

# **An Overview of Special Education in LVJUSD**

## **The Mission to Serve Students with Disabilities**

The LVJUSD Special Education Department partners with schools to deliver targeted supports, services and interventions, so our students with special needs (ages three to twenty-two) can gain the skills they need to contribute and thrive in a changing world. There is a great deal of care taken to adhere to Federal and State legal guidelines. For students with special needs there must be a strong collaborative relationship between special and general educators, administrators, and parents.

### **Special Education under the Law**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), a federal law, requires school districts to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to eligible children with disabilities. FAPE means Special Education and related services are provided in an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Special Education is described in the law as *“specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.”* IDEA also specifies that services take place in the *“least restrictive environment”* in which IEP goals can be met. The word “appropriate” and phrases “specially designed,” “unique needs,” and “least restrictive environment,” play an essential role in how school teams develop IEPs for students.

Parents play a pivotal role in the IEP process. Not only are they the one permanent member of their child’s IEP team, they also serve a critical role in helping the team understand what supports are needed for the student to be successful.

### **Individualized Education Program Development**

The IEP is a legally binding agreement between a school district and the family of a student with special needs. The art and science of developing and implementing an IEP is at the foundation of professional learning conducted by our Special Education Department. To arrive at free and appropriate public education, for each student, a multi-disciplinary team must facilitate a thorough assessment and planning process that ensures the student is making reasonable progress on designated goals. These goals then lead to an instructional service, or set of services, that comprise a Special Education “placement.”

### **The Spectrum of Services for LVJUSD Students with IEPs**

In accordance with the mandate to serve students in the least restrictive educational environment that allows appropriate progress on IEP goals, our District offers a variety of services and programs at varying levels.

All schools have:

- a. Resource Specialist Programs: Directed by a Resource Specialist and assisted by a Paraprofessional, students in this program primarily receive specialized teaching services in the general education setting. However, if a student needs academic support in addition to that which is provided in a general education classroom, it is also acceptable to receive support outside of general education, taught by the Special Education teacher.
- b. Speech and Language: A Speech and Language Pathologist works directly with children when they need help with articulation of speech sounds, receptive language, or expressive language. The services either occur within the context of the classroom setting or through what is known as “pull-out” support.
- c. School Psychologists: School Psychologists work closely with school teams in identifying and planning appropriate instructional programs for children with special needs. In addition, School Psychologists play a central role in the multi-disciplinary team assessment process that is conducted for every child in Special Education. School Psychologists also provide school-based counseling to students and participate in the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) implementation, including, intervention planning teams.
- d. Nurse: Nurses work with students and their families when their medical needs that may affect learning. Our nurses are a part of the multi-disciplinary team at every site.
- e. Program Specialist: Program Specialists are each assigned schools to provide support, training, and guidance on the implementation of Individualized Education Programs. They work closely with school teams and families to ensure there is regular communication and progress is being made for each student who has special needs.

Other District services that may be available at a school site:

- a) Special Day Classes (SDC): Children with more involved learning needs, including academic delays, may be placed in Special Day Classes where they can spend a majority of their learning time in a small group with a Special Education Teacher. Our District has Special Day Classes for students with mild to moderate and moderate to severe disabilities. Paraprofessionals are assigned according to the needs of the students. Students in these programs must spend at least a portion of their day in general education. In our co-teaching and learning center classrooms, students spend the majority of their day in general education.
- b) Adapted Physical Education (APE): Due to their physical limitations, some students are not able to participate in general education physical education, or simply need support to ensure their bodies are developing appropriately. APE teachers support sites to help meet these needs.
- c) Deaf / Hard of Hearing Needs: Children with hearing impairments receive services from a specialist so they can effectively access their education.
- d) Behavior Interventions: Behavior Intervention Specialists and Registered Behavior Technicians ensure that inappropriate behaviors, often a manifestation of a disability, do not prevent a student (or the student’s peers) from learning. Behaviorists and Registered Behavior

Technicians often create and/or implement behavior support plans that are designed to meet individual needs.

- e) Assistive Technology and Augmentative Communication Needs: In order for some students to effectively access their education, assistive technology and augmentative communication supports are needed. Specialists are assigned to sites in order to evaluate what a student may need and provide guidance to that student and staff on how to implement those supports in the classroom.
- f) Physical and Occupational Therapy: within our District, there are a number of students who need physical and/or occupational therapy in order to be able to appropriately access their education. Specialists are assigned to support students who have such needs.
- g) Vision and Hearing Support: Students with vision and hearing disabilities are assigned a specialist to help them access their education. Most of these students are in general education classes throughout their day.

### **Tri-Valley Special Education Local Education Plan Area (SELPA)**

Along with the Pleasanton, Dublin, Sunol Glen, and Mountain House Districts, LVJUSD is part of the Tri-Valley Special Education Local Planning Area (SELPA), which ensures a legally compliant spectrum of services for students in our region and apportions the State funds that flow to students with IEPs. As part of its mission, the SELPA provides special day classes for students with disabilities that are less common. LVJUSD, Pleasanton, and Dublin each have special day classes for students with autism and students with severe multiple disabilities. Livermore, Dublin, and Pleasanton provide counseling enriched classes for students with mental health disabilities.

Some children have learning needs that cannot be addressed by the services routinely offered in the school district or the SELPA. In these cases, our District works with County and State agencies or contracts with non-public schools and agencies. Such services may include:

- a) Physical Therapy
- b) Occupational Therapy
- c) In-home training for children with autism
- d) California Children Services
- e) Orientation and Mobility training for blind and visually impaired
- f) Non-Public Schools for behavioral or mental health needs
- g) Residential Non-Public Schools
- h) California School for the Deaf
- i) California School for the Blind

Some students with IEPs are eligible for subsidized transportation to and from home and school if their IEP teams decide it is necessary. Students who are not able to be offered a program at their home school, or those who have a disabling condition that makes walking, public transportation, or parent transportation to their home school highly problematic, are offered transportation services. Our District contracts with ALC to provide transportation for our students in Livermore.

Current data and trends:

- a. CAASPP Results: Over the last four years, students in Special Education continue to see increases in standardized testing. Their upward trajectory is a positive sign that we are moving in the right direction.
- b. While the other Tri-Valley districts have been identified as significantly disproportionate for three years, including 2021-2022, Livermore continues to stay out of this State identification, which allows our District to have more freedom to allocate funds to best meet student needs in Special Education.
- c. Our co-teaching, elementary classrooms continue to thrive at Arroyo Seco. We are seeing reading and math level gains that are unprecedented and 80% of the students in Special Day Class programs are mastering general education content.
- d. Starting in 2022-2023, we will increase our Learning Center classrooms from two to three. This model, much like co-teaching, allows students to spend a majority of their day in general education instead of being self-contained in classrooms for most of their day,
- e. Our District will be the first in the Tri-Valley to eliminate the use of the discrepancy model for identifying a Specific Learning Disability starting next year. The discrepancy model is now considered a structure that has resulted in part to over identifying emerging bilingual students and those who do not have the level of academic vocabulary they need to access general education.
- f. Due to ongoing positive relationships with most of our families, advocates, and lawyers, Livermore continues to avoid costly litigation for due process complaints and mediated hearings so the money can be used to better support our students.
- g. Livermore continues to provide in-depth training to our new teachers that has resulted in teacher retention and overall job satisfaction of our new Special Education teachers.
- h. Our Special Education Department staff remains concerned with the over identification of English Learners and have provided ongoing training to our Speech and Language Pathologists and School Psychologists to address this issue. We have also established a committee to develop an evidence based practice strategy that will be followed to address this over-identification concern.
- i. Our Special Education Department has used some of its mental health money to contract with two licensed mental health therapists to support our students with the greatest mental health challenges.
- j. Our Special Education staff started a Parent Advisory group that is looking at ways to improve our programming for students with special needs. This group will continue after the initial work ends.

### Students in Special Education by Disability Category

Primary Disability	Total Students
Intellectual Disability	76
Hard of Hearing	18
Deaf	3
Speech and Language Impairment	538
Visual Impairment (Including Blindness)	3
Emotional Disturbance	63
Orthopedic Impairment	17
Other Health Impairment	324
Specific Learning Disability	761
Deaf and Blindness	0
Multiple Disabilities	19
Autism	289
Traumatic Brain Injury	3

**Summary:**

Students in Special Education continue to make progress academically and socially. In large part, this is due to having better trained staff and developing programming that better meets the needs of our students. While there is still a lot of work to accomplish, we are heading in the right direction. Without the support of Senior Leadership and our Board of Education, none of this would be possible. There are many mandates that are part of Special Education and the cost of these mandates can feel burdensome, especially in lean years. What sets Livermore apart from other districts is it has always made Special Education a priority and finds the status quo unacceptable if it is not resulting in dynamic growth of all of our students. With this continued support, we believe students in Special Education will continue to make gains that are unheard of in the field of Special Education. For that, we should all be proud!