

# 2020-21 Annual Report by Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee

Submitted to:  
**The Colorado State Board of Education**

**Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee (CSEAC)**  
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November 2021

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The Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee  
is staffed by  
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**COLORADO**  
Department of Education



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## What is the Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee?

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The Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee (CSEAC) is a state level committee mandated by federal and state law. CSEAC seeks to assist the Colorado State Board of Education in meeting its responsibilities for the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Colorado's Exceptional Children's Educational Act (ECEA). CSEAC's membership is made up of individuals involved in or concerned with the education of children with disabilities. While the CSEAC has representatives from CDE, higher education, Administrative Units (AUs), and other state agencies within the state, it is primarily made up of individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities. CSEAC members are appointed by the Colorado State Board of Education.

To fulfill its obligation to provide support to the State Board of Education, CSEAC engages in the following activities:

- CSEAC may advise the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) of unmet needs within the State in the education of children with disabilities;
- CSEAC may comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities;
- CSEAC may, as needed, advise the CDE on the development of evaluations and the reporting on data to the U.S. Secretary of Education;
- CSEAC may, as needed, advise the CDE on the development of corrective-action plans to address findings identified in Federal monitoring reports; and
- CSEAC may advise the CDE in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities.

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## Recommendations

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The 2020-21 school year has been an historic year. As public schools navigated a pandemic, social and political unrest, and learned to educate in new and innovative ways, CSEAC's priorities remained clear. The virtual Committee meetings looked and felt very different, but this did not stop CSEAC members from making needed changes to benefit our students with disabilities. CSEAC continued to hear constituents' concerns, study, and review topics around "unmet needs" in schools, and to make recommendations for students with disabilities.

### **Recommendation 1: CDE should offer statewide support for the implementation of High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) among special educators within Colorado.**

Developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR Center), high-leverage practices (HLPs) are 22 essential special education techniques that all K-12 special education teachers should master for use across a variety of classroom contexts. These essential skills are grouped into the broader categories of assessment skills, collaboration skills, instructional skills, and social/emotional/behavioral skills.

Specifically, CSEAC recommends that CDE emphasize the following HLPs:

- Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services.
- Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs.
- Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior.
- Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals.
- Provide scaffolded supports.

**Recommendation 2: CDE should develop a framework for Specially Designed Instruction (SDI).**

Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) is defined in the IDEA as adapting the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction in such a way that it addresses the unique needs of a child that result from the child's disability. SDI must also ensure the child has access to the general curriculum. SDI can be provided in academic, behavioral, and social domains. A student's need for SDI must be evidenced as part of determining whether a student is eligible for special education services through a public school.

In developing the SDI framework CSEAC recommends the following:

- Avoid using terminology suggesting a medical model or deficit-based framework, such as "diagnose."
- Intentionally build on student strengths.
- Provide guidance on ways in which SDI may be provided within the general education classroom.
- Create intentional links and integration to the CDE Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework.
- Scale up professional learning on the use of Data-Based Individualization (DBI) to intensify interventions for students who do not respond to Tier I or Tier II instruction.

**Recommendation 3:** CSEAC members strongly urge the Board of Education to take a proactive approach to the education of all students experiencing disruptions because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As students transition back to in-person instruction, additional challenges will be faced. CSEAC members respectfully request that the State Board of Education members consider how they may be able to encourage and support the following recommendations at the local AU level:

- **Maintain pre-COVID funding by placing a "stay-put" on funding levels. While student enrollment numbers may have shifted, needs are greater, and students will return to school.**
  - Maintain full time equivalent (FTE) levels for Extended School Year (ESY) staff.
  - Shift resources to support increased number of initial evaluations.
  - Allocate resources to support social/emotional needs.
  - Allocate funding for transition from home to school specialists.
- **Provide additional mental health, social, and academic supports for all students returning to school.**
  - Bolster Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) for all students.
  - Allocate social/emotional learning resources to address anticipated needs.
  - Utilize both quantitative and qualitative data to identify student needs.
- **Support creative and adaptive practices that have emerged to support academic recovery, accelerated learning, and social/emotional engagement, such as:**
  - Learning pods.
  - Peers assisting peers.
  - "Boost" sessions (skill sessions to help students complete their assignments).
- **Think creatively about recovery and compensatory education. Allow more students to "opt in" to a variety of options to regain skills and regain trust.**
  - Individualize as much as possible.
  - Offer creative and adaptive practices to all students.
  - Offer alternative timeframes such as 1-2 days a week all summer, re-entry 1-2 weeks prior to the school year, among other options.

- Maintain high expectations of what is possible

**Recommendation 4: Support CDE’s efforts to reduce the number of administrative units (AUs) in Colorado identified as significantly disproportionate.**

In 2017 the U.S. Department of Education issued revised regulations concerning the determination of significant disproportionality at the local AU level. Under the 2017 regulations states must collect and analyze data to determine if significant disproportionality based on race and ethnicity is occurring in the State and the local AUs. Specifically, the state must determine if significant disproportionality is present with respect to: (A) the identification of children as children with disabilities, including the identification of children as children with disabilities in accordance with a particular impairment; (B) the placement of children within educational settings; and (C) the incidence, duration, and type of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions. Based on the current method of identification there were four administrative units within Colorado identified as being significantly disproportionate.

To support CDE in effectively addressing these issues CSEAC recommends the following:

- Institute one individual within the CDE to focus on significant disproportionality and describe it in plain language. This individual would track significant disproportionality’s root causes; impacts; and best practice approaches to reducing significant disproportionality across the state.
- Require AUs to report annual data on who is identified for special education by race/ethnicity, English Learners (ELs) and eligibility for free or reduced price lunch (FRL) for parents and other community members to review for education and decision-making purposes.
- Require AUs to provide data from the CDE on significant disproportionality, regardless of compliance level, to create a culture of transparency and to educate parents and community members regarding federal requirements related to significant disproportionality.
- Identify systemic biases across the state and take a proactive approach to addressing these biases by partnering with existing diversity, equity, and inclusion groups within Administrative Units (AUs).

**Recommendation 5: Evaluate the impact of Colorado’s new graduation guidelines on the graduation rates of students with disabilities.**

In evaluating the impact of Colorado’s new graduation guidelines on the graduation rates of students with disabilities, CSEAC recommends that the State Board of Education explore the following questions:

- Which AUs have fully implemented the new graduation requirements for the class of 2021?
- Which AUs have delayed implementing the new graduation requirements?
  - When will they be fully implemented?
- What variations in the implementation exist across AUs?
  - Which of these variations appear to help students with disabilities graduate at higher rates?
  - Which variations inhibit students with disabilities from graduating?
- What assistance do AUs with lower graduation rates of students with disabilities need?
  - How can the CDE provide appropriate, targeted guidance?



CSEAC’s leadership wants to extend much appreciation and gratitude to all the members of the Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee and the Colorado Department of Education, especially in the wake of COVID-19. These committed individuals continued to provide input, review proposed changes and revisions to state policies and guidelines, and create initiatives that will no doubt benefit students with disabilities and their advocates, now and in the future. Their dedication is truly appreciated and amazing.

We also want to thank the State Board of Education Members for considering our recommendations. We appreciate you representing the voices of our families, school staff, and community as we all work together during this unprecedented time, to provide continued support and positive change in our state’s special education system.

### CSEAC Members 2020-21

	Name	Position	County	Congressional District
1	Shelly Agostine	Parent	El Paso	5
2	Heather Alderman	Parent	Larimer	2
3	Shannon Atwater	District Charter School	Arapahoe	6
4	Kelly Balderston	Division of Youth Services	Arapahoe	6
5	Betsy Basch	Special Education Administrator	Douglas	4
6	Rachael Browning	Special Education Administrator	Arapahoe	6
7	Jill Choate	Institution of Higher Education	La Plata	3
8	Carisa Clinton	Transition Services	Larimer	2
9	Nicole Dallek	Special Education Teacher	Denver	1
10	Laurie Ditterline	McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act	Denver	1
11	Amy Dobronyi	Parent	Douglas	6
12	Lynn Fisher	Administrator of Program for Students With Disabilities	Jefferson	2
13	Michel Friberg	Parent	Arapahoe	6
14	Heidi Graber	Parent	Larimer	2
15	Nicole Gross	Parent	El Paso	5
16	Aimee Guildner	Parent	Jefferson	7
17	Rebecca Hall	Parent	Hinsdale	3
18	Samantha Hollister	Parent	El Paso	5
19	Ray Merenstein	Parent	Denver	1
20	Jill Pidcock	Parent	Garfield	3
21	Amy Rosengrants-Smith	Parent	Prowers	4
22	Kaegan Smith	Individual with a Disability	Larimer	2
23	Cassie Sudbeck	Parent	Denver	1



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<b>24</b>	Amanda Summers	General Education Administrator	Jefferson	7
<b>25</b>	Tracy Thatcher	Parent	Pueblo	3
<b>26</b>	Liesel Thomas	Parent	Adams	7
<b>27</b>	Shelli Tillery	Parent	Jefferson	7
<b>28</b>	Kate Tshikalu-John	Parent	El Paso	5
<b>29</b>	Erika Walker	Parent	Denver	1
<b>30</b>	Jennifer Wilger	Private School Administrator	Boulder	2
<b>31</b>	Ann Wilson	Parent Training and Information Center	Denver	1



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## Additional Information and CSEAC Contacts

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[Click here for more information about CSEAC](#), or contact one of the following individuals:

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