

Mountain Empire Unified School District



SPECIAL EDUCATION
PARENT HANDBOOK

Updated November 1, 2023

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Mountain Empire Unified School District's Special Education Program. We look forward to working in partnership with you to provide your child with an enriching and rewarding educational experience.

We have designed this handbook to be a tool for you to use throughout the school year. This handbook covers some basic information about the special education programs and services offered in our district.

As parents, it is important for you to:

- Be active in your child's entire educational program.
- Know your rights and those of your child.
- Ask questions.
- Read various publications to learn about your child's special needs.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Be an informed and confident supporter for your child.

We believe it is important for parents and educators to work together as partners. Our partnership will create an effective and meaningful educational program that will meet the special needs of our students.

VISION STATEMENT

We believe our students can obtain a high level of academic and functional achievement through increased opportunities in the least restrictive environment as determined by their Individual Education Plan. They can acquire the skills necessary for enhancing communication, establishing

positive social relationships, and gaining independence that enables them to transition from school to adulthood and become productive members of our community.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT: WORKING TOGETHER

Parent – School Communication

- Mountain Empire Unified School District special education programs use the teacher advocate system to facilitate parent-school communication. Your child's Special Education teacher functions not only as his/her teacher but also your child's case manager. Frequent two-way communication is encouraged. The way you and the advocate teacher communicate can be worked out on an individual basis by mutual agreement.
- The Principal at the school and the School Psychologist are also available when you are unable to reach the advocate teacher and need to speak with someone immediately.
Alternative Education: Bill.Dennett@meusd.org 619-473-8693 ext. 809
Campo Elementary: Holly.Pawlicki@meusd.org 619-478-5583 ext 401
Clover Flat Elementary: Cheryl.Lugo@meusd.org 619-766-4655 ext 501
Descanso Elementary: Shama.Lyons@meusd.org 619-445-2126 ext 601
Mountain Empire Jr. High: Gary.Brannon@meusd.org 619-326-6662 ext 301
Mountain Empire High: David.Rios@meusd.org 619-473-8601 ext 201
Potrero Elementary: Lorena.Enriquez@meusd.org 619-478-5930 ext 901
School Psychologists:
 - Jeannette.Cabanilla@meusd.org 619-473-8693 ext 812
 - Josie.munoz@meusd.org 619-473-8693 ext 812
 - Jarrett.clifton@meusd.org 619-473-8601 ext 230
- The Director of Special Education, Jon McEvoy, and Administrative Assistant, Yenni Shuster are always available to answer any questions. Please Contact 619-473-8869 ext 144 or Yenni.Shuster@meusd.org
- Another form of communication is through progress on goals that are sent home with reports cards or otherwise stated in the IEP . The progress on goals indicates whether the student is making sufficient or insufficient progress for each long-term annual goal listed on the student's IEP. These are different than the progress reports from the general education teacher.

East County Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA)

- The East County Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) partners with families by providing support, parent workshops and family events, and resources for East County

families. The SELPA is approved by the California Department of Education to support districts' special education programs in San Diego County.

<https://www.sdcoe.net/special-populations/selpas/east-county-selpa/partnering-with-families>

Record Keeping for Parents

It is important you learn as much about your child's education as you can. Please consider the following recommendations to help with the education process. Keep a complete set of records in a file that includes:

- Results of tests conducted by psychologists and special education teachers
- Doctors' and nurses' reports
- Therapy reports (speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, adapted PE)
- Agency reports (Regional Center, County Mental Health)
- Copies of each IEP and documents related to it
- Records of phone calls and copies of letters
- Your notes and observations concerning your child

Also consider the following guidelines:

- If you desire an assessment of your child, request it in writing.
- If you wish to see your child's records, make your request in writing.
- If you desire a hearing to challenge the school's actions or wish to file a complaint, request it in writing and send copies of your request to the school principal, director of special education, and to the superintendent. (Find additional information about Resolving Problems on p. 17)

Tips for Planning for Your Child's IEP

- Don't hesitate to ask for clarification. Asking questions is encouraged and providing additional information about your child is appreciated.
- It is tough to think of questions on the spot, so write down questions you already have.
- You are encouraged to ask your teacher advocate for a copy of proposed IEP goals in advance of the meeting.
- You do not have to give your consent at the IEP meeting. You have the ability to review the recommendations and make a considered, informed decision. The time period for review will be 15 calendar days.

- If there are parts of the IEP with which you do not agree, please share your ideas with the team. This will be noted on the IEP notes page and worked through the IEP process to determine solutions.
- Consider bringing someone with you like a Regional Center caseworker.

SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW

FEDERAL LAW:

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA

This law was originally passed as The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, public law 94-142 and has been amended several times over the years. The most recent amendment is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004.

- <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

California, in response to the federal laws, has developed its own set of laws and guidelines to ensure special education services to individuals with exceptional needs. The “least restrictive environment” is the placement or program that can best meet the individual student’s needs and provides maximum interaction with his/her typical peers. These laws:

- Provide for a free and appropriate education to individuals with exceptional needs in the least restrictive environment.
- Require school districts to offer all necessary special educational services.
- Require a multidisciplinary team assessment of each child’s special needs and an assessment by specialists trained or familiar in areas of suspected disability.
- Require that once a child is eligible for special education, reviews must occur on at least an annual basis.
- Provide for the involvement of parents as partners in the assessment, placement, and evaluation of their children.

THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

Step 1: Identification and Referral

Student Success Team (SST): Staff members who have concerns about a child may call for a Student Success Team meeting that includes the parent. After interventions have been tried and implemented in the general education setting and data show students are not making significant progress, a referral for special education services may be initiated. The assessment will focus on the areas of the child's suspected disability. Once the parents or guardians have given permission for assessment by signing an assessment plan, the child is tested by a multidisciplinary team.

Step 2: Assessment

The parent of the student should receive the proposed evaluation plan within 15 days of the referral for assessment. Once the school district receives the parental consent for assessment, tests must be conducted within 60 calendar days. Days are not counted for school vacation in excess of five school days.

Assessments are given in the student's native language and are completed in all areas of suspected disability. Following the assessment, the results are reviewed, and the child's eligibility for services is determined at an IEP meeting. For children who continue to be enrolled in special education, reassessments may be conducted every three years.

Step 3: IEP Team

The Individualized Education Plan team includes people involved with the child's assessment and educational planning. The team consists of the parent, student when appropriate, the special education teacher, the general education teacher, administrator or designee, and any other service provider such as the speech therapist or occupational therapist. Parents may invite other support people.

A member of the IEP team shall not be required to attend an IEP meeting in whole or part if the parent and the team agree that attendance is not necessary because the member's area of

curriculum or related service is not being modified or discussed. The parent must consent to the excusal, and an excusal form is completed.

Step 4: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Once the child has qualified for special education services, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be written for the child. In California, a child qualifies for special education services when:

- 1) he/she meets criteria for a disability (See qualifying disabilities here:
<https://www.casponline.org/pdfs/pdfs/Title%205%20Regs,%20CCR%20update.pdf>)
- 2) and the disability significantly affects educational performance,
- 3) and identified needs cannot be met through general education services alone.

IEPs are written for up to a year at a time. The IEP should be based on the student's needs and not on the availability of resources. However, having an IEP which meets all the requirements of the law does not guarantee that the student will make the expected progress, only that the student is given the best opportunity to make progress. The law requires that parents be equal partners on the team which develops the IEP because of their knowledge and understanding of how their child learns and reacts to success. Parents must consent, in writing, for placement in special education and to implement the IEP. Parents and teachers may contact one another prior to an IEP meeting to discuss their child's progress and plan and prepare for the upcoming IEP meeting. This strategy allows the people most directly concerned with the education of the child to have direct communication before the official IEP meeting.

The IEP document shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following:

- Child's present level of educational performance including student's strengths and interest and priority area(s) for goal development.
- Annual goals
- Statement of specific special education and related services to be provided.
- Projected date for initiation and duration of such programs and services.
- Appropriate evaluation procedures and objective criteria for determining, at least as often as general education students, whether the student is making progress towards goals.
- How the child's disability affects his/her performance in the general education curriculum and the support needed for the student to participate in that curriculum.
- The extent to which the student may participate in general education and/or the reasons why the participation would not be appropriate.

When appropriate, the IEP shall also include, but not be limited to, all of the following:

- Transportation needs
- A plan for transition into regular education
- Extended school year services

- Transition Plan for students age 16 and older
- Diploma, Alternative Pathway to a Diploma, or a certificate of completion
- Transition program age 18-22 when appropriate

Step 5: IEP Review

A meeting will be held annually to review the child's progress and to evaluate the effectiveness of his/her program. There is also a meeting every three years that includes either a full re-assessment or review of records. If at any time the parents believe a major change should be made in the child's IEP, a special meeting can be requested to consider the change. The same rights, procedures, and responsibilities apply at these meetings.

In making changes to a student's IEP after the annual review meeting within a school year, the parent and district may agree not to convene an IEP meeting for the purpose of making those changes. Amendments or modifications must be documented in the IEP and signed by the IEP team members.

A parent may indicate those parts of the IEP with which he/she does not agree on the IEP form. If the parent disagrees with parts of the IEP, the team continues to problem solve and communicate in order to reach a consensus. If agreement cannot be reached, a due process is an option. When the parent asks for a due process hearing, current services continue and the student remains in his/her current placement (stay-put provision), unless the parent and school agree to another temporary placement. They continue to problem solve and communicate in order to find solutions acceptable to all parties.

The Individualized Educational Program – English Learners Students

Eligibility of English Learners for special education services is based on the same criteria as for other students. Additionally, the team must find evidence that:

- The student's learning problem is not primarily related to second language acquisition.
- If the student has a specific learning disability, the disability is evident in the primary language.
- If the student has a speech and language impairment, the impairment must be evident in the primary language.

Evaluation/Assessment of English Learners Students

In general, documents and forms used in the evaluation process must be provided in the native language of the parent(s) or guardian(s), unless to do so is clearly not feasible. In the event that the documents and forms are not available in a particular language, the contents of all documents and forms must be effectively communicated to the parents either directly or in consultation with a trained interpreter/translator.

Specific mandates include:

- Any psychological assessment of pupils shall consider cultural and ethnic factors appropriate to the pupil being assessed.
- Assessments shall be administered by qualified personnel who are competent in both the oral and written skills of the individual's primary language. If it is clearly not feasible to do so, an interpreter must be used, and the assessment report shall document this condition and note that the validity may have been affected.
- The assessors must ensure that tests and materials are provided and administered in the student's primary language. The ELPAC scores must be considered to determine if the student needs to be assessed in his/her primary language other than or in addition to English.

The Individualized Education Plan for English Learners

The student's native language and identification as an English Learner must be documented, and it must also be noted if the parent requires an interpreter. For students who are English Learners, the IEP must document ELPAC scores.

All academic IEP goals for English Learners must be linguistically/culturally appropriate. English Language Development Standards are aligned with the California Language Arts Content Standards and should be used for writing goals for English Learners.

PLACEMENT AND SERVICES

Resource Specialist Program (RSP) This program provides services for students who are assigned to regular classroom teachers. Instruction may be provided by an Education Specialist teacher or by a general education teacher in consultation with the Ed Specialist. Placement eligibility is determined by a site IEP team.

Special Day Classes (SDC) These classes provide the least restrictive educational environment for students who, because of the nature of their disability, must spend most of the school day in a special learning environment. Instruction is provided by a specially credentialed teacher. Eligibility is determined by the IEP team.

Designated Instruction and Services (DIS) These services are sometimes referred to as "related or supplementary services." Eligibility is determined by the IEP team based on students' individual needs. Designated instruction and services are available to all special education students.

Adapted Physical Education (APE) The Adapted Physical Education Program provides individual and small-group instruction to meet individual student needs in the development of motor skills, physical fitness, self-image, and recreational interests. Services are determined by the IEP team.

Audiological Services Audiological Services provide monitoring of hearing aids and fitting of FM systems, when appropriate. In addition, routine hearing tests and monitoring of middle-ear functioning is provided by our SELPA.

Counseling Services Counseling services provide counseling, consultation, planning, and management programs to meet an individual's needs. Services may be provided by the school psychologist, school counselor, or through a community agency.

Health Nursing Services Nursing Services assist in the identification of health or physical conditions which interfere with a child's learning and serve as a referral and resource for community health services.

Hearing Itinerant The Hearing Itinerant Program provides therapeutic or educational management of hearing-impaired students. Consultation services are provided to parents, teachers, or other personnel in the management of an individual's hearing disorder. The Hearing Itinerant teacher from the SELPA visits the students at their site.

Home Hospital The Home Hospital Program provides five hours per week of individual instruction for students confined to their home due to an illness or physical impairment according to their personal physician. Services documented in the IEP will also be provided at the child's home.

Language, Speech, and Hearing The Language, Speech, and Hearing Program provides specialized instruction in, or consultation service for, students with problems of language or communicative speech and/or hearing. This service is provided at all elementary sites, Jr. high, and high school.

Occupational Therapy (OT) A registered occupational therapist contracted by the district provides services for children who qualify. OT supports a child's overall ability to participate as successfully as possible in the school environment. OT practitioners may focus on fine motor functioning, sensory processing, activities of daily living, visual motor/visual perceptual skills, work skills, and/or environmental analysis.

WorkAbility 1 WorkAbility 1 (WA1) program is funded and administered by the California Department of Education Special Education Division. WA1 is a school and community transition program. It provides secondary students at the high school with opportunities to obtain marketable job skills while completing their education.

TRANSPORTATION GUIDELINES

Eligibility

The IEP team determines eligibility for special education transportation based on the following guidelines:

1. As a result of a student's disability, the student requires transportation services in order to attend their school of residence. For example, a student with an orthopedic impairment may require transportation services to attend his/her home school.
2. As a result of an IEP team decision, the student has been placed in a program that is not at the student's school of residence.

Documented on the IEP, there are two options for transportation: None or Special Education.

The following guidelines are as follows:

1. None: The student can access his/her educational program via the same transportation methods that are available to all general ed students; no special arrangements, accommodations or modifications are necessary, so transportation is not considered a related service.
2. Special Education: The student requires transportation in order to access his/her educational program. He/she may be transported to a school outside his school of residence, require a wheelchair bus, or have other behavioral or physical needs that would require special transportation. Transportation, as a related service, is provided at no cost to the parent.

Additional Considerations:

Once a transportation service is selected, there are a few more factors to consider according to these guidelines:

Special Education Transportation Service on the IEP.

- Curbside *(This service is provided only to students with extensive support needs and/or physical disabilities as identified by the IEP Team as needing such service)*

Pickup and drop-off of students at the safest location close to residence and where the state, federal, or county maintained road meets the private road. All curbside service is

subject to physical inspection and certification by the safety staff of the Transportation Department.

Once transportation options have been arranged, then the parents will be contacted by a member of the transportation department with information on pick up and drop off times and locations.

School Bus Behavior

Students who ride the school bus are expected to follow the rules and guidelines. Bus drivers are provided with training and support for working with special needs students. They may also ask for teacher and staff assistance to create appropriate accommodations and modifications in order to help the student successfully and safely ride the school bus. Such accommodations may include, but are not limited to:

- Safety restraint systems
- Behavior contracts/reward systems
- Toys, books or music to help keep them engaged
- Opportunities to increase or decrease sensory input as they are riding the bus

Students with behavior challenges and those who have Behavior Intervention Plans in their IEPs, may need behavior support while riding the school bus. The transportation department may need to be included in IEP meetings where behavior is being addressed, if bus behavior is an issue, or a follow-up meeting with the bus driver may be required.

It is important to remember that transportation and the student's transportation providers are an integral part of the child's educational program. The bus drivers are willing and able to work with school staff in helping address student issues appropriately and consistently, and they appreciate being informed and included when problem-solving for student needs.

Other Information to Note

- Transportation, as a related service, is about the unique needs of the child.
- Should the parent choose not to utilize the transportation being offered and drive their child to school on their own, they certainly have that choice at no expense to the district.
- Students whose parents have chosen to enroll them at a school outside of their school of residence through an intra-district transfer (i.e. attending Pine Valley when they live in the Boulevard attendance area) are not entitled to transportation services unless they enroll at their school of residence.

- In a district our size, even seemingly minor transportation changes can cause a domino effect of logistics issues. **Please contact the Transportation Department at 473-8166 ext: 133 if your child is going to be absent.** If your child does not ride the van for three days in a row without prior notice to transportation, transportation services will be suspended and will not resume until the Transportation Office is notified by the parent/guardian that the student will be returning.
- When we are able to problem-solve for transportation needs ahead of time, we can come up with solutions that will meet the student's needs. We sincerely appreciate your help with this process.

CDE provides the following guidelines for consideration of transportation:

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/lr/trnsprtqdlns.asp>

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and its regulations, disabled children have the right to:

- A free and appropriate public education if they are between the ages of 0 and 22.
- The same variety of programs and services that children without disabilities enjoy, including non-academic subjects and extracurricular activities.
- Placement in the least restrictive environment, as much as possible with nondisabled children and, whenever possible, at the same school or as close to the same school they would attend if not disabled.
- Participation in the writing of their own Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Participation in the IEP meeting.
- Placement outside the local school district in another public school or a private school at the state's expense, if local schools do not have an appropriate or available program.
- Privacy and confidentiality of all personal records.
- Remain in a regular educational environment unless the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in the regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be satisfactorily achieved.

PARENT'S RIGHTS

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, you as parents of a handicapped child have rights. You may access a full explanation of parent safeguards using these links.

Procedural Safeguards in English <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/ga/documents/pseng.pdf>

Procedural Safeguards in Spanish <https://inet2.cde.ca.gov/cmd/documentdetail.aspx?doc=762>

Parental procedural safeguards ensure you can:

- Participate in the yearly review for your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Agree to a time and place for those meetings.
- Request the school district to provide an interpreter in your primary language at those meetings and to make special arrangements if you have any disabilities, including deafness, so that you can understand the proceedings.
- Review the evaluation plan and give your consent before an assessment is conducted.
- Receive a copy of the parents' rights with the evaluation plan and once per year thereafter with an explanation of your rights.
- Examine your child's school records within five school days after you request them.
- File a complaint with the State Department of Education.
- Seek resolution through voluntary prehearing mediation prior to filing a request for due process hearing, but the prehearing mediation is not a prerequisite to requesting a due process hearing.
- Request a due process hearing if you disagree with the identification, assessment, or placement of your child; the provision of a free appropriate public education for your child; or the agency's refusal to do these things.
- Initiate civil action in the courts if there is no resolution through the preceding steps.
- Revoke consent in writing for the continued provision of special education and related services.

RESOLVING PROBLEMS

If you think your child's educational program is not appropriate or is not being implemented, effective change can be made through one or more of these methods:

- Try to resolve the problem by talking with your student's special education advocate teacher or the principal.
- Contact the Director of Special Education, Jon McEvoy, at 619-473-8869 ext: 150, who can play a key role in resolving differences.
- Request an IEP meeting to discuss specific issues and concerns. If there is someone who you would like to be a participant in the IEP meeting, let the school know so that person can be invited.
- Contact a special education program specialist at the East County SELPA at 619-590-3920.
- If these methods do not work to your satisfaction, you can request mediation or a fair hearing.

Initiating Mediation and Due Process Procedures

You may request a due process hearing in the event of a disagreement between you and the school district regarding your student's special education identification, assessment, educational placement, or the provisions of a free appropriate public education. Due process hearing procedures include the right to a mediation conference, the right to examine student records, and the right to a fair and impartial administrative hearing at the state level.

In special education, due process is a legal way of saying that certain principles and practices exist and must be respected in order to ensure that each child is treated in a manner that guarantees his/her rights to equal educational opportunities. Due process ensures that specific procedures and timelines related to a child's educational program are followed when, and if, significant changes or accommodations are proposed or made. Due process is guaranteed by federal and state laws. It serves as a safeguard so that every individual has the means of protecting and claiming his/her own rights.

File a complaint, in writing, with the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Contact the District Special Education Office for assistance.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

504	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Plan		IFSP	Individual Family Service Plan
AAC	Augmentative and Alternative Communication		LEA	Local Education Agency
ADD / ADHD	Attention Deficit Disorder / Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder		LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
ADA	American with Disabilities Act		OHI	Other Health Impairment
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder		OT	Occupational Therapy
BIP	Behavior Intervention Plan		PT	Physical Therapy
CCS	California Children's Service		PWN	Prior Written Notice
CDC	California Diagnostic Center		RSP	Resource Specialist Program
DIS	Designated Instruction and Services		SDC	Special Day Class
ED	Emotional Disturbance		SECA	Special Education Classroom Assistant
ESY	Extended School Year		SELPA	Special Education Local Plan Area
FAPE	Free and Appropriate Public Education		SLD	Specific Learning Disability
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act		SLP	Speech Language Pathologist
ID	Intellectual Disability		SPED	Special Education
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act			
IEE	Independent Educational Evaluation			
IEP	Individual Education Program			

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Association for Retarded Citizens –ARC

<https://www.arc-sd.com/>

Autism Society - San Diego

<https://www.autismsocietysandiego.org/>

Autism Speaks

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/>

California Autism Professional Training and Information Network-CAPTAIN

<https://www.captain.ca.gov/>

Blind Community Center of San Diego

<https://bccsd.org/>

Braille Institute San Diego Center

<https://brailleinstitute.org/sandiego>

California Children’s Services (CCS)

https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/california_children_services.html

California State Department of Rehabilitation

<https://www.dor.ca.gov/>

California Dyslexia Initiative

https://www.scoe.net/divisions/ed_services/curriculum/cadyslexia/

California Transition Alliance

<https://catransitionalliance.org/>

Child Protective Services

Child Abuse Hot line - 858-560-2191

County Mental Health

<https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/ais/COVID-19-Community-Resources/Mental-Health.html>

Dyslexia Foundation - International

<https://dyslexialibrary.org/>

First 5 San Diego

<https://first5sandiego.org/>

Grossmont College - Disabled Student Services

<https://www.grossmont.edu/student-support/accessibility-resource-center/>

Home of Guiding Hands

<https://www.guidinghands.org/>

Rady's Children's Hospital

3220 Children's Way, San Diego, CA 92123

858-576-1700 <https://www.rchsd.org/>

San Ysidro Health Community Services

<https://www.syhealth.org/clinics/mountain-health-family-medicine>

Saint Madeleine Sophie's Training Center

<https://stmsc.org/>

San Diego County Office of Education

<https://www.sdcoe.net/>

San Diego County Special Olympics

<https://sosc.org/sandiego/>

San Diego Regional Center

<https://www.sdrc.org/>

Individuals Age 3 and Over email us at intake@sdrc.org or call 858-576-2938

For Children Age 0-3 email us at Esint@sdrc.org or call 858-496-4318

SELPA East County

<https://www.sdcoe.net/special-populations/selpas/east-county-selpa>

United Cerebral Palsy

<https://ucp.org/>