

An Overview of Special Education in Livermore Valley Joint Unified School District

The Mission to Serve Students with Disabilities

The Livermore Valley Joint Unified School District (LVJUSD) Special Education Department partners with schools to deliver targeted support, 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 and develop innovative programming that addresses students' individual needs in their least restrictive environment. For students with disabilities to be successful, there must be a strong collaborative relationship between special and general educators, administrators, as well as families who have a perspective that teams must consider when deciding on any educational decisions for their students.

Special Education under the Law

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), 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) and must be in the least restrictive environment. 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.”* 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 hold a perspective no other team member has regarding the student in question. Therefore, their input is critical in the decision-making process and should be treated as such.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) 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 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:

Resource, Learning Center, and Co-Teaching Models: Students attending these models are in General Education at least 80% of their day with support and accommodations and notifications as described by their IEP. It is also acceptable to receive support outside of General Education, taught by the Special Education teacher.

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 extensive support needs. Our District also provides Special Day Classes for students with mental health and behavioral challenges, once it has been decided that to provide the best possible support these programs are necessary. It is always the intent of any programming to at some point transition students to learn alongside their General Education peers once they can do this effectively.

Special Education Related Services Staff:

Speech and Language Pathologists: A Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) or Speech and Language Pathologist Assistant (SLPA) 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. Our SLPs also work with teachers to design lessons that are rich in language development.

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 multidisciplinary 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 and participation on planning teams.

Nurses: Nurses are not under the purview of Special Education oversight. However, nurses work with students with disabilities and their families when their medical needs may affect learning. Our nurses are a part of the multidisciplinary team at every site when such needs exist.

Program Specialists: Program Specialists are each assigned schools to provide support, training, and guidance for IEP's. They work closely with school teams and families to ensure there is regular communication and that progress is being made for each student who has special needs. Program Specialists are also responsible for working with the Executive Director of Special Education to ensure effective programming is in place to support all our students with disabilities in our District.

Adapted Physical Education Teachers (APE): Due to their physical limitations, some students are not able to participate in general physical education, or they simply need support to ensure their bodies are developing appropriately. APE teachers support sites to help meet these needs through individualized physical education support.

Deaf / Hard of Hearing Specialist (DHH): Children with hearing impairments receive services from a Deaf / Hard of Hearing specialist so they can effectively access their education.

Behavior Intervention Specialists and Registered Behavior Technicians: Behavior Intervention Specialists and Registered Behavior Technicians ensure that students who struggle with behavioral challenges, due to their disabilities, are provided a positive intervention strategy so they can access their education to the fullest extent possible.

Assistive Technology and Augmentative Communication Specialists (AAC/AT): In order for some students to effectively access their education, assistive technology and augmentative communication supports are needed. Often these intervention approaches are through technology but can also be low technology approaches as well.

Physical Therapy Specialists (PT) and Occupational Therapy Specialists (OT): Within our District, there are a number of students who need physical and/or occupational therapy in order to appropriately access their education. Specialists are assigned to support students who have such needs.

Vision and Hearing Specialists: 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 Non-Public 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
- 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 First Student/Alt Transportation Services.

Current data and trends:

California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) Results: In the 22-23 school year, our students with disabilities had shown growth. In 3rd grade, 31.78% met or exceed the standard for English Language Arts (ELA) and 37.98% met or exceeded the standard in math. In 4th grade, 26.17% met or exceeded the standard in ELA and 33.33% met or exceeded for math. In 5th grade, 22.3% met or exceeded the standard in ELA and

16.67% met or exceeded the standard for math.

Graduation rates for students with disabilities (4-year adjusted cohort): In 2017, the graduation rate was 82% for students with disabilities. In 2018, 85.5% of students with disabilities graduated from our schools. In 2019, 79.5% of students with disabilities graduated. In 2022, the percentage increased to 87.5%. In 2023, we again had an increase, and 88.3% of students with disabilities graduating from high school.

Due to ongoing positive relationships with our families, advocates, and lawyers, LVJUSD continues to avoid costly litigation for due process complaints and mediated hearings, so funds can be used to better support our students. We have continued with the philosophy that working with families and finding mutually satisfying solutions results in better overall family relationships and is fiscally responsible. While there will always be some situations that end up in disagreement, these are very rare.

Our District 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. In addition, this year we rolled out Paraprofessional training for our support staff that occurs on a monthly basis.

Students in Special Education by Disability Category

Primary Disability	Total Students
Intellectual Disability	76
Hard of Hearing	28
Deaf	4
Speech and Language Impairment	562
Visual Impairment (Including Blindness)	6
Emotional Disturbance	61
Orthopedic Impairment	16
Other Health Impairment	327
Specific Learning Disability	768

Deaf and Blindness	0
Multiple Disabilities	20
Autism	364
Traumatic Brain Injury	3
Established Medical Disability	1
Total Students	2,236