

A Policy Briefing on Special Education

CTA believes that students with exceptional needs should be educated in the most appropriate placement based on their Individual Educational Program (IEP); and that many students with disabilities can benefit by instruction in age-appropriate regular education classes. Class size/caseload limits are vital to supporting educators' efforts to educate our students, and full funding is crucial to provide a full continuum of services educationally appropriate to meet his or her needs.

Appropriate Placement: Special Education

Students with disabilities (SWDs) shall be educated in the most appropriate placement, based on their Individualized Educational Program (IEP). A continuum of services including special education and related services shall be available to meet the needs of SWDs, including general education classes, special education classes, non-public schools and charters, home instruction, instruction in hospitals and state special schools. The impact of this continuum of services must be bargained, including class size and coordinated planning time for the employees involved. Professional development and trainings for employees involved shall be provided to address the needs of SWDs in the appropriate and least restrictive environment (LRE).

Special Education Programs: Foundation for Excellence

Students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), may benefit from instruction provided in general education. Emphasize collaboration between general education teachers and special education staff to improve and expand services to students. Decisions about the appropriate education for a student with a disability (SWD) must be individually determined and made with active involvement of varied professionals. There must be a full continuum of services and a full range of delivery models available. Each student must have available the most educationally appropriate curriculum, setting, and/or program to meet their needs. Educators retain the right to participate in development of IEP's for students whom they serve and can be invited to participate in such IEP meetings. The statute and regulations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) must be fully funded and maintained. Adequate local, state, and federal funding is crucial for special education. Congress must meet its federal commitment to pay 40% of the mandates in IDEA to states to keep up with the increased spending needs for students with special needs each year.

Special Education: Plan Local Committees

A committee within each local agency, county office, and consortium should create the local plan for special education. Composed of 25% administrators, 50% special education teachers, and 25% regular classroom teachers, the committee and the administrative entity of each agency should cooperatively develop and implement the local plan for special education. The exclusive bargaining agent should provide for the appropriate representation of regular and special educators.

Caseload

Mandated Special Education class size limits/specialist case load for programmatic and funding purposes are vital to ensuring students have high quality instruction and support. All students provided direct service or consultation must be counted within the limits, including students who do not have Individual Educational Programs. These limits should be adjusted to reflect the number of schools a staff person covers, travel time, workload, severity of disabilities, IEP preparation, paperwork and assessments, and related issues. Waivers to caseload limits should be issued only in extraordinary circumstances.