

## **Confidentiality**

Maintaining student, parent, and family confidentiality is mandated by law and is of critical and utmost importance when serving students with significant disabilities. As educators, we should be aware of these professional responsibilities in all of our communications, both on and off the job.

For example, the teaching professional:

- ◆ Should never discuss a student's issues, IEP content, medications, behavior or other personal information with the parents or guardians of another student.
- ◆ Should never mention the names of students or parents when in public settings, on or off the job.
- ◆ Should never mention another student's progress or lack of it or attempt to compare students when conferring with parents.
- ◆ Should never make telephone calls to a parent or guardian when another parent is present in the classroom. (Such conversations could be overheard and misinterpreted.)
- ◆ Should never discuss the use, possible benefits, or names of medications that another student may be using when conferring with a parent about his or her child.
- ◆ Should ensure that certificated teaching staff, *not* paraeducators are the primary contacts with parents or legal guardians.



**San Diego Unified School District**

Special Education Programs Division

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# Guidelines for Maintaining Professional Conduct



**San Diego Unified School District**

**Office of the Chief Student Services Officer  
Special Education Programs Division**

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## **Introduction**

San Diego Unified is committed to providing quality educational programs that promote human dignity, respect for personal privacy, individual choices, physical freedom, and social interaction for all students. People with disabilities often indicate that the greatest barrier they face is not their disability, but rather the lack of acceptance and understanding by the rest of society. As professionals with responsibility for education of individuals with disabilities, we are in a unique position to model appropriate attitudes and behavior. The words we use and images we convey provide others with insight on how they can approach and interact with people with disabilities. This brochure is designed to provide guidance in how, as special education professionals, we can model appropriate interactions.

## **General Guidelines**

1. Help others to focus on the individual and not the disability. Help them to look beyond the obvious and superficial and find the person.
2. Assist others to see the importance of self-respect in all of our lives.
3. Don't pity persons with disabilities for what they seem to be, but rather admire them for what they have accomplished.
4. Don't talk about persons with disabilities in their presence and assume they are unable to understand. Rather, find a way to speak with and include them in conversations and try to understand what they are attempting to communicate.
5. Be relaxed with students with disabilities and convey a notion of acceptance and approachability.

## **A Word on Language**

A first step toward changing attitudes is changing the way we speak. The manner in which educators refer to their students can convey a message in itself. Effort should be made to use "people first" language in all professional situations, especially when those involved may have limited contact with persons with disabilities. This is particularly important when addressing the media and community organizations as a representative of or advocate for persons with

disabilities. When speaking about persons with disabilities, keep these guidelines in mind:

- ◆ Avoid using disability labels. Speak about the person first, and then the disability, if it need be mentioned. For example, say, "a child with a disability" instead of, "a disabled child."
- ◆ Learn the preferred terminology. This may vary according to context or locale. For example, in many areas the term "handicapped" has a negative connotation. Locally we use disabled or challenged.
- ◆ Use positive descriptive words in communicating so as to express the dignity, worth, contributions, and skills of the person.

## **Instructional Program**

Each student's educational program should focus on growth, providing greater opportunity and access as the student moves through school and into adult life. People with disabilities, no matter how severe their challenges, have gifts and capabilities to make contributions to society when provided the opportunity. Instructional programs should foster students' independence and interdependence, empowering them with increasing control over their environment and the choices life presents.

Educators can promote student growth by doing the following:

- ◆ Adapting materials and teaching strategies to the individual, thus limiting dependence on others.
- ◆ Providing consistent, ongoing training for staff and parents that encompass teaching strategies and outcomes.
- ◆ Encouraging and facilitating student participation in decision-making whenever possible.
- ◆ Providing students with access to instruction in the natural environment that focuses on their individual needs.