

**SANTA BARBARA**

**INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL STORY**

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**Zaca Preschool, Santa Barbara County Education Office**

**Private Preschool Model**

## Background

The story was developed through interviews with Dr. Florene Bednersh, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education programs, Santa Barbara County Education Office (SBCEO), the Zaca video story, a visit to the Zaca Center in Santa Ynez Valley, review of program documents, and an interview with Shelley Grand, Zaca Center Preschool Director.

For more information, please visit the SEEDS website at [www.scoe.net/seeds](http://www.scoe.net/seeds).

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## Introduction

In 1996, Dr. Florene Bednersh, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education programs, SBCEO, initiated the Zaca Preschool Program concept. Historically, SBCEO began efforts to move special education preschool programs from general education elementary campuses to Head Start Programs, State Preschools, and other private preschool programs during the late 1980s, early 1990s. In the Santa Ynez Valley, SBCEO staff were challenged to identify general education preschool programs in the area. Zaca Preschool Center at the time, offered a private, for profit option for preschool age children living in the vicinity. Florene met with the Zaca preschool director to inquire about leasing slots for children with special needs. The director proposed that SBCEO could “buy” the preschool program. Everyone laughed and Florene went home and began thinking about the real possibility of purchasing a preschool program. She met with the superintendent who recommended she develop a business plan proposal. With the assistance of the accounting department at the district office, Florene formulated a business plan that was approved by the superintendent. Florene secured a superintendent loan through general funds that special education was required to pay back over a period of time. The upfront loan allowed them to lease the preschool at Zaca and purchase the name and furniture from the previous owner.

Florene was trained initially in how to complete a licensing process for a child-care program. The State of California, Department of Social Services requires that the preschool obtain a State license. Florene borrowed salary schedules from the Childcare Department in the county in order to hire a preschool permit teacher with ECE background as the program director. Shelley Grand was selected as the new director who took on the administrative functions including future licensing requirements. The program at Zaca is run as a private preschool serving 58 children through a sliding fee schedule. The director and teachers are NAEYC approved. The preschool initially had nine children attending and has consistently maintained 58 children enrolled for over a decade. The success of the program has influenced the creation of a second private preschool program in Santa Barbara. Others may follow in the future.

## **Model Components- How did you do it?**

### ***Administrative support and involvement at the superintendent level***

The superintendent supported the initiative both fiscally and philosophically. Currently the Zaca Director handles the day-to-day operations of the Center and contacts the Special Education (SpEd) office or the accounting department for personnel or fiscal issues. Special Education provides a preschool coordinator for the region that oversees the student Individualized Education Programs (IEPS) and other SpEd personnel matters. Shelley conducted a presentation about Zaca at one of the first board meetings after the preschool began operating. The superintendent visits the center regularly.

### ***Philosophical statement (mission, vision) for inclusion***

The Zaca Parent Handbook includes a statement of inclusion; “Zaca Center supports the development of children with special needs by including them in our classrooms and all of our daily activities. We encourage acceptance of the differences in all people. We at Zaca Center respect that each child will develop at different rates and in their own way.” (Zaca Parent Handbook). The Center emphasizes a working together approach in supporting all students and meeting them where they are developmentally. The students at Zaca center are considered, as general education students first to assure total buy in from staff in the inclusive philosophy.

### ***Models of inclusion***

SBCEO had attempted several inclusion models initially and conceived a new model based on the needs of the children and the community where they reside. Zaca is located in a neighborhood in the Santa Ynez Valley. The building is part of the homeowner’s association and an integral part of the local community.

### ***Flexible staff***

Florene hired a preschool director and teachers who work as teams to serve children. Specialists participate as active team members and the therapy is integrated and the goals infused in the daily activities of the children. Shelley comments, “Quality is ever changing.” The program includes nine full time staff; director/teacher/cook, ECE teacher, ECSE teacher, assistant, an early start teacher (two days at Zaca as a ES teacher and three days at Lompoc infant program) and assistant (paid under Zaca, Special Education Speech assistant program and translator for Spanish speaking families), and other therapists/specialists visiting on a part time basis.

### ***Program Manager as lead to the collaborative initiative***

Florene took the lead in pursuing the purchasing of a preschool, typically outside the purview of a county office of education and continues to lead the vision of inclusion. A Parent Handbook includes policies and procedures for program management and guidance.

***Developing and implementing an action plan for success***

Florene developed a business plan for procuring the preschool program at Zaca. The program is run through a public agency as a private business that operates as a non-profit.

***Fiscal support***

The superintendent grant paved the way for the purchase of the preschool. The income generated from the program continues to support the ongoing functioning of the site. Special education staff provide training, support, and direct service within the classroom.

***Operational budget***

The Zaca preschool is licensed for 43 children and serves 58 children in full time and part time slots. Ten of those slots are reserved annually for the children with IEPs. The other 48 slots are paid through a monthly tuition schedule. A full day slot (9-5 with snack and lunch) costs \$610 per month. Most of the budget is supported through the private preschool funding system with the special education teacher, assistants, and specialists supported through the Special Education Dept.

***Professional development***

Staff has attended the CA Association of the Education of Young Children conferences in the past. After eleven years of program operation, they are now considering submitting a proposal for a presentation. Staff meet on the first and third Wednesdays during naptime to conduct student study teams and plan collaboratively. Staff attends the workshops sponsored by First Five in their local community and the director provides substitutes for staff to visit other preschool programs to observe different methodologies and approaches. The information is brought back and shared at the next staff meeting. The program is ever changing and growing through new initiatives including this year's focus of outdoor learning through a First Five initiative.

***Resources***

The preschool was purchased including the furniture and materials. Fundraising activities are scheduled throughout the year to purchase items from the wish list. Large-scale items such as new blinds this year are requested out of the general budget. The events include an annual Tupperware fundraiser, the sale of poinsettias to local gardeners and businesses including the casino in the area, a Mother's jewelry and scrap-booking event, and a display of flowers for purchase for Mother's Day in the front entryway. Rummage sales were attempted at the start of the preschool collaborative but were deemed too labor intensive and taxed the limited storage space on hand for sale items. Parents also offer to buy supplies from the wish list posted.

***Public awareness***

Initially, the director advertised through the local newspaper, the homeowners' association newsletter, and flyers posted at the local bank and other businesses. The preschool director accessed her own local networks to garner support for the preschool effort through her community ties. Florene has also presented the model at Special Education Administrators of County Offices (SEACO) meetings and the Northern California Early Childhood Education (NCECE) annual conference in 2008.

***Evaluation and continuous improvement***

The program is NAEYC accredited through 2010 and follows the guidelines and policies required for accreditation. Zaca is licensed through the State of CA. The director reviews rates annually and aligns costs with the average rates of preschools in the surrounding communities. Parents are also queried about program needs such as maintaining the hot lunch program through an increase in monthly rates.

## Statistics

### **Number of children served per year**

58 total part time and full time children; licensed by the State for 43 children per day (10 special education slots)

### **Number and type of staff required for program functioning**

ECE Director, Teacher, Assistant, Special Education Teacher, Assistant, Therapists as needed based on IEP

### **Number of interagency committees to support the effort**

None. The special education program is involved in multiple interagency activities supporting inclusion throughout the district. The Early Start Committee and the First Five Early Childhood Mental Health-Special Needs Initiative are two such committees in which the district participates

### **Number of MOUs and with which agencies**

None. Special Education has a variety of MOUs required by law in place that support preschool inclusive opportunities such as agreements with Head Start programs, State Preschool among others that includes interagency planning activities.

### **Number of interagency representatives involved in the initiative**

None.

### **Number of meetings required for planning and implementation annually**

None. The program is a stand-alone private preschool operated by the SBCEO.

### **Types of resources needed to support staff development**

Staff attends First Five Workshops and preschool program visits along with annual State Preschool Conferences.

### **Total costs of an inclusion program option**

There are two separate budgets for the operation of Zaca Preschool. The general education portion is \$141,000 per year including staff and materials. The general education budget is tuition generated. The special education budget is approximately \$200,000 including teachers, designated instructional support (DIS) personnel, and materials.

### **Other**

Because of the success of the Zaca program, a new private preschool program option was created for Santa Barbara. SBCEO staff are considering private preschool program options for the Santa Maria area as a next step in replication of the model.