

Community Advisory Committee  
**Parent Handbook**



*Kern County*  
**Superintendent of Schools**  
*Office of Mary C. Barlow ...advocates for children*



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# *Introduction*

This handbook was created to help parents understand more about the processes of special education and your very important role as a partner in your child's education.

We hope it will help you to become actively involved as a collaborative partner in the development and implementation of your child's educational program.

This handbook was designed in question format to better address questions parents might have during the special education process.

## *What is a SELPA?*

The Kern County Consortium Special Education Local Plan Area and the County Office of Education is a multi-district consortium made up of 43 school districts, 5 charter schools. We provide special education programs and services to almost 13,000 students from birth until age 22 years. All SELPAs have the same basic goal - to ensure access to high quality special education programs and services to all students with disabilities in the most effective, efficient, and cost effective manner practicable.

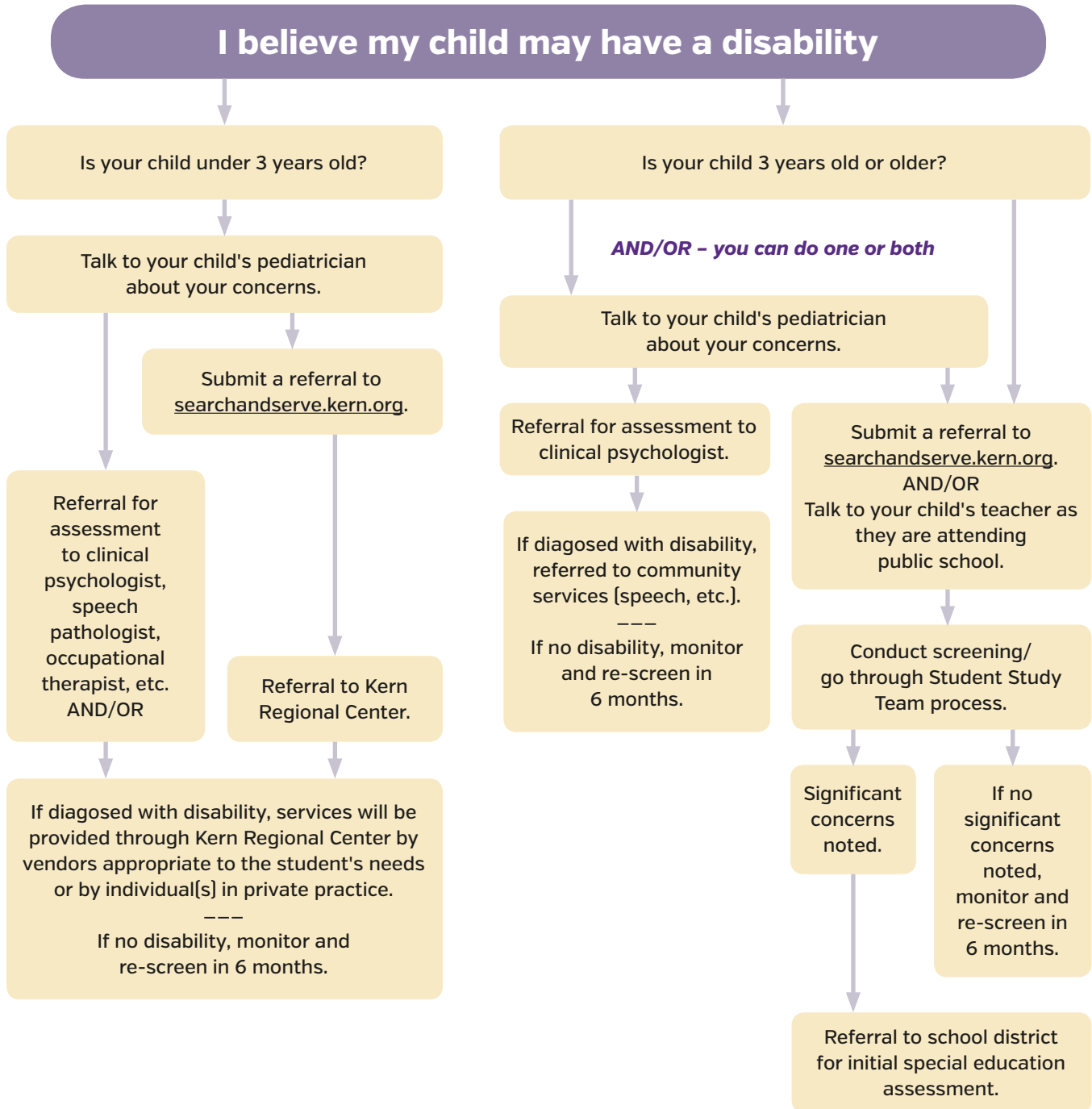
### **How do SELPAs help parents?**

SELPAs:

- Facilitate the development of high quality educational programs and services for students with special needs.
- Provide training for parents.
- Collaborate with county agencies and LEAs to develop and maintain healthy and enriching environments in which students with special needs can succeed.
- Provide reliable resources for use in becoming more knowledgeable about both the IEP Team Process and Procedural Safeguards and Parents' Rights.

# I suspect my child may have a disability.

## Routes for Seeking Help



# *Does my child need Special Education?*

## *Things to try first.*

### **Pre-Referral Activities**

- A student can be referred for special education only after the resources of the general education program have been considered, and when appropriate, utilized.
  - » If your child is younger than 5:
    - Talk to your child's pediatrician about your concerns.
    - Identify daily activities that your child likes to participate in (you may want to make a list).
    - Pay close attention to what your child is doing during those activities so you can "catch them" doing things correctly.
    - Shower your child with positive praise when he/she is doing things correctly (be sure to tell them specifically what they are doing well).
    - Continue to model and imitate the things you would like your child to learn.
    - Look for opportunities to expand your child's language. For example, if your child points to a car in a book and says "car", respond by saying "red car".
    - Talk to and interact with your child as much as possible.
    - Read to your child daily.
  - » If your child is school aged: (The strategies listed for children under 5 still apply)
    - Talk to your child's teacher.
    - Consult with specialists and other appropriate staff.
    - Request accommodations for the student to facilitate access to core curriculum.
    - Ask about the use of general program resources (e.g. counselors, Response to Intervention [RTI], Title I resource programs, tutorials, English Language development programs, migrant programs, reading intervention programs, 504 accommodation plans, summer school, etc.).
    - Ask for a referral to appropriate community agencies.

# *We tried, but I think we still need help - who can help?*

## **Sources of Referral**

- Each SELPA has Child Find activities that are designed to locate individuals, birth through 21 years of age, including children not enrolled in public school programs, as well as children who are homeless or wards of the state and reside in the district, that may be eligible for, and in need of, special education and/or related services. Referrals can be submitted by anyone by going to [searchandserve.kern.org](http://searchandserve.kern.org) [as referenced in the flow chart on page 2].
- Referrals can also come from a variety of other sources, including the following:
  - » Parent, guardian, educational representative, or surrogate parent
  - » Student Study Team [SST]
  - » School staff
  - » Public and private agencies
  - » Student
  - » Physicians and other medical professionals
  - » Other community members

## **Referral Procedures**

- For referrals submitted through [searchandserve.kern.org](http://searchandserve.kern.org):
  - » Upon receipt of a referral for special education assessment, the Search and Serve Project Facilitator will:
    - Enter the given information into the referral database.
    - Generate and forward referral to the Search and Serve Coordinator who will forward the referral to the appropriate assessor (e.g Kern Regional Center and/or your child's school district).
- Referrals for school-aged children coming from another source such as the parent or teacher:
  - » Concerns about a child's ability to perform in reading, writing, math, and/or behavior/mental health have been expressed.
  - » School personnel or parent requests Student Study Team meeting to decide if a referral for special education assessment is needed at this time.



# We've referred, but what happens next?

## Child has been identified as possibly needing special education and related services

- It has been decided that assessment for special education is needed:
  - » Parent is informed, in writing, of district's intent to assess child for possible Special Education eligibility.
  - » School district offers an assessment plan (also known as the *Consent for Assessment*) to parents that explains what areas will be assessed.
  - » A school district cannot proceed until they receive signed approval of the assessment plan and the date it was approved.

## Child is evaluated by a multi-disciplinary team

- Once parental consent for the assessment has been obtained, the case manager shall distribute a copy of the signed assessment plan to all staff conducting the assessment.
- Assessment shall be conducted by persons knowledgeable in the area of the suspected disability.
- A student is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability including, if appropriate:
  - » health and development
  - » vision (including low vision)
  - » hearing
  - » motor abilities
  - » speech & language function/skills
  - » general ability
  - » academic performance
  - » self-help skills
  - » orientation and mobility skills
  - » career/vocational abilities and interests
  - » social, emotional, and behavioral status

- School District has 60 calendar days to complete the assessment and hold the IEP meeting [excluding any school breaks over 5 days].
- The team also documents evidence of child's unique needs and modifications/strategies attempted in the general education program prior to the referral.

## **IEP meeting is scheduled**

- Case manager schedules Individualized Education Plan [IEP] team meeting date and time when all necessary IEP members can attend; sends written invitation to potential members.
- The required members of the IEP team are:
  - » Parent[s]
  - » Your child's general education teacher[s].
  - » Your child's special education service provider[s].
  - » A school district representative who is qualified to provide or supervise the special education instruction, is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum and district resources, and has the capacity to dedicate the needed district resources to appropriately support the student.
  - » An individual who can interpret the instructional implications or evaluation results in each of the areas assessed.
  - » Others who have knowledge or expertise about your child.
  - » The child, if appropriate.

## *What to expect at the first IEP meeting.*

### **Tips on how to prepare for your first IEP meeting**

- You will be asked to share information during the IEP Team meeting specifically related to your child's strengths, interests, and needs from your perspective.
- Be prepared to identify specific strengths, interests and needs based on all the information you have available about your child prior to the assessment.
- Take some time prior to the meeting to think about your child and what you might identify as important information for educators working with your child.

## **If my child is found eligible for Special Education services - these are your options**

- Your child's eligibility for Special Education and related services are based on the assessment indicating that they meet the education code criteria for one or more of the thirteen disabling conditions. [A medical diagnosis does not mean that a student will necessarily meet the educational criteria for that specific diagnosis. Your child may meet the criteria in another category.]
- When eligibility has been determined, the IEP team must determine if the student requires special education and/or related services. This is true when the disability adversely affects his/her educational performance.
- If the IEP determines that a student's needs would be most appropriately met with special education and/or related services, the team is required to provide those services in as close to a general education environment as possible.

## **If my child is not found eligible for Special Education - other options**

- These other options may exist:
  - » Meet with Student Study Team
    - Consider additional Response to Intervention (RtI) Interventions.
    - Consider outside resources that can be accessed for the student.
  - » 504 Plan
    - 504 plans are formal plans that schools develop to provide students with disabilities the support they need and prevent the discrimination of students with disabilities in schools.

# *Your child is found eligible for Special Education services.*

## How the IEP process works - the big picture

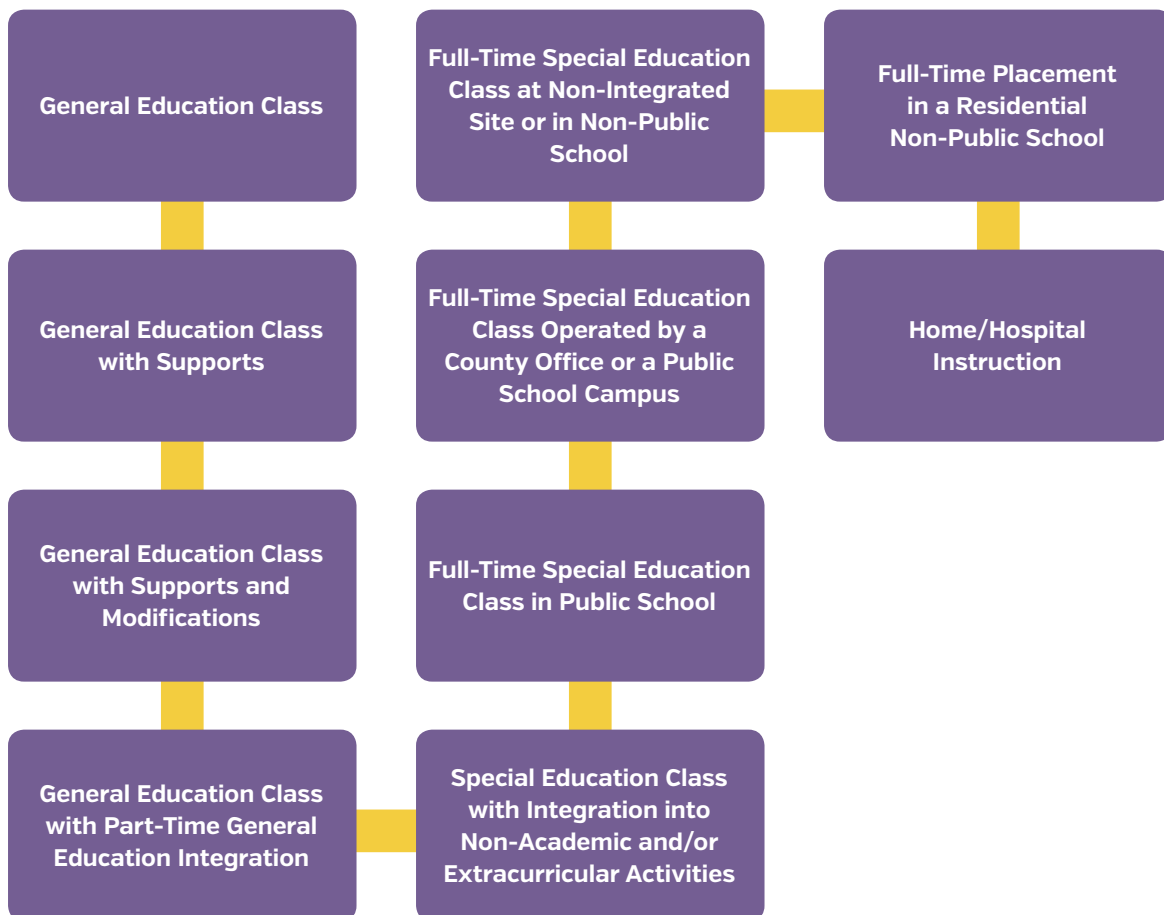


## The typical progression of an IEP meeting

- Introductions - Who are all of these people at the table and what is their connection to my child?
- Review the purpose of the meeting/agenda and development of meeting norms.
- Explanation of parent rights/procedural safeguards.
- Present Levels of Performance (PLOPs) – This is where reports are reviewed and current functioning discussed. It includes the manner in which the disability affects his/her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. This is also where school staff will ask you for your child’s strengths, interests, and needs.
- Goals and Objectives/Benchmarks – Goals are based on all of the areas of need indicated in the PLOPs. Goals should include timelines for achievement and how they will be measured; the team will also indicate how progress toward goals will be reported to parents/guardians.

- Services - This includes any program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided to: enable your child to advance toward attaining the annual goals, be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum, and participate in extracurricular and non-academic activities.
- Further adaptations/modifications/equipment needed to implement goals and objectives/benchmarks.
- Other items/special factors (State Testing, Extended School Year, Transportation, etc.).
- Consent to the IEP - At the conclusion of the IEP meeting, all participants will be asked to sign the IEP. If you are satisfied with the IEP and give your written consent, placement in the decided special education program and all related services shall occur as early as the next day after the IEP has been signed (start date will be determined during the IEP).

## Typical Educational Program Placement Continuum



# *Tips for parents.*

## **Prior to the IEP meeting**

- Extra ears always help. You can bring someone (friend, relative, spouse) with you to take notes, listen, and be your support.
- If you wish to audio-record the meeting, it is possible. You are required to notify the district 24-hours in advance that you will be doing so. They will probably record as well.
- If you have/have had any additional testing done, and want the team to review it and consider the information, make sure a copy is given to your district at least one week before the meeting.
- Special education jargon is confusing and terms and methods are constantly changing. If you don't understand what is being said in a report (or during the meeting), ask for clarification from the report-writer.
- Write a list of questions you want answered and points you want to share.

## **During the IEP meeting**

- Focus on problem-solving with the team, and don't be afraid to ask for something new.
- Don't be afraid to ask to see a program before the placement is finalized.
- It is easy to forget important information when talking with staff members; it is ok to take notes.
- Expect to receive written copies of reports, IEPs, etc. You can actually request to have assessment reports prior to the meeting to review. Keep all paperwork in a file/binder for later reference. If you do not receive a copy of the IEP directly after the meeting, make sure you get one from the teacher or case manager.
- Consent to the IEP – at the conclusion of the IEP meeting, the notes should be reviewed with you. All participants will be asked to sign the IEP. Do not hesitate to ask the professionals present to repeat something, or give explanations to you in everyday language. If you are satisfied with the IEP, you will be asked to initial statements indicating you agree that certain things are true – make sure you understand each one before you initial.
- If there is an unresolved issue at the meeting, be sure to request the name of the person working toward the solution and that the timeline for providing a solution be placed in the notes. (It is recommended you write it down too.).

## After the IEP meeting

- If necessary, make an appointment with your child's teacher for a parent conference to discuss concerns. Don't try to have a conference with the teacher, for instance, while picking up your child.
- Your child's program and progress will be reviewed at a minimum, annually. Additional meetings may be scheduled during the year according to the IEP goals and/or objective/benchmarks to determine the appropriateness of the program in meeting your child's needs. You may request a review or change to the IEP when necessary, by writing to your child's teacher, school psychologist, or administrator. They will set-up the IEP meeting within 30 days.

## *If I am having challenges with the IEP process or communicating my concerns - who can help?*

If you, as a parent, are having challenges coming to agreement with your student's IEP team, these options are available to you. It is important to begin with the least formal process and work toward the more formal process only as needed. If you have concerns with your child's educational program, your first point of contact should be your child's teacher. The next level within the district would be the site principal and then the Special Education Director. If you still have concerns, please contact the SELPA Intake Coordinator at 661-636-4801. He/she will attempt to facilitate the resolution of the concern through the Alternative Dispute Resolution [ADR] process. You can also access this information online at <https://kern.org/selpa/adr/>. There are several informal options to be considered.

### **Informal Level:**

- Collaborative IEP Process
  - » Often parents and school personnel find that they agree on many more things than they disagree on and can build on those areas to reach a compromise.
- Expert Teams/Local Intake Coordinator
  - » If a parent or district is having challenges and wishes a team to come in and review the assessments/IEPs/concerns and offer their opinions, that is possible. The parent can contact the Local Intake Coordinator to coordinate that effort.

- Facilitated IEP
  - » If a parent is having frequent IEP meetings or multiple meetings before the team is in agreement, a Facilitated IEP may assist the team in coming to agreement. This Facilitator is a neutral party that keeps the team focused and documents all agreements. The goal is to achieve a signed IEP that all team members feel represents all the issues needed to educate that student.
- Local Mediation
  - » Parents and districts will be able to participate in no cost, impartial local mediation when desired. Local mediation uses an effective problem-solving method through a Mediator who will discuss possible solutions and develop agreements that are mutually acceptable to both parties. It is a safe, low-pressure process. The final agreements will be committed to writing in a facilitated or collaborative IEP.

**Very Formal Level:**

- Compliance Complaint
  - » A Compliance Complaint may be filed by a parent when they believe that the LEA has violated the educational code. The California Department of Education will review all relevant information and make an independent determination about the alleged educational code violations.
- Resolution Meeting
  - » The Resolution Meeting is a meeting that takes place after Due Process has been filed. The meeting provides the opportunity for discussion and clarification of issues, with both the school and the parent, including a neutral facilitator trained to help the parties come to resolution. The team collaboratively determines solutions to the issues and creates a written agreement which in turn maintains a positive rapport between both parties.
- Mediation
  - » The Mediation Meeting is a meeting that takes place after Due Process has been filed. At this meeting, the mediator helps the parties work together to find a solution that will satisfy those involved. The parties decide whether or not the dispute is settled. If the parties try mediation but can't reach an agreement, they still have the right to continue to a due process hearing. However, the parties can continue to work toward an agreement all the way up to the day the Due Process begins.
- Due Process
  - » Both parents and the LEA have the right to request an impartial due process hearing regarding the identification, evaluation, educational placement or the provision of FAPE for a student. ADR is in place to minimize the use of this option and to encourage parents and LEAs to come to agreement before the issues escalate to this level.



# *Ways to get involved and learn more.*

## **What is a Community Advisory Committee (CAC)?**

The CAC is made up of parents, community members and district staff concerned with the needs of children with disabilities.

## **What is a CAC's purpose?**

- The purpose of the CAC is to improve and promote communication between schools, parents, and public agencies to increase community awareness, facilitate parent education and support, and to coordinate activities on behalf of children with exceptional needs.
- The CAC is mandated by California Education Codes 56190-56194, which gives the CAC a number of specific responsibilities. These responsibilities include:
  - » Advising the policy and administrative entity on the development, amendment and review of the Local Plan.
  - » Recommending annual priorities to be addressed by the SELPA.
  - » Assisting in parent education and in recruiting parents and other volunteers who may contribute to the implementation of the plan.
  - » Encouraging community involvement in the development of the local plan.
  - » Supporting activities on behalf of individuals with exceptional needs.
  - » Assisting in parent awareness of the importance of regular school attendance.
  - » Facilitating communication between schools, parents, and community.
  - » Establishing and review bylaws to govern committee operations.

## **How do I become a member?**

- Please contact your district's Special Education Director to learn more!
- For any other questions, please feel free to contact the SELPA Coordinator at [661] 636-4884.

## Websites that you may find helpful:

Autism Speaks - <https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit/100-day-kit-young-children>

BARC - <https://barc-inc.org/>

California Department of Education, Family Resources - <https://www.cde.ca.gov/>

California Spectrum Services - <http://www.californiaspectrumservices.com/>

Center for Parent Information and Resources - <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/>

Clinica Sierra Vista - <https://clinciasierravista.org/>

Department of Rehabilitation - <http://www.dor.ca.gov/>

Division of Autism and Development Disabilities [DADD] - <http://www.daddcec.org/>

Exceptional Family Center - <https://www.kernefc.org/>

H.E.A.R.T.S. Connection - <http://www.heartsfrc.org/about-us/>

Kern Autism Network - <https://kernautism.org/>

Kern Down Syndrome Network - <http://kerndsn.org/about-us.html>

Kern Regional Center - <https://www.kernrc.org/>

League of Dreams - <https://ourleagueofdreams.com/>

Learning Disabilities Online - <http://www.ldonline.org/>

Shriner's Hospitals for Children - <https://www.shrinershospitalsforchildren.org/shc>

Society for Disabled Children - <http://www.societyfdc.com/>

# *Additional resources:*

## **Commonly used Acronyms in Special Education**

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
504	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Code
AB 602	California's Assembly Bill describing the Funding Model for Special Ed.
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADR	Alternate or Alternative Dispute Resolution
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
APE	Adaptive Physical Education
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
AT	Assistive Technology
CAC	Community Advisory Committee
CALPADS	CA Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System
CASEMIS	CA Special Education Management Information System
CCR	Continuum of Care Reform
CCS	California Children's Services
CDE	California Department of Education
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CIR	Critical Incident Review
CR	Comprehensive Review
DINC	Data Identified Non-Compliance
DIS	Designated Instructional Service
Dispro	Disproportionality
DRDP [2015]	Desired Results Developmental Profile [2015] - the year doesn't change
ED	Emotionally Disturbed
ERMHS	Educationally Related Mental Health Services
FAPE	Free, Appropriate Public Education
FFH	Foster Family Home
FMTA	Focused Monitoring and Technical Assistance
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IDEIA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
IFSP	Individual Family Service Plan
ISA	Individual Service Agreement
ISP	Individualized Service Plan
ITP	Individualized Transition Plan
KRC	Kern Regional Center
LCI	Licensed Children's Institute (Group Home)
LEA	Local Education Agency
LI	Low Incidence
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MOE	Maintenance of Effort
NPA	Non-public Agency



For information please call [661] 636-4801  
[kern.org/selpa](http://kern.org/selpa)



For information please call [661] 636-4817  
[searchandserve.kern.org](http://searchandserve.kern.org)

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