

CHAPTER
3

Students Who May Benefit from Independent Study

The list of student groups identified in this chapter is not intended to imply that any group or category not mentioned should be excluded from an opportunity to pursue independent study. Many students will fit into more than one category.

A Average Students

The average student may need to do independent study to resolve a scheduling problem. For example, when a student has transferred from one district to another or from a private school to a public school, he or she may need to take a course that is not available when the student needs it. To be successful in independent study, the student must exercise the self-discipline necessary to complete assignments or receive help from parents or friends in the form of tutorial assistance and encouragement. Counselors and teachers who participate in the independent study strategy need to understand how part-time and full-time independent study can solve problems for the average student.

B Specialized Students

The specialized student—one who is extraordinarily creative, talented, or gifted in a particular field—may seek independent study assistance as he or she develops or practices an outstanding skill. Performers in areas of physical or artistic expertise may enroll in independent study, which, because of its flexibility and adaptability, can meet their special needs.

C Students with Academic Deficits

Students who lack a few credits to earn a high school diploma or wish to qualify for an examination leading to some equivalent to a high school diploma

(e.g., California High School Proficiency Examination or general educational development (GED) test for students older than 18 years) may ask for help in meeting requirements for the diploma or for tutorial assistance in preparing for an examination or acceptance into a union apprenticeship program and may enroll in independent study to do so. Under the independent study strategy, teachers and counselors can help students achieve their goals by focusing on study skills and providing the necessary materials, guidance, tutoring, academic counseling, vocational assessment, and coursework. Students enrolled in adult education may engage in independent study to complete classes required for high school graduation as specified by the law as amended in 1995 and by the local governing board (*Education Code* Section 46300.4, as amended by the Statutes of 1995, Chapter 530, Section 21; and Section 51225.3(a)(1)).

D Students with Disabilities and Special Needs

Under *Education Code* Section 56000 and following, every California student with exceptional needs is entitled to the provision of an education appropriate to his or her needs. During the elementary years, conditions such as aphasia and aural handicap and myriad less common conditions frequently are unmasked and labeled. However, students with exceptional needs tend to come to terms with their handicaps when they begin to think seriously about future occupations. Some students who fall into this category may ask for aid in acquiring specific skills for entry-level jobs, seek career counseling, or need assistance in accommodating to their handicaps (for example, by learning compensating skills, such as using a computer or reading by means of Library of Congress tapes). Independent study has proved to be the solution for many because the instructional strategy for each student is as individualized as his or her particular need requires. Perhaps the most important benefit of independent study for such students lies in their increased self-esteem, an invaluable by-product of the one-to-one teacher-student relationship. Note that each student in special education must have his or her program developed *within the context of that student's individual education program (IEP)* according to

Education Code Section 51745(c) (see Appendix A; also see Program Advisory SPB: 89/90-11).

The presence of a number of specific disabilities may indicate the need for different strategies. Some disabilities may include neurological factors, which are evident in hyperactivity, distractibility, eye-hand coordination, and problems with test taking, handwriting, copying from board or book, and so on. Audio-logical factors may be noted by symptoms such as difficulty with subtleties in written and oral English and word problems in mathematics as well as difficulty in spelling, taking notes from lectures, listening, retaining information in verbal form, and other indications. Visual factors—often perceived as reading disabilities—affect several areas, such as completion of assignments, test taking, composition, reading, proofreading, typing, depth perception, handwriting, hyperactivity, and so on. Independent study may allow for numerous remedial strategies that cannot be provided in a classroom.

Other student populations that may require special agreements or additional support services or both include students with health problems, pregnant minors, teen mothers and fathers, students with temporary and immediate financial need, students in need of immediate job training, limited-English-speaking students, and Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) participants.

Note that temporarily disabled pupils may not receive individual instruction pursuant to *Education Code* Section 48206.3 through independent study (*Education Code* Section 51745(d)). However, if the temporarily disabled pupil's parent or guardian and the district(s) agree, the pupil may receive instruction through independent study instead of receiving the "home and hospital" instruction provided pursuant to *Education Code* Section 48206.3.

E Students Who Drop Out

The student group with the most diverse and unusual goals and values consists of those who opt to leave school before they graduate. Many young people find that the traditional high school program prevents them from entering "real life" fast enough. They want to combine working and specialized study with their education. Some of these people enroll in college pro-

grams that reflect a specialized interest (e.g., computers or chemistry) or extended work-study plans with traditional subjects. Others drop out of formalized education for periods of a few months to years before they return to enroll in independent study.

Students may drop out because they feel unsupported or disconnected in the regular school setting. They may lack the skills or self-discipline needed to succeed. A student's poor decisions and lack of self-esteem may have led to pregnancy, early parenthood, substance abuse, or criminal offenses. This group is often labeled "at risk." These students will soon enter the job market with few or no marketable skills.

For many dropouts and potential dropouts, independent study may be an opportunity to change direction and continue their education. Counseling and guidance are especially important for these individuals because many will feel forced to drop out of independent study by continual personal problems. Independent study staff should make every effort to recognize early warning signs and offer guidance or make referrals to other community resources.

Roughly one out of every three students in California public schools does not graduate from high school. These students often do not return to school until they are working adults with family and community responsibilities which prevent them from participating in a traditional "seat-time"-based adult education diploma completion program. Independent study offers these adults the opportunity of studying independently at home, at their own pace, and at a time which is convenient. Without such an option, many adults would not or could not complete their interrupted high school education.

F Students in the Juvenile Justice System

Students in the Juvenile Justice System (see the *Welfare and Institutions Code*, sections 300, 601, 602, 654) include students who have been removed from the traditional modes of education. The Juvenile Justice System places the responsibility for their education on the County Superintendent of Schools, and the *Education Code* stipulates some mandated and some optional services and functions (see *Education Code* sections 1980 to 1986, inclusive, for County Community Schools). The students served by this

alternative system fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Regular education students who have sufficient motivation, study skills, and self-discipline to complete school assignments independently, as determined by the school's screening and placement process
- Students who lack some academic credits required for graduation but who demonstrate the academic potential to meet regular or alternate high school graduation procedures, such as the California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE) or the general educational development (GED) test
- Students who have special needs (e.g., needs related to pregnancy, jobs, job training, gang-related security problems, or personal or community responsibilities)

The county community schools may use various instructional strategies, including independent study (see *Education Code* Section 1983b), for four categories of students (*Education Code* Section 1981):

(a) Pupils who have been expelled from a school district . . .

(b) Pupils who have been referred . . . by a school district as a result of the recommendation of a school attendance review board or pupils whose school districts of attendance have, at the request of the pupils' parents or guardians, approved the pupils' enrollment in a county community school

(c)(1) Probation-referred pursuant to sections 300, 601, 602, and 654 of the *Welfare and Institutions Code*.

(2) On probation or parole and not in attendance in any school.

(3) Expelled for any of the reasons specified in subdivision (a) or (c) of Section 48915.

(d) Homeless children (as defined in *Education Code* Section 1981.2)

G Students Who Travel

Students who travel, including those who move because their parents are migrant workers or travel to perform in their area of talent or skill, need a kind of correspondence-based study, which substitutes a variety of communications over a distance for face-

to-face meetings. The traveling student's program is not interrupted when he or she is enrolled in independent study, thereby decreasing the student's risk of falling behind. A variety of materials that can be adapted to independent study is available through Migrant Education.

Traveling students may use instructional materials that are consistent with the district's course of study and that have been prepared for correspondence study, such as those legally provided by a university, particularly the University of California Extension, for high school-level study pursuant to *Education Code* Section 51740. The materials must be integrated into the school's program for the student and administered under the supervision of the responsible certificated school employee.

For information about high school correspondence courses through America Online, the Internet, e-mail, and mail, contact the Center for Media and Independent Learning, University of California Extension, 2000 Center St., Suite 400, Berkeley, CA 94704; telephone (510) 642-4124.

H Home Independent Study Students

A significant and steadily increasing number of students throughout the state are members of families that prefer to educate their children at home for a variety of philosophical and pragmatic reasons. By enrolling students in independent study, the "home study family" may benefit from professional educational services, including parent in-service training, curriculum materials, equipment, audiovisual materials, activities, field trips, testing, and other benefits. The educational partnership created between the family and school provides a professionally prescribed, monitored, and evaluated curriculum, which the parent, guardian, or caregiver presents in accordance with the agreement.

I Students Who Need Different Learning Strategies

Students who request, or who have been tested and need, different instructional strategies based on their own personal learning styles and modalities can

be accommodated via independent study. Students in independent study are sometimes taught in groups, sometimes on an individual basis, and sometimes in some combination of group and individual work plans. Learning styles are innumerable, but examples of student learning styles include the following:

- The *active style learner*, who must be physically involved to learn and needs freedom. He or she appears to be slow, rebels against supervision, prefers to use tools but finds paper and pencil exercises an impediment to learning, and seems confused by symbols unless they are explained and taught directly and slowly. Studies show that 38 percent of the population may be characterized in this and related ways. For more information, see references on learning styles and modalities listed in the Selected References.
- The *focused style learner*, who learns independently, pursues a goal until satisfied, and values intellectual abilities highly. This kind of learner needs to know and to be competent and sets his or her own learning objectives but may ignore other subjects in doing so. He or she sometimes appears to be an underachiever. Teachers may view the student as arrogant, condescending, and cynical—little concerned with what authorities, including teachers, think. This student wants a logical presentation; his or her favorite subjects tend to be mathematics, science, and technology. Research indicates that 12 percent of the population may fall in this category. (See Reckinger, *Parents Record of Educational Progress: PREP*. Coupeville, Wash.: Center for Educational Alternatives, 1982.)

Some students learn better in conditions that are unsuitable for others, such as at nighttime instead of daytime, or where there is social activity, dim light, music, and apparent untidiness. Independent study permits such students to find the conditions in which they achieve the most and learn best without imposing their environment on others. The student's preferences may be verified so that alleged differences are not used as excuses for the exercise of immature self-will.