



SENATOR DAVE CORTESE

SB 692 Special Education Inclusion Act

SUMMARY

Existing state policies and practices encourage the segregation of students with disabilities into separate classes even when students would benefit from inclusive education with their peers. By adding an existing federal inclusion indicator (5a) to the accountability dashboard, this bill would promote planning such that additional inclusive options could be available to students with disabilities. It would also align resources for training such that general education teachers could receive training and professional development on teaching strategies for the most common disabilities such as ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia, and autism.

ISSUE & BACKGROUND

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires schools to educate students with disabilities in the “least restrictive environment” (LRE) (i.e. the general education classroom) to the greatest extent appropriate based on each pupil’s unique abilities. This federal requirement stems from years of research-based evidence indicating that students with disabilities (SWDs) do better academically and social-emotionally when they are included in general education instruction and activities with their peers. Yet only 53% of California’s SWDs spend most of their time in a general education classroom. This rate of LRE/inclusion is extremely low in comparison to the national average of 63%.

The California state accountability dashboard includes 7 academic and school climate indicators and targets that districts strive to meet. It also includes local measures like parent engagement that reflect local values and priorities. Districts that struggle to meet their state or local goals are no longer subject to the punitive consequences of “No Child Left Behind”. Instead, the district is provided with technical assistance and intervention strategies to help identify the “root cause” of the concern. Since creation of the dashboard, the state has made significant progress in reducing suspension/ expulsion rates, chronic absenteeism, and drop-out rates.

However, there has been little improvement for SWDs. In the last decade California has made almost no progress toward greater inclusion of SWDs in general education classes. It is therefore unsurprising that in 2019, SWDs scored on average 88 points and 119 points below standard on state standardized English and math assessments, respectively. Meanwhile, states that have increased their inclusion/LRE rates over the last decade (e.g. Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Florida) have seen parallel increases in academic achievement for SWDs.ⁱ

Teacher surveys indicate that a lack of training and professional development is a significant barrier to inclusion of SWDs. Until last year, California credentialing programs for general education teachers did not include performance expectations on teaching strategies and frameworks that optimize education for students with individual learning differences. As a result, more than 80% of current teachers do not feel well-prepared to teach students with mild/moderate disabilities like ADHD and dyslexia.ⁱⁱ

THIS BILL

- Adding an existing federal inclusion/LRE indicator to the state accountability dashboard would expand awareness of inclusive options for students with disabilities.
- This bill would also promote the use of existing resources for general education teachers to receive training and professional development on teaching strategies and frameworks that optimize education for students with individual learning differences.

SPONSORS

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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¹ https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/r_humphrey_feb20_0.pdf

ⁱⁱ https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Forward-Together_NCLD-report.pdf