

# SB 692 (Cortese)

## Special Education Inclusion Act

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### SUMMARY

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Existing state policies and practices encourage the segregation of students with disabilities into separate classes even when students are capable of keeping pace with their peers. By adding an existing federal inclusion indicator (5a) to the state accountability dashboard, this bill would incentivize districts to offer additional inclusive options to students with disabilities. It would also motivate districts to provide general education teachers with training and professional development on teaching strategies for the most common disabilities such as ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia, and autism.

### BACKGROUND

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The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires schools to educate students with disabilities in the “least restrictive environment” (LRE) (i.e. the general education classroom) to the greatest extent appropriate based on each pupil’s unique abilities. This federal requirement stems from years of research-based evidence indicating that students with disabilities (SWDs) do better academically and social-emotionally when they are included in general education instruction and activities with their peers. Yet only 53% of California’s SWDs spend most of their time in a general education classroom. This rate of LRE/inclusion is extremely low in comparison to the national average of 63%.

The California state accountability dashboard includes 7 academic and school climate indicators and targets that districts strive to meet for all students and each student subgroup (e.g. SWDs, low-income, foster youth, etc.). The expectation is not that schools reach 100% on any of the indicators, but that they work toward improvement. A district that fails to meet indicator targets for a specified number of years is provided with technical assistance and intervention strategies to help identify the “root cause” of issues. Since creation of the dashboard, the state has made significant progress in reducing suspension/ expulsion rates, chronic absenteeism, and drop-out rates.

However, there has been little improvement for SWDs. In the last decade California has made almost no progress toward greater inclusion of SWDs in general education classes. It is therefore unsurprising that in 2019, SWDs scored on average 88 points and 119 points below standard on state standardized English and math assessments, respectively. Meanwhile, states that have increased their inclusion/LRE rates over the last decade (e.g. Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Florida) have seen parallel increases in academic achievement for SWDs.<sup>i</sup>

Teacher surveys indicate that a lack of training and professional development is a significant barrier to inclusion of SWDs. Until last year, California credentialing programs for general education teachers did not include performance expectations on teaching strategies and frameworks that optimize education for students with individual learning differences. As a result, more than 80% of current teachers do not feel well-prepared to teach students with mild/moderate disabilities like ADHD and dyslexia.<sup>ii</sup>

### THIS BILL

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- By adding an existing federal inclusion/LRE indicator to the state accountability dashboard, this bill would encourage districts to offer more inclusive options to students with disabilities.
- This bill would also incentivize districts to use existing resources to provide general education teachers with training and professional development on teaching strategies and frameworks that optimize education for students with individual learning differences.

### STAFF CONTACT

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### SPONSORS

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<sup>i</sup> [https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/r\\_humphrey\\_feb20\\_0.pdf](https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/r_humphrey_feb20_0.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.ncld.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Forward-Together\\_NCLD-report.pdf](https://www.ncld.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Forward-Together_NCLD-report.pdf)