

SPECIAL EDUCATION UPDATES

COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES

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Estacada School District Policy

The Estacada School District does not discriminate against an individual's race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, age, or disability.

Good communication

between teachers and parents doesn't just happen. It requires special skills on your part: skills such as good listening techniques, tact, kindness, consideration, empathy, enthusiasm, and an understanding of parent-child relationships. No matter how you interact with parents and the community at large — through conferences, telephone conversations, e-mail, written notes or reports, lobbying or fund-raising efforts, working together in the classroom — good communication and interpersonal skills will enhance your efforts.

Veteran teachers stress the importance of effective communication skills. "When working with parents, be honest," advises Pennsylvania teacher Laurie Borger. "And be sensitive! Remember that you are talking about their most valuable family resource "

Adds Frank Garcia of California: "Always be tactful with parents. Think and plan what you are going to say to them, and how. Never be confrontational. Always speak in a pleasant voice, yet with firmness and authority when needed. Keep in mind that parents really love their children."

The Right Attitude

Writing about at-risk families and schools, L.B. Lontos lists other "beliefs" that teachers must adopt to work effectively with families:

1. All families have strengths.
2. Parents can learn new techniques.
3. Parents have important perspectives about their children.
4. Most parents really care about their children.
5. Cultural differences are both valid and valuable.
6. Many types of family forms exist.

Recognize that schools and homes have shared goals.

Both are committed to the nurturing, development, and education of children. "Teachers must believe that parents have a crucial role in their children's education, and parents and teachers must trust each other.

Respect caregivers and communicate that respect.

Tone of voice, word choice, facial expressions, body language, expectations, how long we make people wait — all these communicate respect or lack of it. Many parents have personal, family, work, health, or other problems that we know nothing about

Acknowledge the changes in the American family.

In most families, both parents work outside the home, including the families of school teachers. Yet many of us still think of this common lifestyle as an aberration. Further, millions of American school children come from single parent homes. Still others live with relatives or in foster homes.

Be positive!

"Parents enjoy positive communication," "Most teachers only make contact when something goes wrong." Veterans agree. "Make sure if you give negatives that you also follow up with positives. Although e-mail is convenient, we encourage personal phone calls.



BECAUSE YOU ASKED

Is it allowable for paraprofessionals to engage in instructional activities and student control without the continuous, direct supervision of a certified teacher?

Except for Title I programs, the direction and supervision of EAs is controlled by OAR 581-037-0015. Under that section of the regulations, paraprofessionals may assist the teacher in a supportive role. They may be assigned tasks which include, among other things, supplementing instruction by offering the students opportunities to practice and apply what they've learned and assisting with supervision and control of students. OAR 581-023-0015(1)(a) and (c).

Any paraprofessional assigned to instructionally related activities must work under the "direction" of the teacher assigned to that instructional station. OAR581-023-0015(2).

This means that the paraprofessional is only allowed to implement instruction designed by the teacher. The paraprofessional is not permitted to

design or modify curriculum.

The requirement regarding supervision is found in OAR 581-023-0015(3). It simply requires a plan of supervision for the assistant that includes "access to assistance and consultation" and "regular monitoring of the assistant's performance to determine effectiveness of the assigned tasks and the effect on students." It does not require continuous supervision.

By contrast, when paraprofessionals are supported with Title I funds the requirements under Title I provide that the EA may only provide instructional support under the "direct supervision" of a teacher, which has been interpreted to require continuous line-of-sight supervision. That level of supervision is not required under OAR 581-037-0015.



Can a physician's opinion override an IEP team decision?

Recently the court determined that a district incorrectly relied on testimony from a student's physician that the student needed "adapted" PE.

The evidence showed that the physician based her opinion almost entirely on information obtained from the student's parent. She evaluated the student for only fifteen minutes, and did not conduct any testing or observations of the student's education performance. In contrast the student's PE teacher testified that the student successfully participated in regular PE class with modifications.

The 7th Circuit explained that the physician's opinion over that of the IEP team, which included the adapted PE teacher, "a physician cannot simply prescribe special education; rather, the (IDEA) dictates a full review by an IEP team," Judge Manion wrote.

While the team was required to consider the physician's opinion, it did not have to defer to her view about the student's special education needs.

The 7th Circuit further noted that the student's need for physical and occupational therapy did not make him eligible for IDEA services, as they did not amount to

You can't
jump a chasm
in two
bounds.'

Chinese
Proverb

Can placement in a regular education classroom with an aide be more restrictive than a self-contained program?

Despite a mother's sincere belief that her student could succeed in a general education Kindergarten class, the child's district appropriately declined to place the student there. The child lacked the precursor skills to benefit academically from such a setting, regardless of the amount of modification and services he received there. The district instead offered to place the 6-year-old with autistic-like behaviors and mental retardation in a self-contained special day class with low student-teacher ratio. The parent rejected the offer, pointing to the student's prior success in his preschool class.

In the due process complaint the ALJ observed that a student may be placed outside of the general education environment only when "the nature of severity of the student's disabilities is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aid and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily." the ALJ pointed out that the student did not yet use language spontaneously nor did he understand that images or words on paper had meaning. Furthermore, his vocabulary was no more than 15 words,

and his attention span was just 3 seconds. "No degree of modification of the general education kindergarten curriculum would permit the student to obtain educational benefit." In addition, placement in a general education class would isolate him because he would be working with an aide on an entirely separate academic program. As to the child's success in preschool, the ALJ noted that the student was heavily reliant there on prompting by his mother and aide. The student was offered a placement in a structured setting, with teachers specially trained to work with students with severe disabilities.

In another case, the parents of a student with autistic-like behaviors objected when the District proposed placing her in a special day class. Although her parents wanted the student to attend a general education class on a full-time basis, the ALJ observed that the modifications she would require there would both isolate her from her peers and disrupt their learning. The student's abilities were substantially below age level in the areas of adaptive, social, communication, fine motor, and cognitive skills. The student also engaged in loud vocalizations and tantrums. So the question was to determine whether a student could be satisfactorily education in a

general education environment. What were the educational benefits, the nonacademic benefits, the student's effect on others, and the cost.

The district demonstrated that the placement was based on the child's nature and severity of her impairments. In fact the district showed that placing the student in a general education class would have been more restrictive. The ALJ pointed to a district psychologist's statement that the student's behaviors necessitated constant attention by an aide to ensure that she was not hurt and that she would have to be placed in a separate location of the classroom in order to work on her goals. Because the student would be isolated, she would obtain little nonacademic benefit. The program the district placed her in would be with other children her age with similar needs and with teacher's trained to address them.

When considering placement it is important to carefully review all of the factors that impact student learning.

'The excitement of learning separates youth from old age. As long as you are learning you're not old.'

Rosalyn
Sussman
Yalow
Physicist



Instructional Goals

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'If a torrent sweeps a man against a boulder, you must expect him to scream, and you need not be surprised if the scream is sometimes a new theory.
' R L Stevenson

"A student friendly learning environment"

In establishing an effective educational program as part of the student's total education, the district recognizes the importance of developing a partnership that promotes the involvement of staff, parents, and the community. The district is committed to a continuous process of collaborative decision making and goal setting that supports the physical and cognitive growth and development of students as indicated below:

1. Provides equal and open access and educational opportunities for all students regardless of their linguistic background, culture, race, sex, capability, or geographic location;
2. Assumes that all students can learn and establishes high, specific skill and knowledge expectations and recognizes individual differences at all instructional levels;
3. Provides special education, compensatory education, linguistically and culturally-appropriate education and other specialized programs to all students who need those services;
4. Provides students with a solid foundation in the skills of reading, writing, problem solving, and communication;
5. Provides opportunities for students to learn, think, reason, retrieve information, use technology and work effectively alone and in groups;
6. Provides for rigorous academic content standards and instruction in mathematics, science, English, history, geography, economics, civics, physical education, health, the arts and second languages;
7. Provides students with an educational background to the end that they will function successfully in a constitutional republic, a participatory democracy, and a multicultural nation and world;
8. Provides students with the knowledge and skills that will provide the opportunities to succeed in the world of work, as members of families and as citizens;
9. Provides students with the knowledge, skills, and positive attitude that lead to an active, healthy lifestyle;
10. Provides students with the knowledge and skills to take responsibility for their decisions and choices;
11. Provides opportunities for students to learn through a variety of teaching strategies;
12. Emphasizes involvement of parents and community in the total education of students;
13. Transports students safely to and from school;
14. Ensures that the funds allocated to schools reflect the uncontrollable differences in costs facing each district;
15. Ensures that local schools have adequate control of how funds are spent to best meet the needs of students in their communities;
16. Provides for a safe, educational environment;
17. Supports students' academic growth up to and beyond proficiency in academic content standards and encourages their attainment of individual goals; and
18. Utilizes valid and reliable data for evaluating the success of curriculum, instruction, resource allocation, and school improvement.

END OF POLICY Legal References):

ORS 329.025
ORS 329.125
ORS 336.067
OAR 581-022-1030