

**IMPERIAL COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY**

Volume Three – October 1998

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From the Director

The purpose of this Special Schools Report to the Community is to provide information about our program, the students and families we serve, and the progress we have made during the past year. First, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you. If this is your first contact with our organization a special welcome goes out to you. It is extremely difficult for families to learn that their child has a disability and may not be attending the regular program at their home school, but instead will need the services offered through the Imperial County Office of Education. I hope you quickly felt reassured by the dedicated staff we have working with our organization and their commitment to you and your child. There is a special feeling shared by all of us working in the program that the individuals and families that we serve are extremely important to us. Please take time to become actively involved with your child's school and become a partner in the development of exciting learning and growing opportunities.

Since our report to you last year there have been some changes in the Special Schools Program. We have opened a class at Mains Elementary School in Calexico. The students attending this class previously attended Imperial Valley Center for Exceptional Children (IVCEC). However, parents voiced concerns regarding lengthy transportation times and the fact that they

preferred their child to be educated closer to home. We worked collaboratively with Calexico Elementary School District and the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) who authorized us to lease/purchase a portable facility to house the program. Working with the Special Education Local Plan Area Executive Board, Occupational Therapy services have been moved to under our program. We have remodeled IVCEC to develop office and therapy space as well as a technology lab with direct Internet connection to the Imperial County Office of Education.

We look forward to working with you through the year. It is wonderful when we can work collaboratively to better meet student needs.

IMPERIAL COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION MISSION STATEMENT

The Imperial County Office of Education is committed to providing service and leadership to the community, school districts and staff through a supportive environment for risk taking and growth that will encourage effective communication, value diversity and respect differences.

IMPERIAL COUNTY SCHOOLS SPECIAL EDUCATION MISSION STATEMENT

To provide outstanding programs which maximize opportunities for all students to become responsible, productive citizens through a relevant curriculum provided by a highly trained staff responsive to the community, working collaboratively with parents and other support agencies.

VISION STATEMENT

We believe students come first. We share with the family and community the responsibility for each student's growth and development in an environment that is responsive to ever changing individual and societal needs. We believe in working with the child as a whole by development of an educational program that is broad in scope, well defined and focused with the state frameworks. This is achieved through a meaningful curriculum, which includes community experiences, opportunities to interact with regular peers, and relevant classroom instruction. Planning and implementation requires collaboration between all stakeholders and active participation of parents, students, staff and the community. We believe an outstanding educational program can best be achieved by highly qualified and professionally trained staff and families committed to on-going refinement of skills through life long learning in safe, well-equipped and maintained facilities.

Teaching and Learning

Our Programs

The Imperial County Office of Education provides direct instructional services to a variety of high-risk students throughout the Imperial Valley. Programs providing services include alternative education, pregnant minors program, language speech

and hearing, services for students with visual impairments, hearing impairments, severe developmental delays, as well as an infant/toddler program. Classes are located on community based sites throughout the valley and at the Imperial Valley Center for Exceptional Children (IVCEC).

The program provides services for students living in all seventeen school districts within the Imperial Valley. The students in our program have a variety of disabilities, and face unique challenges.

Our program includes a wide range of services. Services include specialized health care, speech and language services, occupational therapy, mobility and orientation training for students with severe visual impairments, sign language interpreters for students with hearing impairments. Assistive technology is provided to students with orthopedic, visual and hearing impairments, as well as to other students based on an assessment of the student's individual needs.

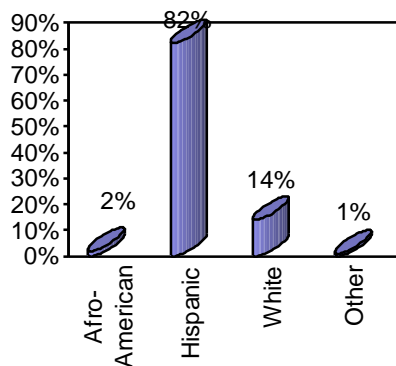
In addition the SELPA (Special Education Local Planning Area) provides services including adaptive physical education evaluation and program specialist consultation. A behavior specialist is available to assist in identifying and establishing positive interventions for use with students presenting behavioral challenges. All of the programs make efforts to maximize opportunities for the students to have meaningful interaction with their non-disabled peers.

The student population is sixty-two percent male and thirty-eight percent females.

Sixty-seven percent of students receiving special education services are typically male

students based on state and national statistics.

The ethnic diversity of the program is represented by the graph below.



Instruction and Materials

During 1997-98, the Imperial County Department of Special Education used a variety of instructional materials and equipment to maximize student learning. Selection of these educational materials is based on each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and identified handicapping condition.

Students identified as having severe developmental delays are provided instruction in the areas of community, domestic, recreation-leisure, self-help, and vocational skills as well as functional academics. Materials are purchased to support the acquisition of skills within these curriculum domains.

Supplies and equipment may include adaptive equipment, such as special switches and devices - to interact with a variety of

functional programs, computers and specialized software programs, as well as remedial academic materials for teaching functional reading and math skills.

Instructional materials are also selected to enhance communication and language development. In addition, materials for vocational training are reviewed and selected.

Additional funding is available through the State for each student identified as having a "low-incidence disability." Low incidence disabilities are defined by the state as: Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Visually Impaired, Orthopedically Impaired, and Deaf- Blind. Purchases from these funds must be approved by the IEP team and must directly relate to the unique educational need(s) of that particular student.

Students in classes identified with hearing impairments may be provided with additional regular textbooks. Students with visual impairments may be provided with Braille or large print materials based on identified need(s).

Students in alternative education are provided regular and special education materials based on identified instructional need(s).

A technology team is in place to help select technology to meet identified needs and provide coordination of purchases to insure school funds are used effectively

Student/ Teacher Ratios

Twenty-five special education teachers are employed to serve approximately 262 students in special day classes located

throughout the community and at the center. Special day classes average ten students with one teacher and two instructional aides. The infant-toddler program provides services both in home and classroom for an additional 34 students. Approximately 165 additional students are provided services through either alternative education, or itinerant services for students identified as having visual impairments or as having speech and language needs.

Standards and Assessment

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (I.D.E.A.) which replaced Public Law 94-142 mandates guidelines for assessment, the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) process and placement of students. Assessments are scheduled and completed in accord with mandated guidelines. Student's IEP's are reviewed annually. Parents have the right to request an IEP review or an assessment if they believe one is indicated.

The purpose of the IEP process is to develop an effective education plan for the student. The IEP process serves as a medium for team interaction - parent, staff, and other care providers and students (when appropriate) to design and implement goals/objectives specific to meet those needs.

Prior to the annual IEP, staff members make efforts to contact the parent(s) or guardian(s) to complete the parent-home inventory to insure parent input in the development of the IEP. Within the IEP, student progress is reported and current levels of functioning identified. Diagnostic information focuses on the student increased performance levels and overall development. Goals and objectives are developed based on identified areas of need, for the coming year in the

functional domains of community, domestic, recreation/leisure, self-help, vocational, functional academics, communication, and/or other areas as needed.

Student achievement is broadly defined for the student population served by the ICOE, Department of Special Education due to the diversity of abilities and needs demonstrated by the individual students being served. Progress on short-term objectives is monitored on a regular basis by classroom staff to insure annual goals are being achieved. Report cards were introduced this year to regularly update parents on student progress. Additionally, modifications in teaching strategies and techniques are constantly evaluated and modified to insure progress on annual goals. Overall, students achieved 47% of their annual goals/objectives for the 97/98 school year.

All students participate in district/statewide assessments with or without accommodations unless exempted from participation through the IEP process or by parent request. Progress for students exempted from participation in the district/statewide assessments is measured through achievement of IEP goals/objectives and progress on a criterion-referenced assessment tool called the Brigance Inventory of Early Development or the Brigance Inventory of Basic Skills depending upon the student's level of functioning and age.

The IEP meetings are well attended. Active participation of all team members is encouraged. Decision-making is based on mutual respect, active participation and listening in order to build cooperative relationships supportive of student learning. Open, respectful communication between

the home, school and other service providers
is essential in fostering student success.

Student Attendance

Research clearly shows students who attend school regularly are much more successful in school and after. School attendance during the 1997-98 school year was 88% compared to 87% for the 1996-97 school year.

Monthly attendance reports are filed through the Department of Special Education, ICOE and with the State Department of Education, Educational Finance Division.

Home teaching is provided when students are too medically fragile to be transported to school or long absences due to illness occur. Extended year attendance is also reported on the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) records.

Linkages Among Schools, Parents and Communities

School Facilities and Safety

Student and staff safety is extremely important. The Imperial County, Department of Special Education works closely with sites on which community-based classes are located to maintain the facility at maximum efficiency. The principal at the center works with the county office, the staff and community agencies such as the police and fire department to insure the center is safe place for students.

Monthly school safety emergency drills are conducted. Reports are sent to the Imperial County Department of Education for review. Additionally, the center has been actively working on updating and revising earthquake procedures during the last year to

better meet the needs of non-ambulatory students.

Routine inspections of general maintenance and playground equipment are completed. Equipment identified as unsafe is removed from student access.

Community-based classrooms are required to follow the safety procedures of the site on which they are housed.

Parent Involvement

Parents are an integral part of any child's success. All the current research indicates students do much better both in school and beyond when parents are involved and supportive of school programs. The ICOE, Department of Special Education encourages parent participation through the Parent Teachers Organization and through disability specific parent groups.

A parent survey is given to parents at the end of each Individual Educational Planning (IEP) meeting to assure quality control of the process itself. Below see the results of the surveys for the 1997-98 school year. The rating scale used consists of a high, medium or low rating. Space for comments are also included on the form.

Interest Area

1. Did you feel comfortable during the home visit?

High = 94% Medium = 3% Low = 3%

2. Was it an effective way to gather information in preparation for the IEP?

High = 95% Medium = 3% Low = 2%

3. Were you encouraged to express concerns/needs and provide input into goals areas that should be addressed in the IEP?

High = 95% Medium = 3% Low = 2%

IEP Meeting

1. Were you encouraged to attend and participate?

High = 93% Medium = 5% Low = 2%

2. Were you notified early enough about the meeting?

High = 95% Medium = 5% Low = 0%

3. Was it scheduled at a mutually convenient time? If not did the district reschedule the meeting?

High = 92% Medium = 5% Low = 3%

4. If you couldn't attend the meeting were you asked for input?

High = 88% Medium = 4% Low = 8%

5. Did you as a parent have an opportunity to share information about your child at the meeting?

High = 98% Medium = 2% Low = 0%

6. Did you participate in decisions regarding the program content and placement of your child?

High = 100% Medium = 0% Low = 0%

7. Did you feel all of your child's needs were addressed?

High = 93% Medium = 7% Low = 0%

8. Did you feel a completed IEP was presented to you in which changes could not be made to address your concerns or child's needs?

High = 92% Medium = 3% Low = 5%

9. Did you understand the IEP development process?

High = 90% Medium = 10% Low = 0%

10. Were you given a copy of the IEP?

High = 100% Medium = 0% Low = 0%

For Limited English Proficient Parents Only

1. If you needed an interpreter, was one provided?

High = 100% Medium = 0% Low = 0%

2. Did you feel comfortable with the meeting in it's translated form?

High = 96% Medium = 4% Low = 0%

3. Were you told of your right to a written translation of the IEP document?

High = 100% Medium = 6% Low = 6%

4. Did you understand the proceedings at the meeting?

High = 100% Medium = 0% Low = 0%

Community Agencies

All ICOE - special education departments work collaboratively with other community agencies such as California Children Services (CCS), Regional Center, SELPA, the Department of Rehabilitation, Child Protective Services, Imperial Valley College etc. to coordinate services for students. Administrators from community agencies attend A Multi-Cultural Interagency Group Offering Services (AMIGOS) meetings to maintain and develop on-going working relationships between all caregivers.

Additionally, the Department of Special Education has developed relationships with other service organizations to either provide

support for student programs or to provide a basis of interaction between regular education and special education students.

Collaborative relationships exist between IVCEC and DeAnza Elementary and Kids-R-Us preschool. Also, other regular education students from other schools and children's organizations are invited to participate in events at the center.

Community agencies that have ongoing cooperative relationships with the ICOE, Special Education department includes the Rotary Club of El Centro, the Elks, Equestrian Therapy Riding, and the Kiwanis Club. Each of these organizations has provided special programs or funds to meet student needs.

Governance and Finance

The SELPA Severely Handicapped Task Force provides guidance to the budgetary decision making process. The task force is composed of representatives from the sending districts, the County Director of Special Education, and the County Superintendent of Schools.

During the 1997-98 school year, approximately 92% of the budget was expended on classroom instruction or student support services. Student support services include language and speech services, interpreter services, assistive technology services, vision services occupational therapy services, behavioral specialist services, psychological services, etc.

Approximately 8% of the budget was spend on central office supervision, administration,

and indirect costs. Transportation costs are paid for by the student's home district.

Assignment of Teachers

Teachers are assigned to classes through the interview process by the director of special education and the interview committee. The teacher's training, credential, experience and interests are taken into consideration when making classroom assignments. If a teacher is interested in working at a different school, the teacher submits a written request to personnel.

Substitute Teachers

When teachers are absent, it is important to hire the highest quality substitute teachers possible. The continuity and quality of the program depends on the ability of substitutes to maintain the highest quality of instruction.

The Department of Special Education has been having difficulty attracting and maintaining substitute teachers. The rural nature of the Valley increases this difficulty. This problem is related to the national shortage of teachers in general. Active recruitment for substitute teachers is ongoing.

Student Support Services

The Imperial County Department of Education provides a range of Student Support Services to pupils participating in the various Special School programs. These support services are provided on an individualized basis to pupils identified as needing such service through the IEP process.

The following support services are available for ICOE pupils:

Staff Positions

Sign Language Interpreters (15.75 FTE's)

Instructional Assistants & Spanish Language Interpreters (48 FTE's)

Nurses (2)

Orientation and Mobility (.15)

Psychologists (2.3)

Health Care Assistants (1)

Visually Impaired Services & Assistants (4.6 FTE's)

Occupational Therapy (2.67 FTE's)

In addition, pupils in need of Physical therapy are provided service through California Children Services (CCS).

While teamwork is important for the success of regular education students, it is even more critical for students with special needs. ICOE is committed to working cooperatively with parents to facilitate a successful educational experience for all pupils with special needs. Students need the mutual support of both parents and educators to reach their maximum potential.

Classroom Discipline and Climate for Learning

The Imperial County Department of Special Education Program stresses the use of consistent, well-planned behavioral guidelines with students. Discipline is built

on providing meaningful instruction stressing functional and developmental skills aligned with the student's current level of performance. Additionally, a positive approach is emphasized. This includes praising students for their efforts on a regular basis and giving directions in a positive manner. Additionally, IVCEC has instituted monthly awards assemblies this year to recognize students for their efforts in achieving IEP goals/objectives, good attendance and improved behavior. We believe recognizing good work builds continued success.

Resources are available to assist staff in meeting the needs of individual students. A behavior specialist is available if needed upon request from SELPA. Specific training in effective behavior management techniques is offered to all staff, as needed. Behavioral Intervention Plans (B.I.P.s) are developed to address the unique behavioral needs of some students. These require parental consent and are developed through the cooperative efforts of parent and staff. The purpose is to create an environment, which both address student safety issues and provides a more supportive environment for the individual student him/herself.

Many of our students participate in activities with regular education peers. These activities range from sharing recesses and lunch, to participating in physical fitness programs, art and music classes. The program encourages interaction between all students. Students at IVCEC interact with regular education peers through a variety of mechanisms. IVCEC students may attend assemblies with DeAnza students, DeAnza provides peer tutors to assist with student learning in the center, preschool students from IVCEC are mainstreamed to the Kids-R-Us preschool as appropriate to participate

in language development, art, and gross and fine motor activities. Also, regular education students (elementary and secondary) are invited to attend and participate in events at the center. These activities provide excellent opportunities for social interaction. They also help non-disabled students learn more about students, who have disabilities. Some students are fully included into regular classes based upon IEP team recommendations. We are always looking for new ways to involve our students in general education.

Teacher Evaluations

All teachers employed with the Department of Special Education are evaluated on a regular basis. Administrators use the "Clinical Supervision" model to evaluate certificated staff. The evaluation process was developed jointly by teachers and administrators, and adopted and approved by the Imperial County Office of Education.

The purpose of the teacher evaluation is to provide teachers and evaluators a means of measuring observable professional competencies related to student achievement. It also provides a means for encouraging continued professional growth. Evaluation is an open-ended, ongoing, positive process. The teacher and evaluator mutually develop the goals on which the evaluation is based.

Special Schools Administration

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