

Monterey County Herald

More teachers OK'd for autistic kids

By Claudia Melendez Salinas
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A decision by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing will increase the number of special education teachers authorized to work with children with autism.

Before the Jan. 29 decision, only teachers with a special education credential and a specialization in moderate-to-severe disabilities were authorized to serve children with autism, said Josh Harrower, coordinator of the Special Education Program at CSU-Monterey Bay.

"This new authorization will allow teachers who hold a mild-to-moderate special education credential to serve students with autism spectrum disorders," he said.

This is good news for students with autism, who will benefit from the additional support, Harrower said. Teachers with a mild-to-moderate specialization often teach in a setting that includes children without disabilities, allowing for more interaction among students with different abilities.

Already, the California Teacher Corps is preparing to provide training for the new credential. Through its partnership with higher education institutions like CSUMB, the Teacher Corps is expecting to train 25,000 veteran teachers.

Autism can cause severe and pervasive impairment in thinking, feeling, language and the ability to relate to others, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. These disorders are usually first diagnosed in early childhood and range from a severe form, called autistic disorder, to a much milder form, Asperger's syndrome.

The prevalence of students diagnosed with autism in California has increased twelvefold over the last 20 years, according to the California Department of Developmental Services. Today, there are more than 53,000 students with autism in California schools who need specialized services. This has been an 88percent increase during the last five years.

The Commission on Teacher Credentialing is offering a temporary approval for teachers who already hold a mild-to-moderate specialization, Harrower said.

The first option for approval is for districts to verify that the teacher has worked with students with autism for one year prior to Sept 1, 2007. The second option is to take one

three-unit university course in autism. These two options are only available through August 2011. After that, anyone seeking this credential will need to complete a commission-approved university autism program.

CSUMB will offer the three-unit course this summer, and will hold an information meeting about the class from 6:30 to 7:30p.m. May 13 at the Music Hall on campus.