



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 5, 2012

Contact: Ty Eberhardt
(202) 223-5452
teberhardt@edexcellence.net

Study: Districts Could Save \$10 Billion, Improve Results, by Shifting Special-Education Staffing to National Median

WASHINGTON, D.C.—A new study of 1,411 public-school districts finds that reducing special-education personnel in high-spending districts to the national median would save—or free up for redeployment—\$10 billion nationally each year while also boosting educational outcomes for special-needs students. Using the largest and most detailed database of U.S. special-education spending ever built, *Boosting the Quality and Efficiency of Special Education* found that the majority of the money goes for staffing but that there is wide variance in how districts staff for special education—and in their outcomes for children with special needs.

At a time when school budgets are being squeezed from many directions, special education consumes a growing share of district spending. Yet too few students with special needs achieve academic proficiency. To address this reality, Nate Levenson, managing director at the District Management Council and a former public-school superintendent, analyzed spending and staffing patterns in 43 percent of all U.S. school systems enrolling more than three thousand students, identifying trends and patterns in how those districts spend on special education. Using pairs of demographically similar districts from Florida, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Ohio, and Texas, Levenson shows that districts that spend less on special education often produce better academic outcomes for special-needs youngsters than do their higher-spending counterparts.

Based on this pioneering analysis, Levenson outlines five clear steps to improve the outcomes and efficiency of American special education:

1. Employ *more effective* general-education and special-education teachers at the district level—not just *more* of them or more non-teachers (i.e., aides).
2. Carefully manage pupil loads for special-education teachers.
3. End federal “maintenance of effort” requirements that prohibit states and districts from reducing spending on special education.
4. Preserve the Elementary and Secondary Education Act’s (ESEA) subgroup accountability and reporting requirements, including those that pertain to students with special needs.
5. Permit greater flexibility in the use of federal special-education (IDEA) funds.

“Special-education spending can’t be exempt from efforts to improve educational outcomes and efficiency,” said Fordham Institute President Chester E. Finn, Jr. “Kids with special needs deserve better and districts literally can’t afford *not* to do better.”

Find *Boosting the Quality and Efficiency of Special Education* online at:

<http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/boosting-the-quality-and-efficiency-of-special-education.html>

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute is committed to the renewal and reform of primary and secondary education in the United States. Generous support for this report was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Searle Freedom Trust, as well as by our sister organization, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. For further information on this report, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, please visit us online at www.edexcellence.net.

###