Communication Regarding

“CALIFORNIA SPECIAL EDUCATION FINANCING SYSTEM STUDY”

by West Ed

Provided by

SELPA
Administrators of California
Special Education Local Plan Area
STUDY TIMELINES

Phase 1
Descriptive Report
October 2020

Phase 2
Implications Report
May 2021

Phase 2
Stakeholder Preview/Input
January 2021

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THEMES

01 TIMING MATTERS
Major reforms to the State’s special education funding model cannot fairly be considered during a worldwide pandemic, when school leaders are navigating unprecedented educational challenges.

03 FUNDING
Equity and adequacy in special education funding reform must become a reality for students with disabilities and the educators who serve them, and must be central to any thoughtful and accurate study.

05 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
SELPA design and lead extensive technical assistance activities necessary to ensure LEAs are able to meet state and federal performance targets for their students with disabilities.

02 LOCAL CONTROL
SELPA Governing Boards, made up of their LEA superintendents and representatives, are in the best position to determine how to allocate funds, and design and implement change efforts, for their students with disabilities.

04 ACCOUNTABILITY
SELPA exist and operate under state-mandated and approved comprehensive Local Plans that include detailed service, budget, and expenditure reporting, pursuant to state and federal laws.

06 STUDY QUALITY
Significant reforms to funding and services to students with disabilities, like those contemplated in the WestEd study, deserve honest, unbiased exploration, with a focus on programmatic needs as opposed to solely funding.
TIMING MATTERS

During these uncertain times, school leaders are fully focused on educating all students while keeping them mentally and physically safe and healthy, as well as supporting the staff who serves them and the communities in which they live.

LEAs and County Offices are overwhelmed by changing and ever-increasing amounts of new compliance, reporting, and monitoring requirements related to the pandemic, school re-openings and legislative changes.

When full attention can be paid, our special education funding model will require sustained improvement efforts with input and representation from state leaders, SELPA practitioners, funding experts, parent advocacy groups, and agency partners.

Urgency is necessary to address special education finance, and SELPA leaders have long fought for, and continue to advocate for, thoughtful reform through their leadership in funding coalitions, in legislative advocacy, and in multiple statewide task force groups.

Major reforms to the State’s special education funding model cannot fairly be considered during a worldwide pandemic, when school leaders are navigating unprecedented educational challenges.
**LOCAL CONTROL**

SELPA Governing Boards, made up of their LEA superintendents and representatives, are in the best position to determine how to allocate funds, and design and implement change efforts, for their students with disabilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SELPA Governing Boards are comprised of LEA superintendents and local leaders, and each SELPA operates with the full consent of its member LEAs who collaborate and coordinate activities for the benefit of students with disabilities in the communities they serve.</th>
<th>Intending to review nearly 70 SELPA allocation plans, study authors stopped after reviewing 16 of them, stating they were so unique and different, they could not determine common methodology to measure or understand them, speaking to the power and need for local control.</th>
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<td>Diversity and complexity in SELPA governance and allocation should not be feared, but more carefully understood prior to formulating conclusions or making recommendations.</td>
<td>Flexibility and autonomy of SELPAs in allocation and program design and development must be viewed as strengths and not liabilities of SELPAs.</td>
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Equity and adequacy in special education funding reform must become a reality for students with disabilities and the educators who serve them, and must be central to any thoughtful and accurate study.

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<th>The study attempts to address reforms to special education finance without a discussion about adequacy, at a time when over 65% of the cost of educating students with disabilities comes from the general fund of each LEA.</th>
<th>SELPA leaders advocate for increased funding for infants, preschool, and early intervention; adjustments to out of home care funding; protection of funding to small and sparse SELPAs; and increased funding and flexibility for extraordinary cost pools.</th>
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<td>The study suggests weighted funding by disability, a model tried unsuccessfully in California, which resulted in inequities in funding, over-identification, and more restrictive placements of students in higher-funded categories.</td>
<td>Many of the charts and figures in both the descriptive report and implications preview are unexplained, incorrect, or incomplete; are based on old data or understandings; or are misleading.</td>
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**ACCOUNTABILITY**

SELPA's exist and operate under state mandated and approved comprehensive Local Plans that include detailed service, budget, and expenditure reporting, pursuant to state and federal laws.

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<th>The study focuses solely on allocation as its subject, and its authors concede that SELPA governance and administration plans, as well as the statutes and regulations SELPA's operate under, were outside the scope of the study.</th>
<th>Recent legislation has greatly added to components of the SELPA Local Plan to make them more transparent and accessible for the public, including significant additions to the annual budget and service plans, as well as an additional assurances plan.</th>
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<td>SELPA's are now required to review and consult on Local Control Accountability Plans for each LEA to ensure the needs of students with disabilities are aligned and addressed across the multiple compliance-related plans crafted at the LEA level.</td>
<td>Authors allege a lack of external accountability and speculate that locally designed SELPA allocation plans have resulted in failure to meet state priorities, without defining what that means, and with a limited understanding of the scope of SELPA level supports and work.</td>
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SELPA Technical Assistance

SELPA Technical Assistance

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<th>SELPAs are leading the way in special education reform in California through their work as System Improvement Leads and Content Leads under the CCEE initiatives and at the local level.</th>
<th>SELPAs necessarily play lead roles in Differentiated Assistance work related to students with disabilities without additional funding for this purpose.</th>
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<td>Compliance monitoring responsibilities for SELPAs and LEAs have grown significantly in reviewing and certifying LEA data, monitoring multiple CALPADS reports, and meeting changing deadlines and expectations of CDE, a new reality notably neglected in the study.</td>
<td>Recommendations made in the absence of in-depth analysis and discussion of the interconnectedness and necessary alignment of compliance, monitoring, funding, and technical support should be considered with caution.</td>
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### STUDY QUALITY

Significant reforms to funding and services to students with disabilities, like those contemplated in the WestEd study, deserve honest, unbiased exploration, with a focus on programmatic needs as opposed to solely funding.

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<th>The study uses flawed methodology by triangulating multi-LEA SELPA allocation data, already incongruous data sets, in lieu of a traditional systematic analysis. Survey content, data, and item analysis is not provided, a standard practice in the industry.</th>
<th>This study is privately funded by the same two entities who financed the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) report on special education finance in 2016, which manifested a similar anti-SELPA bias despite overwhelming local support for SELPAs.</th>
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<td>Numerous instances of editorial language and value statements appear throughout the study, and the authors’ assumptions and perspectives appear to be based on information not provided in the study or appendices.</td>
<td>While the study authors collected allocation plan information from SELPA administrators, only one SELPA administrator was personally consulted in the course of completing the study.</td>
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NEXT STEPS

Share messages from this presentation that especially resonate for your LEA or SELPA with educational leaders, influencers, and policy makers as appropriate between now and May.

Join us in advocating for meaningful change in special education finance through membership in the Coalition for Adequate Funding for Special Education or other similar coalitions.

Ask your LEA or organization to routinely sign on to support letters for legislation aimed at improving outcomes and funding for special education.
THANKS

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