

### *What is Special Education?*

Special education is instruction that is specially designed to meet the unique needs of children from birth to age 22 who have disabilities. This is done at no cost to the parents. Special education can include special instruction in the child's general education classroom, in a special education classroom, or in other settings. This definition of special education comes from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

### *Who is eligible for Special Education?*

Certain children with disabilities are eligible for special education and related services if their needs cannot be met through general education programs. The IDEA provides a definition of a "child with a disability". This law lists 13 different disability categories under which a child may be found eligible for special education and related services, including autism, blindness, deafness, hearing impairment, mental retardation, orthopedic impairment, emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, speech/language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment. According to the IDEA, the disability must affect the child's educational performance.

The question of eligibility, then, comes down to a question of whether the child has a disability that fits in one of the IDEA's 13 categories and whether that disability affects how the child does in school. That is, the disability must cause the child to need special education and related services.

### *How do I find out if my child is eligible for special education?*

The first step is to find out if our child has a disability. To do this, call the principal of your child's school and share your concerns. The principal may set up a Child Study Team (CST) meeting with you and your child's teacher. At the CST meeting, the team will discuss ways to help your child improve in school. The school may feel that an evaluation is needed. Or you can request an evaluation of your child. If the school agrees that an evaluation is needed, they will develop a plan for assessing your child and ask you to sign it, giving your permission for the evaluation. However, the school does not have to evaluate your child just because you have asked. The school may not think your child needs special education. In this case, the school may refuse to evaluate your child. However, it must let you know this decision in writing, as well as why it has refused. If the school refuses to evaluate your child and you disagree with that decision, ask the principal for information about its special education policies, as well as parent rights to disagree with decisions made by the school system. These materials describe the steps parents can take to challenge a school's decision.

### *Still have questions?*

If you've read through this brochure and still have questions, feel free to call the principal, special education teacher, or school psychologist at your school. You can also contact the SELPA directly with questions.

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Special Education Local Plan Area  
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#### Serving:

Bret Harte Union High School District  
Calaveras Unified School District  
Mark Twain Union Elementary School District  
Vallecito Union School District  
Calaveras County Office of Education

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Additional information can also be obtained through:

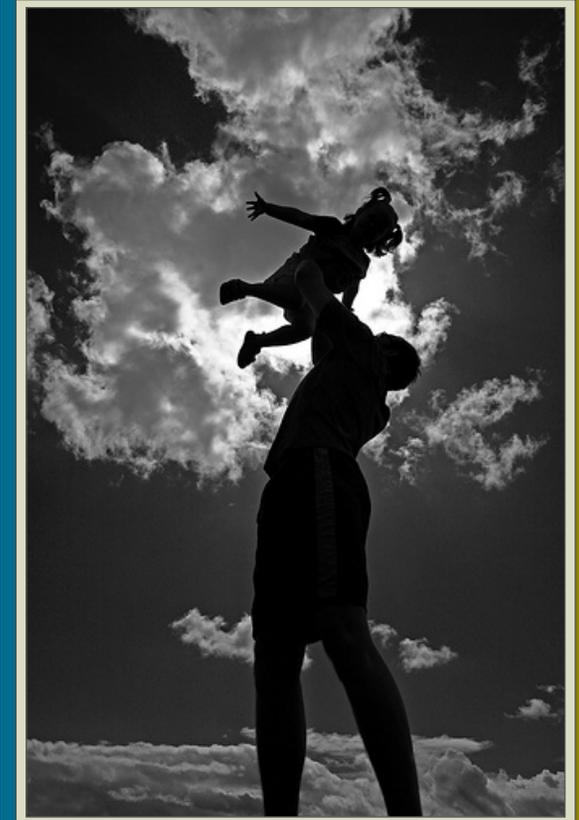
California Department of Education (CDE)  
(916) 319-0800

National Dissemination Center for  
Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)  
(800) 695-0285

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This brochure was created by the Calaveras County SELPA to help parents understand the special education process. Some of the information in this brochure was obtained from the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) and is used with their permission.

# Introduction to Special Education



Calaveras County Special Education  
Local Plan Area

Phone: (209) 736-6016  
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## *What happens during an evaluation?*

When you sign the assessment plan to give your permission for the evaluation, the school has 60 calendar days to complete the assessment and meet with you. Evaluating your child means more than the school just giving your child a test or two. The school will evaluate your child may be affected by the possible disability. This will include looking at your child's health, vision, hearing, general intelligence, and academic performance in school, and may also include looking at your child's social and emotional well-being, how well your child communicates with others, or how your child uses his or her body. The evaluation usually takes place during school hours. It will consist of observations, interviews, review of previous information such as report cards, and individually administered tests. People evaluating your child may include a special education teacher, a speech/language pathologist, a school psychologist or others.

## *What happens after the evaluation?*

When the evaluation is complete, the school will schedule an Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. You will be invited to that meeting, as well as your child's classroom teacher, the principal, and anyone who helped evaluate your child. At the meeting, the people who evaluated your child will share the results of their evaluation with

the team, and will give you a report that describes the results. As parents, you have the right to receive a copy of the evaluation report on your child and the paperwork about your child's eligibility for special education and related services.

When all the results have been discussed, the team will look at all of the information gathered during the evaluation and decide if your

child meets the definition of a "child with a disability." (This definition will come from the IDEA and from the policies your state or district uses.) The team will also decide if your child's needs can be met through a general education program. If your child meets the definition of a child with a disability and his or her needs cannot be met through a general education program, your child will be eligible for special education and related services.

If your child is found eligible, you and the school will work together to design an educational program for your child, called an Individual Education Plan, or IEP. If the team decides that your child is not eligible for special education services, the school must give you information about what you can do if you disagree with this decision.



## *So what is an IEP?*

An IEP is a written statement of the educational program designed to meet a child's individual needs. Every child who receives special education services must have an

IEP. The IEP has two general purposes: (1) to set reasonable learning goals for your child; and (2) to state the services that the school district will provide for your child.

The IEP will contain information about your child's present levels of educational performance, annual goals, special education services, dates and location of those services, and participation in state- and district-wide testing. The meeting to make all of these decisions may be long. At the end of the meeting, you will be asked if you agree with the services and goals. If so, you will need to sign the IEP to give your consent to the services. The school must also give you a copy of the IEP.

## *Can the IEP be changed?*

Yes. At least once a year a meeting must be scheduled with you to review your child's progress and develop your child's next IEP. The meeting will be similar to the IEP meeting described above. The team will talk about your child's progress toward the goals in the current IEP, what new goals should be added, and whether any changes need to be made to the special education and related services your child receives.

This annual IEP meeting allows you and the school to review your child's educational program and change it as necessary. But you don't have to wait for this annual review. You (or any other team member) may ask to have your child's IEP reviewed or revised at any time. Every three years, your child may be reevaluated to determine if he or she continues to have a disability and need special education services. This is often referred to as a triennial evaluation, or a "tri".



## **Common Acronyms**

- APE:** Adaptive Physical Education
- AU:** Administrative Unit
- CAC:** Community Advisory Committee
- CCOE:** Calaveras County Office of Education
- CCS:** California Children's Services
- CDE:** California Department of Education
- DIS:** Designated Instructional Services
- ED:** Emotionally Disturbed
- ESY:** Extended School Year (Summer School)
- FAPE:** Free and Appropriate Public Education
- IDEA:** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- IEP:** Individual Education Plan
- LD:** Learning Disability
- LRE:** Least Restrictive Environment
- MR:** Mentally Retarded
- NPS:** Non-Public School
- OHI:** Other Health Impairment
- OI:** Orthopedically Impaired
- OT:** Occupational Therapy
- PT:** Physical Therapy
- RSP:** Resource Specialist Program
- SDC:** Special Day Class
- SELPA:** Special Education Local Plan Area
- SH:** Severely Handicapped

