

February 13, 2017

Information regarding upcoming changes to San Diego Unified's Special Education program

Dear Families:

In order to ensure that students have access to quality instruction, opportunities for peer interaction and social development, and are able to engage as a member of a robust classroom community, some elementary school and K-8 moderate-severe classrooms will be combined into neighborhood cluster classrooms beginning with the 2017-2018 school year.

Of the approximately 15,000 students with disabilities served by San Diego Unified School District, this change will impact the school of enrollment for 220 students. Those families impacted by the change were notified the week of Feb. 6. Although your family may not be directly impacted, we wanted to inform all families about this change.

As we prepare for changes this fall, neighborhood classrooms have been designated within the already established school cluster patterns. Students will continue to matriculate through the same middle and high schools that are part of their existing neighborhood cluster feeder pattern. District leadership is committed to maintaining and growing the relationships your child has built in his/her community by ensuring that students affected by this change will remain in their current cluster. Through the IEP process, families and staff will work together to thoughtfully consider individual student needs during this process.

The decision to combine classrooms into neighborhood clusters was based on several factors. Most importantly, after reviewing classroom data, we realized that many of our elementary/K-8 level moderate-severe classes were significantly under-enrolled. From a student perspective, this is actually opposite of best practice recommendations. Rather than providing opportunities for peer interaction, language development and classroom community, these very small classrooms instead create very restrictive learning environments. In restrictive settings, the opportunities for students to learn important life and classroom skills that will generalize to other areas become very limited.

In addition to the changes for Elementary/K-8 moderate-severe classroom locations, two of our high school programs will also experience location changes for the upcoming school year. The Successful Transitions Achieved Through Responsive Support (STARS) program currently located on the Clairemont High School campus will relocate to the Serra High School campus beginning in 2017-2018. This move will allow the high school sections of the STARS program to serve a more geographically broad area of our community, expanding and facilitating access for families. Additionally, Marcy School, which has operated as a separate school facility, will relocate its services to the Clairemont High School Campus, allowing students to attend school on a comprehensive facility rather than a separate setting. (Note: Other STARS program locations will not be impacted).

It is important to note that the services that children receive, as determined by their IEP teams, will not change; only the location of services will change. Our goal is always for your student to participate in a class (or classes) that offers high quality instruction by a well-supported teacher with access to appropriate, grade-level curriculum, technology, and enrichment activities. If your student is affected, we will work with you to:

1. Maintain all services in the IEP, and add bus transportation if appropriate.
2. Arrange a thoughtful transition that will include opportunities for parents to visit the proposed program principal and campus this spring.
3. Work on a 1-1 basis with your family to accommodate extenuating circumstances wherever possible.

The majority of students who receive services for special education will continue to receive them at the same site; only a few will experience a location change for the upcoming school year. Although change, especially unexpected change can be a surprise, we firmly believe that the restructuring of this model will allow us to most effectively meet the needs of our students. We have communicated with the Community Advisory Committee about these changes, and are committed to ensuring open communication through this process as we continue our focus on ensuring the highest quality support for our students.

Sincerely,  
Cindy Marten, Superintendent  
Deann Ragsdale, Executive Director, Special Education