

## What is a Special Education Local Plan Area - SELPA?

THE HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELPAs - On January 10, 1974 the California State Board of Education adopted the California master Plan for Special Education. This plan outlined a process of developing a quality educational program for the disabled students of California. The plan was to equalize educational opportunities for all children in need of special education. The plan required that all school districts and County Offices of Education join together in regions to implement the Master Plan. Each region, be it a large single district or many small districts, developed a regional special education service delivery system. In the 1983-84 school year, the service regions were named Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs). Education Codes 56170 and 56220 codified the establishment of SELPAs. California now has 116 SELPAs carrying out the spirit and mandate of the California Master Plan for Special Education.

TYPES OF SELPAs - In general, there are two types of SELPAs. The single district SELPA serves one district which may be unified or non-unified. This SELPA generally operates within the administrative structure of the district and operates all of the district's special education programs as well as providing the functions of the SELPA. The second type of SELPA is a multi-district SELPA, which may or may not operate programs along with providing SELPA functions. Multi-district SELPAs are generally governed by a board made up of representatives of the districts within the SELPA. The SELPA Director receives evaluations, direction and policy through the governing structure. The governing body or council carries out an annual evaluation of the SELPA director. Some multi-district SELPAs have a County Office of Education as their administrative unit but direct guidance and governance is provided by the governing board (usually a Superintendent's Council). Some SELPAs operate under a joint powers agreement. Governance and actual functions and duties of the SELPA and SELPA Director are spelled out in each local plan.

GOVERNANCE - Governance structure is detailed in the local plan. Recognizing that individual districts have resources that often vary according to their relative size and geographic location, the governance structure is developed to provide equity in the sharing of resources to students within the SELPA regardless of district resources. This is particularly true regarding students with low incidence disabilities such as the orthopedic impaired, blind and deaf. In many cases, SELPAs will develop regional agreements among themselves to share specialized services. Governance structure varies among SELPAs according to local norms; however, they have a consistent theme of districts (or schools in the case of the single district SELPA) working together to share resources for students. The Governance section of the local plan describes who provides oversight and accountability over the SELPA. In most multi-district SELPAs the staff answer to their Superintendent's Council, while some answer to a JPA Board. In the single district, the SELPA is accountable through the district administration and ultimately to the Board of Trustees. The governing bodies establish annual and multi-annual goals, objectives and action plans for the SELPA. These provide a matrix for evaluation and accountability. Most governing boards evaluate the SELPA Director annually along with the goals, objectives and action plans. In addition, the Community Advisory committee of each SELPA participates in writing and reviewing the local plan, annual budgets and other planning activities.

SELPA SUPERVISION - The SELPA Director supervises SELPA staff which, depending on the local plan, may include Program Specialists, Designated Instructional Specialists, teachers and clerical staff. The supervision follows procedures established requiring annual and semi-annual evaluations. Supervision is provided by the Director according to the local plan and SELPA annual goals, objectives and action plans. SELPA Directors also help develop interagency agreements with Mental health, Public Health and other agencies. They frequently establish and monitor contracts with non-public schools and non-public agencies.

FUNDING/BUDGET - Each SELPA prepares an annual budget outlining all income and expected expenses which is reviewed and approved by their governing board. The majority of funds allocated to SELPAs are in fact funds which belong to the member district(s). The SELPA role is to be sure that district apportionments are in accordance with the Local Plan. In addition, SELPAs receive Regionalized Services funds and Program Specialist funds which are designated to carry out services for the special education students within the SELPA. These funds are spent in accordance with the annual budget. Part 30 of the California Education Code designates how funds may be spent; however, input from the governing body, SELPA Community Advisory Committee, special education coordinators and superintendents will set budget priorities and develop the budget using the parameters of Part 30. SELPAs are also responsible for up to 10 different grant programs including programs such as PL 99-457 Part H infant programs. This program includes interagency agreements with Regional Centers and has a completely different set of program guidelines. SELPA budgets are audited annually by an outside auditor and subject to all the guidelines of the School Finance Manual. In most cases the auditor for the SELPA is the same as the auditor for the administrative unit of the SELPA.

RELATIONSHIP TO PARENTS - SELPA Directors often serve as consultant, ombudsperson, advocate, and, in some cases, the spokesperson for parents within the special education system. SELPA Directors act as a liaison to parents between the various districts in a multi-district SELPA or to the district in a single district SELPA. On a formal basis, the SELPA Community Advisory Committee provides parent input to the SELPA via the Director in the area of programs and services provided as well as staff development and parent training. In turn the SELPA provides a variety of inservices to parents and the Community Advisory Committee. Informally, the SELPA Director wears many hats in dealing with parents with the principal role being one of problem solver and "putting a human face" on the special education system.

RELATIONSHIP TO DISTRICTS - Multi-district SELPAs act as the advocate for services to all special education students. The Director is the special education expert, trouble shooter, peace-maker and administrator of coordinated services provided to member districts. The Director provides the leadership required to insure that the member districts work together in solving problems and providing services. A key function in this process is in working out policies and procedures so that resources are shared or divided equitably. In addition, as the resident expert, the Director provides guidance in the quality control of services and also the staff development required to maintain high quality services. The SELPA frequently acts as a catalyst for the development of new programs. These programs may be new and innovative in nature designed to focus on areas such as prevention of becoming at risk of needing more services. Due to the unique data gathering by SELPAs they often are first to identify a need and respond to the need by developing a new service, program, or professional development. SELPAs are responsible for the allocation of new classes and services annually. This may include shifting services within the SELPA region according to changes in the needs of children or the equitable allocation of new growth units among the districts and County Office of Education. SELPAs frequently provide the operation of services to low incidence students with severe disabilities and the service of Program Specialists who consult with district personnel regarding instructional methods

and other program issues. In the single district SELPA, the Director's role is to establish and maintain equitability among schools and programs so that students have access to the services they need to benefit from their education. They also serve as the contact person for parents and students and provide similar functions as in a multi-district SELPA. In most SELPAs, staff serve frequently as due process representatives assisting districts in resolving disagreements with parents regarding programs and services provided to children. Most disagreements are solved at the informal level. When disagreements move to the formal level, the SELPA may provide the expertise needed to come to a resolution and often represents the district in dispute. SELPA Directors are often contacted by parents to act as an advocate or ombudsperson in settling a dispute with a district. In the case of an administrative hearing, the SELPA Director usually plays a large role in preparing the case and may serve as a witness or in some cases actually represent the district in the hearing. After due process, the SELPA Director will frequently follow up to see that decisions are carried out.