



## SENATOR DAVE CORTESE

# Special Education Inclusion Act

### SUMMARY

Existing state policies and practices incentivize the segregation of students with disabilities into separate classes even when students are capable of performing at grade level. This bill creates a disincentive for districts that unreasonably segregate special education students by adding the federal inclusion indicator to the state accountability dashboard. It would also incentivize districts to provide general education teachers with 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. More than 90% of SWDs have a disability that, if appropriately accommodated, does not prevent them from keeping pace academically 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 other states. (The national average inclusion rate is 63%).

The California state accountability dashboard includes 7 academic and school climate indicators and targets that districts strive to meet for all students and each student subgroup (e.g. SWDs, low-income, foster youth, etc.). A district that fails to meet indicator targets for a specified number of years is provided with technical assistance and intervention strategies to help the "root cause" of issues. 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.<sup>i</sup>

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.<sup>ii</sup>

### THIS BILL

- By adding an existing federal inclusion/LRE indicator to the state accountability dashboard, this bill would disincentive districts from inappropriately placing SWDs in segregated classrooms.
- This bill would also incentivize districts to use existing resources to provide general education teachers with training and professional development on teaching strategies and frameworks that optimize education for students with individual learning differences.

### SPONSORS

Santa Clara County Office of Education

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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<sup>i</sup> [https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/r\\_humphrey\\_feb20\\_0.pdf](https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/r_humphrey_feb20_0.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.ncl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Forward-Together\\_NCLD-report.pdf](https://www.ncl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Forward-Together_NCLD-report.pdf)