

**GUIDELINES FOR PLACEMENT OF
SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS
INTO INDEPENDENT STUDY
PROGRAMS**

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ANTELOPE VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT GUIDELINES

For Placement of Special Education Students into Independent Study Programs

Alternatives to comprehensive high school programs are in existence to meet the needs of students who do not experience success in a traditional school setting. Students receiving special education services are not denied access to alternative education programs based solely on their disability. Once enrolled in an alternative education program, they continue to receive the appropriate special education and related services as stipulated in their Individual Education Program (IEP). **An IEP team meeting must be convened, anytime an individual with exceptional needs is referred for placement in an alternative education setting to determine if such placement can appropriately meet the needs of that student.**

As with other program placements, when a student is placed in an alternative education program, the decision to discontinue special education services is made only by the IEP team. This decision is reached only after determining that the student's problems have been remedied to such a degree that the student is capable of functioning satisfactorily in general education programs without special education assistance.

In general, the IEP team may recommend the placement of a student in an alternative education program, but the final decision is made by District administration (Program Advisory, CA State Dept. of Education, March 30, 1990; EC Sect. 48432). There are specific procedures that a district must develop regarding the placement of student in alternative education programs. Prior to the placement of a student with special needs in an alternative setting, the IEP team must meet and agree upon, an appropriate educational plan that documents how the alternative education program will continue to meet the educational needs of that student. If the parties disagree with the placement recommendation, they are entitled to and may request a due process hearing. The student must remain in the last placement per his or her IEP until issues are resolved, unless parent agrees to another interim placement.

Placement in an independent study program of a special education student is only appropriate if the education placement needs of the student, as identified by the IEP team, can be met through that placement. Rarely, would a special education student who requires specialized instruction and services, benefit from an independent study program where the majority of the assigned work must be completed on his or her own. Therefore, careful consideration by the IEP team is always needed prior to making this type of recommendation. Two important points should be emphasized:

- Special education students who are “discipline problems” in the conventional high school setting shall not be placed in alternative education programs solely because of the discipline problem.
- Students with special needs cannot be placed involuntarily in an alternative education program.

The same criteria, regarding the indicators of possible benefit, apply to students in special education that also apply to student in general education, who are placed in alternative education programs. These include, but are not limited to: student with poor achievement, students who need to work at a slower pace or in a smaller class with individualized attention, or students who have work permits. In all cases, the need for independent study must be clearly documented. The only exception is in the case where placement in an independent study program is a result of Board action, e.g., expulsion orders. **For students receiving special education services, the IEP team should exhaust other less restrictive placements before they recommend any alternative education program.**

To reiterate, the role of the IEP team is to determine what the educational needs of the student are, and whether these needs can be appropriately addressed in an alternative education setting. Only if they can be met, may an IEP team recommend an alternative education program. *However*, the District administration makes the final placement decision.

The District administration will make their final placement decision contingent upon the responses obtained to the following questions:

- 1) Did the IEP team appropriately document the educational needs of this student?
- 2) Did the IEP team document how the alternative education program would be able to meet the educational needs of the student, as stipulated in the IEP?
- 3) What were the less restrictive placements/interventions that were attempted prior to this recommendation for an alternative education program?
- 4) Why were these less restrictive options not successful in meeting the educational needs of this student?
- 5) If the student were to be placed in the alternative education program,
 - a. Does the student possess basic reading proficiency and the appropriate work habits in order to be able to complete course work independently? (*If not, what curricular modifications are needed and are they feasible?*)
 - b. Does the student have supervision at home during the day?
 - c. Does the student have transportation to be able to attend the alternative education site?

These questions should be addressed, answered, and documented during the IEP meeting. The standard application for alternative education program with all required attachments needs to be completed. The District administration will review attendance and discipline reports, transcripts, and health records (if appropriate). Placement in an independent study program is strictly voluntary; parent consent is required. In addition, it should be emphasized that placement in independent study is limited to one semester to discuss return to a comprehensive school or another alternative education program, such as a continuation school.