

9 KEY ELEMENTS OF GREAT SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

*From exceptional special education programs and practices at California charter schools**

1. Philosophy of inclusion. *ALL students educated in content-rich, general education settings.*

- **SHARED VALUE:** All school staff have a shared value of inclusion.
- **UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING:** Present content in multiple formats. | Allow students alternatives to demonstrate their learning. | Tap into students' interests and motivation for learning in a variety of ways.
- **ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATION:** Different languages | Braille | Large Print | Multimedia | Technology
- **CONSTANT COLLABORATION:** Between general and special education teachers and service professionals.

2. Individualization of programs. *Adaptable programs, individualized supports around student needs.*

- **CREATE SERVICES NOT PLACEMENTS:** Utilize existing expertise to build specialized systems of interventions and supports around each student.
- **ASK SPECIAL EDUCATION LOCAL PLAN AREA (SELPA):** SELPA can provide guidance and assistance with implementing innovative programs.

3. Supportive school community. *School celebrates differences and deliberately works to create a positive culture.*

- **BEHAVIOR FRAMEWORKS:** Well-established values and behavior norms throughout the school and in the classrooms.
- **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE:** Repair relationships rather than punish.
- **COMMUNITY CIRCLES:** Address school-wide issues | Resolve Conflict | Build Trust | Address Bullying

4. Multi-tiered support systems. *Support framework for academic, behavioral, and socioemotional needs for all students.*

- **TEAM-BASED:** Designated team responsible for student interventions who consistently meet to review student data and pull in family, school, and community partners for support.
- **DATA-DRIVEN:** Robust data collection and analysis mechanisms that inform decision making.
- **INCREASINGLY INTENSE:** Tiered supports that increase in intensity in response to needs. | The intervention framework is well-known by all staff.

5. Family and community partnerships. *Schools built strong partnerships with families and community organizations to develop support networks around their students.*

- **UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS:** Student teaching mentorship programs focused on special education
- **FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS:** Family trainings on support topics, home visits, connect families to additional supports, transition services into the next school.
- **COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:** Partnerships with community organizations that connect families to services, including mental health services, food, shelter, transportation, etc.

6. Cutting-edge technologies and practices. *Charter schools enjoy flexibility in how they deliver curriculum and embrace innovative approaches to providing services.*

- **IMPLEMENT INNOVATIVE APPROACHES:** Mindfulness | Neurofeedback | Assistive Communication Software | Zones of Regulation

7. Flexibility and autonomy. *Allows schools to make programmatic decisions and build full array of supports and services to meet the needs of their students.*

- **SECURE LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY (LEA) FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION OR "LEA-LIKE" STATUS:** Charter schools that have autonomy through LEA or "LEA-like" status serve a higher percentage and broader range of students and are free to develop supports to meet their needs.

8. Staff development. *Rigorous professional development practices to ensure that general and special education teachers and staff were prepared to meet the needs of all students.*

- **UNIVERSAL COMMITMENT TO COACHING AND SUPPORT:** Summer Trainings | Ongoing Training | Professional Learning Communities | Teacher Individualized Professional Development | Data-Driven Professional Development | Leadership opportunities | Paraprofessional Training

9. Constant refinement and improvement of programs. *Schools set goals for their ongoing refinement and improvement of their programs.*

- **COMMON THEMES:** Observe successful programs | Workshops | Track Outcomes and Growth | Streamline Supports for Overlapping Needs

Have you used one of these key elements, or do you have a best practice to share? Tell us in CCSA's Special Education Best Practices Toolkit Survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/specialtoolkit>

**The California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) created a special education best practices toolkit based on a statewide study of exceptional special education programs and practices across California charter schools. These are the nine key elements. Note that some of the resources are not free and it is not the intent of CCSA to endorse them.*