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TOPIC: LEARNING CENTER

INTRODUCTION: The purpose of this FAQ is to clarify the purpose and implementation of a learning center as an essential element in institutionalizing a multi-tiered model of service delivery leading to increased access and achievement of students with disabilities in the core curriculum. Outcome 2 of the Targeted Strategy Plan requires that materials and operational guidelines be provided for elementary, middle school, and high school learning centers.

Question 1: *Is the learning center a new concept?*

Answer 1: No. Learning centers have been an important element in service delivery for students with disabilities for over three years evolving from the traditional Resource Specialist Program. BUL-1258.1 *Description of the Resource Specialist Program and the Role of the Resource Specialist Teacher – Revised* issued in November 2004 described how the learning center should be implemented to provide direct instruction at each of the Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III levels of intervention. Additionally the Division of Special Education issued position papers in 2004 that described learning centers. Since the introduction of collaborative models of instruction in 2000, the Division of Special Education has offered extensive professional development and support regarding the multi-tiered model of service delivery and the implementation of learning centers. These professional development opportunities and support are currently available.

Question 2: *What is the purpose of the Learning Center*

Answer 2: The learning center has three purposes characterized as AIM:
1. A: teach *access* strategies
2. I: provide intensive *intervention*
3. M: *monitor* student progress

Question 3: *Does the learning center require the acquisition of additional classroom space at each school?*

Answer 3: No. In most cases, schools do not require additional rooms beyond what they already have designated for their special education programs to implement a learning center(s). With the implementation of collaborative models of service delivery including co-teaching, resource specialist teachers and special day program teachers were to maintain their designated classroom spaces. The California Education Code § 17047 clearly defines allotted space for the provision of special education services. Schools should look at the utilization of existing space, the number of students to be provided intensive services in the learning center, and the staff who will be providing service in this setting. Existing special education space can be configured to create a learning center for all students while continuing to provide adequate space for teachers to assess students, work individually or in small groups with students, and maintain files and records. There may be rare cases where no separate space currently exists such as at a primary center. Division of Special Education personnel will be available to assist such sites in examining ways to maximize their facilities to provide appropriate programs for students with disabilities in accordance with their Individualized Education Programs.

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Question 4: *What equipment and/or furniture are required to implement a learning center?*

Answer 4: New equipment and/or furniture should not be needed to implement a learning center. However, instructional spaces for students with disabilities including learning centers should be provided with the same basic equipment, furniture and materials as instructional spaces for general education students. Most resource specialist programs and special day programs should already have a computer and a listening center (provided at secondary schools) intended for use with students with disabilities.

Question 5: *Who will provide services to students with disabilities in the learning center?*

Answer 5: The school will analyze data including student assessment results, Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and designated services, and the number of certificated and support staff in determining the schedule for instruction in the learning center. Generally, special education teachers and paraprofessionals will provide instruction and support for students in the learning center.

Question 6: *Will the implementation of the learning center conflict with the provision of collaborative services between general and special educators?*

Answer 6: No. Students whose IEPs indicate that services will be provided in the general education classroom with collaboration between general and special educators including co-teaching will continue to receive their services in this model. However, some students require more direct instruction related to the core curriculum based on ongoing monitoring. These students are provided opportunities for accelerated learning, intervention, and provision of immediate and corrective feedback in the learning center. The learning center is a dynamic, flexible setting which provides opportunities for students to receive either short or long term intervention(s) based on individual needs. At the secondary level, students may be programmed into the learning center for an elective in the area in which the IEP team has determined that the student needs direct and intensive intervention. General and special educators will continue to collaborate including co-planning for students who receive direct instruction for a period of time in the learning center.

Question 7: *What materials are used in the learning center?*

Answer 7: Materials provided for use in the learning center are supplemental programs to be used with students with disabilities who participate in the core literacy and math program but may require intensive intervention for a period of time. These materials match one of the three purposes of access, intervention, and monitoring. Supplemental materials were identified in *The Los Angeles Unified School District's Position Papers*. Instructional, assessment, and progress monitoring materials being provided address State standards and are used to close the achievement gap and accelerate the rate of achievement for students with disabilities based on assessment of student need. They do not replace the core program nor are they a direct match to the core materials. The learning center materials provided by the Division of Special Education are intended as intervention materials to address specific areas of need for the student. It is assumed that special education teachers are provided with the core literacy and math programs and intervention guides that may be used in the learning center for pre-teaching or re-teaching.

Question 8: *Do these intervention programs replace the core program?*

Answer 8: No. Students with disabilities participating in the core English Language Arts and/or Mathematics curriculum continue to receive instruction in the core programs. Students who receive services in the learning center receive instruction with intervention materials that are intended to accelerate learning for students with disabilities and not to replace core instruction. Instruction in the

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learning center provides for systematic, direct instruction including strategy instruction, content area support and social skill instruction.

Question 9: *Which students receive services in the learning center?*

Answer 9: Students with IEPs indicating that the student may require a level of direct instruction and support beyond that provided in the general education classroom may receive services in the learning center for a period of time. The learning center allows for flexibility in service provision. In this way, one student may receive intervention for a short intense period of time whereas another student may require a longer period of intervention. Teachers should use ongoing progress monitoring to assist in determining the level of instructional support that each student requires.

Question 10: *How does a school schedule services in the learning center?*

Answer 10: The learning center may be available for a complete day schedule or part of a day depending upon the structure of the school. In order to implement effective instruction in the learning center, the school needs to analyze their data:

- Who are our students (numbers by grade, need)?
- What are the needs of the students (assessment results, IEP goals)?
- Who are our teachers (credentials, strengths, interests)?
- What is our current structure (houses, core, academy, schedules – block, 4 by 4, etc.)?

Having analyzed the data, the school will structure students into needs based groups and attach staff to those areas of need.

Question 11: *What supports are available to assist schools in implementing a learning center?*

Answer 11: Staff from the Division of Special Education is available to assist schools in implementing a learning center. Staff from the Local Support Units including Least Restrictive Environment Specialists, Program Specialists and Behavior Specialists can also provide assistance. Through the Special Education Leadership Academy, Bridge Coordinators, APEISs, and APSCSs have received information and training to enable them to support the development of a learning center.

Questions or comments may be directed to Sharyn Howell, Director, Division of Special Education; Meredith Adams, Elementary Specialist, Division of Special Education; or Susan Tandberg, Administrator, Secondary Instruction, Division of Special Education at (213) 241-8051.