

AB 428 (Medina)

Special education Finance Reform

Background

Under state and federal law (IDEA), local educational agencies are mandated to provide a free and appropriate public education to individuals with disabilities aged birth to age 22, including preschool-age children with special needs. Despite this mandate, no state funding is allocated for special education preschool programs.

Currently there are 700,000 students with disabilities in the state. California's special education funding formula AB 602 (Chapter 854, Statutes of 1997), does not equitably provide the necessary funding to pay for the cost of services needed for the students with disabilities.

The most common disabilities among students are specific learning disabilities, speech and language impairments, and other health impairments, which together constituted about 73% of all students with exceptional needs in 2015. Students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disability (ASD) have increased notably over the last decade, from 2% of all disabilities in 2002 to 13% in 2015.

Problem

Special education in California lacks the following:

Special Education Preschool Funding: Early intervention programs for preschoolers are an excellent investment. Children who receive high quality care and education before kindergarten are 40% to 60% less likely to require special education interventions when they reach school-age, resulting in significant future cost savings to the state and local educational agencies

In California, no state funding is provided to subsidize the estimated \$490 million that schools

report spending on special education preschool programs. The California Statewide Special Education Task Force and the Public Policy Institute of California have recommended that the state establish a funding mechanism to support special education preschool programs.

Equalization: For decades, California's special education funding rates have varied considerably – from \$480 to \$930 per pupil - for no logical reason. The Legislative Analyst's Office, the Public Policy Institute of California, and the California Statewide Special Education Task Force have all recommended that the legislature retain the census-based model and provide funding to equalize special education AB 602 funding rates.

Funding for students who need extra support: In the 20 years since the last major special education finance reform, the percentage of special education students requiring greater support has risen dramatically. During the same period, the state's dedicated fund to support these "low incidence" students was eliminated.

Solution

AB 428 would establish a funding mechanism to support special education preschool programs, by adding preschoolers to the AB 602 funding formula.

AB 428 would address long-standing inequities by equalizing special education funding rates to the 95th percentile over time, making the rates fair throughout the state.

AB 428 would provide a supplemental grant to support students with greater needs, including students on the autism spectrum, and students who are blind, deaf or hard of hearing, and intellectually disabled.

AB 428 would allow school districts the ability to calculate a declining enrollment adjustment based on district, rather than SELPA, ADA.

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Support

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