



## 2018 LEGISLATIVE SHARING DAY SELPA Administrators Association of California

**California must ensure students with disabilities have meaningful access to a quality education to acquire the skills needed to go on to higher learning, secure stable employment, and live independently as adults.**

### **Special Education Finance: Equalization and Preschool Funding**

**Background:** There is no dispute that special education is insufficiently and inequitably funded. Since 2013, the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) has recommended special education (AB 602) base rates be funded at the 90th percentile. Currently, Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) base rates vary from \$488.28 to \$935.72, without logical justification. The 2016-2017 Local Educational Agency (LEA) expenditure data revealed special education costs grew by over \$14.19 billion statewide over prior year, while state and federal revenues decreased overall. In 2016-2017, special education programs were primarily funded via Local General Fund contribution, on average 64.45% of total expenditures. State resources decreased to 26.70% of special education costs, and Federal funds accounted for 8.85% of expenditures. Clearly, costs for special education services require increased general fund contribution, putting undue pressure on LEAs and general education programs.

Early intervention and preschool programs, especially for children with disabilities, provide significant educational and social benefits, and result in substantial future cost savings to the state and LEAs during the students' remaining educational career. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), LEAs must provide preschool services for students with disabilities beginning at age three. In California, the only funding designated specifically for preschool-age children with disabilities are small federal preschool grants, which amounted to \$133M in 2016-2017. During this same period LEAs reported expenditures in excess of \$658M to pay for services provided to preschool-age children with disabilities, an increase of about \$200M over 13-14 expenditures. As California provides no direct funding for services for preschoolers with disabilities, LEAs have paid these program costs with general funds allocated for K-12 programs, which has additional impact on local budgets.

**Ask: Support AB 3136 (O'Donnell)** Special education funding. AB 3136 would implement key fiscal recommendations, including addressing special education funding equity by:

- Leveling up base AB 602 funding rates to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Establishing funding within AB 602 for programs serving preschoolers with disabilities
- Amending the AB 602 formula to allow a declining enrollment adjustment based on district average daily attendance (ADA) instead of aggregated SELPA ADA.
- Providing additional funding for students with significant high-cost disabilities.

## **Accountability and Transparency**

**Background:** Family empowerment centers help families navigate the special education system, assist parents in understanding their children's disabilities, and facilitate the formation of peer-support communities. FECs are a partner and link between families, Community Advisory Committees (CAC), and SELPAs. Enhanced FEC networks would complement the efforts of SELPAs seeking to build partnerships and collaborative relationships that support accountability and transparency.

**Ask: Support AB 2704 (O'Donnell)** Special education programs: Family Empowerment Centers on Disability. AB 2704 would provide the following:

- Revise the base grant for FECs from \$150,000 to \$223,000
- Prioritize creation of new FECs in areas of high need
- Improve coordination between California Department of Education and FECs by developing a uniform and rigorous data collection, monitoring and reporting system.

### **Focus on Accountability and Transparency**

As California embraces major education reforms in funding and accountability, focus remains on students with disabilities. SELPAs are critical partners in the work utilizing the California Dashboard, differentiated assistance and the continuous improvement model for LEAs in need of improvement. Current efforts for transparency and accountability include:

- SELPAs training in the continuous improvement model and partnering with County Offices of Education to offer technical assistance related to improvement needs for students with disabilities.
- SELPA Administrators are working with California Department of Education (CDE) to create a user friendly Annual Budget Plan for communication with parents, the community, and LEA members, which will increase transparency of LEA expenditures for students with disabilities.
- Partnerships with the CDE focused on aligning accountability and monitoring requirements in one system of support for all students.
- Partnerships with parents and CACs remain an ongoing priority in SELPAs.
- Preserving relationships with parents through the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution models to prevent and resolve special education disputes.

