



#INSIGHTS

EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Challenges in Providing a Quality Education for Young Children with Disabilities in California

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates equal educational opportunities for young children with disabilities and specifies that this education be provided in inclusive environments to the greatest extent possible. However, just one in five young children with a disability in California are in inclusive educational settings (One System, 2015).

Teachers are a critical component in providing high-quality, inclusive early childhood education (ECE) for children with special needs, yet **there is a shortage of Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) and general education teachers who are well-prepared to teach in inclusive settings** (CA Special Education Task Force, 2014-15). Research suggests that many early childhood teachers do not have the training to work effectively with families of young children with disabilities (Bruder, 2010) nor do they feel adequately prepared to work with young children in inclusive settings (Chang, Early, & Winton, 2005).

Addressing the Challenge: ECSE Accelerated Credential Program

In 2016 California State University, Dominguez Hills launched SELECT-LA, a research-based, accelerated ECSE credential program to respond to the need for qualified ECSE teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District, specifically in high-needs schools. SELECT-LA will prepare 60 teachers and is unique in offering an accelerated pathway to teaching in early childhood special needs with a focus on family-centered and inclusion practices. Program participants become university intern teachers in inclusive settings where they co-teach with general education teachers after one summer of coursework and field experience. As intern teachers, participants are highly supported by university and district coaches to be successful in the classroom. After one year of teaching and completion of additional coursework, candidates earn a preliminary ECSE credential.

Evaluation Findings – Year 1

Vital Research (VR) was contracted as the project evaluator to examine the implementation process and targeted outcomes. As a member of the management team, VR contributes to program development based on data and evaluative thinking. Surveys, focus groups, and interviews were conducted throughout the first year of implementation to assess the successes and challenges of the model. Based on program management and participant feedback the following are essential components in making the accelerated ECSE credential a success:

- **Blend theory with practice;** coursework provides a theoretical foundation, which classroom practice reinforces.

- Immediate placement in inclusive settings is necessary so theory is translated into practice right away.
- Forecasting ECSE teaching needs is challenging and **placements in inclusive settings remain limited.**
- Strong partner relations are vital to the placement process.
- **Financial support was essential** for students during summer coursework given the intensive model.

During the next phase of implementation, it will be important to document classroom practices and child outcomes. Coaching data regarding site visits will be analyzed to explore the extent to which key family-centered and inclusive practices are implemented. Student data will be analyzed to evaluate impact on development.



RESOURCES & REFERENCES

POLICY AND ADVOCACY

1. U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education
Dear Colleague Letter Related to Preschool Least Restrictive
Environments

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/preschool-lre-dcl-1-10-17.pdf>

2. U.S. Dept. of Education and Health and Human Services
Policy Letter on the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in
Early Childhood Programs

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/earlylearning/joint-statement-full-text.pdf>

3. Early childhood inclusion: A joint position statement of the
Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association
for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2009).

https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/DEC_NAEYC_EC_updatedKS.pdf

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

1. Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional
Children: Recommended Practices (2014)

<http://www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices>

RESEARCH

1. Bruder, M. B. (2010). Early childhood intervention: A
promise to children and families for their future. *Exceptional
children*, 76(3), 339-355.

2. Report of California's Statewide Task Force on Special
Education March 2015. *One System: Reforming Education to
Serve ALL Students*.

3. Winton P.J. (2016). Taking stock and moving forward:
Implementing quality early childhood inclusive practices. In:
Reichow B., Boyd B., Barton E., Odom S. (eds) *Handbook of
Early Childhood Special Education*. Springer, Cham.