

The Reorganization of the LAUSD SELPA: A New Approach to Providing Special Education Services in Los Angeles Charter Schools

The core idea behind the 1992 California Charter Schools Act was to create a new kind of public school would have more flexibility and autonomy in exchange for higher levels of accountability. From funding to curriculum to staffing, charter schools operate independently of school districts and have the autonomy to shape their programs to meet the unique needs of the communities they serve. However, in one area, charter schools have not had as much autonomy and have generally operated much like traditional schools - special education.

Special Education in Charter Schools

In California, special education services are coordinated through [Special Education Local Plan Areas \(SELPA\)](#)s. These entities, which are divided up by geographical regions, are responsible for allocating state and federal special education funding to school districts, as well as carrying the responsibility to ensure that member districts have the capacity to effectively serve all students with special needs that fall within their geographic boundaries

Since the approval of the Charter Schools Act in 1992, there have been two options for charter schools when it comes to providing special education services:

1. Operate as a "school of the district," where the District or authorizer typically carries the responsibility of serving students with disabilities that enroll in the charter school. Under this arrangement, the district or authorizer retains all state and federal special education money and is responsible for ensuring Free and Appropriate Education (FAP) to all students.
2. Operate as a "local educational agency (LEA)" for special education purposes by joining a SELPA; under this option, the charter school is treated like any other member of the SELPA. In line with the SELPA allocation plan, state and federal funds are allocated equally across SELPA members, and the charter school assumes full responsibility for providing services to all qualifying students enrolled in the program..

A New Approach in Los Angeles

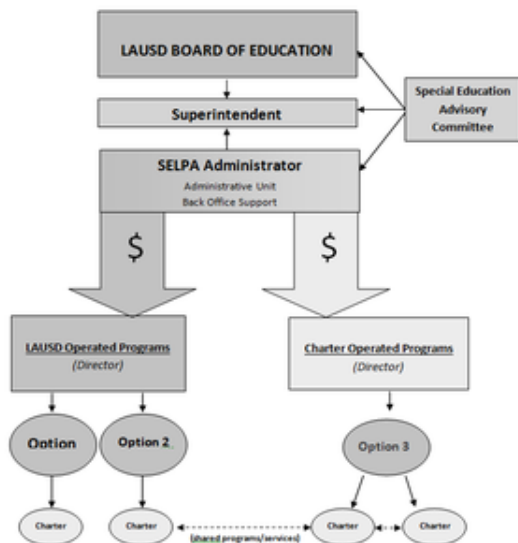
Charter schools located in LAUSD long operated under a model that was a hybrid of the two arrangements described above. The district retained between 27% and 40% of charter schools' special education funding and required the charter schools to provide all special education services to qualifying students enrolled in their programs. This arrangement has presented challenges for both charter schools and the District.

From the charter perspective, the challenges included being bound to the district policies and procedures, often times having to rely on district staff to provide services, and not having a say in the SELPA governance structure. At that time, however, charters did not have any other options available to them. That changed in 2010 when the State Board of Education approved the option for charter schools to join SELPAs as LEA members for special education purposes outside of their geographic boundaries.. As a result, 93 LA charter schools submitted letters announcing their intention to leave the LAUSD SELPA, taking all of the state and federal special ed revenue with them.

Working in a new spirit of collaboration and with a common goal of creating a viable option for charter schools to remain part of the LAUSD SELPA, CCSA staff, LAUSD Special Education administrators and local charter school leaders came together to create a new structure and approach.

In January 2011, the LAUSD Board of Education voted unanimously to restructure the existing Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) SELPA to provide charter schools a new option with full responsibility, flexibility and autonomy for serving students with disabilities. The Charter Operated Program ("COP") became operational on July 1, 2011 with 47 participating charter schools, representing every local board district.

The New Structure of the LAUSD SELPA



New Structure of the LAUSD SELPA (click to view full size)

The reorganization plan maintains the SELPA's status as a single district SELPA, while creating two divisions of the SELPA - one for traditional district-operated programs and charter schools wishing to remain linked to the District, and one for charter schools wishing to operate independently for special education purposes. The SELPA is administered by a single SELPA Administrator and governed by the existing LAUSD Board of Education

Each charter school has the ability to choose between a full continuum of options, which offer an increasing level of independence and autonomy. This continuum of options includes both a model that is similar to a "school of the district" model as well as options that offer increased independence up to, and including, an option that closely resembles LEA for special education purposes in a SELPA.

The reorganization gives charters flexibility and control in funding and program delivery, which will improve the ability of charter schools to provide innovative and high-quality special education services to increased numbers of students with special needs. By providing charter schools with viable options to remain in the LAUSD SELPA, the reorganization plan ensures that charter school students and their families are able to access local educational services and administration.

It is CCSA's hope that this innovative new model may serve as an example of how traditional public schools and charter schools can work together to share expertise, services, funding, and a role in decision-making within a single SELPA.

Learn more

- [Read a report on results from the first year of the program.](#)
- [Fact sheet on the program and the results from year one](#)
- [LAUSD board report on the reorganization, January 2011](#)

