

August 22, 2002

MEMORANDUM

TO: Special Education Directors
Superintendents
Other Interested Parties

FROM: Sam Howarth
State Director of Special Education

RE: Role of Related Service Providers

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The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidance to parents, teachers, administrators, and related service providers regarding the ways in which related service providers support students receiving special education in New Mexico's public schools. These matters are not specified in either state or federal special education regulations and our office has had ongoing requests for interpretation in this area. As such, we offer the following background and guidance.

Two of the chief policy initiatives of the Special Education Office, both of which are aligned with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Program's priorities and selected indicators for the monitoring of states for compliance with IDEA, are (1) to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities; and, (2) to increase, as appropriate, the number of students with disabilities receiving services in the regular education environment alongside their typically developing peers. Related service providers, working together with teachers, administrators, and parents are critical partners as we continually strive to ever improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities and increase the number of students with disabilities accessing the general education curriculum in the regular education environment alongside their

typically developing peers.

This memo breaks down the various roles of related service providers into five general areas, each of which is aligned with, and designed to ensure the furtherance of our policy initiatives as stated above while honoring the letter and the intent of state and federal regulation. These five roles are as follows:

1. Related Service Providers as Evaluators

Traditionally, related service providers have participated in the evaluation process for a majority of students with disabilities, lending their expertise to the identification of suspected areas of disability. They have also traditionally been involved in the review of data for reevaluations and, in many districts, have evaluated students for assistive technology needs. For those students who are not successful in regular education, and do not respond to pre-referral interventions, related service providers often participate in the evaluation of students to determine eligibility for special education services under one of the fourteen definitions of exceptionality. **We are not recommending any changes in this role.**¹

2. Related Service Providers as Contributors in the Development of IEP Goals and Objectives

Traditionally, if a student received a certain score on one of a variety of related service assessments, the student was assumed to be in need of direct service from that related service provider. Then, under that traditional model, related service providers supplied draft annual goals and objectives to IEP teams that would be aimed at progress on therapy-related activities. In order to increase educational outcomes for students with disabilities, we are recommending a change in this traditional practice. After the IEP team has discussed a student's present levels of performance, the family's (and student's, if appropriate) vision for the student, the team needs to develop goals. It is important to recognize that goals must (1) be tied to the New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks; (2) be individualized and appropriate for each student; and, (3) address each student's educational needs such that the student is provided access to, and progresses in, the general curriculum. **We are recommending that once the present levels of performance have been determined, the vision for the student articulated and the goals established, related service providers, as relevant, contribute to the development of appropriate objectives that lead to the attainment of the IEP goals.** This would be true for all students receiving special education services and for whom an IEP is being developed. Even in the case of a student who is eligible under the definition of speech or language impairment, the goals need to be related to the NM Content Standards and Benchmarks. Objectives under these goals may address certain articulation or fluency skills, but the goals must still be tied to Standards. **Our intent in recommending this change in practice is to focus attention on improving outcomes for students in relation to the general curriculum, while recognizing that building skills that lead to improved outcomes may very well involve the**

¹ Although we are not recommending changes in this role, the nature of this role may change as IDEA is reauthorized. A reauthorized IDEA may require different criteria for eligibility for special education services and/or a different set of protocols and evaluative expectations.

specialized contributions from related service providers .

3. Related Service Providers as Experts on Access

Traditionally, related service providers have contributed information that assists the IEP team to develop the health plan section and/or transportation plan of the IEP for students whose ability to access the general curriculum depends on services such as tube feeding or specialized transport. These types of services do not require goals since no instruction is taking place. However, these services do get included on the IEP service schedule and are considered part of a student's special education service. **We are not proposing any change in this role.**

4. Related Service Providers as Creative Implementers

Traditionally, most related service has been delivered directly to students by related service providers in segregated settings (either in segregated classrooms and/or through "pull out" whereby a student is completely removed from the classroom context). In order to improve student outcomes and increase the number of students with disabilities accessing the general curriculum and receiving services in the regular education environment alongside their typically developing peers, we are recommending a change in this traditional practice. **We recommend that IEP teams delay decisions about who will implement each of a student's goals until all of the goals have been developed and the team has discussed the least restrictive environment for implementing the goals.** Then, at that point, the team would discuss the best ways to achieve the goals and which individual, or combination of individuals, in what ways, will support the student to attain the goals, and ultimately educational success. Related service providers should contribute to this discussion with the understanding that they may be called upon to provide service along a continuum, designed to facilitate the attainment of IEP goals. Some of these points of service along the continuum have not always been considered traditional. Specifically, related service providers could (1) train and support the regular or special education teacher in how to accomplish certain objectives with a particular student within the context of the learning environment and in relation to the regular learning activities that all students engage in; (2) work with the student directly, but in the regular education classroom or other school context (playground, cafeteria, hallway) where non-disabled peers are present and involved in the intervention(s) the related service provider is facilitating; and/or, (3) work with the student directly in a segregated setting. All three service roles would be based on particular student objectives, and time spent in these roles should be included on the service schedule of the IEPs for those students. Time needed for direct service would be broken down into time in the regular education setting and time in a segregated setting. Service time for supporting teachers and other staff on how to accomplish certain objectives for a particular student would be noted on the part of the service schedule called "Supports for School Personnel."

While we are aware that all of the above-mentioned service options currently exist for some students in some schools, we are recommending a change in emphasis from the all-too-often automatic decision that related service providers deliver direct instruction/intervention, one-on-one, in segregated settings. **We are**

recommending that IEP teams expand their thinking about the role of related service providers in working collaboratively with educators and other students to structure the supports, interventions, and services that will help students with disabilities attain their educational and life goals. As such, we are recommending that the entire school context and all those within it be considered when designing these supports and interventions.

5. Related Service Providers as Instructional Team Members

Traditionally, related service providers have been isolated from meaningful collaboration with regular and special education teachers, due to heavy caseloads that require direct service. In order to increase educational outcomes for students with disabilities and to increase the number of students with disabilities receiving services in the regular education environment alongside their typically developing peers, we are recommending a change in this traditional practice. If students with disabilities are to receive services in more inclusive settings, they need to be supported by a team of educators that collaboratively plan and instruct. Related service providers should be partners on these instructional teams. They have expertise in designing and measuring progress on learning activities. They have experience in breaking down large tasks into smaller tasks. They are committed to focusing attention on particular aspects of a student's strengths, needs, behavior, learning style, processing, and so on. All of these are valuable skills for an instructional team member. **We are recommending that administrators create work schedules for related service providers that include weekly time for collaborating and planning with professional staff who share responsibility for students with disabilities.**

We realize that some of these recommendations propose departures from traditional practice for related service providers. We also realize that we are expecting **all** educators to take on nontraditional roles as we work together to improve outcomes for all of New Mexico's students. We are developing a training plan to provide assistance on the issues addressed in this memo. If you have suggestions about how the Special Education Office might most effectively provide training on this topic, or if you have questions or comments about this memo, please contact Bonnie Anderson at 827-6798 or at banderson@sde.state.nm.us.