



San Diego Unified School District

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May 30, 2008

Dear Principals and staff,

For the past 3 months we have been communicating to all District staff and parents about the upcoming changes in special education for the 08-09 school year, specifically regarding Specialized Academic Instruction. As with all change and an introduction of a new way of doing things, there are various levels of anxiety, which we are addressing through continued communication with staff, parents and administration. We have used the following forums to disseminate information and communicate:

- All Area Principal Meetings
- Community Meetings in the evening in every high school feeder pattern
- Mandatory SAI staff trainings for special education staff
- Mailings to staff and parents
- Various staff settings
- Updates on the special education web page

We have updated the Frequently Asked Questions on the Web Page and have the Powerpoints of the SAI staff presentations on the web page for future reference.

Here are the additional questions we are addressing.

Are all students with disabilities returning to their neighborhood schools?

No.

For the 08-09 school year, all middle and high schools will have the capacity to provide the entire continuum of services and supports for students based on their IEPs. Students who have been placed at non-resident schools due to their special education needs will have the option of attending their neighborhood schools, where that option may not have been available in the past, or remaining at their current site.

We are strongly encouraging students who are articulating from elementary to middle school, and middle school to high school to attend either their neighborhood school or their Enrollment Options (VEEP, Choice, Charter and Magnet, and Program Improvement School Choice) school.

Placements at elementary regional program classes will continue as they are now. Parents have and always have had the option of having their child included. Any changes must occur through an IEP and each student should have a transition plan that supports his or her success in moving to this delivery model.

Who will be supporting my school with all of these changes?

As many of you know the District's Special Education Division reduced its budget by \$12 million. These cuts included much of the central office staff who had been supporting schools, so the structure around providing supports will change. As there are so many changes in the District right now, it has been difficult to solidify a firm organizational chart to provide to you. We will still have some resource teachers available for professional development and some school support, but it will be much less than in the past.

Your related service providers (psychologist, speech language pathologist, occupational therapist) will have an understanding of changes as they occur and should be able to assist you with any questions you may have.

How will the IEPs change for my students?

The IEP process will remain the same, the focus must always remain on the individual student needs. The change will take place in the language used to describe special education services. We will now be using Specialized Academic Instruction and will no longer use our program labels (PACE, ILS, ED, Non-severe, and Resource Specialist).

As has always been the case, the IEP team must identify the primary disability (Specific Learning Disability, Mental Retardation, Visually Impaired....) that qualifies the student for Specialized Academic Instruction and related services. Then the team must determine how much time the student requires the services and in what environments (general or separate class etc...) the student should receive that instruction.

How will we know where the student will be placed?

Middle and high school students will remain at their neighborhood school (with very few exceptions as determined by the IEP team). An individual schedule of services and supports must be developed for each student that will ensure the implementation of the IEP.

Elementary student placement will be determined by the IEP team. A descriptor of various environments will be available for them to use to determine which one will work best for the student. Boundaries will continue to provide the various options for the team to consider based on the team's recommendation prior to the final IEP.

What will my classes look like?

At middle and high schools, individual student needs will determine what the supports will look like. Administrators will view their staff as a team of special educators to use in the most effective way to meet the needs of their students. Some students may receive all of their instruction in general education with support, some may have a combination of general education / separate class, and some may be in a separate class for the majority of their day.

At elementary schools the classes should look very similar to what they look like now. Least restrictive environment must be considered for every child. At the elementary level, most students will receive the majority of their instruction in a combination of general education and separate classroom or in a separate classroom.

When will I begin seeing SAI on the IEPs?

District Program labels will stop appearing on the IEPs when school begins in September. Since the District is no longer providing classes with labels, IEPs will need to reflect this change. However, there is no need to re-do the IEPs immediately, instead as IEP meetings are held in the 2008-2009 school year, the IEP will change to reflect Specialized Academic Instruction and the environment of the service.

What is the plan for preparing facilities for students with special needs? (i.e. sinks / hot water in classrooms where diapers are changed)

If the concern is about access, ramps etc... you would contact the facilities department. Staff are currently surveying schools that have not previously served students with specific hygiene needs. They will ensure facilities are appropriate for the students projected to be served in 08-09. Please feel free to contact the Moderate/ Severe Program office at 858-693-5500 if you have questions.

When will principals know their allocations?

All sites have received their projected certificated allocations based on student numbers in their budget workbook. Please remember that the allocations look different as they now list the staff as either Mild/Moderate or Moderate/Severe rather than by program label. Allocations were based on the number of students projected to attend, their disabilities and needs, we then assigned teachers accordingly based on credentials (Mild/Moderate or Moderate/Severe). As the principal, you need to look at the credentials staff hold, as well as their strengths, and determine who is the best fit for each service environment. Viewing your staff as a team provides the flexibility to provide a strong continuum of services for students.

Are there grievable issues around credentials – do teachers have any say as to who they teach?

As principal, you have the right of assignment at your site. You need to look at who has the credential to provide service for students and assign your staff accordingly. Teachers would have options within the contract if they wanted to look elsewhere for a different assignment. Typically Mild/Moderate would serve students with specific learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, other health impaired ... (formally RS, NS-SDC, ED-SDC). Moderate/Severe typically serves students with Mental Retardation. Autism goes across the spectrum.

What is the principal's role without an SBDRT / SSEA?

I know this expertise is a great loss for school, none the less, services must continue at the required level. You will need to ensure that all IEPs are being followed, that services are being implemented, and that timelines for compliance are adhered to, and that staffing is in place. You will want to access the tools that are available to you such as the Procedures Manual as you handle IEP compliance. Ultimately your role will be to ensure that there are strong academic outcomes for your students with special needs and that they are contributing members of your campus. Teachers assigned to your school should not do administrative duties previously done by the SBDRT/SSEA as it takes them out of the classroom.

When will all principals know about the summer professional development? What will be included in the professional development?

The details are being finalized on the summer sessions for principals. The dates should be out very shortly. The sessions will be about Planning for Student Success: Establishing Systems of Intervention K-12. There will be plenty of time for you to work on your Single Plan for Student Achievement for all students, areas covered include, data, assessments, Data Director, case studies, accommodations and principal's responsibilities regarding special education.

What is the plan for support for the Point Loma cluster next year?

A plan is currently being put in place to support the staff and students in the Point Loma Cluster as families begin to have their students attend their neighborhood schools. In the past, there were very few service options for students with special needs in this cluster. Therefore, more support will need to happen in this cluster than others to ensure student success during the time of transition. The various offices are working closely together to make sure that sites, students, and families are transitioned smoothly and well supported.

Managing change is a complex process. It requires providing a clear vision, a detailed plan, and an understanding of the outcomes. We recognize that we are experiencing many changes simultaneously. Everyone is concerned about ending this year as well as being prepared for the opening of the 2008-2009 school year, which speaks to your dedication as professionals. We will continue to provide updates as soon as they are available. Thank you for all that you do daily to support students with special needs on your campuses and making them welcome contributing members of your campus.

Roxie Jackson
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