conditions that may not be related to a disability but that threaten academic performance and behavior. An effectively implemented RtI, MTSS, or PBS will give teachers both the structure and the training to intervene and help struggling students catch up before they have fallen two years behind in their

reading or math skills. When well done, these structures increase the likelihood that only those students who have an actual disability will be identified for special education services.



Conclusion

A key measure of the quality of a school is its ability to honor individual differences and ensure that all students receive maximum, meaningful benefit from their education. As we learned long ago, our world is not divided into generic and special places. When young men and women with disabilities leave our public school system, they face the same realities and challenges as everyone else. Our schools are best when they reflect this reality.

When thinking back to my first experience with disability, at the finishing table, I often wonder what happened to that boy in my shop class so many years ago. He showed much promise to blossom and grow when given just the slightest bit of opportunity. I believe the perceptions and regulations in my school system at that time let him down. But today, school systems in this country have the legal grounding, guidance, and technical know-how to do much better. ◀

A New System of Assessments:

New Fears, New Possibilities

The Common Core State Standards require a new system of student assessments for the state.

How will these assessments accommodate the diverse needs of California's students with disabilities?

- ▶ The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, with information, resources, and practice tests, is available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org>
- ▶ The National Center and State Collaborative's resources Web site is https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/mediawiki/index.php/Main_Page
- ▶ For resources on the accessibility and accommodations for the new assessments, go to <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/sbacc.asp>

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2. Thurlow, M. (2011). Common Core State Standards: Implications for Students with Disabilities. Retrieved from <http://www.ncscpartners.org/Media/Default/PDFs/Resources/Thurlow-CCSS-SWD-8-2011.pdf>
3. Thurlow. (2007).

When imagining the future of assessments for students with disabilities in California, some people see a perfectly efficient, customized, computerized world, one backed by robust data management systems that accurately capture in real time precisely what all students know and are able to do, based on a set of rigorous standards; a system that, as efficiently, gives teachers, parents, administrators, and state and federal personnel ready access to student progress at any time and at every level: individual, classroom, school, district, and state.

Others imagine a frightening mess.

The rollout of anything new in a state as large and complicated as California will invariably include a few glitches—intimations of the second vision. But the people currently working to create and implement a new system of student assessments for the state are on track to deliver something much closer to the first.

Accountability for All

In California, many students with disabilities have taken tests that differ from those of their general education peers. The California Modified Assessment (CMA) was designed for students with mild to moderate disabilities who were not able to achieve grade-level proficiency on the California Standards Test (CST); and the California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA, with alternate performance standards) was for students with significant cognitive disabilities. However, Martha Thurlow, director of the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), insists

on the importance of including all students in the same standards-based system of education and assessment. “We know of the challenges that states and districts face as they work to implement the goals of standards-based reforms,” she wrote in testimony submitted to a U.S. Senate hearing in 2010 on standards and assessment.¹ But “research has revealed the negative effects that 40 years of separate curriculum, disparate funding and teacher quality, and segregation from opportunities to learn a standards-based curriculum have had on struggling students.”²

Thurlow's argument for including all students in a national system of assessment is powerful: “Most students with disabilities (75% altogether) have learning disabilities, speech/language impairments, and emotional/behavioral disabilities. These students, along with those who have physical, visual, hearing, and other health impairments (another 4–5%), are all students *without intellectual impairments*. . . . These students (totaling about 80% of students with disabilities) can learn the grade-level content in the general education curriculum” [italics by Thurlow].³

Including All Students

California is phasing out the CMA (aside from its science components) and the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) system as the state transitions to a new system of assessments that align with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and other state-adopted content standards. Most students with disabilities who previously took the CMA will take the Smarter Balanced assessment, as will all students in general education. Students

with significant cognitive disabilities will take the CAPA until an alternate assessment is adopted. California is a member of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and a partner in the National Center and State Collaborative, which is developing an alternate assessment that the state is considering adopting.

Both initiatives promise to deliver the following in their assessment systems:

- Formative assessments
- Interim assessments
- Through-course assessments
- Summative assessments
- Alternate assessments
- Access and inclusion
- Universal design/Access by Design
- Computer-based assistive technology

For special education, the most important question about these new assessments is how well they will be able to assess accurately all students in California—possibly the most diverse student body in the country. Thurlow, who sits on the Smarter Balanced Special Education Advisory Board, has used language from IDEA to articulate the challenge: how can these assessments provide “appropriate access, supports, and accommodations”?

Smarter Balanced

The Smarter Balanced consortium did not exist before states started adopting the CCSS. Money from a \$176 million federal Race to the Top assessment grant was used expressly to fund this consortium, which has been charged with a single mission: to develop assessments that are aligned to the new state standards—and that help students graduate from high school ready for college or a career. This consortium consists of a group of CCSS-committed states that are working together—the first time the majority of states have collaborated in this way—to develop a common assessment.⁴

Too often in the past, the needs of students with disabilities have been tacked

onto an assessment only after it was created. Smarter Balanced promises something different: a computer-adaptive test with built-in access, supports, accommodations, and modifications that “address visual, auditory, and physical access barriers—as well as the unique needs of English language learners—allowing virtually all students to demonstrate what they know and can do.”⁵ Three categories of resources ensure access for all students and promise adherence to principals of universal design:

- A set of universal accessibility tools—such as a digital notepad and scratch paper—will be available to all students.
- Designated supports—such as a translated pop-up glossary—will be made available to students for whom a need has been identified by school personnel familiar with each student.
- Accommodations will be available to students with a documented need noted in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan. These accommodations include braille and closed captioning, among others tools.⁶

Paper vs. Computers

Many are alarmed at the prospect of a computer-based assessment. They are concerned that some students are not adept at using computers or attend a school where computers are rare or outdated. To help students in those schools that have not made the transition to computer-based testing or online assessment, the Smarter Balanced Consortium will offer a paper-and-pencil option for the first three years that the new test is being used. Smarter Balanced will deliver the appropriate materials to each school that chooses this option so that students’ accessibility needs will always be met. The goal of Smarter Balanced is to have all states transition completely to computer-based tests by 2018.

As well, the Smarter Balanced assessments

(*Assessments* continued on page 10)

Notes & Resources

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(Assessments continued from page 9)

are being designed to work with the computing resources in schools today. The assessments can be delivered on very old operating systems and require only the minimum in processors and memory required to run the operating system itself. In addition, the file size for individual assessment items will be very small, lessening the bandwidth that networks will need to deliver the assessment online. "A 600-student middle school could test its students using only one 30-computer lab."⁷

National Center and State Collaborative

The National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) is also working collaboratively to develop an alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities, who represent approximately 1 percent of the student population and 10 percent of students with disabilities. Twenty-six states and five assessment and research centers have joined to design a full range of alternate assessments (AA) along with professional development modules and instructional resources that are all based on alternate achievement standards (AAS) to the CCSS. The goal of the NCSC is for students with cognitive disabilities to achieve "college and career readiness," which the NCSC defines as including community readiness.

NCSC is building supports into its assessment system that will help IEP teams accurately identify how individual students with the most significant cognitive disabilities learn, allowing the teams to make appropriate decisions about how each student participates in the assessments.

Thurlow sees "great potential for the

NCSC to improve outcomes for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. . . . These students have in the past been taught a separate curriculum from their peers, often in separate settings. Since a refocus of special education funding requirements on the same general curriculum for all students . . . all students with disabilities must be participating and making progress in a curriculum based on the same academic content standards defined for all students." Thurlow's colleague Rachel Quenemoen, senior research fellow at NCEO and project director of the NCSC, is also a staunch defender of higher standards



for all students. "Very early on in this work, we found startling evidence that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities were able to master and apply in meaningful ways the academic skills and knowledge that we never before had tried to teach them. . . . Our project will develop not only a system of assessments to accurately reflect what the students have learned, but we will also build an integrated system of curriculum and instructional materials and intensive professional development and support to build capacity in our schools to teach these students well."⁸

Thurlow, as director of one of the NCSC

partners, is involved in the work of developing these alternate assessments. “The ultimate purpose,” she says, “is to provide states with a full set of assessments, curriculum and instructional supports, and professional development tools to implement a research-based, systemic approach to improving academic outcomes for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.”⁹

Professional Development

The Smarter Balanced consortium is working to address concerns in the field about how both general and special educators can prepare to support the new assessments. When complete, the Smarter Balanced assessments will be accompanied by a digital library of tools and resources. Currently under development, these Web-based resources will be available in the spring of 2014.¹⁰ The NCSC has already developed instructional materials and professional development modules, the collaborative having intended from the start to design the assessments around an existing curriculum. All professional development, instructional, and support materials are available on an NCSC Web site (see resources on page 8).

Pilot Testing

Parents, students, and teachers can examine complete descriptions of the Smarter Balanced assessments on the Smarter Balanced Web site. Practice tests also are available for each tested grade and both subject areas (English language arts/literacy and mathematics).¹¹ The consortium pilot-tested the assessment in spring 2013. In spring 2014, it will conduct a culminating field test to present the entire pool of Smarter Balanced items to students across member states. From this, the consortium will gather the information it needs for a final evaluation before the rollout.

Dr. Fred Balcom Elected NASDSE President

Dr. Fred Balcom, director of the Special Education Division of the California Department of Education, was elected 2013–2014 president of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) at its annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia, in October 2013.

NASDSE was formed 75 years ago to improve educational services and outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. The association promotes policies and proven practices to ensure that these students have the opportunity to fully participate in their education and transition successfully to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. NASDSE creates resources and guidance documents, provides a forum for its members to share ideas, and collaborates with other key organizations, such as the National Association of State Title I Directors and the Office of Special Education Programs.

Dr. Balcom is assuming the role of NASDSE president at a time when the country faces numerous changes that promise to significantly influence the school experience of students with disabilities, including the adoption of the Common Core State Standards and their accompanying assessments and new federal guidelines related to behavior and discipline. As well, the federal government is due to reauthorize the two most important pieces of legislation influencing education: the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. With Dr. Balcom at the NASDSE helm, California is certain to provide important national leadership in these areas. ◀

California will also participate in the first phase of NCSC’s alternate assessment pilot testing in the spring of 2014.

Current State of Assessments

Governor Brown recently signed into law Assembly Bill 484, which waives many assessment requirements for the current school year. Some see this waiver as “giving teachers the opportunity to fine-tune their practice relative to this new assessment environment.”¹² Others are concerned that the law will “leave school districts with a year of missing test data, which is often used to gauge the effectiveness of

teachers, administrators, and schools.”¹³

Whatever happens in the short-term, the new assessments, as they are aligned with the Common Core State Standards, promise to reinforce the skills of critical thinking and problem solving for all students. With critical thinking “regarded as the most important skill employees could contribute in helping their companies, [ranking] higher than innovation or mastery of information technology,”¹⁴ the new assessments promise to be part of a large effort to deliver brighter career futures for California’s students with disabilities. ◀

Complications and Successes

Federal funding for education is complicated, particularly as it affects special education. Several factors contribute to this complication: restrictions on categories of funding, “maintenance of effort” requirements, the fact that the federal mandate for special education services is only partially funded, ostensible “encroachment” of special education on general education funds, and state teacher credentialing authorizations.

Funding Restrictions

Funds awarded to states by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—essentially special education money—“may be expended only for the provision of special education and related services for students with disabilities.”¹ This makes sense as a reasonable insurance that the money is spent for the services it is intended to secure. However, two provisions of the law make even this much complicated: (1) students with disabilities are general education students first, and (2) students with disabilities are to be included in general education settings whenever appropriate.

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education published *Impact in Place: A Progress Report on the Department of Education’s Place-Based Strategy*, with a section titled “Break Down Silos” that discusses how “silos in the public and private sectors create blinders, causing people to focus insularly on their own work. . . . A siloed perspective loses sight of other resources and strategies that can be leveraged to help achieve the broader goal.” The section goes on to describe how this insularity results in increased “administrative costs and duplication of efforts.”²

Enter response to intervention (or multitiered system of supports, RtI/MTSS),

conceived as a schoolwide, general education approach to creating a system of seamless instruction and supports for all students—very much in keeping with the original intents of the IDEA and the federal charge to combat insularity. Yet there is no clear formula for how special education funds can be used in a school operating within an RtI/MTSS framework. In fact the question most frequently asked of the U.S. Department of Education is “how federal funds may be used to support RTI.”³ The common understanding is that there is no clear understanding, “no hard and fast way to indicate which parts of RTI can be funded by federal dollars.”⁴

The word “silos” is taken from the “cylindrical towers . . . used to store grain. Silos in the public and private sectors create blinders, causing people to focus insularly on their own work within their own program or agency. A siloed perspective loses sight of other resources and strategies that can be leveraged to help achieve the broader goal.

—from *Impact in Place*

Recent data put issues of strict categorical funding in even more conflict with certain realities, as students themselves do not line up in discrete groups. In California, 63 percent of students with disabilities are also Title I students; 31.5 percent are English language learners, and more than 27 percent belong to all three categories. (Perhaps even more interesting is the fact that nearly 90 percent of all California K–12 students fall into at least one of these three categories, leaving only 10.5 percent of California students not eligible for

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categorical funding.) Clearly the needs are blended, while not so easily the federal funds.

The rule of “incidental benefit,” according to IDEA, certainly can mitigate some of the challenges related to funding categorizations, since special education teachers can provide services to general education students in an inclusive classroom, for example, or a learning center “if the benefit to the nondisabled students could be deemed ‘incidental.’” Yet what constitutes incidental benefit “must be made on a case-by-case basis [and] if special education personnel provide instructional services to children who are nondisabled, and who are not suspected of having disabilities or of being eligible for services under IDEA, and the benefits conferred are more than ‘incidental,’ the time spent providing those services may not be charged to IDEA funds, and appropriate time-and-effort allocation and record-keeping would be required.”⁵ Again, efforts to provide and pay for services can be complicated.

Title I money from the general education side of the ledger does not make things easier for many schools. If an entire school has a large enough population of students living in poverty, budgeting can be relatively straightforward: that school is described as a “schoolwide” Title I school and can use all appropriate, available money for services to all students. However, if fewer than 40 percent⁶ of a school’s students live in poverty, the school still receives Title I money, but it is designated a “targeted” Title I school; and Title I money can be used only to fund teachers and materials for the Title I students.⁷ In addition, there is the “supplement not supplant” requirement attached to federal dollars, so that the federal money cannot replace state or local funds that are already being used for services; it can only “enhance” existing programs.⁸ More complications.

Maintenance of Effort

Special education funding is very complex,” agrees Eddie Davidson, accountant at the Fresno County Office of Education. “Districts

must code things properly and understand all of the exceptions. Our biggest challenge is trying to make maintenance of effort [MOE], which can be a big problem for a district when funds are not sufficient and it is trying to reduce expenditures.” MOE refers to the federal requirement that states and school districts receiving IDEA funds must show that the level of state and local funding remains relatively constant from year to year.⁹ “With some exceptions, a district must spend the same or more of state and local dollars each year, regardless of revenue shortfalls,” says Davidson. If these spending levels are not maintained for special education, the school or district must return the difference out of state or local funds to the federal government, dollar for dollar.

MOE is intended to serve as a protection for services to the state’s most vulnerable students, but MOE also increases the financing complications—and contentions. Davidson sees some of the MOE complications hinging on the fact that the “federal government has not fully funded special education. It promised 40 percent funding. We’re receiving about 17 percent right now. We would love to see full funding; it would release a lot of district general education dollars from contributing to special education. Statewide, the general fund contribution to special education has averaged around 27 percent.”

Special education is mandated by the federal government, with much of the cost of providing special education services coming from state and local money, with no cap on the spending limit, and with federal funding below promised levels. If a student needs services, the district must provide the services. With available special education funding often less than the cost of those services, the shortfall can be a cause of contention and accusations of “encroachment” on the general fund.

California’s Legislative Analyst’s Office has attempted to correct misconceptions about the notion of encroachment.¹⁰ Special education

(Funding continued on page 14)

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8. Wrightslaw.
9. U.S. Department of Education. (2013). Memorandum. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oig/auditreports/fy2013/109n0004.pdf>
10. A full explanation of encroachment from the Legislative Analyst’s office is at <http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2013/edu/special-ed-primer/special-ed-primer-010313.aspx#6>

(Funding continued from page 13)

11. California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2012). Implementation of Response to Instruction and Intervention and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support in California. Retrieved from <http://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/agendas/2012-12/2012-12-5A.pdf>
12. California Weighted Formula. (2013). Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <http://caweightedformula.com/about/fact-sheet/>
13. Letter from the California School Boards Association. (2013, August).
14. School Services of California. (2013). "LCFF Myths, Facts, and Fixes: Funding for Enrollment Growth." *The Fiscal Report*, 22(5).
15. Albrecht, S. F., Skiba R., Losen D., Chung, C.-G., & Middelberg, L. (2011, June 7). Federal Policy on Disproportionality in Special Education: Is It Moving Us Forward? *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*. Retrieved from <http://dps.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/06/03/1044207311407917>
16. A Student Study Team is a problem-solving group that brings together all resources to help and support students who are facing challenges in general education classes. The SST process is a general education responsibility; it must be considered before a student is referred for special education services or 504 accommodations.

students, by law, are general education students first, and they are entitled to as large a piece of the general education funding pie as other students. But the MOE requirement, even as a protection for services, does complicate efforts to balance budgets and makes special education funding less flexible.

Teacher Credentialing

Funding structures also complicate issues of teacher placement and salary. Prior to 2001, anyone in California wanting to be a special education teacher was required to earn a general education credential first. With nationwide shortages of special education teachers, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing removed this requirement in an effort to attract more people to the field and quickly address the shortage. Then came the No Child Left Behind Act, which required all classrooms teachers to be "highly qualified" and resulted in many special educators without a general education credential not being allowed to work in certain settings with general education students, funding streams aside. This "highly qualified" requirement complicates efforts to provide early intervention services to all students, particularly when the intervention specialists are special educators.

It makes sense to demand that, for special education students to learn reading and mathematics, their teachers must be trained in the subject matter and effective pedagogy—they need to be highly qualified. Yet because of this requirement, many of California's current special education teachers are frozen out of certain instructional placements, within an RtI/MTSS framework,¹¹ for example. Their credentials do not align with a seamless education system.

SELPA director Trina Frazier extends this complication. "When I started out as a general education teacher and I needed help, I went to the special education teacher," she said. "Now there are discussions that would prohibit special ed teachers from providing interventions to

general education students unless they have an added authorization. Our teachers are leaving the field because of these authorizations, which place on them an incredible financial burden. We're losing some of our great teachers."

Local Control Funding Formula

At the state level, California has created one way to remove some of these complications—by simply getting rid of state categories. Governor Brown's newly passed Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) eliminates strict categorical guidelines for more than 30 of the state's educational funding sources.¹² The California School Board Association broadly favors the changes, writing that "LCFF presents an . . . historic opportunity for local education agencies to improve student outcomes, close achievement gaps, and increase the level of communication between schools and the communities they serve."¹³ However, the board also acknowledges that the changes bring "many questions and uncertainties." How special education will be affected remains to be seen.

While "no new monies are allocated for special education" under the LCFF, and special education money is not "part of the blended pot [of money]," Sanger District Superintendent Matt Navo sees many good things about the state's new funding structure. "Most of the pot is together now. We'll have allocations of funds to meet the needs of all students." Navo also was pleased that "students with disabilities who qualify will be able to be served with money for English language learners. Money will now be provided not just for groups but for needs."

Navo, who has been instrumental in establishing robust systems of early intervention in his district, is particularly hopeful that the LCFF will help to "dissolve encroachment accusations. In fact," he says, "you could make the argument that you're being dual-funded for kids with disabilities. When a student doesn't require all of the funding, the money is then flexible. We're eliminating the word 'encroachment' and can instead talk about

addressing need and maintenance of effort.”

In general, the new funding formula shifts control of spending and budgeting from the state to school districts, and it steers substantially more money to high-need students: low-income children, foster youth, and English learners. “No district is to receive less [money] moving forward than it received last year” and “most districts will see an increase in state funds,” says Navo. “LCFF was created to break down funding silos and can allow you to be very creative about programs and people to bridge the [achievement] gap.” But Navo is also concerned that it may create other problems. “LCFF will put a lot of flexibility in the hands of the district. The problem is that people like their issues to be black and white, and the decisions we have to make are based on what is a shade of gray. There are multiple variables in schools—school boards, unions, the economy—all of the pressures of running a school district and many that are beyond [the district’s] control. Districts are trying to protect the real purpose behind the money. For example, if I lose my adult school, I’ve lost the ability to educate the people in my community. That translates into lost economic power in the community, and we end up with families struggling to survive and in despair, with children who are transient. We operate under a constant pressure to make sure money is in the right place, to realize the greatest benefit for the common good. Special interests are loathe to these kinds of efforts, and they want their money only in their place. People don’t like these kinds of politics in education, but they’re there.”

Some educators are concerned as well that LCFF “does not fully fund enrollment growth,” and, “when

implemented incrementally over time . . . will deprive growing districts of sufficient funds to maintain their programs,” particularly those districts that do not have large populations of high-need students.¹⁴

Beyond Complications

Even with more flexibility and more money, educational funding remains complicated—and contentious. Yet many schools and districts in the state are working around these complications and realizing success in educating their most at-risk students, including students with disabilities. Districts such as Sanger, Val Verde, and Santa Ana defy the demographic odds of highly transient populations, large numbers of English language learners, and high percentages of students in poverty—all of the indicators that suggest their student achievement scores should be tanking. Through RtI/MTSS approaches, these districts are decreasing the numbers of children identified as having learning disabilities. They all seem to have in common two things: strong leadership and a firm conviction that the fabric of their schools is tightly woven and every improvement benefits all.

Equity

Issues of equity typically tend to break across the special education-general education divide. General education has no formal indicator for monitoring equity, while special education programs are scrutinized for disproportionate representation by ethnicity in special education placement (in such categories as emotionally disturbed, for example) and in suspensions and expulsions. Consequently, disproportionality is often seen strictly as a special education problem, and initiatives to address it are too often dismissed by general education

as “not our issue,” says Troy Knudsvig, director of special education at Val Verde USD. Yet research shows that when disproportionality is a problem, it is a problem of the entire school. “Racial and ethnic disparities appear to be multiply determined by a number of interacting factors, including . . . classroom management, cultural mismatch, and unequal opportunities in general education.”¹⁵

Caryl Miller, former executive director of Riverside County SELPA, believes indicators of special education accountability actually serve as barometers for the health of general education: “identification rates in certain disabilities categories and the numbers of students with disabilities being served in the general education classroom. If there are weaknesses in general education interventions and the SST [Student Study Team]¹⁶ process, it will show up in these special education numbers.”

Eddie Fergus, a national leader in addressing root causes of disproportionality, has seen both entrenchment and success in efforts to address disproportionality. But he sees more of the latter when special education “changes the conversation to focus on loss of instructional time. It’s like night and day in getting [general education] counterparts on board.” Val Verde has taken just that tack.

Because schools are funded on formulas of students’ average daily attendance, “in the 2010–2011 school year, Val Verde lost \$800,000 due to suspensions and expulsions,” said Knudsvig. But general education and special education worked together, and the district changed its approach to addressing problem behavior, moving from a punitive to an educational model.

(Funding continued on page 19)

Project READ: Raising Educational Achievement for Students with Disabilities

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Reading is fundamental to school success. In fact, a child who is a poor reader by the end of third grade is six times more likely to drop out of school than a child who reads competently.¹ And those who drop out face a bleak future, financially and otherwise. High school dropouts can expect to “earn \$200,000 less than a high school graduate” over their lifetime “and almost a million dollars less than a college graduate.”² In addition, high school dropouts face poorer health outcomes and an increased likelihood of legal trouble.³

Yet too many children, especially those with learning disabilities, leave the third grade without basic reading skills. Recent scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that 44 percent of California’s fourth-grade students read below a basic level, and 68 percent rank as less than proficient readers.⁴ Even for those poor readers who do manage to go on to graduate from high school, “almost 40 percent . . . lack the reading and writing skills that employers seek. . . . Deficits in basic skills cost the nation’s businesses, universities, and under-prepared high school graduates as much as \$16 billion annually in lost productivity and remedial costs.”⁵

As reading expert Louisa Moats succinctly

puts it, “Reading failure begins early, takes root quickly, and affects students for life.”⁶

Students who experience reading failure in the early grades find that, as they get older, their school problems compound and their chances of catching up diminish. It is simply harder to learn the fundamentals of reading in the later grades. Typical middle school classes and teachers, even in inclusive settings, focus on content; and the ability to read is assumed, with textbooks getting only

more complex and literacy demands greater, particularly when students enter high school.

What can be done? “Plenty,” says Moats, “if we are committed to applying best practices supported by reading research.”⁷



A new initiative in California is looking to do just that. Project READ, funded by an Office of Special Education Programs State Personnel Development Grant, is designed to help students with disabilities from low-performing middle schools throughout California become better readers and better students through the intervention program called READ 180.

There is strong evidence that READ 180 works. The U.S. Department of Education’s Striving Readers Program found READ 180 to be effective in combating adolescent illiteracy with students who were two or more grades behind in their reading skills.⁸

And the What Works Clearinghouse found READ 180 to have “positive effects for comprehension and general literacy achievement for adolescent learners.”⁹

However, Project READ has no intention of simply tacking an intervention program onto existing structures. The project’s approach customizes READ 180 to fit seamlessly within each school and help all students who are struggling readers, regardless of whether or not they have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). To this end, the grant provides five years of training and coaching for school administrators and teachers so that they can develop and sustain their own effective approach to reading intervention.

The project is partnering with the professional development expertise of the IRIS Center, which, in addition to providing face-to-face coaching, training, and support, will design and implement two online professional development modules as well as Leadership Academies for the teachers and administrators involved in the project. Experts in the field of special education will facilitate these academies using the most current adult-learning and systems-change theory to ensure enduring change for schools and certain improvements in student reading.

Innovative Approaches

Grant money will pay for READ 180 materials and technical assistance in participating schools. The professional development that is part of the project includes putting in place collaborative teams and supportive learning communities that will have time to meet regularly as they work with professional coaches to implement READ 180 in a way that meets the needs of the students in their school. In addition, the grant money will fund formal trainings, classroom observation and coaching feedback, regular meetings with site implementation teams, and other forms

of frequent communication to support and guide schools in their efforts.

In the language of the multitiered system of supports, READ 180 provides a Tier II intervention for struggling readers. Using content-area text and literature, the approach individualizes lessons to match each student’s reading level. Large-group, small-group, and independent reading activities are incorporated into daily lessons. As well, the work a school does with Project READ will incorporate a focus on the Common Core State Standards. So while implementing a READ 180 approach, each school will be aligning grade-level curriculum with the new standards in English language arts, history, social studies, and science, making the school’s READ 180 efforts a seamless support to the larger curriculum.

Project READ also will assist schools in blending new technologies to conduct data analyses, provide content and resources that engage students, make assessment easy and efficient, and give school leaders the vision and expertise they need to retool reading instruction.

Parent Involvement

One of the explicit goals of the project is to help parents and family members become better able to support their child’s reading and learning—support that is essential for a child’s school success. To secure this involvement, the project includes workshops designed and customized specifically *for* parents and family members *by* parents and family members from local Parent Training and Information Centers. These trainings will feature strategies and materials that families can use at home to reinforce what their children are learning at school—and to help every child learn to read. ◀

Bookshare

is an online library of accessible eBooks and educational materials for people with print disabilities. Membership is free to U.S. citizens who qualify. To learn more, go to <http://www.bookshare.org>

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- ▶ Learn more about Project READ and how middle schools can apply at <http://www.calstat.org/Project-READ-page-pdf.html>
- ▶ Learn more about the IRIS Center, its professional development resources and trainings, at <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu>

requirements and two on the instructional aspects of the IEP.

Even within separate programs, students take courses in other areas of study. The future special educators whom Diane Haager teaches at Cal State LA take a general education reading methods class, and they cover PBS and RtI “in great depth,” she says. “My hope” says Fazzi, “is that we are modeling for our students how they will behave [as educators] in the public schools.”

School Psychology Programs

Some of the strongest emphasis on research-based, data-driven assessment and intervention for all students is occurring in school psychology programs. “Over the last decade we’ve seen more of a focus on intervention in school psychology programs than in teacher training programs,” says Mike Vanderwood, associate professor and director of school psychology at the University of California, Riverside.

The school psychology students at Riverside are taught “an RtI approach to service delivery, how to use screening tools to identify who needs support and to intervene as soon as a problem appears. We work in a preventative role to reduce the need for special education,” says Vanderwood. Students at UC Riverside also have the opportunity to collaborate with other departments “and possibly be co-advised by special education or educational psychology faculty.”

Similar approaches are used in the school psychology programs at Cal State Long Beach and Cal State LA. Kristi Hagans, associate professor of psychology, says several classes at Long Beach are devoted to a “service delivery model that starts with an assessment of all students. Then we narrow down who needs what

supports, both behavioral and academic.” This approach, Hagans says “is not disability focused; it brings up the needs of all students and is based on need rather than disability status.”

Margaret Garcia, coordinator of the school psychology program at Cal State LA agrees that “this is not about assessment for learning disabilities; this is about general education. We prepare our students to get more involved in intervention, not just assessment.”

While school psychologists may be trained in current research-based assessment and intervention, the challenge, Vanderwood says, is “how do we integrate this into teacher preparation? We go around the state to train teachers” in how to use “up-to-date science” to assess and support all students. “But we’re getting to them after they’ve been educated.”

This delay may be “an artifact of the times,” says Haager. “We need to retool a profession that got its training” before the advent of multitiered systems of intervention and support. “Recent graduates of teacher preparation programs are learning these things,” she says.

Credentialing

Part of the problem, says Vanderwood, lies with the way teachers are credentialed in California. The Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) “isn’t pushing the ideas of MTSS and intervention. If we want to have MTSS to improve outcomes for all students, we need to change how we credential teacher education programs.” The standards are so broad, he says, “that they don’t reflect current knowledge and research; they don’t force training in the specifics of academic and behavioral interventions.”

Fazzi notes that “the CTC is already looking at revising credentialing

standards. But she also cautions that “our credential standards need to be designed for longevity. If standards are wedded to a specific service delivery model or an acronym, they can quickly become outdated as new models are formed.”

Meanwhile, Haager says that Cal State LA is exploring a way to revamp its own credentialing program to include a dual credential in general and special education.

Charter Schools

The Aspire public charter schools are taking a “grow your own” approach to recruiting and training “individuals of all ages and backgrounds to become highly effective teachers,” says Sue Shalvey, Aspire’s director of special education. A four-year teacher residency program from the University of the Pacific offers a Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction followed by classroom work with a mentor teacher in an Aspire school.

Once on board at one of Aspire’s 37 schools in California and Tennessee, teachers “work collaboratively across departments and across schools,” says Shalvey. “The goal is to build a team of people around all the kids.” Special educators, she says, “are part of a system that provides access and opportunity for learning for all students. It’s powerful to see co-teaching in a middle school, with special and general ed teachers sharing the stage.” Shalvey says that Aspire is a “very data-driven organization” and that RtI and PBS are “really key as all [Aspire] schools are working toward implementing tiered academic and behavioral systems.” An Aspire middle school in Los Angeles “is using PBS as an alternative to suspension.”

Shalvey sees more change coming with the advent of the Common Core State Standards. “The conversation

in California is so strong and student-focused now. It has shifted from compliance to outcomes. But it all goes back to the teacher preparation piece: How do you attract, support, and maintain good teachers?"

School Leaders

The CANDEL program—Capital Area North Doctorate in Educational Leadership—is a partnership between the University of California Davis and Sonoma State University. The students in this program are all professional educators, and they include everyone “from beginning teachers to high-level executives,” says co-director Viki Montera. The program offers a master’s degree with a teaching credential and a doctorate in educational leadership, training educators to be leaders in data-based decision making and emphasizing achievement for all students.

Each CANDEL student, says Montera, brings a “diversity of perspectives.” But most, she says, “have been leaders in a specific aspect of education. They know a lot about their positions, but they don’t see the larger perspective. We look at school as a complex organization.” She tells of a student with a master’s degree in special education who “said she learned [through CANDEL] about general education perspectives in a way she hadn’t at school.”

The program’s basic philosophy, Montera says, is “leadership for transformation. We look at assumptions about the way things are. Some current practices are working against innovation. Take grade level, for example. We know kids don’t learn in nine-month chunks, so why have we organized school this way? What might be other ways?” At CANDEL, students discuss these kinds of assumptions while absorbing the

perspectives of their colleagues across the educational spectrum.

Tools for Teacher Educators

The IRIS-West Center at Claremont Graduate University aims to improve outcomes for all struggling students, including those with disabilities. To accomplish this, the center provides instructional resources to those educators and professional development providers “who are preparing the next generation of teachers,” says director Deborah Deutsch Smith.

Funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, IRIS offers free, online, research-based instructional strategies that can be used in college teacher training programs or in post-graduate training for practicing teachers.

Now in its twelfth year, IRIS initially served general education teachers, school nurses, and school counselors, but always with a focus on students with disabilities in inclusive school settings. “Then we added special education faculty and professional developers to our agenda,” says Smith. In January, the center will develop an emphasis on preschool early intervention and “provide instructional resources for those who work with the very young.”

Using an MTSS framework, IRIS develops and makes available resources that support efforts across all three tiers, including units on classroom management. Despite this wealth of material, Smith says, “After all these years, general education teachers and school leaders still say they don’t feel qualified to work with special needs students. We will continue to put instructional materials in the hands of faculty who are preparing the next generation of general education teachers so they feel confident about working with struggling learners.”

Clearly a variety of efforts are underway to ensure that future California educators—whatever their individual positions—will have the knowledge and understanding to serve all students, including students with disabilities. ◀

Funding *(continued from page 15)*

“We now work with kids to help them learn how to behave.” The district’s “change in culture and mindset,” as Knudsvig describes it, resulted in a \$560,000 reduction in its loss of funds through suspensions and expulsions in 2012–2013—in effect, a \$560,000 gain. The even better news is that more students are staying in school, learning, and graduating.

Preschool

Preschool RtI is Navo’s current “silobusting” focus at Sanger. Instrumental in developing a successful RtI/MTSS in the district before many people even understood what it was, Navo is now devoting his energies to “a full-court press on early childhood literacy. This is the key to success with most of our kids in special education.” He is currently working to couple “preschool transitional kindergarten” with “a robust RtI through the third grade. You have to find a way to make sure that when kids leave third grade they are reading at grade level.” The research guiding Navo’s reach into early childhood is conclusive: studies from Vanderbilt University show that rich preschool literacy environments can predict fourth-grade reading comprehension, which itself is one of the strongest predictors of school success.

Despite the restrictions on funding and federal programs, and despite categorical rules and regulations, most successful school and district leaders simply “find a way.” ◀

Preparing Teachers and School Leaders

Schools and districts throughout California are starting to adopt such whole-school structures as response to intervention (RtI), positive behavioral supports (PBS), and multitiered system of supports (MTSS), all of which are designed to create a system that provides seamless services and supports to all students, with and without a disability.

This trend aligns with the mandates of federal law requiring that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment and, if possible, with their general education peers. Yet how are educators today being prepared to serve all students within these new structures? Are future teachers, principals, school psychologists, and educational administrators ready to work within the service delivery models of RtI, PBS, and MTSS?

The answers to these questions vary. Educators are being prepared in college-level teacher training and school psychology programs, in collaborative efforts across college programs, through professional development after receiving a credential, in graduate education programs, in partnerships between charter schools and universities, and in online courses for college and university professors who then take the methods they learn and pass them on to their own students.

Collaboration

Many colleges and universities that train teachers address such topics as RtI and PBS, which operate within integrated systems of general and special education. Yet most training for general education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, and school psychologists takes place in separate programs. Cal State Los Angeles, however, is one of several schools that are starting to blur those divisions. “We call it collaborative teaching,” says Diane Fazzi, acting associate dean of the Charter College of Education at Cal State LA. “We’re getting faculty across disciplines to work together, talk, and think together. We see it as an opportunity to be innovative, share ideas, and learn from each other. The initiative came from the faculty’s strong desire

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to collaborate in their teaching,” says Fazzi. These faculty members created their own grant proposal, received funding, and now use the resources to plan and evaluate their work. Two general education and special education teams were funded last year and will share presentations with other disciplines. Funds exist for as many as six other collaborative programs.

Lori Kim, coordinator of Cal State LA’s educational administration program is, for example, working with professors from the school’s teacher education program, and they propose to train their students together. They could, she says, “set up an IEP session and role play.” The graduate students in Kim’s program already are required to shadow a special education student for a day and to participate in four Individualized Education Program (IEP) sessions, two focusing on the IEP’s legal

(*Leaders* continued on page 18)

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