



State of Alaska Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education

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Background

As the State Advisory Panel on Special Education, the Council is concerned about funding for special education. Many administrators have concerns related to child count, intensive needs funding and overall special education funding. The Council decided to gather more information from school districts about the extent of the problem and recommendations.

Survey Questions

1. Approximately how many students eligible for special education come into your district after the fall child count?
2. Approximately how many students eligible for special education services leave your district after the fall child count?
3. Approximately what percentage of the new students do you provide intensive services to?
4. What impact does this have on your staff? On services?
5. Do you have any comments related to this issue or about state special education funding in general?

Responses to Questions

Question 1: Number of students eligible for special education after child count (16 responses – 30%)

On the average, districts have **10 new students coming into special education after the child count**. The largest district cites more than a thousand new special education students after child count.

Question 2: Number of students leaving the district after the fall child count? (16 responses – 30%)

On the average, districts have **4 special education students leaving** after the child count.

Question 3: Percentage of new students receiving intensive needs services (9 responses – 16%)

Responses ranged from 1 % to nearly 50%. The **average was 10%** of new students coming in after child count who qualified for intensive services.

Question 4: How does special education funding impact staffing and service provision? (22 responses = 41 %)

Child Count Issue

- Almost all districts receive or identify students needing special education after the child count. Almost all districts reported losing fewer special education students than the number they gained
- School districts are required under federal and state law to continuously do child find, but the final funding count is complete in October
- The teacher to student ratio is increased when new students come in after the count, stretching everything thin

Intensive Needs Issue

- Specialized equipment was almost always needed to meet intensive needs
- Intensive needs students enter the district with little or no notification
- Funding for intensive services does not begin to cover the costs

Funding – Staffing

- Districts struggle to find funding to pay additional staff
- Salary and fringe benefits are greater than cost of five times the regular average daily membership for intensive needs funding per child
- Principles of economy of scale do not apply in small, rural districts so funds are spent for out-of-state related services providers and/or running extended school year for one student
- Finding additional support staff with requisite skills is demanding to impossible
- More and more students with severe behavioral problems are in school, not meeting the criteria for intensive needs, but putting a drain on staff supervision, training and resources
- There is constant realigning of staff and resources over the course of the year to adjust to increasing service needs
- Help is requested to find a way for OTs, PTs and SLPs traveling through the Pribilofs to cross over to work with school age population. There is not good sharing of specialists
- Given that teachers in a large rural district serve as General Educators and Special Educators in K-6 and K-12 settings, it is a challenge to balance the needs of all students especially with new school accountability obligations
- Funding is needed for pre-referral intervention to provide staff and programs, for example for small group reading
- 20% for special education, vocational education and bilingual isn't adequate
- Special Education staff are continually forced to "beg, borrow and steal"
- Services are understaffed, leaving teachers with high caseloads and high burnout
- Expectations continue to rise while funding does not, which leaves parents and teachers frustrated
- Travel expenses take a huge chunk out of the budget

Question 5: Solutions and ideas suggested by Special Education Directors/Coordinators (11 responses = 20%)

Ideas on Child Count

- Conduct a monthly child count such as Washington state does
- Conduct a mid-year count (in February) to make adjustments for new students
- Consider a quarterly funding count

Ideas on Funding - Staffing

- State Department of EED should have a contingency fund for serving high needs students who do not qualify for intensive funding
- Funding could be used to find, keep and train high qualified and dedicated staff
- The State Department of EED can hold back 6B funds for emergency purposes
- Put more funding into Preschool and Head Start, since we know early intervention works
- The State could provide funding for districts to hire OT, PTs and SLPs
- Start a scholarship fund for allowing districts to support funding of developing specialists – like the old Alaska Student Loan program, where if you stay in district your loans are decreased
- Revisit the report of the taskforce established by the legislature (under Dr. Covey published in 1993 or 1994)
- Increase Special Education funding 10 – 15 %

The Council's is interested in collaborating with the Department, the State Board of and other stakeholders to

explore options for determining child count and amending the process as appropriate

examine the funding formula for special education