



Referral Process

For

Merced County Office
of Education

Program and Services for
Students with
Moderate/Severe Disabilities

MCOE Referrals may be accessed at www.mcoe.org
or by request to the MCOE Special Education office.



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INTRODUCTION

The Merced County Office of Education provides special classes for students with moderate / severe disabilities. These classes, located at various school sites in Merced County, are designed to meet the needs of groups of students with similar disabling conditions. More complete descriptions of each program are given in following sections of this packet to provide guidance regarding the characteristics and purposes of each program.

Prior to a referral:

The referral process is greatly streamlined if the appropriate Program Coordinator is contacted prior to the referral being submitted. This allows the District & Coordinator an opportunity to discuss.

Purpose of this packet/process

Each school district in the Merced County SELPA is responsible to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to eligible resident students. MCOE operates specialized, intensive special education programs on behalf of these school districts to meet students' needs that are difficult or impractical for individual school districts to address. MCOE programs are inevitably more "restrictive" than local school district programs since they reduce access and exposure to non-disabled peers and the general curriculum. In order to satisfy the IDEA requirement that each student be served in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) appropriate to meet his/her needs, the MCOE Referral Process requires the specification of a District Case Manager (someone familiar with both district programs and services and the needs of the individual student). The role of the District Case Manager is to help determine when a more restrictive MCOE program is appropriate versus when a local district program can be modified and supported to meet the needs of a resident student (usually a Case Manager should be an administrator with authority to commit district resources).

This referral packet / process is intended to strike a balance between two competing requirements:

1. To provide easy, clear access to consideration for MCOE programs and services with timely decisions and responses, yet also,
2. To gather comprehensive information needed to determine that a Less Restrictive Environment (LRE) is not appropriate, and when appropriate; to develop an intensive, specialized Individual Educational Program (IEP).

SECTION I - MCOE PROGRAMS DESCRIPTIONS

Early Childhood Special Classes (RSG Program)

Early Childhood Special Classes (ECSC) provide specialized instruction to children with moderate / severe disabilities between the ages of 3 and 5. Instruction in these classes is enhanced with increased staffing and specialized services, including consultation to the classroom teacher by designated specialists.

ECSC Programming includes:

- Small class size with high adult/pupil ratio
- Individualized program for each student
- Nursing, health, and psychological services
- A visual communication system, (e.g. Picture Exchange Communication System – PECS)
- Visually structured tasks for pre-academic skills,
- Exposure to visual scheduling and other visual strategies designed to promote learning
- Language for Learning (an explicit structured language development curriculum)
- Structured / facilitated play periods
- Sensory motor activities and motor skills development as appropriate
- Positive Behavior support if appropriate
- Discrete trial training if appropriate

To receive placement and services a child must have moderate to severe Intellectual Disability and/or Autism or Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD), Orthopedic Impairment requiring regular therapy at CCS. The level or intensity of the above services will be individualized for each student and adjusted based upon the student's response to each.

Transition from ECSC

Preschool children vary widely in their response to intensive early intervention. Research and local experience has shown that students in ECSC transition to any of three school settings as they approach kindergarten age:

- MCOE special classes for school aged children with moderate to severe disabilities
- General Education class placement in home districts with minimal special education support provided by the districts
- Special education settings in home districts (e.g. LH special class)

Preparations for transition of children to their home districts will be facilitated by ECSC staff in collaboration with the district.

Tiered Academic and Behavior Support Classes (TABS Program)

TABS are designed to meet the special education needs of students from five through twenty-two years of age who have moderate to severe Intellectual Disability as their primary disability. Students most appropriately served in SCSD classes have limited intellectual functioning (at or below three standard deviations below the mean) with adaptive skill deficits, physical disabilities and/or medical conditions that preclude adequate service in less restrictive settings.

The major goal of the TABS program is to develop the skills needed for independent living to the fullest extent possible. To this end, self-help and daily living skills are taught in addition to vocational and work-related skills. Social skills and emotional development are also important components of the program, and functional academic skills are included in each student's educational program as appropriate.

The functional curriculum provided in TABS classes identifies critical skills for each student through a process of collaboration between the teacher and parent, with input from the student as appropriate. After the skills are identified, efforts are made to teach in the environment in which they will be utilized.

SCSD Programming includes:

- Small class size with high adult/pupil ratio
- Individualized program for each student
- Nursing, health and psychological services
- Functional living skills
- Functional academics as appropriate
- A visual communication system (PECS)
- Visually structured tasks for pre-academic skills
- Exposure to visual scheduling and other visual strategies
- Community based instruction
- Structured / facilitated play periods
- Sensory motor activities and movement skills development

To be recommended for placement a student must have a diagnosis of moderate to severe Intellectual Disability.

Sierra Program

The Sierra Program is intended for students with Emotional Disturbance (ED) who need a more specialized and restrictive program than can be provided in their district of residence (many students with ED can be appropriately served in less restrict settings in their district of residence). Sierra Program classrooms provide specialized instructional

services to school-aged students (6-22 years old) with social and emotional difficulties. Instruction in the program is enhanced with increased staffing and specialized services, including social skills instruction, counseling, academic supports, and consultation services to support successful transition back to the district of residence.

Sierra Programming Includes:

- Social skills
 - Anger Management
 - Communication Skills
 - Conflict Resolution
 - Friendships
 - Personal Appearance
 - Stress Management/Anxiety Reduction
- Positive discipline/supports program model
- Consultation services to district's and families
- Instruction for all basic academic standards
- Safe environment for students with normal intellectual ability

Transition

The goal of the Sierra Program is to replace problem behaviors with more functional and socially acceptable social skills and coping strategies in order to return students to their district of residence. Relative to other MCOE programs, placements made in the Sierra Program are not as likely to be long-term. For students enrolled in the Sierra Program, it is expected that the District Case Manager will monitor the student's progress and assist in the implementation of a successful transition plan for the return of the student. This often involves the development of appropriate accommodations and supports in the district of residence to maintain the student's appropriate behavior.

1. Prior to placement in the Sierra Program, district staff will develop a transition plan designed to reunify the student with his/her school of residence.
2. District and MCOE personnel will use a monitoring system to track student progress towards his/her transition plan.
3. When the criteria of the plan have been met, the student will be exited from the program with appropriate monitoring and follow-up as needed.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHOH) Program

The Merced County Office of Education serves children with hearing impairment from birth through twenty-two years of age. Children from birth through thirty-six months are served through the Infant Care Program which is part of the California Early Start Program, administered under Part C of IDEA.

Children from ages three through twenty- two are served by the MCOE Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program through a special day preschool class, elementary class or itinerant services.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) regulations, deafness is defined as a “hearing impairment, which is so severe that a child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, which adversely affects educational performance.” A child is hard of hearing if he or she has “a hearing impairment whether permanent or fluctuating, which adversely affects a child’s educational performance, but which is not included under the definition of ‘deaf’” (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Part 30, S 300.7)

“Any hearing loss, which may be mild to profound, bilateral or unilateral, reverse slope, cookie bite, and permanent or fluctuating, may result in delays in the development of speech and language and may result in delays in achievement of academic potential”. (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Part 30, S 300.7)

Deaf and hard of hearing children have unique communication needs, which directly affect their personal development and educational growth. Communication and educational growth depend on a language-rich environment, one with ongoing, direct, and age-appropriate language opportunities. The primary need for deaf and hard of hearing children is a communication system that is accessible and allows for effective and efficient social interaction and the acquisition and sharing of ideas and concepts.

The Merced County Office of Education, along with federal and state laws, has recognized the unique educational needs of children with hearing loss.

These unique needs include:

- A communication mode that is identified, respected, utilized, and developed to an appropriate level of proficiency
- An understanding by all service providers of the unique nature of deafness and specific training to work with deaf and hard of hearing children
- Special education teachers and support personnel proficient in the student’s primary language mode and language
- A sufficient number of language-mode peers of similar age and ability
- Involvement in program development by parents and by deaf and hard of hearing adults
- Access and exposure to deaf and hard of hearing role models
- Equal access to all components of the educational process, including lunch, recess, and extracurricular social and athletic activities
- Access to vocational programs
- Access to appropriate technology, including assistive listening devices
- Accommodations, when appropriate, in the general education classroom, including but not limited to quality educational interpreting services, note-taking support, assistive listening devices, preferential seating, adequate lighting levels, and modifications in teaching style

The purpose of the D/HH program is provide the deaf or hard of hearing student with an education that is rich in communication so that he/she may achieve his/her academic, social-emotional, and vocational potential in adulthood.

General Education Program – Itinerant Services

For some deaf or hard of hearing students, the general education classroom with modifications may be the most appropriate placement. These students may need special materials, equipment, seating, and services. Factors that must be considered when placing a deaf or hard of hearing student in a general education classroom include:

- Will the student have full communication access in the classroom?
- Is a credentialed itinerant teacher of deaf and hard of hearing students available to provide ongoing direct and consultative services as necessary?
- Does the general education class enrollment allow the teacher an opportunity to devote some of his or her time to assist the deaf or hard of hearing student to meet the classroom or course requirements?
- Is the student's social and emotional maturity level within the average range of the students in the regular classroom?
- Is the student able to direct his or her attention to the assigned work and follow the directions he or she is given for doing the work?
- Is the student's reading level at the approximate level of the general education class in which he or she is enrolled?
- Have environmental factors, such as lighting, ambient noise, classroom location, and visual emergency warning devices, been considered?

Special Classes

Includes:

1. Preschool class for the deaf
2. Preschool class for oral learners
3. K-5 class

Deaf and hard of hearing students with needs for intensive services in communication, social, and academic skills are considered for enrollment in a special day class for deaf and hard of hearing students for all or part of the school day. Special day classes can provide students with a sufficient number of age-appropriate language-mode peers and with direct access to teachers and other professionals/paraprofessionals who are proficient in their language and language mode. In a special day class, direct instruction that emphasizes communication skills development, language acquisition, concept development, and development of academic skills using core and specialized curriculum is provided by a teacher of deaf and hard of hearing students in coordination with other appropriate specialists. Some deaf and hard of hearing students may benefit by participating in general education classes in selected academic subject areas or nonacademic areas, or both, as appropriate.

The Merced County Office of Education utilizes the Total Communication philosophy. Total Communication is a philosophy that encourages equally the development and use of speech, speech reading, sign language and finger spelling, and written language. In most total communication programs, a form of manually coded English is used so that speech and sign may be used simultaneously. MCOE utilizes Signing Exact English (SEE) as the program language of instruction.

(All information in this section is taken directly from or aligns with Programs for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students: Guidelines for Quality Standards, California Department of Education, 2000).

Referral Packet Required Contents

Referrals to MCOE programs must include the following:

1. A completed "Referral for MCOE Special Class Placement." (this form is the "cover sheet" with a checklist to guide the District Case Manager to collect and attach all required reports and documents)
2. A current (within 12 months of referral) and comprehensive Multi-Disciplinary Report (MDR) that establishes the student's disabling condition(s) and rationale for referral to an intensive, specialized MCOE program (see MCOE program descriptions for guidance).
3. A teacher evaluation report should be included or attached when the referred student has a current teacher. This report should include observational and assessment data, and for students in special education programs, the student's response to instruction and progress toward IFSP outcomes or IEP goals and objectives.
4. Health/developmental and family history (Note that current immunization records are not required with referrals, but will be required prior to enrollment in any MCOE program).
5. Any medical reports/diagnoses relevant to the student's disability and eligibility.
6. A current vision and hearing screening (at time of enrollment)
7. Current/existing IFSP or IEP.
8. For students in grades K-12, a Home Language Survey, results of initial language proficiency testing, and Language Classification (at time of enrollment).
9. Speech-language evaluation.
10. Copies of other assessments/observations such as mental health evaluations and any independent assessments from the student's file.
11. Behavior Intervention Plans from the student's file.

Referrals should also include the following information, if appropriate or required for particular programs:

12. For EL students, results of initial and annual language proficiency testing.
13. For students being referred to the D-HH program, a current audiogram completed by a licensed audiologist must be included. A determination of the etiology of the hearing loss should be included, if possible.

Referral Process/Timeframes

When the District Case Manager has completed a referral request, please send completed forms and required documents to:

- Annette Palmer for Merced TABS K-5 Program, at apalmer@mcoe.org or fax to (209) 381-6765
- Lissa Mitchell for Atwater/Delhi/Winton/Livingston/Schelby TABS K-5 Program, lmitchell@mcoe.org or fax to (209) 394-7818
- Richard Kleitman for Merced/Atwater/Delhi 6-8, high school or transition Program, rkleitman@mcoe.org or fax to (209) 394-7818

Within two days of receipt, the MCOE Coordinator will contact the District Case Manager to confirm receipt of a completed packet or to identify missing elements needed to complete the packet.

The MCOE Coordinator will review the completed referral packet and recommend one of the following:

- Maintain local district placement
- Additional information is needed (e.g. conferences, observations)
- Hold an IEP meeting to consider MCOE placement

SECTION III - INTERIM PLACEMENT

Pursuant to California Education Code 56325 (a-b) cited below, when an administrator of a local program has evidence that indicates an interim placement for a transfer student should involve consideration of an MCOE program (generally the evidence consists of an IEP from the previous district), a referral should be submitted to the MCOE referral coordinator who will give expedited consideration to an MCOE interim placement based on the student's IEP and assessment information from the previous district

California Education Code 56325:

- (a) Whenever a pupil transfers into a school district from a school district not operating programs under the same local plan in which he or she was last enrolled in a special education program, the administrator of a local program under this part shall ensure that the pupil is immediately provided an interim placement for a period not to exceed 30 days. The interim placement must be in conformity with an individualized education program, unless the parent or guardian agrees otherwise. The individualized education program implemented during the interim placement may be either the pupil's existing individualized education program, implemented to the extent possible within existing resources, which may be implemented without complying with subdivision (a) of Section 56321, or a new individualized education program developed pursuant to Section 56321.
- (b) Before the expiration of the 30-day period, the interim placement shall be reviewed by the individualized education program team and a final recommendation shall be made by the team in accordance with the requirements of this chapter. The team may utilize information, records, and records from the school district or county program from which the pupil transferred.
- (c) Commencing on July 1, 1998, whenever a pupil described in subdivision (a) was placed and residing in a residential nonpublic, nonsectarian school, prior to transferring to a school district in another special education local plan area, and this placement is not eligible for funding pursuant to Section 56836.16, the special education local plan area that contains the district that made the residential nonpublic, nonsectarian school placement shall continue to be responsible for the funding of the placement, including related services, for the remainder of the school year. An extended year session is included in the school year in which the session ends.