

HB 198
Special Education Service Agency

- Currently, there is no relationship between school district funding and funding for the Special Education Service Agency (SESA).
- School districts currently receive \$5,680 per child (Base Student Allocation) based on the Average Daily Membership (ADM) during the October count period adjusted for school size; the BSA has increased steadily over the past decade from \$4,010 in fiscal year 2002 to \$5,680 in fiscal year 2011.
- Special needs funding for special education (except intensive special education), gifted/talented education and bilingual/bicultural education is block funded; each district's previously adjusted ADM is then multiplied by the special needs factor of 1.20.
- Funding for students with intensive needs is multiplied by 13.
 - In September 2011, the number of students with intensive needs ranges from 0 in the Chugach, Galena, Pelican, Pribilof, Skagway, Yakutat school districts and Mt. Edgecumbe to 741 in Anchorage. In September 2011, a total of 2,027 students or 1.7% of all students were eligible for intensive needs funding; of these 2,027, 1,662 or 81.2% were students in the Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai and Mat-Su school districts, which do not typically refer students to SESA because they have low incidence specialists on staff.
- Intensive needs funding is only available to students who meet **ALL** of the following criteria outlined in Part IX, Section 1 in EED's *Special Education Handbook*:
 - Direct daily instruction by a certified special education teacher.
 - Provision of multiple services including related services. (*This means that in addition to special education and special transportation, the child must also be receiving at least one related service involving instruction. (i.e. speech and language services, audiology services, psychological services, physical therapy, occupational therapy, recreation, therapeutic recreation, early identification and assessment of disabilities in children, counseling services, rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes, school health services and social work services in schools).*)
 - All services not provided by a certified special education teacher are supervised by at least one certified special education teacher or related service provider.
 - Continuous special education programming (this means that the child needs specially designed instruction for the entire school day).
 - Assistance and training in two or more basic self-help, daily living or adaptive skills, appropriate to the age of the child.
 - That individual care will be provided to the student for the student's entire school day by staff who are trained to meet the student's individual needs.

- When the student needs transportation, (the student will receive special transportation), except that this transportation requirement does not apply in the case of a student who has received special transportation for at least a year and no longer needs it.
- **Note:** a district may seek a waiver, for one year, from one or more of these requirements if the district needs additional funding for a child whose Individualized Education Plan Team determines the child's educational program includes high-cost services that do not meet the intensive funding criteria.
- School districts use intensive needs funding to cover the costs of all the required services.
- **SESA assists school districts in serving children with low-incidence, severe disabilities, which include autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, hard of hearing, multiple disabilities, severe intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, emotional disturbance, traumatic brain injury and visual impairments.**
- **Note: A student may have a low incidence, severe disability but not be eligible for intensive needs funding because they do not meet ALL or any of the intensive needs funding criteria. For example, SESA served students in Skagway and Yakutat but neither district received intensive needs funding.**
- SESA's core service is funded by statute through the Low Incidence Disability (LID) Outreach Program, which employs special education teachers with advanced training and specialized disability experience.
- SESA specialists provide technical assistance to help local school district personnel and parents develop and implement an effective education program based on student needs and may be student-specific, school-wide or district-wide, depending on the number of eligible children and SESA resources. Technical assistance may be provided through on-site visits, in-service training, topical workshops and information dissemination (newsletter, Internet, Listserv, library materials).
- Topics commonly addressed by LID specialists include educational planning and placement, instructional methods and materials, behavior programs, assistive technology, transition planning, and evaluating the effectiveness of instruction. All consultations are customized to the needs of the eligible student(s) and district staff.
- SESA currently employs 11.42 FTE staff who specialize in the following low-incidence disabilities: Autism (3); Multiple Disabilities (3); Emotionally Disturbed (2); Visually Impaired (2) and Hearing Impaired (1.42)
- **In addition to the student having a low incidence disability, Part IX, Section 5 of EED's *Special Education Handbook* makes it clear to the school district that enrollment of children with similar needs must be too low to warrant a district-employed specialist: "The Alaska Legislature and EED expects districts to employ their own disability specialists when enrollments exceed the intent of the Legislature in creating SESA and the Low Incidence Disability Outreach Program."**

- **The manual goes on to say: “Districts should understand that assistance provided through SESA’s Low Incidence Disability Outreach Program is supplemental to the District’s programming. State and federal requirements in the identification, evaluation, planning and education for children served through the Low Incidence Outreach program remain the responsibility of the District.”**
- SESA specialists review completed referrals from the district to determine the service needs and priorities of the student and the student’s school staff. Referrals are assigned to specialists as allowed by existing SESA caseloads and staffing; the assigned specialist travels to the school district to help general and special education staff develop and implement evidence-based practices in the school, home and community. If no specialist is available, the student may be placed on a wait list; the school district is then contacted to determine if interim alternative services might be available.
- As determined in 1998, SESA receives \$15.75 x the average daily membership of students to provide the specialized services described above; unlike school districts, SESA’s funding was NOT increased when the Base Student Allocation was increased.
- The majority of special education teachers in Alaska were trained as generalists. As such, they have the ability to use a variety of assessments to identify specific areas of student strengths and weaknesses and use the results to guide instruction; and individualize instruction to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities for the majority of special education students who are students with learning disabilities or speech impairments, not students with low incidence disabilities. Only a small minority has the advanced training and specialized disability experience with low incidence disabilities that SESA staff has.
- The *Alaska Statewide Mentor Project* provides intensive, individual support to first and second year special education teachers in participating districts with the goals of improving teacher retention and student achievement through developing instructional effectiveness. However, not all school districts participate and the focus is on the teacher and not students with low incidence disabilities unlike the very specific, student-focused technical assistance that SESA provides.