

Meeting the Needs  
of  
Students from Special Populations  
  
in  
California's  
K- 12/Adult and Community College Systems

Position Paper of the Joint Special Populations Advisory Committee

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## **Introduction**

The Joint Special Populations Advisory Committee (JSPAC) was formed in 2000-01 to address the needs of students from "special populations" in California's Career and Technical Education (CTE) system. The JSPAC provides state leadership (1) to facilitate and improve access by students from special populations to quality CTE programs, and (2) to provide necessary support services for students from special populations to achieve nontraditional, high skill, high wage, or high demand occupations that lead to self-sufficiency.

In 2006, the U.S. Congress reauthorized the Carl D. Perkins Career and Vocational Education Act of 1998 with the passage of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act (Perkins IV). In Section 3 of Perkins IV, Special Populations are defined as:

- Individuals with disabilities;
- Individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including foster children;
- Individuals preparing for nontraditional fields;
- Single parents, including single pregnant women;
- Displaced homemakers; and
- Individuals with limited English proficiency.

Evidenced by the numerous references in Perkins IV to "special populations" and "nontraditional fields," along with new accountability requirements to disaggregate and monitor the performance levels of all special populations, it is apparent that the Act mandates that the State set a priority on serving students from special populations. This paper outlines the objectives and activities of California's Joint Special Populations Advisory Committee in light of the 2006 legislation.

The JSPAC is jointly supported by the California Department of Education (CDE) and the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO). The 30-member JSPAC represents the education community served by CDE (grades K-12, Regional Occupational Centers and Programs, and Adult Education), the ten California community college regions, and private and public sector groups, including representatives from industry, labor, professional organizations, community-based organizations, affiliated agencies, and/or four-year universities. Additional information about the JSPAC is located at [www.jspac.org](http://www.jspac.org).

## **Definition of Special Populations Students in Career and Technical Education**

The six categories of special populations are defined in Section 3 of the Act as follows:

An "**Individual with a disability**" is an individual with any disability as defined in Section 3 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12102). This definition is:

(A) A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an individual. (For example, caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, breathing, learning and working.);

(B) A record of such an impairment; or

(C) Being regarded as having such an impairment.

(see <http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/ada.html>)

"**Economically disadvantaged families or individuals**" are families or individuals earning low incomes according to the latest available data from the Department of Commerce.

The term "**Nontraditional field**" means occupations or fields of work, including careers in computer science, technology, and other emerging high skill occupations for which individuals from one gender comprise less than 25 percent of the individuals employed in each such occupation or field of work. *It is important to note that this definition is based on employment statistics, not on enrollment data.*

A "**Single parent or single pregnant woman**" is an individual who is unmarried or legally separated from a spouse and has a minor child or children for whom the parent has either custody or joint custody; or who is pregnant.

The term "**Displaced homemaker**" means an individual who:

(A) (i) has worked primarily without remuneration to care for a home and family, and for that reason has diminished marketable skills;

(ii) has been dependent on the income of another family member but is no longer supported by that income; or

(iii) is a parent whose youngest dependent child will become ineligible to receive assistance under part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et. seq.) not later than two years after the date on which the parent applies for assistance under such title; and

(B) is unemployed or under employed (working less time than desired or at jobs below one's skill level) and experiencing difficulty in obtaining or upgrading employment.

The term "**Individual with limited English proficiency**" means a secondary school student, an adult, or an out-of-school youth, who has limited ability in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language, and

(A) whose native language is a language other than English; or

(B) who lives in a family or community environment in which a language other than English is the dominant language.

It should also be noted that while migrant workers or children of migrant workers are not identified as a special populations category in Section 3 of the act, they are a subgroup on whom data must be reported. As such, they might be considered a seventh special populations group.

## **History of Special Populations within Career and Technical Education**

The major federal funding source for Career and Technical Education is the Carl D. Perkins Act. The first Perkins act in 1984 (Perkins I) and its reauthorization in 1990 (Perkins II), established "set-asides" to fund programs specifically for single parents, displaced homemakers and students training for careers nontraditional to their gender. The 1998 reauthorization of Perkins (Perkins III) eliminated these set-asides and combined single parents, displaced homemakers and students pursuing nontraditional career paths with economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, and disabled students to become "special populations." Thus, Perkins III eliminated the funding set-asides for serving three of the special populations groups, and expanded the scope of students that must be served as special populations. Perkins III did require that each state reserve from \$60,000 to \$150,000 to be available for services that prepare individuals for nontraditional fields.

Perkins IV in 2006, continued the six special populations groups, the nontraditional reserve, and renewed emphasis on the importance of nontraditional training and employment. Nontraditional training and employment is emphasized because it is one way to ensure economic success for special populations students - particularly females. Nontraditional training offers an opportunity to end occupational segregation by encouraging students to pursue careers in which fewer than 25% of the workers in those careers are of the student's gender. For women, nontraditional careers offer 20-40% higher wages than traditional women's jobs, and a dramatic increase in earnings over a lifetime. Examples of nontraditional occupations for women include electrician and firefighter. For men, nontraditional careers offer a chance to enter social service and helping professions dominated by women, such as dental hygiene and nursing.

Reducing gender segregation in career choice can offer everyone a chance to choose a career based on interest and aptitude. Fully opening the doors to career choice may have the effect of building our economy and offering real freedom in career choice and upward mobility for many.

While there is evidence that some students, both women and men, are in CTE programs nontraditional for their gender, the complementary numbers of people in the workforce do not reflect much gender integration. Men are 3% of secretaries, 8% of elementary and middle school teachers, and 8% of nurses. Women are 2% of all construction workers, 7% of welders and 4% of firefighters<sup>1</sup>.

## **Data on Numbers of and Services for Students from Special Populations in California**

The Statewide Assessment of California's Career Technical Education System prepared by WestEd for the California Department of Education and the California Community College Chancellor's Office in December 2006 reports the following enrollments of secondary and post secondary special populations students. The data are taken from the Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Educational Basic Grant Student Enrollment Report for 2004-05. Since some students may identify with more than one special populations group, totals may include duplicative counts.

### California Community College Data

In 2004-05, out of a total CTE postsecondary enrollment of 1,408,036, Special Populations students in California's community colleges represented:

Individuals with Disabilities	134,352	9.5%
Economically Disadvantaged	481,323	34.2%
Nontraditional Enrollees	348,845	24.8%
Single Parents	63,372	4.5%
Displaced Homemakers	20,558	1.5%
Limited English Proficient	97,656	6.9%

Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Educational Basic Grant Student Enrollment Report, 2004-05<sup>2</sup>

Corroborating these figures, a study of the educational, employment, and earnings outcomes of special populations students in the California community college system, reported that 52% of students in the sample were found in one or more of the six special populations groups<sup>3</sup>. Thus, students from special populations constitute roughly half of all community college CTE students.

### California Department of Education Data

Individuals with Disabilities	95,997	7.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	373,274	27.7%
Nontraditional Enrollees	582,719	43.3%
Single Parents	5,544	.4%
Displaced Homemakers	1,393	.1%
Limited English Proficient	204,171	15.2%

Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Educational Basic Grant Student Enrollment Report, 2004-05<sup>2</sup>

Given the large numbers of students from special populations enrolled in California CTE programs, it is abundantly clear that California's economic future relies on the successful performance of its special populations students. Furthermore, at the community college and adult education levels, CTE dollar allocations are based on the number of economically disadvantaged students served by the institution.

"Economically disadvantaged" is one of the six designated special populations groups, and students in the other five special populations categories, particularly single parents and displaced homemakers, are often economically disadvantaged as well. Thus, in addition to the social importance of meeting these students' needs, there is an economic incentive to all colleges and adult schools to recruit and retain these students. Yet, data indicate that services for these students are lacking.

National data indicate that with the loss of set-aside funding for special populations in 1998, services to these groups declined. For example:

- Many programs serving nontraditional students, single parents and displaced homemakers were discontinued following the elimination of set-asides.<sup>4</sup>
- Sharp decreases in support services such as transportation, tuition assistance, and childcare occurred.<sup>4</sup>
- Enrollment of nontraditional students has not improved. CTE course participation by gender is not more balanced.<sup>5</sup> This has a negative impact on the earning power and career prospects primarily of women.<sup>6</sup>

Data specific to California mirror the national data:

- In a survey of state CTE programs, California's programs for women and girls were reported to be "losing ground."<sup>7</sup>
- In California community college CTE programs, students who receive the least services are displaced homemakers, single parents, and nontraditional students. Only 39% of colleges reported making efforts to serve displaced homemakers. Single parents received services from 51% of the colleges, and nontraditional students were served by 54%. Eighty-eight percent of colleges reported serving economically disadvantaged students, 72% served limited English proficient students, and students with disabilities were served by 68%.<sup>8</sup>

## Significant Changes in Perkins IV Related to Special Populations

The provisions for serving special populations, and especially students preparing for nontraditional fields, have been greatly strengthened in Perkins IV. Specifically:

- Perkins IV requires that states provide professional development to locals on serving *all* special populations students.<sup>9</sup> The Law also continues the requirement that state funds be allocated to address the needs of nontraditional students;<sup>10</sup> for the State Plan to describe strategies to ensure special populations equal access, nondiscrimination, and programs to enable them to meet the state levels of performance;<sup>11</sup> as well as State Leadership requirements to assess the needs of special populations, provide preparation for nontraditional fields for special populations, and support programs for special populations.<sup>12</sup> The state's responsibility to continue support of nontraditional students has been expanded. It must now provide parity for the remaining special populations categories.
- Perkins IV requires local recipients to spend funds on programs that help special populations succeed in CTE, and ultimately in obtaining high-skill, high-wage employment.<sup>13</sup> Under Perkins III, providing programs to special populations was included as a permissible use of local funds and many offered such programs. Now they are required to do so.
- Local recipients and the state will now be held accountable for the progress and are in jeopardy of losing funds if they fail to do so.<sup>14</sup> Perkins IV requires locals to negotiate performance levels with the state for all of the core indicators, and disaggregate data by all special populations groups. The state must require an improvement plan if a local recipient does not meet at least 90% of any one of its negotiated performance measures in the first year. If in the next year there is no improvement, the state can withhold funds the following year. Similarly, at the state level, the federal government can withhold funds if a state shows no improvement by failing to meet at least 90% of any of the negotiated measures.

## **Recommendations of the JSPAC based on these changes**

Based on the preceding changes, the JSPAC makes the following recommendations:

### **1. The state should continue to use the maximum amount of its Section 122(a)(2)(B) nontraditional set-aside funds to address the needs of nontraditional students.**

This will ensure that the State provides leadership and comprehensive statewide technical assistance to enhance the recruitment, retention, and program completion of nontraditional students enrolled in CTE programs. Nontraditional employment issues continue to be a challenge for schools and colleges. Utilizing expertise on a statewide level to assist schools and colleges is a cost-effective method for giving expert help and advice. Recipients can then utilize both experts from within and statewide experts to craft the best possible strategy for success. It will enable them to meet the negotiated core indicator levels for nontraditional participation and completion.

### **2. State Leadership funds should be allocated for expanded professional development and technical assistance to increase success of *all* categories of special populations students. These funds should be committed over and above the nontraditional set-aside specified in Section 122(a) (2) (B).**

In Perkins IV, the state has been given an expanded leadership role and must now provide professional development programs/services to improve access and success of *all* special populations. The allocation of additional State Leadership funds will ensure that all categories of special populations students achieve parity with nontraditional students. Local recipients will be supported as they respond to the Perkins IV requirements to (1) provide services for special populations students and (2) be held accountable for progress. Such assistance will increase the likelihood that local recipients, and thereby the state, will meet their negotiated levels of performance, thus avoiding possible withholding of funds. It is especially critical to offer these services to institutions that are not meeting their negotiated performance measures. To assist locals, comprehensive, ongoing professional development must be provided on:

- Research-based strategies for increasing the performance of nontraditional and special populations students and overcoming performance gaps.
- Structuring the educational environment to address the needs of nontraditional and special populations students.
- Outreach, recruitment, and marketing strategies targeting nontraditional and special populations students.
- Linkages and partnerships to support nontraditional and special populations students, including the identification of community-based organizations, social service agencies, and workforce development agencies.

**3. Local plans must describe how special populations students will be identified and tracked over the years of the plan. This should include a quantitative summary of the services received and performance of special populations students on all core indicators of performance.**

Eligible recipients must do a better job of identifying and tracking special populations students to insure student success and achievement of all core indicators, meeting at least 90% of the negotiated level for the recipient. Eligible recipients need to know who their special populations students are, the services and support they require and receive, and what their progress is over time. This will enable local recipients to allocate resources more effectively and to meet their negotiated performance standards.

**4. Local plans must describe how special populations students will be served.**

Under previous legislation, local recipients were *allowed* to spend funds on programs for special populations in CTE. Now they are *required* to do so. The JSPAC recommends the following school and college improvements to ensure special populations students access and success in the state's CTE programs.

- Outreach and recruitment to increase student/parent awareness of educational/career options
- Career support (career development and exploration, field trips, mentoring and exposure with a focus on career paths that include high skill, high wage, or high demand jobs)
- Academic support (advisement, tutoring, and special instructional materials)
- Financial support (for childcare, transportation, books, and instructional materials)
- Access to technology which special populations need in order to succeed
- Staff development on the specific needs of nontraditional and special populations students and the most effective tools and strategies to assist them. Many special populations students fall into more than one special populations category and face multiple barriers.

Examples of effective practices recommended by the JSPAC to support nontraditional and special populations students include:

- Support for childcare, transportation and other needs
- Financial aid
- Linkages to support services both on and off campus
- Assessment of skills and interests paired with academic and career counseling
- Tutoring, coaching, and mentoring
- Assistance with study and test-taking skills
- Remedial education and basic skills programs
- Strengthening skills in mathematics and science
- Vocational English as a Second Language courses
- Participation in CTE student organizations

- Apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs
- Placement and employment services

### **The JSPAC's Role in Addressing the Recommendations**

With the guiding mission to improve access to, and support of, nontraditional and special populations students in CTE programs, another major role of the JSPAC is to serve as a statewide resource to secondary and postsecondary CTE educators by identifying, developing, and disseminating information on:

- The performance of nontraditional and special populations students and strategies for improving and overcoming performance gaps;
- Professional development activities that address the needs of nontraditional and special populations students;
- Research-based documents on nontraditional and special populations students to improve public awareness;
- Marketing materials to support and promote outreach to, recruitment and retention of, nontraditional and special populations students; and
- Effective practices on serving nontraditional and special populations students.

The major strategies that the JSPAC will employ are:

- Provide training on strategies to assist nontraditional and special populations students to meet or exceed state-adjusted levels of performance. This training will be provided through statewide leadership conferences and regional workshops.
- Develop linkages and partnerships to support nontraditional and special populations students, including the identification of community-based organizations, social service agencies, and workforce development agencies.
- Collaborate with other programs and services to address the needs of nontraditional and special populations students.
- Collect and disseminate information and make policy recommendations to facilitate statewide planning.

Footnotes

1. U.S. Dept of Labor, <http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/nontra2004.pdf>,  
<http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/20lead2005.htm>,  
<http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/Qf-nursing-05.htm>
  2. WestEd, "Needs Assessment of California's Career Technical Education System," p.27, December 2006.
  3. Mather, Anita K, "Success for All: Assessing the Education and Economic Outcomes of California Community College Special Population Students," prepared for the California Joint Special Populations Advisory Committee, p.2, 2004.
  4. Women Work: The National Network of Women's Employment, "An Advocate's Guide to the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006," p.4, November 2006.
  5. National Assessment of Vocational Education (NAVE), Final Report to Congress, Executive Summary, p. 10, 2004.
  6. National Women's Law Center, "Title IX and Equal Opportunity in Vocational and Technical Education: A Promise Still Owed to the Nation's Young Women," p.2, June 2002.
  7. National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, "Invisible Again: The Impact of Changes in Federal Funding on Vocational Programs for Women and Girls" p.17, October 2001
  8. VTEA Title IB Special Populations Collaborative Project, "Findings of the Statewide Survey of Services and Programs for Special Populations Students in California Community Colleges, p.13, 2003-2004.
  9. Section 122 (c)
  10. Section 112 (a)(2)(B)
  11. Section 122 (c)(9)(A), (B) and (C)
  12. Section 124(b)(1)(5) and (8)
  13. Section 135 (b)(9)
  14. Section 113 Accountability, and Section 123 Improvement Plans
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