



## Autism Bill Package Moving Through the Legislature

The comprehensive legislative bill package introduced in 2008 to combat the rise in diagnoses of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is slowly making its way through the legislature. The bills were inspired by two reports presented to the legislature in 2007; the first report was issued by the California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism which focused on legislative and administrative efforts to improve the appropriate screening, diagnosis, assessment, intervention, and treatment of children with Autism. The second report was issued by the AB 2513 Autism Advisory Committee which was charged with identifying ways public and nonpublic schools can better serve students with autism and their families.

Last month, Governor Schwarzenegger signed into law **AB 2302 (Bass)** which authorizes the holders of mild/moderate education specialist credentials to provide instruction to pupils with autism. We believe that the enactment of AB 2302, as a temporary measure, is critical as schools try to meet the needs and demands of this growing population. Autism is the fastest growing special education eligibility category for public education in California. Unfortunately, our credentialing process and training programs have not kept pace with our changing needs. AB 2302 will help schools cope with this teacher shortage area while still insuring that we have adequately credentialed teachers instructing children on the autism spectrum.

Following are the specific details of **AB 2302 (Bass)**. The bill authorizes a local education agency (LEA) or school to assign a teacher who holds a credential authorizing the instruction of students with mild and moderate disabilities to serve students with autism if the teacher meets one of the following criteria:

- Has provided full-time instruction for at least one year prior to September 1, 2007, in a special education program that serves pupils with autism and received favorable evaluation or recommendation to teach pupils with autism from the local education agency or school.
- Has completed a minimum of three-semester units of coursework in the subject of autism at a regionally accredited institution of higher education.

The bill requires the LEAs and schools to maintain verification of completed coursework on file and report teacher assignment based on these options in their assignment monitoring program.

AB 2303 would become inoperative two years after the CTC adopts regulations to modify current education specialist credential requirements or on August 31, 2011, whichever ever comes first, and is repealed on January 1, 2012.

*Other bills in the autism bill package which are still moving through the legislative process and could have a positive impact on K-12 education are as follows:*

**SB 527 (Steinberg)** would require the State Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to partner with at least one regional center to implement a two-year ASD early screening, intervention, and treatment pilot program in at least three counties. The pilot program would

establish best practices for early screening, diagnosis, referral, and treatment for children with ASD. The bill would also require DDS to establish an

advisory committee of stakeholders to assist in coordinating the pilot program. The bill would require the department and the advisory committee, no later than July 1, 2011, to report to the Legislature and the Governor on the pilot program. The bill requires DDS to apply to the California and Families Commission (First 5) to support the pilot project financially.

**SB 1475 (Torlakson)** would direct DDS to use an advisory body to identify best practices in providing a smooth transition for young autistic children and their families when the children change programs provided through regional centers to programs operated by the public schools. The bill specifies that DDS shall apply to the California Children and Families Commission for funding to cover the costs of the pilot.

**SB 1563 (Perata)** would require the Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC) and the California Department of Insurance (CDI) to establish the Autism Workgroup for Equitable Coverage. The bill requires the workgroup to:

1. Examine gaps in health coverage, payer or provider denials, and discrimination in implementation of current law coverage requirements with regard to medically necessary treatment of pervasive developmental disorder (PDD) or autism.
2. Evaluate the California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) best practice guidelines for the screening, diagnosis, assessment, intervention, and treatment of autism and pervasive developmental disorders and to develop recommendations on ensuring that health care service plans and health insurers provide appropriate and equitable coverage for those illnesses.

The bill would require the workgroup, DMHC, and the CDI to submit a report to the Legislature by June 2009.

**AB 1872 (Coto)** would require the California Department of Education, in conjunction with other state agencies, to establish the California Autism Spectrum Disorder Clearinghouse in order to provide evidence-based recommendations and practices for the education of pupils with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

AB 1872 (Coto) is the first step in a multi phased project. Our initial hope was that we would be able to secure prior year unused federal special education dollars for the establishment of the California Autism Spectrum Clearinghouse. Unfortunately, the \$500,000 did not make it into the budget package approved by the Budget Conference Committee. We are now shifting our attention on approaching private organizations in an effort to establish a partnership to achieve our goal of establishing the clearinghouse. We have taken some initial steps in approaching Autism Speaks and the Barona Band of Mission Indians. We will keep you apprised of our efforts to secure funding for the clearinghouse.