

# Organizing Schools to Serve Students with Disabilities in California

## SUMMARY OF THE PACE POLICY RESEARCH PANEL ON — SPECIAL EDUCATION —

February 2020

### Who Are California's Students with Disabilities?

Over 725,000 K–12 students in California received special education services in the 2018–19 school year. The largest group of students with disabilities (SWDs), making up more than half of special needs students, is comprised of those with learning disabilities and speech impairments. They are also a diverse group, both in terms of background and experiences. Males, African Americans, English language learners, and foster youth are more highly represented relative to their representation among all students.

### How Are SWDs Currently Being Served, and What Could We Do Better?



Students are not always identified for services, though early screening and intervention has been shown to have long-term benefits and cost savings.



Inclusion rates are low in California, though SWDs benefit from inclusion in general education settings.



There is a shortage of special education teachers and insufficient preparation and support for general education teachers to teach SWDs in inclusive classrooms.



Health services are not readily available in California schools that could benefit many SWDs.



MTSS is not adequately resourced. Full implementation of California's Multi-Tiered System of Supports would support the success of all students.



Transitions between services are bumpy and can be confusing and burdensome for SWDs and families.

# What Can Be Done to Support Schools to Serve SWDs?

At the level of state policy, several fundamental recommendations emerged from the thirteen studies in this PRP:



**Establish positive expectations** around inclusion of SWDs in general education classrooms.



**Develop capacity** of special education teachers, general education teachers, and administrators to meet the needs of SWDs.



**Systemize and communicate data** on services and outcomes for SWDs.



**Foster interagency collaboration** between multiple child-serving systems.

## Conclusion

The path toward meaningful improvement for the support of SWDs in California will require substantial, systematic, and sustained investment to deliver the special education and services that students with disabilities in California deserve.

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Find the full set of products from the PACE Policy Research Panel on Special Education at <https://edpolicyinca.org/initiatives/policy-research-panels/organizing-schools-serve-students-disabilities> :

- Organizing Schools to Serve Students with Disabilities: A Summary of the PACE Policy Research Panel, by Jeannie Myung & Heather Hough
- Students with Disabilities in the CORE Districts: Characteristics, Outcomes and Transitions, by Kevin Gee, Carolynne Beno, & Joe Witte
- Identifying Young Children for Early Intervention in California, by Nancy Hunt
- The Transition to Preschool for Children with Disabilities, by Connie Kasari
- Increasing Access to Universally Designed Mathematics Classrooms, by Rachel Lambert
- Work-based Learning for Students with Disabilities, by Fred McFarlane & Mari Guillermo
- Promoting Successful Transitions for Students with Disabilities, by Lauren Lindstrom & Carolynne Beno
- California's Special Education Teacher Shortage, by Naomi Ondrasek, Desiree Carver-Thomas, Caitlin Scott, & Linda Darling-Hammond
- Preparing Teachers to Educate Students with Learning Disabilities, by Michael Gottfried & Jacob Kirksey
- Improving Education for California Students Via Professional Development, by Aubyn Stahmer, Kelsey Oliver, & Patty Schetter
- Students with Disabilities and Differentiated Assistance, by Kevin Gee
- Promising Policies to Address the Needs of Students with Disabilities, by Daniel C. Humphrey, Beth C. Gamse, Jeannie Myung, Ben Cottingham
- Achievement Gaps and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, by George Farkas
- Realizing One Integrated System of Care for Children, by Ron Powell, Elizabeth Estes, & Alex Briscoe