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SELPA POLICY - Independence and Access

Every Local Educational Agency (LEA) within the San Mateo County SELPA is required to provide a full continuum of placement options for students with identified disabilities who are receiving special education services. The Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Education Act (IDEA 2004) and California laws and regulations describe a continuum of placements such as instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions (CFR 300.551 (b) (1)).

IDEA 2004 also defines Related Services as the utilization of aids, services, and other supports that are provided in regular education classes or other education-related settings to enable children with disabilities to be educated with non-disabled children to the maximum extent appropriate. This applies to any general education program or special education program in which the student may participate (34 CFR Part 300.550-300.556). The goal for any student with special needs is to develop maximum independence. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team is responsible for developing and implementing a program that promotes that independence. Natural supports and existing staff supports should be used whenever possible.

A goal for any student with special needs is to encourage, promote, and maximize independence. The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team is responsible for developing and implementing a program that promotes that independence. Although paraprofessional, such as Intensive Individual Services (IIS) or Behavioral Intervention Services (BIS) supports are typically offered with good intentions, studies cited by Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, and Fialka (2005, p.30) have linked excessive or unnecessary paraprofessional proximity with the following inadvertent detrimental effects.

Effect	Description
Separation from classmates	Student with a disability and paraprofessional are seated together in the back or side of the room, physically separated from the class
Unnecessary Dependence	Student with a disability is hesitant to participate without paraprofessional direction, prompting, or cueing.
Interference with Peers	Paraprofessional can create physical or symbolic barriers that interfere with interactions between a student with disabilities and classmates.
Insular Relationships	Student with a disability and paraprofessional do most everything together, to the exclusion of others (i.e., teachers and peers).
Feeling Stigmatized	Student with a disability expresses embarrassment/discomfort about having a paraprofessional; makes them stand out in negative ways.

Limited Access to Competent Instruction	Paraprofessionals are not necessarily skilled in providing competent instruction; some do the work for the students they support.
Interference with Teacher Engagement	Teachers tend to be less involved when a student with a disability has a paraprofessional because individual attention is already available.
Loss of Personal Control	Paraprofessionals do so much for the students with disabilities that they do not exercise choices that are typical for other students.
Loss of Gender Identity	Student with a disability is treated as the gender of the paraprofessional (e.g., male student taken into the female bathroom).
May Provoke Problem Behaviors	Some students with disabilities express their dislike of paraprofessional support by displaying inappropriate behaviors.

If not carefully monitored, related services provided by paraprofessionals can easily and unintentionally foster dependence and lead to the development of an IEP that is not deemed to be an offer of free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Natural supports and existing staff supports should be used whenever possible.

There may be special circumstances when a student may need additional support in order to be successful in his/her educational placement. If the IEP team is considering adding 1:1 paraprofessional support (IIS or BIS) as a related service for a student, the team must first determine:

1. Natural supports and/or existing staff supports are not adequate for the student to participate and progress in their educational placement;
2. Additional support is necessary to assist classroom staff in facilitating the student in:
    a. Advancing appropriately toward their annual goals and/or;
    b. Involvement in and progress in the general curriculum and/or;
    c. Participation in their educational settings and/or;
    d. Participation in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities and/or;
    e. Participation with other disabled and non-disabled students.
3. How quickly it anticipates the support can be faded and develop a method for systematic evaluation toward independence and more natural supports.

Use of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)

As part of the consideration of natural supports for a student with a disability, all schools should consider the implementation of an MTSS program. There is ample research showing that a well-developed, robust Tier 1 greatly enhances the success of students with disabilities. Based on that research, a good MTSS program should support the following:

- The use of inclusionary lesson planning, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiation.
- The use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to create an accepting, supportive environment for students with behavioral challenges.

- Training, coaching, and support of general education staff to successfully teach and support included students with disabilities.
- The collection of meaningful, formative data to support continuous improvement of the instructional program with data analysis and action based on that analysis.
- The use of data to determine the level of support any student with disabilities might need to access the appropriate curriculum.

If the IEP Team recommends 1:1 support, the team is also responsible for developing goals and monitoring the student's progress so that this additional support may be faded as soon as possible. If not carefully monitored and evaluated on a regular basis, additional 1:1 support can unintentionally foster dependence.

The San Mateo County SELPA has developed an **Independence and Access Planning Framework** consisting of strengths-based planning tools that guide IEP teams in identifying what a student needs to build independence and access learning opportunities across settings. The process supports thoughtful decision-making around accommodations, services, and supports that uphold equity and inclusion. This framework prioritizes understanding barriers, strengthening supports, and aligning services to promote engagement and success in the least restrictive environment. Additionally, the framework outlines: IEP documentation, monitoring and fading of 1:1 services (IIS and/or BIS), as well as roles and responsibilities of various IEP Team members.

Approved by SELPA Governing Board September 16, 2025