

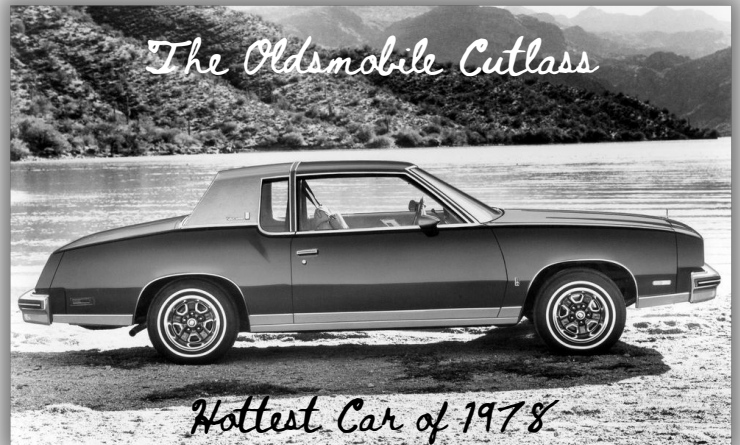
SELPA Accountability, Innovation & Design

An IDEA Whose Time Has Come

For over forty years, Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA), in partnership with the California Department of Education (CDE), have provided programs, services, and support to students with disabilities (SWDs), their families, and local educational agencies (LEAs), and have successfully implemented numerous federal and state education reform efforts. The State's continued investment in and reliance on well-established SELPA regional structures demonstrates the high levels of trust, effectiveness, and quality support SELPAs provide.

Over the past several decades, the number of SWDs has consistently grown to over 760,000, and trends show students are being identified with more significant disabilities. The costs of providing programs and services has grown significantly, the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) contribution has diminished, and LEA general fund contributions have increased. At the same time, improved accountability systems have required greater focus and attention on statewide priorities to address equity and improve student outcomes.

There is great variety among SELPAs in type and structure, level of interaction with general education, and in the amount of centralized SELPA supports they provide, all based on their unique structures and local priorities. Some LEAs are large enough to be their own SELPA, while other SELPAs consist of two to over 30 LEAs who team together to provide a continuum of options for all students within their boundaries. Some SELPAs allocate most of funding to LEAs while others reserve some funding for regionalized programs utilized by member LEAs. This variance is allowed and expected, and it is explained in each SELPA's approved local plan.



The original design and focus on of the SELPA structure was based on the needs and requirements of IDEA in 1978 terms, which was primarily to ensure access and educational opportunity for SWDs and to give SELPA governing boards flexibility in the local decision-making necessary to provide these programs and services to their communities in economies of scale.

While that need remains, the reauthorization of the ESEA as the No Child Left Behind Act and subsequent reauthorization of IDEIA in 2004 IDEIA shifted our focus from "access and opportunity" to "accountability and improving outcomes," even adding an "I" for "improvement" to "IDEA." As California developed its plans for accountability, the SELPA structure has remained relatively unchanged.

We have a rare opportunity, right now, to re-engineer our SELPA structure for the next half of the 21st century and beyond by acknowledging, and planning for, the growing emphasis on accountability; by leveraging and strengthening coordinated state-level technical assistance leadership; and by giving greater attention and support to California's focus on improving student outcomes at the SELPA level.



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Designing Forward to Improve Student Outcomes

Reimagining the role of SELPAs for the present day and beyond will require a unity of purpose and action by the Legislature and educational partners at all levels. California's vision for special education is guided by the principles of equity, inclusive practices, local decision-making, accountability, transparency, and alignment. To achieve this vision, the SELPA Administrators of California offers **FOUR** overarching recommendations that will reestablish the role of SELPAs as agents of strategic change in partnership with the state and LEAs. Acting on these recommendations begins with a shared recognition of the vital role SELPAs play and a willingness to engage them in the important work ahead.

1 Clarify the role of SELPA in Education Code

Clearly state in Education Code and in the State Systemic Improvement Plan that, in addition to ensuring the provision of equitable, efficient sustainable programs and services across all regions of California through local decision-making, SELPAs are accountable for implementing local plans that focus on statewide priorities of equity, inclusive practices in the least restrictive environment, providing technical assistance, and improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

2 Expand investments in the System Improvement Network

Legislatively commit funds for the structural, fiscal, and human resources necessary to speed and strengthen implementation of statewide priorities within LEAs and SELPAs across California, in collaboration with the CDE and partner agencies within the Statewide System of Support and beyond via the System Improvement Network.

3 Provide SELPA-specific funding in AB 602

Establish a new and distinct AB 602 allocation for Regionalized Services for "Statewide Priorities" or "System Improvement" to directly support the alignment of SELPA structures within the System Improvement Network to address the statewide priorities of achieving equity, improving outcomes for SWDs, and creating more inclusive educational environments.

4 Remove barriers to inclusion and build inclusive supportive practices

Remove instances of Education Code nomenclature that contribute to segregated student placements; ensure that key teacher and administrator preparation faculty and credential candidates are well-trained in inclusive practices; require state-level review of appropriate staffing levels and requisite funding; and provide that future legislation related to instruction promotes inclusive practices.

