During the 2015 CEC Convention and Expo in San Diego, CA CEC members began a discussion examining the benefits of updating the 1998 *Bright Futures* study. The original *Bright Futures* study reviewed the “conditions of teaching” students with exceptionalities and offered recommendations for improvements. With 17 years since the studies completion is it time to revisit the work to see what things have changed?

Representative Assembly (RA) members for CEC units and division are a distinguished group of individuals who serve as a unique leadership body for the field of Special Education. They come from across the US and Canada and hold leadership positions in divisions and/or State and Provincial Units, focused on exceptionalities including disability areas, gifted and talented, young children, and culturally diverse students. The RA members serve as advisors to the CEC Board of Directors. During the 2015 RA meeting, RA members (N=?) participated in round-table discussions of the following questions:

- What would be the benefits of a new study of special education teaching conditions?
- What societal trends are influencing education today?
- What societal/educational trends are influencing special education?
- What barriers currently affect high quality-special education?
- What are positive enablers that support high-quality special education today?
In addition to the RA discussion, four of these questions were explored in depth during the Pioneers Showcase session (N +/- 12) and these results are included as a comparison sample of CEC membership. The RA and Showcase discussions were facilitated by members of the Pioneers Division and CEC Past Presidents. Notes were collected and responses were compiled and placed in rank order according to the number of times each response was mentioned. These were reviewed for comprehensiveness and accuracy by 5 members of the Pioneers Division who participated in the RA and/or Showcase sessions. In this summary we will focus on the answers that were most frequently given, the top 5-6 responses, however the full set of comments will be used as this work moves forward (the full response-set is available in Appendix A)). The top responses for both the RA and Showcase are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion Question</th>
<th>RA Responses (Top 5-6 responses)</th>
<th>PD Showcase Responses (Top 5-6 responses)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question #1:</strong> What would be the benefits of a New Study of Special Education Teaching Conditions?</td>
<td>Needs of today’s generation (millenials) for organizations (11)</td>
<td>Question not asked of Showcase participants.</td>
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<td>Comparisons of conditions of teaching across the decades (11)</td>
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<td>Advocacy (policy) at national, state, provincial, local levels (10)</td>
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<td>examination of teacher</td>
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### Question #2: What societal trends are influencing education today?
- Changing demographics (16)
- Privatization of education (14)
- Technology; social media (12)
- Funding patterns-national, state, provincial (11)
- Family structure changes (8)
- Public perception of education (7)
- Technology; social media (10)
- Privatization of education (7)
- Changing demographics (7)
- Funding shortages (6)
- Parental engagement (4)

### Question #3: What societal/educational trends are influencing special education today?
- Accountability, outcome-based education, data-driven, growth models (20)
- Common Core Standards (8)
- Multi-tiered systems of support (7)
- Teacher accountability/evaluation (7)
- Teacher credentialing across states/provinces (7)
- Common Core Standards (5)
- Multi-tiered systems of support (5)
- Inclusion with lack of supports (4)
- High Stakes Testing (3)
- Various teaching strategies (3)

### Question #4: What barriers currently affect high quality-special education today?
- Higher education curriculum/training programs have not kept pace with current needs (14)
- Lack of appropriate funding (13)
- Teacher workload issues (10)
- Lack of role models, mentoring
- Professional development resources and higher education preparation programs (12)
- Funding inadequacies (4)
- Teacher workload issues (4)
- Low morale among teachers and administrators (4)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Programs (8)</th>
<th>Special education knowledge base in general education (7)</th>
<th>Inadequate staffing (7)</th>
<th>Lack of collaboration time (4)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Question #5: What are positive enablers that support high-quality special education today?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Good teachers and effective instructional practices; professionalism (6)</td>
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<td>• Teacher mentoring programs (6)</td>
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<td>• Highly qualified administrators (6)</td>
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<td>• Provision of appropriate resources (6)</td>
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<td>• Professional development; research and evidence-based practices (4)</td>
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<td>• Parent partnerships (4)</td>
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<td>• Collaboration/teaming in schools (8)</td>
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<td>• Highly qualified administrators (7)</td>
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<td>• Instructional practices (UDL, differentiated instruction, personalized education, etc) (6)</td>
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<td>• Strong teacher/administrator preparation programs (6)</td>
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<td>• Technology (4)</td>
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*responses not in bold were only given by one group

RA members indicated that an update of the *Bright Futures* study would help us respond to today’s teacher and student populations whose needs and interests reflect the “millennial” generation. Other benefits included the ability to do compare the conditions of teaching across time periods, and the ability to use findings from the study to influence policy, teacher preparation, and practice. They felt that an updated study would position CEC for continued leadership on issues within Special Education that need to be addressed.

Education does not take place in a vacuum and societal trends often impact the direction and context of educational policy and practice. The RA and Showcase responses were similar in the social trends they identified. The change in demographics with increases in children of color, linguistic diversity, and poverty was a key factor cited by both groups. The increased use of technology
and social media both for communication and for education was included as a key trend. Both groups cited the increased role of privatization of school and the “for profit” movement within special education combined with general concern over funding patterns and shortages for public education. Changes in family structure and the impact this has on keeping families engaged with their child’s education was mentioned by both groups. Members of the RA also include concerns about growing negativity of the public’s perception of education in their top societal trend impacting education today.

When asked about educational trends that are impacting special education specifically the most frequently given response was the movement toward accountability for student outcomes with increases in the use of high-stakes testing, growth-models for tracking student progress, and data-driven decision making. On the whole these responses indicated a positive impact for students with exceptionalities, but concerns were raised about appropriateness for students with significant areas of challenge. The common core and state curriculum standards were given as a major trend impacting special education and again the overall tone was encouraging with some disclaimers that the movement toward standards can be difficult when appropriate curriculum materials are not provided for students with exceptionalities. Educational reform efforts that include multi-tiered models for supports and services was given as one of the top five trends impacting special education with the focus on the positive benefits of greater collaboration and the possible draw-backs of shared funding and role confusion for teachers. The RA members include increasing emphasis of teacher accountability/evaluation and challenges resulting from differences in teacher credentialing across states and provinces. While the Showcase respondents included the general education movement toward a range of teaching/instructional strategies (e.g. Universal Design for Learning, Differentiated Instructions, and Personalized Learning) as trends impacting special education.

The top response given, by both the RA and Showcase participants, to barriers affecting a high-quality special education was teacher preparation programs that have not kept pace with the changes faced in today’s educational environments. This includes concerns about pre-service teacher preparation and in-service resources and supports. There was a strong consensus that pre-service and in-service teacher preparation programs do not provide adequate and appropriate support for teachers to meet the needs of children with exceptionalities. Lack of appropriate funding and teacher workload issues were both sited as barriers to high-quality
special education. The RA members gave three additional barriers: lack of role models and mentors for special education teachers, a limited knowledge of special education practices within general education, and inadequate staffing to meet student needs. The Showcase participants included low morale among teachers and administrators and limited time to collaborate with colleagues as major barriers to high-quality special education.

While there are clearly challenges that must be addressed there are also factors that support or enable high-quality special education. These enablers included: good teachers who use a range of instructional practices; highly qualified and knowledgeable administrators; professional development and teacher preparation programs that incorporate evidence-based practices; and teaming approaches that capitalize on collegial collaboration and partnerships with parents. Other enablers sited by the RA included the provision of teacher mentor programs and appropriate resources. The Showcase participants cited the availability of technology as an enabler for high-quality special education services.

Summary and Conclusions

The RA members offered a compelling list of benefits tied to a new study examining the conditions of teaching. These benefits included increasing CEC’s ability to provide effective leadership for the current generation of teachers within the contemporary societal and educational context. The RA and Showcase participants provided areas that this study would need to address across societal and educational trends offering insight into areas of concern and areas of hope. The results from this discussion will be useful as we think about next steps in revisiting the Bright Futures study. We thank all of the participants in these discussion for their frank and perceptive comments. Questions regarding this work should be directed to Mary Ruth Coleman maryruth.coleman@unc.edu and Bill Bogdan wkbogdan1@gmail.com.

Appendix A

All Responses Bright Futures CEC 2015 RA and Pioneers Showcase