



San Diego Unified School District

EUGENE BRUCKER EDUCATION CENTER
4100 Normal Street, Annex 2, San Diego, CA 92103-2682

(619) 725-7700
Fax: (619) 725-7090

Roxie Jackson, Executive Director
Special Education Programs Division
Office of the Deputy Superintendent

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INFORMATION FOR PARENTS REGARDING SPECIALIZED ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION

This information is regarding changes that you will begin to see on your child's IEP next year. These changes are about the way we refer to special education services and some increased options for the locations where services will be provided within the San Diego Unified School District.

While all of us know that special education is a service, the many years of using terms like "special day class" has confused people into thinking special education is a place. It is not a place that students go, but rather a service that students may receive in a number of different places. The Special Education Department for the State of California is now referring to primary special education service as "specialized academic instruction" (SAI). There will no longer be designations such as ILS, PACE, Non-Severe, etc, as a primary service.

The IEP will now have:

- Primary Federal Handicapping Condition (FHC).
- Amount of time the student will receive SAI.
- Amount of time a student will receive SAI in or out of general education.
- Related services (e.g., speech and language) to be listed separately.

This change takes us away from labeling students and allows more opportunities for them. It requires that staff members think of students as individuals who have very unique needs and who need their school schedules to be highly individualized. It creates additional least restrictive environment (LRE) options by enhancing supports at every neighborhood school.

The IEP team will determine the student's individual schedule and will plan where the child needs to receive educational services. Some children who have an existing IEP may be transitioning this year to elementary, middle or high school. For those children, the teachers from the child's previous class will work with the receiving teacher to review the child's needs and decide where the child might best get special education services. For example, they will decide where the language instruction should take place; or whether some courses should be taken in the general education class; or how much time is needed generalizing skills out in the community; or how much time the child may need in a separate room (support room). A child may be in the support room for as little or as much time as they need. Not every child's schedule will be different from what it looks like today. At this point in time we see this affecting a small number of children. Parents will always have a say in their child's IEP. Our teachers are getting more familiar with these changes and you may feel free to talk with them about it.

In addition, you may be aware that the San Diego Unified School District contracted with Dr. Thomas Hehir and Associates to provide a comprehensive review of special education services. Dr. Hehir presented his findings to the Board of Education on January 22, 2008.

Three priority areas were endorsed by the Board of Education:

- Improve instructional programs for students with disabilities;
- Assure that general education, including charter schools, take greater responsibility for the education of students with disabilities; and
- Develop an effective Response to Intervention (RTI) model. (This is a general education initiative)

Many parents spoke in support of the goals. We are pleased to be able to begin working towards the recommendations that we will implement over a three-year period. Dr Hehir’s complete report is available on the district website at <http://www.sandi.net/depts/specialed/>.

We are aware that change is always difficult. It makes everyone feel unsure and worried about the outcome. Between the changes in the language and the move toward neighborhood schools, folks feel like they are losing equilibrium. This is a time for discussion and we will provide many venues for parents to meet with the special education staff. Please help dispel the inaccuracies that inevitably abound in times like this. Please review the chart below. We are committed to provide students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education consistent with federal and state laws.

WHAT THE CHANGES MEAN	WHAT THE CHANGES DO NOT MEAN
1. Services at neighborhood schools will be enhanced in order for students to be able to get their needed services at their neighborhood schools.	1. It does not mean that all children will have to go to their neighborhood schools.
2. Many parents will be happy that their children will not be sent away from their neighborhoods to receive special education services.	2. It does not mean that Choice, Magnet, VEEP and Charter options will be eliminated.
3. Children will be seen as students first and not be identified by labels.	3. It does not mean that children will have less service.
4. Children will have individualized schedules; many students will continue to spend the majority of their day in classrooms with their special education teachers.	4. It does not mean that children will have to have their instruction in general education.