

**DESERT MOUNTAIN SELPA  
DESERT MOUNTAIN CHARTER SELPA  
COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) MEETING  
MEETING MINUTES**

**November 13, 2025**

**4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.**

**Location: CAHELP JPA – Virtual Meeting (ZOOM)**

**1.0 CALL TO ORDER**

1.1 Heidi Chavez, Program Manager Regional Services called the meeting to order at 4:32 p.m.

- **MOVED BY** Diana Ramos
- **SECOND BY** Sharon Garibay
  - Motion carried and was **approved** unanimously.

**ATTENDEES:**

Heidi Chavez - CAHELP  
Marysol Hurtado – CAHELP  
Ana Perez – CAHELP  
Jessica Soto – CAHELP  
Melissa De Silva – CAHELP  
Vianca Padilla - CAHELP  
Yazmin Medina- CAHELP  
Karen Ware - Taylion  
Suzanne Jennings – Victor Elem  
Shelley Walsh – CAHELP  
Agustina Garcia -CAHELP  
Susan Bennis – AVUSD  
Leigh Anne Drake – Bear Valley

Stephanie Van Epps - SoCal Flex Acad  
Letitia Macaraeg - CAHELP  
Jessica Groh - Snowline  
Shannon Garibay – Hesperia  
Diana Ramos - Hesperia  
Christina Leal - Options for Youth  
Cheri Rigdon – Silver Valley  
Eric Land - Hesperia  
Nicole Yeager - Trona  
Hailey Verhague - Taylion  
Anne Laird – Leonardo da Vinci  
Valerie Graham - AAE

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The general public is encouraged to participate in the deliberation of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC). Several opportunities are available during the meeting for the CAC to receive oral communication regarding the presentations of any items listed on the agenda. Please ask for recognition either before a presentation or after the presentation has been completed.

None

### **3.0 ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

It is recommended that the CAC review and adopt the agenda as presented. If there are any proposed modifications, they should be stated at this time. Upon approval, the agenda will establish the framework for the meeting's discussions and actions in compliance with the Brown Act.

**3.1 BE IT RESOLVED** that the Agenda be approved as presented:

**3.1.1 Adopting of Agenda for CAC Meeting of November 13, 2025**

- **Action to Approve Agenda for November 13, 2025**
  - **MOVED BY** Cheri Rigdon
  - **SECOND BY** Susan Bennis
    - Motion carried and was **approved** unanimously

### **4.0 CONSENT ITEMS**

It is recommended that the CAC consider approving several Agenda items as a Consent list. Consent items are routine in nature and can be enacted in one motion without further discussion. Consent items may be called up by any CAC Member at the meeting for clarification, discussion, or change.

**4.1 BE IT RESOLVED** that the following Consent Items be approved as presented:

**4.1.1 Approve Minutes – September 18, 2025**

- **Action to Approve Minutes for September 18, 2025**
  - **MOVED BY** Karen Ware
  - **SECOND BY** Susan Bennis
    - Motion carried and was **approved** unanimously

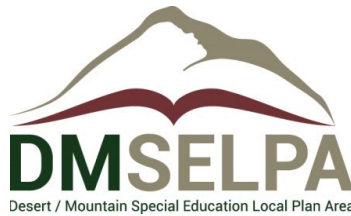
### **5.0 ACTION ITEMS**

### **6.0 REPRESENTATIVE REPORT**

It is recommended that the [Board/Committee] receive and review reports from designated representatives. These reports are provided for informational purposes and may include updates, activities, and relevant matters. No formal action will be taken unless an item is agendized for discussion.

**6.1.** Discussion of Community Advisory Committee Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Secretary.

Heidi currently serves as Chair and Tish serves as Secretary. Heidi shared that she is willing to continue supporting if members are not interested in serving but would love CAC representatives to support these roles. Heidi and Tish collaborate on developing the



meeting agendas and would work with those in the position of Chair and Secretary. The Vice Chair will assume responsibilities when the Chair is unavailable.

Cheri asked for clarification on term length. Per the bylaws, the term is two years; however, the group acknowledged that retirements may occur. Cheri is willing to serve as Vice Chair through this year and the first half of next year, with her retirement scheduled for January 27, 2027.

Elections will be held, and action taken, at the February 19th meeting. Any LEA representative staff member, or parent who is interested in serving may submit their name

## **7.0 PRESENTATION**

**7.1 Presentation:** *Building Inclusive Communities: Enhancing Autism Awareness and Support Systems*. Presenters: Melissa de Silva, Intervention Specialist and Agustina Garcia, Program Specialist.

Melissa and Agustina provided a presentation on building inclusive communities and enhancing autism awareness and support systems. They began by sharing their backgrounds as California Autism Professionals Training and Information Network (CAPTAIN) members serving San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. They highlighted key data from the 2025 Community Report on Autism, including: 1 in 31 prevalence rate reported by CDC. California shows a significantly higher prevalence at 1 in 19, nearly double most states. Given these numbers, it is increasingly likely that individuals will interact with someone who is autistic.

The presenters discussed the ongoing shift in preferred language, noting varying preferences between “autistic person” and “person with autism.” They also conducted a poll regarding autism symbols; participants favored the puzzle piece over the infinity symbol.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disability characterized by social communication differences and repetitive patterns of behavior. Melissa and Agustina reviewed the four major areas impacted:

### **Social Skills**

- Challenges with joint attention and sharing focus.

- Difficulty interpreting facial expressions and nonverbal cues.

- Reciprocal conversation and topic shifting may not come naturally.

- Abstract language may be misunderstood, so mindful communication is essential.

### **Communication & Language**

- Repetition of words or echolalia may occur.

### Restrictive & Repetitive Behaviors

Stimming behaviors help with self-regulation and should not be discouraged.

Strong need for routine; resistance to unexpected changes is common.

Intense focus on specific interests or topics.

### Sensory Processing, Thinking & Learning

Sensory input may be experienced differently by each individual.

Generalization of skills may be challenging.

Adaptive skills often require explicit teaching and practice.

They emphasized that autism presents differently in every individual.

Inclusion supports all learners, strengthens communities, builds empathy, encourages acceptance of diversity, and focuses on meaningful skill-building. The presenters referenced 28 evidence-based practices for ages 0–21 (Pages 63–139 of the referenced guide).

### Key Supports Discussed

Visual Supports: Help make tasks predictable and manageable, promote independence, and increase confidence. Over time, the need for visuals may decrease.

Task Analysis: Breaking skills into smaller steps improves success and independence.

Preparing Teens with Autism for School & Work.

Early preparation increases long-term success. Examples included:

Minimal Support: Participation in vocational or peer programs.

Moderate Support: Practicing greetings, making simple choices.

Higher Support: Dressing, grooming, and basic daily living choices.

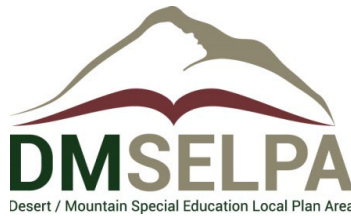
### PEERS Program

The presenters introduced PEERS, a free 16-week social-skills program for middle and high-school students. Developed by Dr. Elizabeth Laugeson at UCLA, the program includes direct instruction, role-playing and weekly homework. A required “social coach” who attends all 16 weeks. PEERS is offered twice a year (spring and fall). After a referral, families complete a phone interview, followed by an in-person interview. Classes are expected to begin late January or early February at St. Timothy School, from 5:00–6:30 p.m. every Tuesday. The program is not limited to students with autism; it is also appropriate for students with ADHD, depression, or anxiety.

Cheri Rigdon asked, do families need to come to the office or can the process be completed online? Melissa answered families must attend in person.

## **8.0 MATTERS BROUGHT BY THE COMMUNITY**

This section provides an opportunity for members of the public to address the CAC on items not listed on the agenda or any school related special education issue. It is requested that the speakers’ name and the district the speaker’s student attends are stated in their opening remarks, Speakers are given three minutes per person as determined by the presiding officer.



While the CAC may listen to concerns, no action or discussion can take place on non-agendized items. However, the CAC board may direct staff to place a topic on a future agenda or provide brief responses as permitted by law.

## **9.0 ADJOURNMENT**

The next regular meetings of the Desert Mountain SELPA CAC will be tentatively held on **Thursday, February 19, 2026, from 4:30 – 5:00 p.m. CAC Representative Business Meeting and 5:00 - 6:00 p.m. Presentation: “Keep the Peace: Simple De-escalation Tools for Parents”** Danielle Cote, Program Specialist and Miya Narvaiz-Ward, Program Specialist. Virtual.

A motion to adjourn at 5:56 p.m. was made by Cheri Rigdon and was seconded by Shannon Garibay

- Motion carried and **approved**

**Individuals requiring special accommodations for disabilities are requested to contact Letitia Macaraeg at (760) 955-3552, at least 24 hours prior to the date of this meeting.**