

The FISCAL REPORT *an informational update*

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Ask SSC . . . Can You Explain the Special Education Staffing Ratio Data From the May Revision Workshop?

Q. During the May Revision Workshop, some class size/caseload averages and staffing ratios were shared. Where did the data come from, and are these School Services of California, Inc.'s (SSC) recommended guidelines for staffing Special Education programs?

A. Let's start with the last question first. The class size/caseload averages and staffing ratios on slides 120 and 121 of the May Revision **are not** SSC recommended guidelines. Annually, we conduct a large number of Special Education studies for local educational agencies (LEAs) across the state. In our studies, we conduct comparative analyses of class size/caseloads and staffing ratios based on a voluntary survey of similar districts in the client district's region. In the current and three previous fiscal years, more than 98 districts have participated in one of these studies. The data on slides 120 and 121 represent class size/caseload and staffing ratio averages based on these 98 districts. The data was provided for comparative purposes only and is not meant to be a standard or best practice.

Many years ago, SSC provided Special Education staffing ratio and class size/caseload guidelines. These guidelines were based on a statewide survey conducted by SSC more than two decades ago. We discontinued their use more than five years ago as they lacked relevance, particularly in light of increasing compliance demands, changes in the incidence of disabilities across the state, and the evolution of more inclusive options for students with disabilities.

As LEAs work to contain the rising costs of Special Education, conducting comparative analyses of expenditure data, number of students served, and staffing data can illuminate areas of concern. But data is only part of the story. Understanding fully what is driving Special Education costs requires careful study of Special Education data. It is well worth the effort to collect, monitor, and compare data to ensure an LEA's ability to continue to provide quality, defensible, and cost-effective programs.

—*Suzanne Speck and Debbie Fry*

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