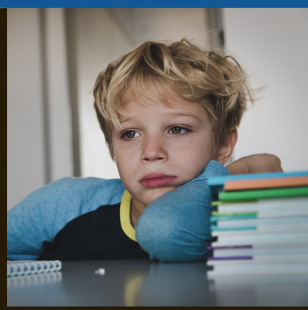


# 2021-2022

## THE CALIFORNIA ADVISORY COMMISSION ON SPECIAL EDUCATION



## Annual Report



### Overview

As the nation celebrates the thirty-second anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the California Advisory Commission on Special Education (ACSE) recognizes this landmark law to promote equal opportunities for all people with disabilities—and the important work that must continue. As ACSE commissioners, we are reminded of our mission, vision, and collective responsibility as a state body to support another equally important piece of federal legislation—the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—which charges the ACSE to actively advise and advocate in support of all students with disabilities and their families. We are reminded of our oath and our commitment to diligently study each issue, educational program, legislative bill, research proposal, and initiative on our agendas and to advise the public and our appointing bodies to the best of our ability.

As a commission, we strive to be an exemplary role model for all educational organizations and agencies across California. Our goal is to create inclusive school communities that embrace diversity, equity, and accessibility, communities where students with disabilities are treated with respect and afforded the same opportunities as their nondisabled peers.

This 2021–2022 annual report synthesizes the topics, issues, research, and discussions from our meeting year. We hope you enjoy reading about the important work we did and the progress we made, not just for students with disabilities, but for all students. The ACSE is honored to serve you.

— Dr. Havaughnia Hayes-White, ACSE Chair

### Strategic Plan and Legislative Platform

The ACSE is committed to strengthening a system of education that gives all children, especially children with disabilities, a high-quality education in preparation for adult life. To this end, the ACSE examines educational efforts and initiatives through the lens of equity—applying considerations of access and opportunity for all students, regardless of the type or severity of disability. Finally, the commission supports adequate funding for initiatives that contribute to these ends. With this set of commitments in mind, the ACSE works in support of the following:

## Student-Centered Education

- ❑ Ensuring that all students are seen and supported as general education students first by receiving universal supports, meaningful access to core curriculum, necessary
- ❑ Strengthening early identification and early intervention services
- ❑ Eliminating disproportionality
- ❑ Supporting extensive availability of and expertise in assistive technology and augmentative and alternative communication devices
- ❑ Offering instruction that is universally designed and differentiated to meet the needs of every child and the whole child
- ❑ Strengthening the preparation and professional learning of all educators so they have the knowledge and skills they need to support each child to succeed in school
- ❑ Creating a coherent educational system built on a framework of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) including:
  - ❑ Academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports
  - ❑ Evidenced-based interventions that support the strengths and needs of students in the most inclusive and equitable learning environment possible
  - ❑ Data-driven decision-making

## Authentic Family and Community Engagement

- ❑ Building and strengthening the infrastructure between schools and families to ensure active and meaningful engagement, cooperation, and trust
- ❑ Establishing meaningful community partnerships predicated on the strengths and needs of students and their families and the resources of the community
- ❑ Supporting commitments to cultural competency and culturally responsive teaching
- ❑ Developing effective transition plans and services
- ❑ Establishing seamless and effective Part C to Part B transition services and protocols through clear and thoughtful articulation between the IFSP and the IEP



## Successful Educational Outcomes

- ❑ Providing for every student the opportunity to earn a high school diploma
- ❑ Ensuring that educators support students to develop the skills that prepare them to be civically engaged, independent learners, and college and career ready
- ❑ Providing post-secondary transition planning that begins as soon as a child is identified as having a disability and that is sustained throughout the child's K–12 education
- ❑ Giving students access to the full range of career and technical pathways aimed at building independence, self-sufficiency, and skills that lead to post-secondary education and/or meaningful employment opportunities and a family-sustaining wage
- ❑ Strengthening data-collection efforts to better inform instructional decisions
- ❑ Aligning assessments to instruction with appropriate supports and accommodations and/or modifications that provide opportunities for students to fully demonstrate knowledge, skills, and growth
- ❑ Holding schools and local educational agencies accountable for the success of their students

This platform focuses the advice and support that the ACSE provides to the California Department of Education, the California State Board of Education (SBE), California's governor and state legislature, and all other engaged partners to remain committed to creating a system of education that provides each child with a disability the skills and knowledge they need to lead a full adult life.

## Reports from the SED

The ACSE welcomed regular reports during its 2021–2022 meeting year from the SED division's director, Heather Calomese, who provided detailed and comprehensive updates of the many efforts within the CDE to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The ACSE is especially appreciative of the remarkable grace and grit Calomese has displayed as she assumed her position only to face the numerous unforeseen and unique challenges created by the coronavirus pandemic.

Calomese began the ACSE meeting year by acknowledging the fragile state of many schools and families as they and their students were challenged to find a way to return to in-person classrooms, even as the

pandemic continued. Wanting students to experience classrooms as safe and supportive environments, Calomese focused the work of the division on:

- Delivering guidance to the field on creating and implementing high-quality, comprehensive IEPs, as students' programs were often attenuated or compromised when the pandemic forced them to learn virtually
- Strengthening positive behavioral supports so that schools increasingly become safe and nurturing places with the ability to respond effectively to the full range of disruption and trauma that students and families experienced during school-site closures
- Assessing the learning needs of students

with disabilities so their learning loss could be quickly and effectively addressed

- Confronting the issues of equity and disproportionality that the pandemic heightened and exacerbated
- Throughout the meeting year, Calomese reported to the ACSE on the SED's work to:
  - Deliver guidance to the field and especially to parents on independent study as an option for students with disabilities, and examine the implications of this approach to schooling for these students
  - Collaborate with other divisions and agencies, especially the Early Learning and Care Division and the Multilingual Support Division, as historic investments

are creating unprecedented opportunities for alignment across programs and systems

- Work closely with SELPAs to provide them and their member LEAs with data about assessments and annual IEPs so they can determine and respond to areas of need
- Work with LEAs that have been identified for significant disproportionality
- Monitor out-of-state nonpublic schools in which California students have been placed, ensuring that each of these schools remains certified and is implementing each student's IEP
- Participate in cross-sector workgroups to build and sustain a high-quality early learning system, with teacher preparation programs to support it

The ACSE especially appreciates the attention Calomese brings to the intersectionality of race and disability and her commitment to using this awareness as a lens for viewing policies, practices, and beliefs to inform the work of the division.

### **State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report**

In October, Director Calomese presented the SED's new State Performance Plan (SPP). This plan is mandated by the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and identifies 17 indicators that reflect the progress the state has made to educate students with disabilities. These indicators are designed to ensure compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and to improve results for students. Once the SPP is submitted to OSEP and approved, the SED reports annually to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) on California's progress in reaching identified targets through an Annual Performance Report (APR). Part of the ACSE's charge is to review and approve the SPP before the SED delivers it to the SBE for final review.

Guiding the plan and targets were two considerations: (1) Students with disabilities are general education students first; and (2) 70 percent of students with disabilities also belong in one or more student groups that the Local Control Funding Formula identifies for additional funding: students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, students who are English language learners, and students in foster care.

The ACSE sees this percentage as strengthening a mandate for an aligned and integrated system to improve outcomes for

all students, especially those with disabilities.

Calomese identified several current conditions that represent significant challenges to meeting SPP targets, including an ongoing shortage of teachers, related service providers, and paraprofessionals. At the same time, Calomese characterized the plan and the new SPP targets as key levers to improvement and an "heroic effort" to change our system in a way that will lead to improved student outcomes. The new targets "will serve as our north star for improving services," she said, and she described the new plan for 2022–2026 as "much more than a required submission to OSEP. It is the heart and soul of our special education system."

With the division's evident commitments—to effective assessments that direct appropriate services and supports, high-quality educational settings for all children, an increased number and quality of inclusive settings, quality transition services at both the start and the culmination of a child's K–12 experience, and options and pathways that offer a meaningful adult life for every student—the ACSE voted unanimously to approve the SPP for 2022–2026.

### **California Budget for Education**

The ACSE received regular updates from California's Department of Finance (DOF) on state budget allocations for education. In general, these budgets reflected significant investments in students with disabilities, with the state earmarking millions and in some cases billions of dollars for dozens of initiatives and projects.

As a champion of high-quality inclusive settings and practices for students with disabilities, the ACSE welcomed the news of increased investments in the state's Supporting Inclusive Practices (SIP) project to expand inclusive efforts throughout the state.

Given the vitally important role that parents play in the lives of their children and the specialized supports they need to effectively advocate for and support their children with disabilities, the ACSE applauded the allocation of state funds to finance the long-awaited expansion of California's Family Empower Centers.

With the IEP being foundational to effective schooling for students with disabilities, the ACSE welcomed the news of funding from the 2021 State Budget Act to study what would be involved in establishing an IEP Facilitation Network in the state. An

organization with expertise in IEP facilitation and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in special education in California will be selected and charged with conducting this study.

The ACSE viewed the money for expanding the use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) as generally important in strengthening family-school partnerships and specifically helping to support the IEP process.

Since nonpublic schools serve some of the state's most vulnerable students with disabilities—while often representing a sometimes-crippling cost to LEAs—the commission appreciated the state's funding to study both the placement of students in these schools and the effectiveness and certification status of the schools themselves.

Given the importance of early childhood learning and care on the life trajectory of children with disabilities, the ACSE was pleased to learn of the budget's support for the SED to partner with the Early Childhood Division to improve and strengthen transitions between IDEA Part C and Part B services.

The ACSE especially welcomed news of the large sums of money the state is allocating for educationally related mental health services. At the same time, the ACSE recognized the challenges the state faces in determining the best approaches for disseminating these funds and the potential for competing perspectives, especially as the state's history of separate systems meets the newer vision of one coherent system to serve all students.

Given that LEAs are required to create Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) plans that integrate activities and services for all students, and given that students who receive special education services are considered general education students first, the ACSE acknowledged the logic of flowing mental health services dollars through LEAs. The ACSE also appreciated the DOF's attention to the complex nature of special education and interest in identifying, prioritizing, and addressing the needs of students. At the same time, the ACSE is cautious and hopeful that the large amounts of money that are currently available will be used to inform and improve systems in ways that last.

### **Accountability and Assessment**

The ACSE has witnessed California's assessment and accountability systems gain coherence during the past seven years,

evolving from one system for general education and another for special education to a system of increased coordination, equity, and transparency. ACSE commissioners have appreciated the willingness of representatives from CDE to appear regularly at meetings, explain the challenges of this complex and nuanced work, and seek guidance and direction from the ACSE to ensure that the data gathered best serves the needs of students with disabilities.

In February the ACSE welcomed an update from the Analysis, Measurement, and Accountability Reporting Division (AMARD) on CDE's 2022 Accountability Workplan. The ACSE has observed the division's efforts to refine the new indicator for college and career readiness and welcomed future opportunities to examine how this indicator might suggest if and how students with disabilities are able to take advantage of educational options.

The School Accountability Report Card (SARC), available since 1988, compares data publicly for student achievement, school environment, resources, and demographics. The AMARD will soon be tracking data about teacher assignments. The ACSE was pleased to learn that this augmentation of the SARC will support both state and federal accountability requirements for teacher assignment.

The commission also followed closely the progress this division has made in developing a Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) program for schools with 70 percent or more high-risk students. The DASS uses the same metrics that other schools use—e.g., graduation rates and academic indicators—albeit modified. The goal was to create an accountability system that accommodates the challenges that these students and schools face.

The ACSE was disappointed that the U.S. Department of Education has denied California's request for modified measures. The ACSE believes that these unique schools deserve to be treated uniquely and expressed concern that, without modified measures, DASS schools will be over-represented among schools requiring intense intervention.

The ACSE appreciated hearing from the Assessment Development and Administration Division (ADAD) in February about testing windows for the numerous state assessments for 2021–2022. The assessments in question include the California Assessment of Student Performance and

Progress (CAASPP), the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC), and the Alternate ELPAC. Given the ongoing pandemic, the commissioners welcomed the news that remote options were being made available for most assessments (with the exception of the alternate assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities, which must be administered in person).

The commission was in full support of the SBE-approved changes to assessments that made universal accessibility tools, accommodations, and designated supports more readily available to teachers and students through the Test Administration Manual. The ACSE recognizes the importance of these features in facilitating accurate outcomes by allowing students the full range of options for showing what they know and can do.

The Local Agency System Support Office (LASSO) updated the ACSE on revisions to the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) template and instructions that were adopted by the SBE. The ACSE appreciates the dynamic nature of these improvements, revisions, and updates as reflective of the state's process of continuous improvement. ACSE commissioners also see these changes as reflective of the state's effort to ensure accountability for LCAP money and to guarantee that funds are being used as they are intended—to serve those students most in need.

In a state as large and diverse as California, and in a field as complicated and nuanced as special education, the ACSE regularly voices concerns related to accountability: about financial transparency, the ongoing and significant achievement gap for students with disabilities who have no cognitive impairment, the availability and accuracy of the assessments that determine academic progress and those that identify the existence of disability, efforts to prepare students for adult life, and more. Even so, the fact that CDE is aligning its statewide accountability system with the California Statewide System of Support (CSSOS) suggests that needs, when identified, are being addressed.

California Statewide System of Support Staff from the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) provided the ACSE with an overview of the structure, purpose, and vision of the CSSOS. A joint effort of the CCEE, the CDE, and the California State Board of Educa-

tion (SBE), this system provides a framework for supporting LEAs as they address barriers to student success. While not part of the state's monitoring efforts, this system works directly with LEAs in response to their self-identified needs—with the goal of building their capacity to develop and sustain processes of continuous improvement in support of student achievement.

Commissioners welcomed the explanations of the many elements of the CSSOS and how they work together to provide three levels of support: universal support to all LEAs for improvement; targeted/differentiated support for select LEAs to address significant disparities in student progress; and intensive supports for persistent school challenges. With the ACSE's continued commitment to the development of one system of support for all students, commissioners were pleased to learn of these efforts to integrate and coordinate the state's school improvement efforts. The ACSE was also pleased with the attention the CSSOS is giving to authentic parent engagement as it seeks information and advice from FECs and other parent organizations to better address parents' needs and concerns.

With SELPAs having been central to the provision of special education services in the state since 1978, the ACSE was interested in the key roles that SELPAs are playing in the CSSOS by providing resources, information, and support in specific geographical areas and in key content areas: UDL, ELL, Disproportionality, MTSS, and autism. The ACSE welcomed information about the CSSOS's California Technical Assistance Network (CaTAN), a website that is being developed by the Riverside SELPA to serve as a resource library of webinars, trainings, and supports for special education in the areas of assessment, collaboration, instruction, social-emotional learning and behavior, and high-quality IEPs.

In general, the ACSE is supportive of the CSSOS's intentional efforts to determine where students with disabilities fit into each LEA's LCAP plans, meaningfully coordinate the system's numerous elements, and serve all schools, including state and district special schools, so as not to perpetuate separate initiatives and bifurcated efforts.

The commission applauded the CSSOS's proactive approach to strengthening LEAs and supporting their continuous efforts to improve the school performance of all students, including students with disabilities.

## Special Studies

ACSE heard summaries of two CDE-commissioned studies that were conducted with the goal of identifying ways to improve outcomes for California's students with disabilities.

*The California Special Education Governance and Accountability Study*, as directed by Senate Bill 74, Budget Act of 2020, was presented at the August ACSE meeting. This study examined the state's current governance and accountability structures for students with an IEP and provided recommendations for improvement. The study echoed previous recommendations, including those of the 2015 Statewide Special Education Task Force that called for the state to develop one education system that serves all students, including those with an IEP. The study made five key recommendations:

1. Give LEAs the responsibility for their students with an IEP and for meeting all legal requirements; give each LEA full authority to make special education funding and program decisions for its students.
2. Provide each LEA with the sole decision-making authority, autonomy, and resources for agreements with other LEAs and agencies to offer a flexible continuum of services to meet the needs of its students with an IEP.
3. Align all improvement planning requirements and supports across general and special education.
4. Increase transparency and alignment of the state's general and special education accountability, monitoring, and technical assistance structures while amplifying the voices of special education's partners, including families, in all governance and accountability structures.
5. Increase state communication and guidance to LEAs, communities, and families about the state's special education priorities and available resources.

A second study, the *California Special Education Funding System Study*, was initiated to learn how to improve outcomes for students with disabilities through the state's funding system. Research had shown that how resources are allocated, distributed, and spent has a direct impact on student outcomes.

The study uncovered opportunities to realign funding to better meet the needs of students with disabilities within three funding components: allocation, distri-

bution, and expected expenditure. More specifically, the study determined that certain revisions to California's special education funding system would make it more responsive to the state's increasing population of students with disabilities while promoting inclusive practices, prioritizing appropriate early intervention and identification, and ensuring that funds reach the students with the greatest needs.

The ACSE appreciates the insights and recommendations from these two studies and is supportive of the state investing and leveraging resources toward improving equity, transparency, and alignment as well as increasing engagement in local decision-making. The ACSE recognizes the many challenges to improving special education governance, accountability, and funding structures. At the same time, the commission sees significant opportunities for better aligning California's general and special education governance and accountability structures so that students with the greatest need, including students with disabilities, are better served and realize improved school outcomes.

## Mental Health

The ACSE has supported every effort to provide comprehensive, coordinated, and readily available mental health services to all students, since they cannot learn if they do not feel physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe. Through this commitment, the commission has maintained an ongoing subcommittee dedicated to studying and reporting on the challenges and opportunities school face in providing effective mental health services.

### Mental Health Subcommittee

While acknowledging the tremendous progress the state has made in prioritizing the delivery of holistic services, the subcommittee emphasized the amount of work yet to be done to create the kind of system that best serves students, families, and teachers. The subcommittee identified the importance of the following:

- Incentivizing cooperation among all child- and family-serving agencies and articulating and acting on shared goals among agencies so that no child "falls through the cracks"
- Developing a blueprint of concrete rubrics to ensure that the field understands and knows how to use best models and practices for integrating services
- Creating an interagency guide that provides the field with strategies for evaluat-

ing and deploying resources, especially for using one-time state and federal monies to build a coordinated system of mental health services that is sustainable

- Providing sustainable funding to create and maintain whole-system, cross-agency collaboration
- Increasing support for community schools to continue to create, strengthen, and maintain coordinated child-serving systems
- Creating cultural competence in outreach for mental health support
- Acknowledging and addressing the challenges staff face in supporting students with behavioral and mental health needs and giving them the time and supports that are essential for performing their jobs
- Integrating mental health and special education services so that the IEP is no longer used as the default mechanism for providing mental health services in schools
- Developing student-to-student support networks
- Creating a designated school staff position responsible for examining mental health needs and determining necessary services and supports
- Addressing staff shortages by paying teachers a wage commensurate with the importance of the work they do and using more interns in schools to help provide mental health support
- Training educators in concrete strategies for working with students and each other while experiencing an ongoing crisis
- Partnering with children and families to design services that meet their needs and address their challenges

## CalHOPE

Early in its meeting year, ACSE was pleased to learn that the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) had contracted with the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) to develop a Social Emotional Learning Community of Practice for California (CalHOPE). The commission welcomed information in February from representatives of this initiative about its strategies for developing a coherent and effective system to meet the mental health needs of California's students and teachers in the wake of the pandemic and the associated challenges of returning to in-person learning.

The ACSE learned of the many partnerships that SCOE has developed in this

effort, which included the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley’s School of Social Welfare, the Orange County Department of Education, and the California Mental Health Services Association. ACSE was appreciative of these high-level partnerships between health care and education and sees them as promising signs of success for the effort.

The commission is supportive of CalHOPE’s strategy to build the capacity of county offices of education (COEs) to provide direct support to LEAs, schools, and educators by developing and scaling efforts through communities of practice (COP) so that educators at every level throughout the state can learn, share, and network. The ACSE was pleased to learn that all 58 counties in California are engaged in this work, which will involve creating, vetting, and sharing high-quality resources and tools; modeling structures and activities; and showcasing successful Social Emotional Learning (SEL) efforts.

The ACSE endorsed CalHOPE’s vision of creating stronger partnerships among behavioral health agencies and schools and focusing on prevention and early intervention through SEL as a tier-one, universal support for all students. The commission appreciated CalHOPE’s acknowledgment that “the work is messy,” but not letting that interfere with its commitment to transforming schools.

The ACSE encouraged CalHOPE to incorporate the voice of youth and young adults with disabilities into its work so that it develops programs that are responsive to their needs. The commission also highlighted the importance of recognizing the intersectionality of trauma, school failure, poverty, and cultural barriers that too often contribute to mental health issues among students. Finally, commissioners pointed out the importance of thinking and responding creatively to the overlap of disability and mental health services and the role of prevention in that confluence.

Within this context, the commission also welcomed in April an update from SCOE on how SEL was being introduced and starting to be implemented in county offices of education, local educational agencies, and schools.

The ACSE appreciated the primer provided on why SEL is important, especially in light of the inequities the pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated, and on how SEL works. The ACSE was pleased with the

initiative’s efforts to model the principles of social emotional learning at every level, “from the board room to the classroom,” and the strategies that the initiative is using to disseminate practices from counties to districts to school sites. The commissioners also welcomed the initiative’s awareness of SEL as a whole-system effort that includes training and support for communities and families.

## Early Childhood Care and Education

The Early Education Division (EED) and the Special Education Division (SED) presented to the ACSE an overview of the state’s plans for universal prekindergarten (UPK). The ACSE welcomed the news of California’s investments in UPK as these programs lay important groundwork for children to succeed later in school.

Commissioners recognize that too many children enter kindergarten without the background or preparation they need to thrive in school, and these early inequities fuel often intractable achievement gaps. The ACSE is pleased that the state is now actively working to address these disparities through UPK, and that this effort includes creating increased opportunities for young children with disabilities to receive early care and education services in inclusive settings.

Included in the UPK vision is early intervention for disability or delay of any kind—academic, social, emotional, or physical—which has been proven to significantly improve lifespan outcomes for children.

The ACSE was impressed with the extent of the state’s preschool reform vision, which includes extensive plans for training, educating, and supporting teachers and administrators in the unique factors required in quality early care and education programs, along with a commitment to salaries that reflect the importance of this work.

The ACSE enthusiastically supports the state’s work to leverage investments by building on the *Master Plan for Early Learning and Care: California for All Kids* and aligning programs and services administered by the education system to coordinate (1) curriculum and practices from PreK through third grade in a concerted effort to ensure student engagement and success and (2) all agencies, organizations, and programs in the larger system that serves young children. The ACSE sees these

efforts as continued and expanded successes in realizing the vision of one system of education to serve all students.

## IEP Template and Alternate Pathways to a High School Diploma

The ACSE received an update in October on the progress of two important and interrelated workgroups that were funded through a state budget act, directed by the CDE, and facilitated by the Sacramento County Office of Education: the Individualized Education Program Template Workgroup and the Alternative Pathways to a High School Diploma Workgroup.

Both efforts acknowledge the importance of (1) mapping education to employment for all students with disabilities and (2) creating, coordinating, and strengthening one system that supports the goal of competitive, integrated employment for all students so that as adults they are able find family-sustaining employment and enjoy community involvement.

To this end, The Alternate Pathways to a High School Diploma workgroup envisioned the following:

- Every student expects to earn a diploma.
- All students with disabilities, including those with significant cognitive disabilities, exit the K–12 system with the skills they need to earn a family-sustaining wage and participate in their communities.
- Students and their families understand the requirements for earning a diploma and can see how they reach their goal.

Because students with disabilities have such a wide range of needs, the workgroup sought to clearly articulate three pathways to a high school diploma: (1) one for those with significant cognitive disabilities, (2) a second for those with needs for specialized, intensive supports, and (3) a third for those whose high school experience will be similar to that of their nondisabled peers.

To reach the goal of diploma pathways for all, the workgroup highlighted the importance of the following:

- Timely and robust planning for graduation
- Timely data reporting
- Extensive training and ongoing professional development for educators

The workgroup also emphasized the importance phasing out the Certificate of Completion, which serves as an exit document and does not necessarily represent a course of study.

The ACSE expressed intense interest in the second workgroup and its efforts to develop an IEP template. This workgroup envisioned a future where:

- IEPs are aligned to academic and performance standards for all students.
- IEPs are backwards mapped from employment and living wage to school and courses of study.
- General education teachers meaningfully participate in the IEP process.
- IEPs are tools used in daily teaching and planning.
- Families have the information they need to support their children and their children's teachers and to believe in bright futures for their children.
- Comprehensive services, both at and outside school, are available and coordinated.

The ACSE appreciated the emphasis this workgroup placed on providing training and resources for everyone attending IEPs, along with the importance of family input. The commissioners recognize that educators will need to place a greater and more sustained focus on secondary transition planning in IEP reform, and schools and family centers will need to provide parents with the information and training they need to understand their role to the process. At the same time, the commission welcomed the prospect of a universal IEP template and a future where a single template creates equity, transparency, consistent guidance, and support for all involved in the IEP.

In general, the ACSE sees these two workgroups as contributing to a framework that guarantees for all students a school experience that opens doors for the future. The ACSE looks forward to the state's continued efforts on both fronts, with the increased focus on student strengths and needs rather than disability categories.

### Teacher Preparation

In February, the ACSE welcomed representatives from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) who updated commissioners on the requirements for Education Specialist programs; new teacher credential authorizations; and COVID flexibilities for teachers.

The ACSE has followed CTC's years-long reform efforts to adopt new standards and Teacher Performance Expectations

(TPEs) to ensure that all teachers are fully prepared to work in inclusive classroom settings, address the unique needs of each student, and collaborate with their educational partners. The standards and TPEs adopted in 2018 reflect a commitment to a "common trunk" of preparation for all teachers. The CTC had been working with teacher preparation programs throughout the state to fully incorporate these changes into their course offerings by July 2022. The CTC has also redefined the state's credential authorizations for special educators to focus more on individual student needs rather than specific disabilities.

The ACSE appreciates the work of the CTC to review the plans of teacher preparation programs and create techni-



cal assistance opportunities that support these efforts, along with opportunities for programs to collaborate in their program redesign. The most significant change in program standards requires educational specialist candidates to complete at least 600 hours of clinical practice, including 200 hours of early fieldwork in general and special education settings. ACSE was pleased to learn that CTC intends this clinical practice to give candidates active experience across all grade spans and was purposefully designed to ensure that candidates develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to work successfully with all students.

CTC is in the process of providing guidance to LEAs on its new authorizations—for mild to moderate support needs, extensive support needs, early childhood special education, deaf and hard of hearing, and visual impairment. CTC is also requiring training for on-campus supervisors of clinical practice so (1) they see themselves as integral partners in helping

interns develop their skills and (2) there no disconnect between program practice and a teacher candidate's preparation.

The ACSE was pleased to learn of the progress CTC is making on the requirements for dual-credential candidates as it works to determine the necessary extent of a program to provide candidates with sufficient knowledge, skills, experience to be effective in both general education and special education settings, as well for candidates seeking a dual credential to work with students with mild-to-moderate disabilities and students with extensive support needs. The ACSE appreciates the CTC's awareness that these determinations both take time and may be specific to each candidate.

CTC has created several pathways for current special educators to earn one of the new credentials: through coursework, clinical practice, professional development, and demonstrated competence. While these pathways still need regulatory approval and are not yet available, the ACSE honors the CTC's sensitivity to the needs and situations of those experienced educators who have been working with credentials that are no longer available, in particular the fact that current Education Specialists will not be required to follow one of these pathways and will always hold their original credentials.

ACSE appreciated the thoughtful responsiveness and flexibility that CTC has demonstrated during the school-site closures caused by the pandemic, particularly as it deferred tests and subject-matter competency requirements for teacher candidates and waived many fees. The ACSE also anticipates that the new preparation requirements will benefit students as well as teachers, especially as these requirements will contribute to teachers' success and satisfaction in their work and promote their longevity in the profession.

### The Importance of Families

The ACSE is in full support of all efforts to increase the involvement of families in the education of their children. As such, the commission was pleased to learn of the creation of a Family Engagement Office under the Student Support Services Branch of the CDE. It is the hope of the commission that this office will support the CDE in its efforts to invite, establish, and sustain authentic parent-school partnerships in

order to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

### Family Empowerment Centers

The state's 2021 budget act provided additional good news for parents, students, and families in the form of significant funding for Family Empowerment Centers (FECs). FECs were established in 2001 through Senate Bill 511 and written that year into the *California Education Code*. These important centers provide vital supports to families of children and young adults with disabilities by offering resources and training on such aspects of special education as the Individualized Education Program (IEP), inclusion, family-school partnerships, alternative dispute resolution (ADR), and social and emotional learning and supports. FECs advocate for students with disabilities and their families and often work closely with other FECs, SELPAs, and the CDE to improve services for students overall.

California contributed to the funding of 14 FECs, which serve 26 of the state's 58 counties, but before 2021, funding remained at 2001 levels. With the 2021 state budget act, however, and the subsequent changes to *Education Code* as it pertains to FECs, California has now granted funding both to create more centers so that all families across the state can be served and to increase funding for established FECs so they can fully implement their programs and expand their efforts to meet the needs of families. To this end, CDE has been charged with, among other things, implementing a Request for Application (RFA) to select and onboard new FECs. Part of this mandate involved gathering input from the ACSE, among other constituents, on a grant-award process, particularly as it relates to assessing the training and information needs of families and students, the capacity for community partnerships, the necessary grant funding

for needed programs, and any additional advice for selecting these new centers that ACSE commissioners could offer as CDE develops and executes this RFA.

The ACSE commissioners welcomed this invitation to aid in the selection process of these important centers, looked forward to providing individual feedback through the CDE's survey, and eagerly anticipate the creation of new centers so that FECs exist across the state and allow every family of a student with a disability to receive the support and guidance it needs.

### The GOAL Award

The California Advisory Commission on Special Education created the GOAL Award in 2005–2006 through a generous contribution from film producer Brian Grazer, who donated \$100,000 over a ten-year period to award programs in the state that demonstrate exemplary practices in special education. GOAL—Grazer Outstanding Achievement in Learning—celebrates the programs that support California's children and youths with disabilities and the professionals who serve them. The award also functions as a vehicle for sharing effective practices with parents, other educators, and policymakers. GOAL Award recipients are chosen based on their demonstrated success with students, innovative or highly effective design elements that are replicable and sustainable, and connections with invested partners.

The commission has been committed to—and successful in—continuing this award well past its original ten-year span. In April 2022, the ACSE voted on and

passed a motion to offer the award through 2026–2027.

The ACSE's process for seeking and selecting a GOAL Award winner for 2021–2022, however, was not immune to the effects of the pandemic. This year the commission received an insufficient number of qualified applications to confidently select a winner. The GOAL application, selection, and award process will resume in ACSE's 2022–2023 meeting year. The commissioners look forward to discovering new and promising programs and practices for students with disabilities in California.

Applicants for the 2022–23 award are encouraged to review guidelines and descriptions of previous award recipients at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/as/acsegoalaward.asp>. Previous applicants are encouraged to re-apply if they were not selected in prior years.

### A Look Forward

As the ACSE moves into the 2022–2023 meeting year, we commissioners are excited about our ongoing collaboration with our partner organizations, agencies, and commissions across the state. We are dedicated to engaging with them in active, collaborative conversations on how to “move the needle forward” on the important topics of Student Voice, Family Partnerships, Mental Health, Equity, Mitigating Disproportionality, Early Childhood Education, Inclusion, Teacher Preparation, Transition, and more.

Together we can make further advancements toward the goals of the ADA and IDEA. Working together, we can provide equal opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in inclusive educational settings and to successfully complete both high school and college, thus, fostering well-prepared adults working in their communities and earning a living wage



*The ACSE Executive Secretary and Commissioners at the June 2022 meeting.*

The dates and locations for ACSE meetings in 2022–2023 can be found at [www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/as/acse.asp](https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/as/acse.asp). A directory of ACSE members is at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/as/acsedrct.asp>. To view ACSE meetings via live webcast, go to [www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/as/acsemtgwebcast.asp](https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/as/acsemtgwebcast.asp).