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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Senate Bill 10: Georgia Special Needs Scholarship

Created by the Georgia State Legislature in the 2007 Session, Georgia's Special Needs Scholarship Act (Senate Bill 10; SB-10) provides Georgia students with disabilities the opportunity to attend an eligible participating independent/private school. The program went into effect on May 18, 2007 when Governor Perdue signed the bill into law.

Independent/Private School Choice

The SB-10 scholarship allows parents of students with disabilities, who were enrolled in the Georgia public schools and have an active IEP (Individual Education Plan), to choose an independent/private educational setting for their child.

According to the Georgia Department of Education*, 117 private schools participated in the SB-10 program during the 2007-2008 school year. A total of 899 Scholarship students were enrolled in 115 of those schools. Seventy-one percent of the 899 students are male. Fifty-five percent are White, 40% are Black and the other 5% consists of Multi-racial, Asian, Hispanic, and Native-American students.

The top 6 counties, which currently consists of the largest Scholarship student participants are, in order: Fulton, DeKalb, Cobb, Gwinnett, Clayton, and Fayette. Scholarship student participants varied by disability, although the majority were classified as having a "specific learning disability" or "Other health impairment".

ISC's "SB-10 Private Schools Survey" Results

In late October 2007, ISC, with the support of Dr. Kathleen Fabrikant, administered an electronic survey to the 117 participating schools' lead administrators to better understand the challenges schools face or anticipate facing because of this new opportunity. Dr. Fabrikant currently serves as the Executive Director of Royce Learning Center, which includes Chatham Academy, a school for children with learning differences. We are privileged to feature her article as this issue's Guest Feature.

Statistics

Fifty-four individuals responded to the survey over a approximately two-month period and 53 schools were represented in the participant pool. Fifty percent of the respondents held positions as headmaster, executive director, administrator, or owner of their schools. Fifteen percent of respondents were principals or division principals and another 15% of respondents worked in the admissions office. Six percent were either office managers or administrative assistants and another 6% worked in the business office.

Results

Results to most of the survey questions are presented on the following page. Some qualitative responses are not shown for purposes of brevity.

* Georgia Department of Education. 2007-2008 Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Summary Information. www.doe.k12.ga.us/sb10.aspx

Prior to becoming an eligible private school for the Program, which of the following groups did your school's student profile include?

- Only students without learning disabilities/academic difficulties: 6%
- Only students with learning disabilities/academic difficulties: 25%
- Both of the above: 69%

How would you classify your school's student profile?

- Students of below average academic ability (IQ of 85 to 100): 27%
- Students as described above with learning deficits: 31%
- Students of average academic ability (IQ of 100): 43%
- Students as described above with learning deficits: 59%
- Students of above-average academic ability (IQ greater than 100): 63%
- Students as described above with learning deficits: 57%

*As a result of becoming a SB-10 provider, do you currently, or plan to, serve students with a diagnosis of the following: ***

- Learning disabilities: 94%
- ADD/ADHD: 92%
- Asperger's Syndrome: 58%
- Emotional Disorders: 40%
- Autism: 38%
- Auditory, visual, speech difficulties: 6%
- Bi-polar; Seizure Disorder: 4% each
- Tourettes; Mild Depressive; Downs; Mild EBD; High anxiety; At-risk; Developmental: 2% each

*Why did your school choose to become a participating school for the GA Special Needs Scholarship? ***

- To serve a broader range of students: 47%
- To increase enrollment: 33%
- To somewhat change the direction & purpose of the school: 10%
- I do not know: 6%
- Other - Help more families by giving access to financial support: 22%
- Other - Help current families at school: 16%

How will your school incorporate this new group of students?

- As a part of the current approach included with the rest of the student community (within same classes): 87%
- As a separate group within the school community (school within a school) who share facilities with other students: 6%
- As a totally separate group with separate facilities: 0%
- Other - Mainstreamed with assistance: 4%

Do you anticipate the following areas of your school to experience change as a result of accommodating this new group of students?

- Administration/Staff/Faculty: 44%
- Admissions office: 34%

- Development office: 7%
- Marketing office: 5%
- Curriculum/Pedagogy: 27%
- Classrooms: 24%
- Student assessment/evaluation: 46%
- Other - No changes: 17%

In which of the following areas will your school find it necessary to devote more time?

- Monitoring a new group of students: 40%
- Tracking separate curricula/teachers: 13%
- Reporting performance summaries to parents/trustees: 32%
- Reporting achievement/attendance to the GA Dept. of Education: 70%
- Maintaining eligibility requirements to continually serve SB-10 students: 36%

*Please specify the names of any tests (standardized or independent) you administer at your school.***

- ITBS: 37%
- Stanford 10: 26%
- PSAT/SAT: 21%
- Brigance: 9%
- OLSAT: 9%
- Woodcock-Johnson; ERB CTP; Qualitative Reading Inventory: 7% each

*Is your school administering any new tests for this school year? ***

- No: 57%
- Yes - Stanford 10; PSAT; ITBS: 7% each

How do you anticipate that the new group of students will affect the way your school assesses student performance/achievement?

- No change: 58%
- Addition of new & better tests: 13%
- More individual assessment: 11%

Do you plan to demonstrate or report how your school adds value to the new student group?

- Yes: 44%
- No: 56%

If yes, to whom?

- Parents: 50%
- Community: 30%
- State: 25%
- Teachers/Administrators: 25%
- Board: 15%
- Students: 10%

** The majority of responses to the question were shown here.

GUEST FEATURE: **DR. KATHIE BURKE-FABRIKANT**
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ROYCE LEARNING CENTER

Dr. Fabrikant is the Executive Director of Royce Learning Center in Savannah, GA, which was founded in 1970.

"I got very good at being invisible."

That is what happens to bright children who cannot learn successfully with conventional teaching. They are the children for whom typical inclusion doesn't work. They are the children who retreat and don't take risks, either socially or intellectually. They are simply not engaged. Maureen Brenner is the Head of Riverview School in E. Sandwich, MA, and these are scenarios she sees on a daily basis. "The Riverview School serves children who have complex language and learning disabilities and gives them a small class setting with unique forms of systematic instruction. We restore students' self-esteem and confidence while developing their academic skills. We combat learned helplessness," says Mrs. Brenner.

Private LD schools, built on the principle of designing instruction to meet the individual needs of students with learning differences, have pioneered, tested and proven the effectiveness of alternative classroom instructional methods for many decades. They have developed or refined and supported with their own research many instructional models and methods designed specifically for learning disabled students. The main change I have seen in 16 years is the growth that we have experienced as has been true of independent education in Georgia whether from schools inside or outside GISA.

The success of the LD schools' methods in solving the academic and social learning problems of nontraditional learners has had a significant ripple effect in the broader educational environment. As the new methods were proven successful in their classrooms, the private LD schools began impressive programs of community outreach to spread the word. The outreach efforts typically trained parents to be effective advocates for their children's needs in the public schools and provided teacher training seminars and classes for both public and private school teachers. The scope of this paper does not allow acknowledging by name the specific contributions of even a fraction of the multitude of LD schools which have mounted successful curriculum development and outreach programs across the nation. Each of these schools has become expert at meeting the needs of its population and in creating effective instructional methods to meet the formidable challenges faced by learning disabled children. This has been accomplished in nearly as many ways as there are schools. Thus, to illuminate the methods by which the collective efforts of all of these schools have dramatically changed the landscape of education in this country, I have elected to cite as representative examples a few schools and centers whose work in these areas is well known to me.

And while the purpose of this article is to examine the influence of independent LD schools, the important contributions of other nonprofit educational organizations which have worked in parallel with the schools deserve mention also. Training clinics such as those at Mass. General Hospital in Boston and Scottish Rite Hospital in Dallas; professional development efforts like Mel Levine's Schools Attuned program and the Neuhaus Center in Houston; and professional organizations such as the International Dyslexia Association itself have all been important influences. These organizations have trained and cultivated leaders, developed programs, published curricula, conducted teacher training, provided diagnostic and tutorial service, supported research, led advocacy campaigns, and worked to promote change in the public school programs across the country. Without question, they have served as important allies of the LD schools in changing the educational landscape.

This article was originally published in *Perspectives* (Volume 31, No. 1, Winter 2005), a newsletter distributed by The International Dyslexia Association. To read the full article, [click here](#).

2008-2009 Special Needs Student Scholarship Eligibility Criteria

- The student's parent currently resides within Georgia and has been a Georgia resident for at least one calendar year; and
- The student has spent the prior school year in attendance at in a Georgia public school in grades K-12 and was in attendance on both the October 2007 and March 2008 FTE counts; and
- The student had was served under an Individualized Education Program (IEP) written by the school in accordance with federal and state laws and regulations at any point during the 2007-2008 school year; and
- The Student is enrolled at one of the state's approved participating private schools by Friday, September 5, 2008.

Important Dates

June 30, 2008

This is the last day for an independent/private school to apply for approval in the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship program for the 2008-2009 school year. The school must complete and submit an application through the [website](#), where more information can be found.

July 2008

A list of approved 2008-2009 private schools will be updated monthly throughout April to July.

ISC Contact Information

For Questions related to Insights:

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For Funding; Strategic & Campus Planning:

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