

2016 SPECIAL EDUCATION REPORT

Meeting The Needs of Every Student Through Inclusion

A Qualitative Study of Ten California Charter Schools

The Study

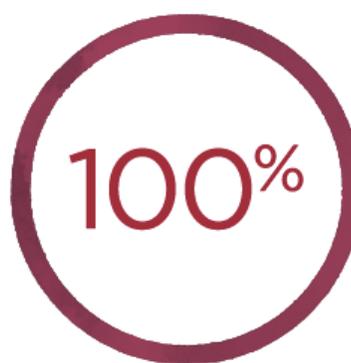
The California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) conducted a year-long study of 10 charter public schools across the state that are improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Through interviews of both general education and special education staff and administrators, conducting classroom visits, and delving into program design, CCSA was able to identify the effective and innovative special education practices these schools implemented and highlight the specific policy environments that help these charter schools meet the needs of all their students.

The Why: Charter School Values, Philosophy and Approach

CCSA's study found that these schools:

- Embrace student differences;
- Educate students with disabilities in inclusive environments;
- Tailor programs and supports to individual student needs; and,
- Build a supportive school community.

In fact, according to the study, 100% of charter school leaders and teachers at these schools stated that the best way to ensure students with disabilities meet grade level requirements is to have them fully included in general education settings. And according to data from the California Department of Education (CDE), 88% of students with disabilities in charter school local education agencies (LEAs)* are in the general education setting for the majority of their school day.



School leaders and teachers agreed the best way to ensure students with disabilities met grade level standards was to have them fully included in general education classes

Source: analysis of interview transcripts across participating schools



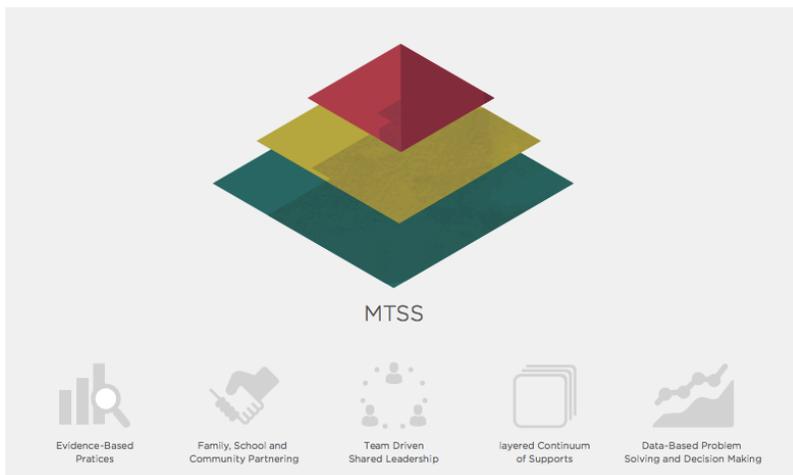
Of students with disabilities in charter school LEAs are in general education for the majority of their school day.

Source: USDE Office of Special Education Programs - CA FFY 2014 Part B State Performance Plan (SPP)/Annual Performance Report (APR)

**See "The How" below.*

The What: Ways in Which Services and Supports Were Provided

The study found systems that worked for students with disabilities were the same systems that worked for **ALL** students, including:



- Layered interventions, or Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)*;
- Data-driven instruction and accountability; and,
- Family and community partnerships.

**Not all schools used MTSS, but all identified a school-wide support model to offer a comprehensive and responsive framework for systemically addressing student academic, behavioral, and socioemotional needs.*

The How: Local Policy Elements Enabling Successful Models to Function

CCSA's study found the following school structures and systems made it possible for these charter schools to realize their vision and mission for educating students with disabilities:

- **Independent LEA in a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA):** Allows charter to attain full autonomy and flexibility over their special education funding and programs, allowing schools to hire the right staff and create high-quality, individualized programs for students.
- **LEA-like environments:** Charter school creates an agreement with their authorizing school district to secure funding and programmatic freedom for special education services.

Nine Elements of Successful Special Education Programs

Data from the report shows that the charter schools CCSA visited were able to successfully meet the needs of their students with disabilities because they based their program on the following nine key elements:

1. **Philosophy of inclusion.** Students with disabilities in these schools were educated predominantly in content-rich, general education settings.
2. **Individualization and tailoring programs to student needs.** Schools were highly adaptable and built individualized supports around student needs rather than placing students into predetermined settings.
3. **Flexibility and autonomy.** Schools sought autonomy in special education, which allowed them to make local programmatic decisions and build the full array of supports and services necessary to meet the unique needs of their students.
4. **Supportive school community.** Schools deliberately worked on creating and maintaining a positive school community where differences are celebrated and staff and students support one another.
5. **Multi-tiered support systems.** Schools implemented clearly-defined, team-based, data-driven systems to combine general and special education supports within a framework focused on prevention and intervention, regardless of disability.
6. **Family and community partnerships.** Schools built strong partnerships with families and community organizations to develop support networks around their students.
7. **Cutting-edge technologies and practices.** Schools embraced innovative and emergent approaches to providing services for students with disabilities.
8. **Staff development.** Schools implemented rigorous recruitment and professional development practices to ensure that general and special education teachers and staff were prepared to meet the needs of all students.
9. **Constant refinement and improvement of programs.** Schools continually evaluated and refined their practices to match the evolving needs of their students.

"[Our Philosophy] Is making sure that you are always thinking that the child is a general education student first... Here's your general education student who has some special needs; not here is a special education student."

- SCHOOL LEADER, OXFORD PREPARATORY ACADEMY

Participating California Charter Schools

- CHIME Institute's Schwarzenegger Community School, Woodland Hills, CA
- EJE Middle Academy, El Cajon, CA*
- Gabriella Charter School, Los Angeles, CA*
- Oakland School for the Arts, Oakland, CA
- Literacy First, El Cajon, CA
- Magnolia Science Academy 7, Northridge, CA
- Multicultural Learning Center, Canoga Park, CA
- Oxford Preparatory Academy, Chino, CA
- KIPP Raíces, East Los Angeles, CA**
- Santa Rosa Academy, Menifee, CA.

*2016 California Gold Ribbon Winner

**Honored with National Blue Ribbon Award

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