

Orinda Union School District Parent/ Guardian Handbook for Navigating Special Education



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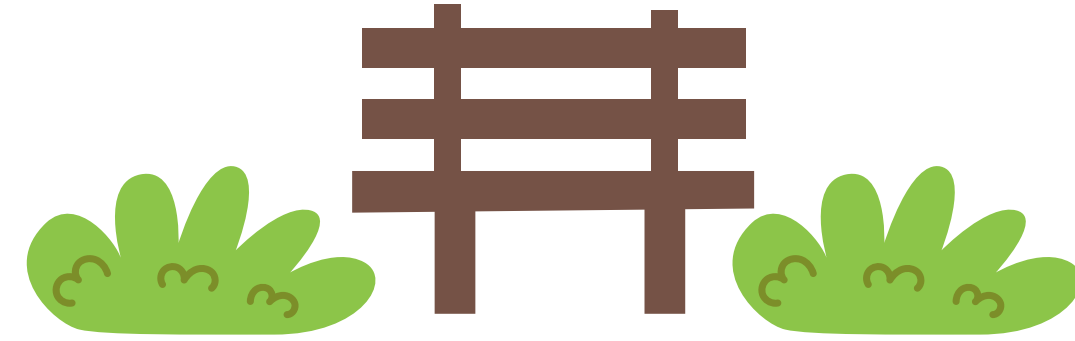
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[Orinda Union School District Website](#)

WELCOME!



Dear Parents/Guardians,

Orinda USD values its partnerships with our parents/ guardians. Navigating the Special Education roadway can be challenging and overwhelming. This handbook aims to give you the necessary information to understand and participate fully in the Special Education process and program.

The first part of this handbook will give you a roadmap for the Individualized Education Program process. Each part of the IEP process highlights your rights as a parent/guardian. The second part of this handbook will give you definitions of the various terms and acronyms used throughout, and the third part of this handbook is an updated list of resources.

We are here to support you. Our intention with this handbook is to provide parents and guardians with the relevant and most up-to-date information so they can be informed and active participants in their child's IEP. Parents and Orinda USD, working collaboratively, can ensure the success of all of our students.

In Community,

Dr. Carrie Nerheim
Director of Student Services

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Alicia Keenan
Director of POISE

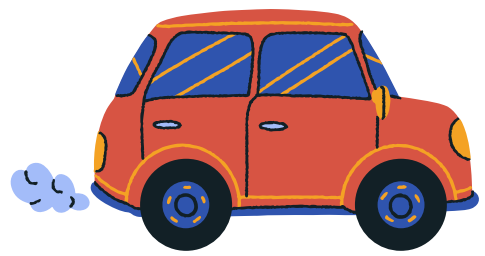
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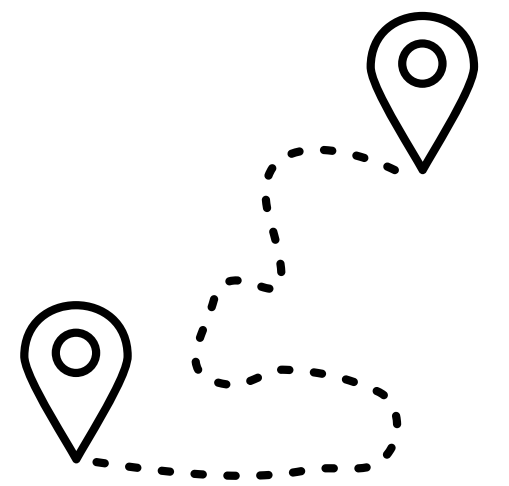


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An IEP Road Map



Where does it start? What is the path?



When a parent or school staff member suspects a student may have a disability, the District's Child Find obligation is triggered. Child Find requires identifying, locating, and evaluating all children with suspected disabilities. An effective Child Find system is an ongoing part of each state's responsibility to ensure that a free appropriate public education (FAPE) is made available to all eligible children with disabilities ([citation](#)). The process that is followed is always the same:

Assessment → **Areas of Need** → **Goals** → **Services** → **Placement**

Assessment

This is the evaluation of your child's current levels of functioning, including needs. Some students may receive a wide range of assessments, and some may receive a more narrow assessment based on the initial request for assessment. The District will always conduct its assessment of a student's needs. Additional information, such as outside/third-party assessments, will be considered by the IEP team but are not a substitute for the District's assessment.

Areas of Assessment May Include

Academic, cognitive, processing, speech/language, occupational therapy, behavior and social-emotional, adaptive/daily living, motor, and health.

Assessments determine present levels of academic achievement and functional performance.



Parental Rights

As a parent, you have the right to request an assessment of your child when you have a concern impacting your child's education. This request must be in writing to the District, your child's teacher, or principal. The District has 15 days to respond to the request with either a proposed assessment plan or a denial of the request. As a parent, you have the right to know what assessments are being conducted with your child and you must provide written consent as an assessment plan provided by the District. The assessment plan identifies areas of assessment. Once an assessment plan is signed, the District has 60 days to complete the requested assessment.

Initial Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Meeting

Once all assessments are complete, and reports are written, an initial IEP meeting will be scheduled. You will receive a written IEP meeting notice for a mutually agreed upon time. The meeting will occur no later than 60 days after the District receives the signed assessment plan. Under extraordinary circumstances, the District may request an extension which you may or may not grant.



Parental Rights

You have the right to request the team to make reasonable accommodations for you to attend the meeting. You can bring other people to the meeting for support and participation; however, it is always best to provide prior notice to the team that you are bringing people to the meeting. You have the right to record the meeting provided you give the District 24 hours notice.

Initial IEP Meeting: An IEP Team Must Include

Parents/ Guardians

Administrator

Special education teacher

General education teacher

Individuals who assessed the student; those who will present the assessment findings

At an initial IEP meeting, the team will do the following

Give Parents a copy of their Procedural Safeguards (parent's rights)

Review all assessment reports

Discuss Student's Eligibility for Special Education and Related Services

To be eligible for Special Education, the student must meet one of the 13 categories for Special Education. The meeting may end if your child does not meet the eligibility criteria for special education and related services. The team may give you the recommendation to continue to support the student and re-evaluate if concerns persist.

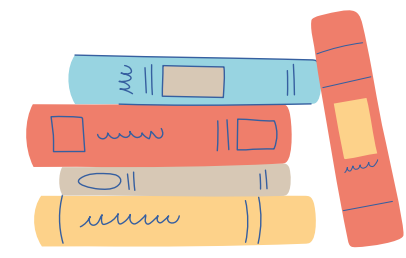


Parental rights

If you disagree with the eligibility determination, you can request an independent educational evaluation (IEE). You need to submit in writing your formal disagreement and indicate which parts of the assessment you disagree with. The IEE must be conducted by a qualified examiner certificated and/or licensed by the state of California in the area assessed in the evaluation. Tests and other assessment materials must be validated for their specific purpose; they must be tailored to assess specific areas of educational need. The District may approve or deny a request for an IEE.

If your child meets one or more of the 13 eligibility criteria under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for special education and related services, the meeting will continue, and the District will develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for your child, starting with **areas of need**.

Areas of Need



The assessment findings determine the student's present academic achievement and functional performance levels. The student's strengths and areas of need will be identified from these assessments. For example, academic assessments may reveal that a student's strength is in mathematics, and the areas of need are in reading and writing. In other cases, academic assessments may reveal strengths in all academic areas, while social/emotional behavioral assessments may show that a student needs support in emotional regulation.

The areas of need will be described in your child's IEP. They drive a critical component of your child's IEP, the student's **goals**.



Goals



The student's areas of need drive the goals written in those areas. In the example above, IEP goals will be developed in reading and writing. Parents must consent to the goals and can work with the special education team on their wording.

Goals must be

Specific

Measurable

Appropriately Ambitious and Attainable

Realistic

Time-bound

All goals must contain specific and measurable baseline data based on assessment findings. The goals are written to be achieved in a year beginning from the date the IEP is signed. If a student achieves goals early, new goals can be written. Each goal lists the certificated staff member responsible for implementing and monitoring the student's progress on the goal. If there is more than one staff member on a goal, the second person is "tagged" on the goal. Progress on IEP goals is reported simultaneously as general education progress reports and report cards. All goals are reviewed at the annual IEP meeting.

The U.S. Supreme Court requires schools to provide "appropriately ambitious" ([citation](#)) goals for each student's circumstance. They must be robust enough to be challenging but not so complex that they are unattainable. Special education students can not be asked to meet a higher standard than general education students. When a student does not meet a goal, the team can celebrate progress and, if appropriate, rewrite it to make it more attainable or create a new, more appropriate goal.

Once IEP goals are determined, the IEP meeting will move to **services**.



Services



IEP goals drive the necessary services for the student to meet their goals. Services are the necessary support given to your child to assist them with achieving their IEP goals. The IEP goals will determine the services provided to your child.

The services will specify

Service provider - who will be working with the student on this goal

Frequency - how often during the week/month will this goal be worked on

Duration - how many minutes is the service

Location - where will this service be provided

Services can be push-in (in the classroom) or pull-out (in a separate setting).

Services can be individual or group based on the student's needs. The team will consider the effects of special education and related services on your child's access to general education curriculum and peers with and without disabilities.



Parental rights

You'll need to give informed written consent before the district can provide your child with special education and related services.

Accommodations

Accommodations are the supports to minimize the effects of a student's disability. Students with disabilities often experience barriers that interfere with their ability to access and demonstrate learning.

Barriers to learning can include

The way information is presented (e.g., text, lecture)

The way the student is required to respond (e.g., writing, speech)

The characteristics of the setting (e.g., noise, lighting, access to tools)

The timing and scheduling of instruction (e.g., time of day, length of assignment)

Teachers can address these barriers by providing students with accommodations.

Accommodations are adaptations or changes in educational environments or practices that help students overcome the barriers presented by their disability.

([citation](#))

Examples of accommodations

Extra time on a test

Preferential seating

A slant board for writing

Access to a fidget tool

There are many possible accommodations, and the IEP team will determine the appropriate accommodations for each student.

Modifications

When students require more support than accommodations can provide, modifications may be necessary. Modifications are adaptations that change *what* students learn. Whereas accommodations *level* the playing field, modifications *change* the playing field. ([citation](#))

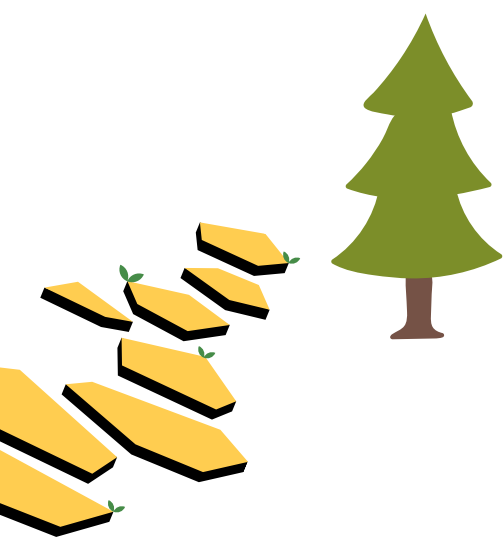
Accommodations change how a student is taught; modifications change what a student is taught.

Examples of Modifications

Read a book at a lower level to address decoding difficulties

Write a narrative and an informative text but not an argument (assumption: grade-level standards require that students write narratives, informative texts, and arguments)

After determining the services necessary for the student to achieve their goals, the IEP team will determine the student's **placement**.



Placement



“Federal law requires that a student’s educational placement reflects the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). As much as possible while meeting the student’s academic needs, the student should be included in regular education classes, with additional support as needed, and attend school in a location as close to the student’s home environment as reasonably achievable.” ([citation](#))

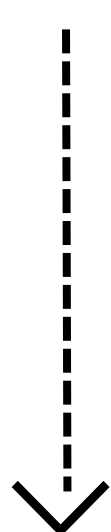
The term “environment” in the least restrictive environment setting can be interpreted to imply that LRE is a place or location. LRE involves making program decisions about what services and supports a student needs to be successful and where and how those services and supports can be provided effectively. ([citation](#))

Examples of LRE educational placements may include the general education classroom, general education classroom with a related service, general education classroom with specialized academic instruction (SAI), special day classroom (SDC), non-public school, home/hospital instruction, and residential facility.

When making placement decisions, the IEP team should consider the full range of options that might be appropriate based on the student's individual needs and the environment in which the student will most likely make progress. The IEP team must document the reasons for any decision resulting in the student’s services being delivered outside the general education classroom. ([citation](#))

IEP Placement Continuum from Least to Most Restrictive

Least



Most

ISP Services Push-In

ISP Services Pull-Out

Inclusion

SDC Part Day

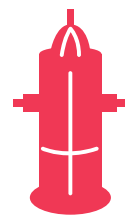
SDC Full Day

Non-Public School (NPS)

Residential Treatment Center (RTC)



When Additional Support May Be Needed



According to the State Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) Manual, this is based on an IEP Team determination that the student requires additional support to meet their IEP goals. Additional support may include increased ISP time, new goals, a change from a small group to a 1:1 setting, and additional adult support.

Before a student receives support from an instructional aide, a pre-referral for Special Circumstance Instructional Assistant (SCIA) needs to be completed. Using the SCIA form/process determines current levels of independence. During the IEP meeting, the team will review areas of concern and methods of support. New goals should focus on developing increased independence.

By law, services to students with special needs must be delivered in “the least restrictive environment.” This pre-referral process, consistent with the law, will ensure that accommodations, staff training, classroom environmental modifications, and/or behavior supports are implemented before considering highly restrictive support like an instructional aide. A SCIA request is made only after documented site interventions have proven unsuccessful. Natural supports and existing staff should be used whenever possible to promote educational benefits in the least restrictive environment.

When SCIA data supports that an instructional aide (SCIA) is necessary, the IEP team will discuss and define appropriate goal areas to support. An Independence Plan is introduced when the student receives additional aide support and data is collected. A primary goal for all students with special needs is to build, increase, and maximize independence. Additional assistance must be targeted to the identified areas of need and carefully monitored for progress, as well as the IEP team periodically reviewing the continued need and effectiveness of this additional support. If not monitored and reviewed, this assistance may unintentionally foster dependence rather than independence.



Components Of An IEP



The previous section described the process used to develop a student's IEP. The following chart shows all of the components of an IEP document.

Information/ Eligibility	Student and parent information, annual IEP meeting date, evaluation date, eligibility
Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance	Student's strengths, parent input and concerns related to educational progress, present levels in various areas
Special Factors	Student's need for assistive technology, considerations if the student is blind or deaf, if the student is an English language learner, if student's behavior impedes their learning or that of their peers
Statewide Assessments	How the student will participate in statewide testing
Annual Goals and Objectives/ Benchmarks	Annual goals based on the student's areas of need. Objectives are required for students who have more significant disabilities
Services - Offer of FAPE Educational Setting - Offer of FAPE	The District's offer of services and placement
Individual Transition Plan (ITP)	Addresses the student's postsecondary goals and services related to education, employment, community involvement and independent living (as needed). Should be in place by the time the student turns 16. Not applicable to a K-8 district.



More About IEPs

Initial IEP Meeting

Held within 60 days of receipt of a parent-signed assessment plan. In this meeting, assessors will discuss their findings and determine if a student is eligible to receive special education and related services according to California Education Code.

Plan Review (Annual)

Held annually to review a student's IEP

Eligibility Evaluation (Triennial)

Held every three years to discuss the findings of a student's reevaluation and determine a student's continued eligibility for special education and related services

Administrative / Interim Placement

This is considered an amendment to the current (Annual) IEP

A meeting held within 30 days of a student's transfer into a school district from another special education local plan area (SELPA).

In this meeting, the school district where the student is currently attending will offer an IEP comparable to the IEP that the student had in their previous school district.

Other

This is considered an amendment to the current (Annual) IEP

IEP meetings must be held:

When a student's placement is changed or terminated

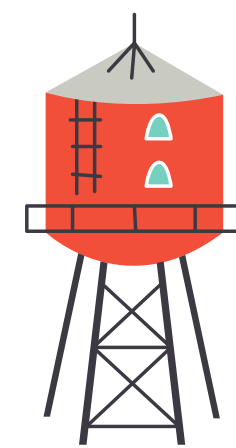
When a lack of progress exists in the Special Education Program

Within 30 days of a written request by a parent for a review

When a teacher requests a review



13 Categories of Eligibility For Special Education



Autism

Deaf-Blindness

Deafness

Emotional Disturbance

Hard of Hearing

Intellectual Disability

Multiple Disabilities

Orthopedic Impairment

Other Health Impairment

Specific Learning Disability

Speech or Language Impairment

Traumatic Brain Injury

Visual Impairment

Glossary of Acronyms



504

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: This is part of General Education and provides students with accommodations but not goals

AAC

Alternative Augmentative Communication

ABA

Applied Behavior Analysis

ADA

Americans with Disabilities Act

ADA

Average Daily Attendance

ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ADR

Alternative Dispute Resolution

ALJ

Administrative Law Judge

APE

Adaptive Physical Education

ASD

Autism Spectrum Disorder

ASL

American Sign Language

AT

Assistive Technology

BCBA

Board Certified Behavior Analyst

BIP

Behavioral Intervention Plan

CAA

California Alternate Assessment

CAASPP

California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress

CAC

Community Advisory Committee

CART

Communication Access Realtime Translation

CCR

California Code of Regulations

CCS

California Children's Services

CDE

California Department of Education

CDS

Community Day School

CFR

Code of Federal Regulations

DHH

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

DOJ

Department of Justice

DSM-5

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th Edition)

ED

Emotional Disturbance

EL or ELL

English Learner or English Language Learner

ESL

English as a Second Language

ESY

Extended School Year

FAPE

Free Appropriate Public
Education

FBA

Functional Behavioral
Assessment

FERPA

Family Education Rights and
Privacy Act

HHI

Home Hospital Instruction

IA/SSA

Instructional Aide/Special
Services Aide

IAES

Interim Alternative Educational
Setting

ID

Intellectual Disability

IDEA

Individuals with Disabilities
Education Act

IEE

Independent Educational
Evaluation

IEP

Individualized Education Plan
(developed in IEP meetings)

IFSP

Individualized Family Services
Plan

IS

Independent Study

ISA

Individual Service Agreement

ISP

Individualized Service Plan

ITP

Individualized Transition Plan

LCI

Licensed Children's Institution

LEA

Local Education Agency

LEP

Limited English Proficient

LRE

Least Restrictive Environment

MD

Manifestation Determination

NPA

Nonpublic Agency

NPS

Nonpublic School

O & M

Orientation and Mobility

OAH

Office of Administrative
Hearings

OCD

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

OCR

Office for Civil Rights

ODD

Oppositional Defiant Disorder

OHI

Other Health Impairment

OI

Orthopedic Impairment

OSEP

Office of Special Education
Programs

OSERS

Office of Special Education and
Rehabilitation Services

OT

Occupational Therapy

PDD

Pervasive Developmental Disorder

PWN

Prior Written Notice

RSP/ISP

Resource Specialist
Program/Instructional Specialist
Program

RTI

Response to Intervention

SAI

Specialized Academic Instruction

SBE

State Board of Education

SEA

State Education Agency

SELPA

Special Education Local Plan Area

SLD

Specific Learning Disability

SLI

Speech or Language Impairment

SST

Student Study Team

SWD

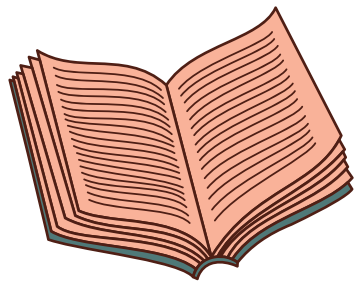
Students with Disabilities

TBI

Traumatic Brain Injury

VI

Visual Impairment



Glossary of Terms

504 Plan: 504 refers to the rights and responsibilities to accommodate individuals with disabilities. Students with an identified disability may receive accommodations if their disability impacts their access to education. There is no specialized instruction for students with a 504, but students may receive accommodations. Referrals for 504 eligibility testing can be made by a Student Study Team or parents/guardians. All parent/guardian requests for assessment should be made in writing and directed to the principal. Parents/guardians must provide their written consent for the assessment and implementation of a 504 Plan.

Accommodations: Procedures that allow students to access their general education curriculum.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR): ADR is a process for resolving special education disagreements in a respectful, neutral environment. All ADR activities are voluntary and mutually agreed to by the parents and district. The goal is to reach a local resolution for disputes, maintain positive relationships, and ensure an appropriate education for the student.

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP): A plan developed to support a student in using replacement behaviors.

Case Manager: The person who oversees a student's special education plan. They will coordinate IEP meetings, send out meeting invitations to all team members and provide parents with their procedural safeguards (parent's rights). This could be an ISP teacher or a speech and language pathologist.

District Model vs. Medical Model: A student can be diagnosed with a disability by an outside medical provider and still not be eligible for special education in the school. The disability must impact the student's ability to access the general education curriculum.

Early Intervention: The preschool Special Education Program for students with an IEP. Orinda's program is located in Moraga.

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): A free appropriate public education must be available to all children who qualify and reside in the state between the ages of 3 and 21.

Goals: All goals must contain specific, measurable baseline data based on assessment findings. The goals are written to be achieved in a year beginning from the date the IEP is signed.

Inclusion Specialist: A credentialed special education teacher who supports students with IEPs in the general education setting. They work with students, general education teachers, and administrators to provide appropriate support and services in the school setting. They may also provide staff training.

IEP Team: An IEP Team includes parent/s, general education teacher, special education teacher, and administrator or administrator designee. They must have (in an Initial and Triennial IEP) Individuals who assessed the student and presented the assessment findings and may have related service providers.

Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE): An Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) means an evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner not employed by the District of residence. A qualified examiner is an evaluator competent to perform the evaluations through criteria established in policy 6550 by the District following Ed. Code, Section 56322, and as a member of the Contra Costa SELPA.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): This plan is developed to ensure that a child with an identified disability attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives appropriate support and services as determined by their assessment.

Instructional Support Program (ISP): This provides students with specialized academic instruction within the classroom setting or ISP room.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): “Federal law requires that a student’s educational placement reflects Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) as much as possible while meeting the student’s academic needs. The student should be included in regular education classes, with additional support as needed, and attend school in a location as close to the student’s home environment as reasonably achievable.” ([citation](#))

Modifications: Modifications are adaptations that change what students learn.

Non-Public School (NPS): A Non-public School is a private, nonsectarian school that enrolls individuals with exceptional needs pursuant to an Individualized Education Program (IEP). An NPS must be certified by the California Department of Education and meet certain standards set by the Superintendent of Public Education and Board of Education. EC § 56034.

POISE: Support group for Parents of Orinda Individuals in Special Education; orindapoise.org.

Procedural Safeguards: This is a document outlining [Parent’s Rights](#).

Regional Center: Regional centers are nonprofit private corporations that contract with the Department of Developmental Services to provide or coordinate services and support for individuals with developmental disabilities. To be eligible for services, a person must have a disability that begins before the person’s 18th birthday, be expected to continue indefinitely, and present a substantial disability as defined in [Section 4512\(a\)\(1\) of the California Welfare and Institutions Code](#). Eligibility is established through diagnosis and assessment performed by [Regional Centers](#). Infants and toddlers (age 0 to 36 months) who are at risk of having developmental disabilities or who have a developmental delay may qualify for services. The criteria for determining the eligibility of infants and toddlers is specified in [Section 95014 of the California Government Code](#).

SELPA: Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) is a separate educational entity (funded by state and federal monies). The Contra Costa SELPA works directly with all fifteen of our member districts and the Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCCOE) to ensure that appropriate programs and services are available for students with disabilities under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). In addition, SELPAs work closely with non-public schools and agencies, businesses, higher education institutions, and local, state, and national elected representatives to ensure that meeting the educational needs of our students is a community priority. ([citation](#)). They also have a [Parent Handbook](#).

Services: Services are the necessary support given to your child to assist them with achieving their IEP goals.

Special Day Class: A class with pupils enrolled in a class for individuals with exceptional needs, typically for the majority of the school day.

Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI): Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of individuals whose educational needs cannot be met with modification of the general instruction program.

Special Education: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) ensures the provision of special education services and supports for all students who meet federal eligibility criteria. These services may include specialized academic instruction, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, and other specialized services as required. Referrals for special education testing can be made by an SST or directly by parents/guardians. All parent/guardian requests for assessment should be made in writing and directed to the principal. Parents/guardians must provide their written consent for the assessment and implementation of an IEP.

Student Services Assistant (SSA): Special Services Assistants support students receiving special education services in the classroom or school setting with additional adult support written in their IEP plan.

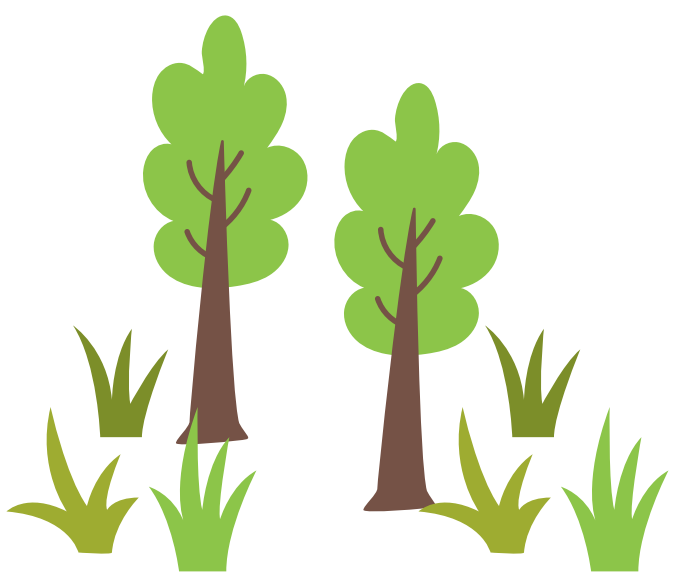
Student Study Team (SST): This team includes parents, a general education teacher, an administrator/designee, and other possible participants to discuss interventions to support struggling students. The team reviews the student's strengths and needs and recommends interventions to support and promote the student's success.

Tier 1 Interventions: Whole Class Instruction, where the teacher uses evidence-based teaching methods to lead the whole class through direct instruction. The class may break into small groups, paired, and independent activities.

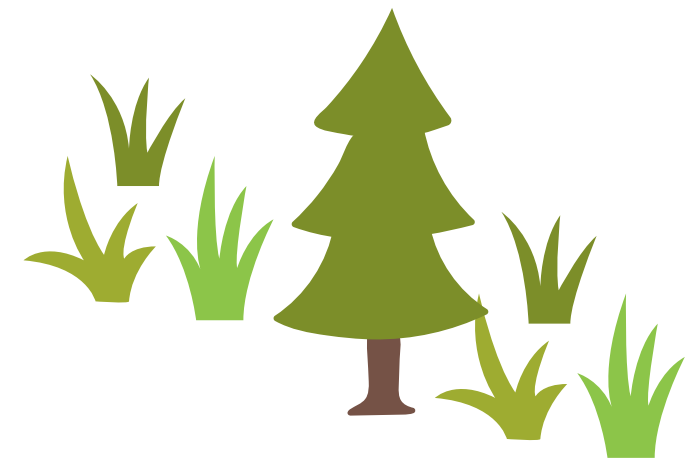
Tier 2 Interventions: A few times each week, the teacher works with small groups of students through instructional interventions. Usually, students are sorted into groups based on their shared skill levels in a particular area of the course.

Tier 3 Interventions: Students in Tier 3 may take part in individual lessons or continue to work in small groups of students. They may need to spend time outside the regular classroom for reteaching. Generally, these students need help mastering foundational knowledge and skills required to build on skills.

Triennial Evaluation: A formal reevaluation of a student in the areas of suspected disability. This meeting is held every three years to determine a student's continued eligibility for special education and related services.



Resources



[California Department of Education \(CDE\).](#)

[CDE Special Education Division](#)

[POISE](#)

[Procedural Safeguards \(Parent's Rights\).](#)

[Special Education Local Plan Area \(SELPA\).](#)

[SELPA Parent Handbook](#)