



COMMISSION ON
TEACHER CREDENTIALING
Ensuring Educator Excellence



STATEWIDE SPECIAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE

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Transforming Education to Improve Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

During the past decade, the reform movements toward greater accountability have highlighted the achievement gap that exists among students based on race/ethnicity, family income, language ability, and disability. While progress has been made to address the inequities evidenced in our educational outcomes, students with disabilities remain among the lowest performing subgroup in California and implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) could further exacerbate the differences that exist.

California's current policies, including funding, credentialing, and a range of service delivery options, tend to "bolt on" special education to general education. While there are certainly examples throughout the state of well-integrated models of supports, these are the exceptions rather than the norm. Our prevailing model has made it acceptable, and in some instances seem desirable, to isolate special education as a unique and separate system that parallels general education. This approach defies current research, which suggests that inclusive practices, integrated systems, and coherence are essential to provide high-quality, cost-effective special education programs within (rather than apart from) a well-articulated system of education. Transforming our understanding of special education from being a place where students go to receive more or different services, to a viewpoint that includes special education services as one of many programs of support under the umbrella of general education, requires transforming the policies California has in place that serve as direction, incentives, and supports for local implementation action.

Funded by the Schwab Foundation and the Stuart Foundation, a new statewide Task Force has been formed to examine California's complex systems for serving students with disabilities and forward recommendations to the State Board of Education, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and the California Department of Education for consideration. The following overarching questions will guide the work of the task force:

1. *What is the state's vision/mission for students with disabilities? Once articulated, how do we communicate and implement the state's vision/mission on a broad scale? What systems of teacher training, school funding, and accountability are needed to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education that is appropriate to their needs and effective in supporting their learning?*
2. *With implementation of Common Core, how do we ensure access to and success in the CCSS -- and in other core academic subjects -- for students with disabilities, beginning with their earliest years in the educational system? In addition, how do we ensure all students are appropriately included in our new assessment system?*

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3. *What types of changes in teacher preparation and credentialing are necessary to ensure all teachers are prepared to meet the array of learning needs of their students in the least restrictive environment?*
4. *How should special education services be funded and organized? Specifically, with the new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), how do we/should we account for students who carry more than one label/weight in the LCFF who are also students with disabilities? What strategies would most support effective service delivery options?*
5. *What are current policy barriers to implementation of more inclusive school practices -- such as MTSS, RTI, and RTII -- and how can these be overcome?*

The Task Force membership includes parents, teachers, school and district administrators, university professors, members of the policy community and other stakeholder groups, and will be co-chaired by Dr. Carl Cohn and Mr. Fred Weintraub. Dr. Cohn is a faculty member at Claremont Graduate University and a member of the State Board of Education. After his retirement as a senior administrator for the Washington, D.C. based Council for Exceptional Children, Mr. Weintraub provided consulting services, including training, policy analysis and research studies on special education policies and procedures for school districts. He currently serves as the Federal Court Appointed Independent Monitor for Los Angeles Unified School District.

Two seasoned California educators with substantial background and experience in special education, Vicki Barber and Maureen Burness, are co-directing this initiative. Dr. Barber recently retired as the Superintendent of Schools for El Dorado County, and Ms. Burness recently retired as the Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services with the Folsom Cordova Unified School District. Both Barber and Burness bring years of experience working in the K-12 sector in support of equitable student access to high quality instruction. Under their Direction, the Task Force will complete its work over the course of the next year and release a report with policy recommendations in the late Fall, of 2014.

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