

CHAPTER 1. THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESS: AN OVERVIEW

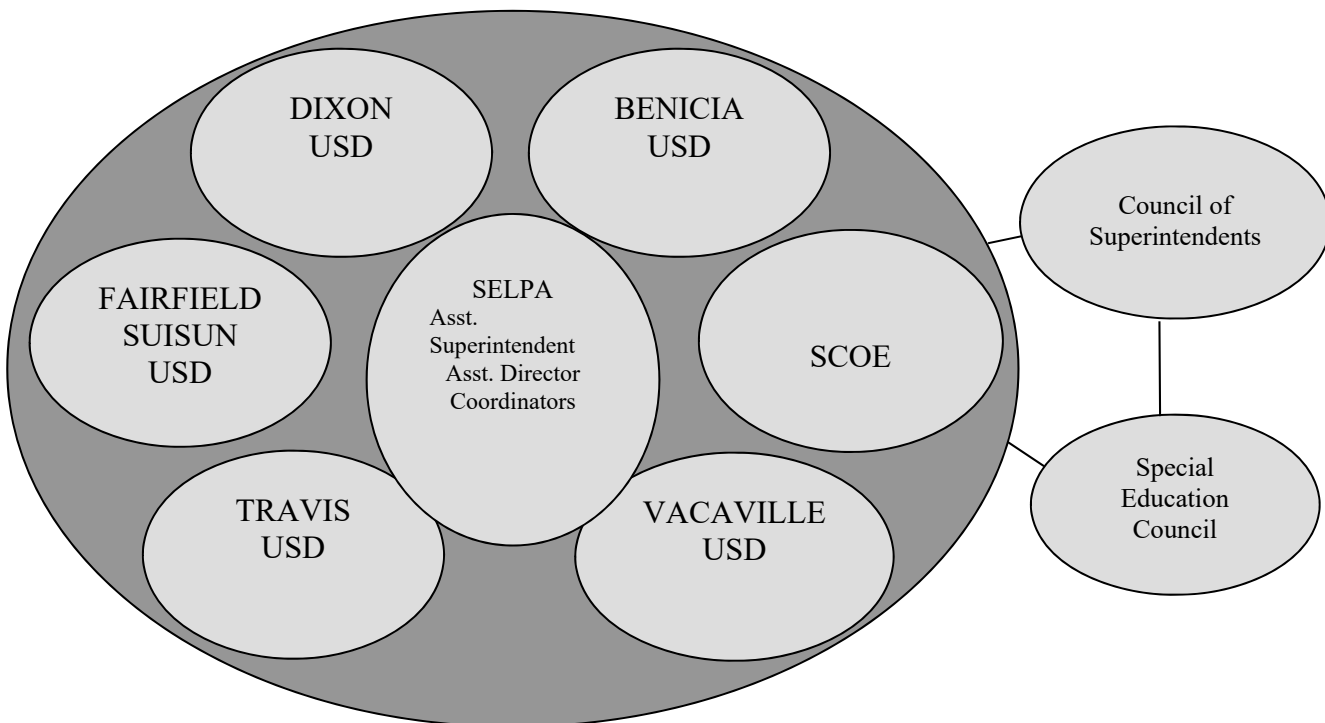
What is a SELPA?

In 1977, all school districts and county school offices were mandated to form consortiums in geographical regions of sufficient size and scope to provide for all special education service needs of children residing within the region boundaries. Each region, Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA), developed a local plan describing how it would provide special education services.

SELPA's are dedicated to the belief that all students can learn and that special needs students must be guaranteed equal opportunity to become contributing members of society. SELPA's facilitate high quality educational programs and services for special needs students and training for parents and educators. The SELPA collaborates with county agencies and school districts to develop and maintain healthy and enriching environments in which special needs students and families can live and succeed.

The Solano County SELPA consists of five school districts and the Solano County Office of Education. The Solano County Office of Education also serves as the administrative unit for the SELPA. Member districts include: Benicia Unified School District, Dixon Unified School District, Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District, Travis Unified School District, and Vacaville Unified School District.

SOLANO COUNTY SELPA



What is the function of the Solano County SELPA?

The SELPA develops a Local Plan for special education that defines the governance structure and the local procedures for identifying and serving pupils with disabilities across all five districts. Each member district's board of education approves the SELPA Local Plan for special education. The Solano County SELPA's Council of Superintendents approves all plans and expenditures developed by the Special Education Council of District Directors with the support of the SELPA Assistant Superintendent.

What role does the SELPA Assistant Superintendent play?

The SELPA Assistant Superintendent works at the direction of the Superintendent's Council to assure full compliance with state and federal special education laws. Responsibilities include:

- * Ensuring Program Availability for All Children with Disabilities
- * Community Advisory Committee Support
- * Management Information System
- * Interagency Coordination
- * Personnel Development
- * Budget Review
- * Evaluation
- * Program Coordination
- * Fiscal Management
- * Community Awareness
- * Ensuring Legal Compliance

What roles do the Directors of Special Education play?

The district directors administer the provision of special education programs and services in each district. The county office director and assistant director oversee county-operated classes throughout the SELPA.

What is special education?

Special education is a specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, designed to meet the unique educational needs of children with disabilities. Special education services can begin at birth and continue, if needed, up to 22 years of age for students who qualify per laws and regulations outlined by the federal and state governments and whose parents give their written consent to such services.

Who receives special education services?

To receive special education services, a student must meet the legal criteria for eligibility. The student's eligibility is determined after a complete assessment, in all areas of suspected disability, by a qualified multidisciplinary team of professionals. The student must fall into one of the following categories:



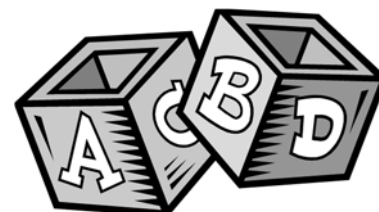
1. Infant/Toddler Disabilities (ages birth to 2.11) - A significant developmental delay in one or more of the five developmental areas, have an at-risk condition, or have potential high risk factors.
2. Preschool Disabilities (ages 3-5) - Children in this age group must meet the same eligibility requirements as the K-12 population unless they have a disabling medical condition or syndrome that the IEP team determines has a high predictability of requiring special education services.
3. School age population - Students in Kindergarten through grade 12.

4. Post-secondary students from ages 18-21 who have not completed their course of study and require intensive educational services to make a successful transition into adult life.

There are 13 categories of special education as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To qualify for special education, the IEP team must determine that a child has one of the following **and** requires specially designed instruction:

Autism	Blindness
Deafness	Emotional Disturbance
Hearing Impairment	Intellectual Disability
Multiple Disabilities	Orthopedic Impairment
Other Health Impaired	Specific Learning Disability
Speech or Language Impairment	Traumatic Brain Injury
Visual Impairment	

Preschool children, ages 3 to 5 years old, may qualify for special education services if they have one of the previously listed eligible disabilities or an "established medical disability." An "established medical disability" is a disabling medical condition or congenital syndrome very likely to require special education services.



Conditions that alone do not make a child eligible for special education:

Classification	Explanation
Dyslexia (or reading difficulties)	A student who is assessed as being dyslexic must meet the criteria for "specific learning disability" in order to qualify for special education.
Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and/or ADHD	A student whose educational performance is adversely affected by a suspected or diagnosed Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and demonstrates a need for special education and related services must meet the criteria for Other Health Impairment, Emotional Disturbance, or Specific Learning Disability as defined in the California Education Code of Regulations in order to qualify for special education.

Who is not eligible?

Individuals are not eligible for special education when it has been determined that their difficulties are the result of one or more of the following:

- Limited school experience
- Poor school attendance



- Cultural or economic disadvantages
- Lack of familiarity with the English language

These difficulties must be addressed by modifications, accommodations, or by other regular categorical services offered within general education.

What if my child has disabilities but does not qualify for special education under IDEA?

If, based on the assessment results, the IEP team agrees that the child is not eligible for special education services, an IEP will not be written. However, he/she may qualify for accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Under this act, disability is defined more broadly to include persons who have, or have a record of, physical or mental impairments that substantially limit one or more major life activities. Examples of such activities include caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.

Per Section 504, physical impairments may include any physical disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or loss of bodily parts or functions. Mental impairments may include such mental or psychological disorders as organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities.

Section 504 assures that a child with disabilities not suffer discrimination in any program receiving federal funding. Specifically, it states that "...no otherwise qualified individual with disabilities shall, solely by reason of the disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

What is a Section 504 Accommodation?

The Student Study Team will suggest interventions and accommodations to the general education program for a student who may qualify under Section 504. The Student Study Team will approve a plan for interventions related to the needs of the eligible student to ensure

that the individual receives an appropriate education. This is called a "504 Accommodation Plan."

The Plan outlines program accommodations to be made for the student and/or provides special aids and services required for the student to succeed in the classroom. Accommodations and services might include, modifications in student assignments, modifications in test taking procedures, help in organization and study skills, etc. An accommodation plan is designed by the general education staff for the student based on his/her individual needs. Each school district in Solano County has appointed a 504 Coordinator to assist parents with questions related to the implementation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Contact your school district office for the name and phone number of this person.

Children who have been medically diagnosed as having a chronic illness or acute health problem may be provided services under Section 504 guidelines or may be referred for an assessment to determine the need for special education.