



**TULARE COUNTY COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION**

MINUTES

**The Tulare County Community Advisory Committee for Special Education
met in-person and virtually on February 10, 2022 @ 9:00 am**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sally Fernandes Stephanie Caldera, Irma Peralta, Anthony Martin, Michelle West, Phillip Rios, Celeste Toledo, Timberly Romero, Connie Acevedo, Tiffany Stark, Amy McMahan

MEMBERS ABSENT: none

OTHERS PRESENT: Jessica Ceja, Malinda Furtado, and Joy Voita—Parent Liaisons with Tulare County Office of Education, Nicole Delima—Parenting Network, Nicolette Martin—TCSD psychologist, Tammy McKean—Assistant Superintendent Special Services/SELPA Administrator, Ray Buchanan & Christina Agda—TCOE BHS, Gianna Merriam—TCOE Mental Wellness Services, Eric Lindberg, Josie Garcia, Josefina Manriquez, and Lauren Minton—Parents and Members of the Public

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS: Anthony Martin, CAC Chair, welcomed everyone and called for self-introductions.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: There were no comments made by members of the public present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Anthony Martin called for approval of the minutes for January 13, 2022. Timberly Romero made a motion to accept the minutes and Sally Fernandes seconded. The minutes stand.

REPORTS:

- A. **DOSE REPORT FOR JANUARY 2022:** Provided by Michelle West Dyer—Director of Special Education for Woodlake School District
- Joe Martinez, Director, Psychological Services, provided an update on UPK (Universal Pre-Kindergarten) Planning and Implementation Allocations
 - Malinda Furtado, Parent Liaison, requested nominations for the upcoming CAC Luncheon by March 1st
 - Sarah Hamilton, Administrator of AcCEL, provided a State SEACO Report
 - Tammy McKean, Assistant Superintendent/SELPA Director, shared an update on the State SELPA and reminded DOSE about the submission deadline for Carolyn Dobbs Teacher of the Year Nomination
 - John Davis, Administrator, Leadership Support, gave an update about Leadership Support Services

NEW BUSINESS:

- A. **STUDY TOPIC/PRESENTER:** “The Role of the Parent Liaison”—Malinda Furtado, Stephanie Caldera, Jessica Ceja, and Joy Voita—Parent/School Liaisons for TCOE Special Services
- Malinda Furtado introduced the topic and briefly explained the unique role of a Parent Liaison while sharing a graphic.
 - Stephanie Caldera, Parent/School Liaison, described how she came to her role in 1997, after having been a mother of a child with special needs and helping others understand special education. Her role is unique among the liaisons because she works specifically with Bright Start children from birth to 3 years old. Much of her work involves educating and supporting the whole family as they learn about their child’s diagnosis. She does this by visiting families in their homes and providing family workshops and trainings. Also key to her work is making sure families know about community resources that can help them meet their basic needs, because it is impossible to focus on academics and education when you are

struggling to find enough food, clothing, or medical care. She loves her work and cares deeply for the families she serves.

- Jessica Ceja, Parent/School Liaison, shared that she has a sister with Down syndrome and remembers attending IEP meetings with her parents. That is what makes her work personal for her. Sometimes, she receives referrals from Stephanie when parents exit Bright Start services and transition to school. She also receives referrals from community agencies like Parenting Network, CVRC, and Youth Services. Jessica shared how much she values home visits for the chance to connect with parents in a more casual setting and learn about their family. This gives her a different perspective than the school and allows her to make important personal connections that are fundamental to the role of a Parent Liaison. Once a personal connection is made, it is much easier to educate parents about special education, IDEA, assessments, etc. Another role of hers is providing opportunities for parents to connect with each other through parent support groups.
- Joy Voita, Parent/School Liaison, described coming into her role “by accident” when she adopted her son with autism years ago. After moving to Tulare County and seeing the opportunities that were available, she started asking questions and gradually began meeting other parents to help them with their children. That led to someone at TCOE reaching out to hire her as a liaison. Her work is a passion of hers because she cares deeply about students with special needs and believes in including them as much as possible. Joy reminded the CAC that liaisons are not “advocates” because they work with both sides to encourage dialogue and compromise. Parents often feel comfortable talking to the liaisons because they have family with disabilities and understand what parents are feeling. Liaisons also do a lot of networking with the school before a meeting to communicate a parent’s concerns and find out where compromise can happen. In short, the most important thing a liaison can do is help parents communicate effectively with the school and advocate on their child’s behalf.
- Malinda Furtado, Parent Liaison, shared how emotional IEP meetings can be for parents, but that the relationship between parents and the school is like a marriage without the option of divorce—the two sides must work together for the good of the student. This is harder when parents haven’t accepted their child’s disability and don’t agree with the school’s proposed services. The best we can do then is be a support for parents. Liaisons also serve as “investigators” to learn everything they can about a child so that the best educational plan can be developed. Often, we allow parents to vent their frustrations and then brainstorm ways to move forward towards a solution. Liaisons work to empower parents so that long after they are gone, parents will feel capable of advocating for their own child—who may need their support for a lifetime. Schools must remember that the world of special education is unfamiliar to parents, and they may feel overwhelmed and confused by the process. Liaisons are there to help explain things and ask the questions that parents may not feel comfortable asking. We can help suggest solutions that the school hasn’t considered because of our connection to the family. When parents ask to have a liaison present, we don’t want schools to feel threatened. Sometimes, a parent is just looking for support.
- Liaisons took questions and CAC expressed their appreciation for the presentation.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

A. CVRC Updates:

- a. Karina Padilla shared info regarding: “Social Recreation and Camp Services”—the ability of regional centers to fund camping services & associated travel expenses, social recreation activities, educational services for children 3-17 years old, and nonmedical therapies including specialized recreation, art, dance, and music. Behavioral support may be offered to facilitate inclusion of children with disabilities.
- b. Amy McMahon shared about Provisional Eligibility—this will allow CVRC to keep children between the ages of 3-5 as clients if it appears they “might” meet eligibility in the future.

B. Parenting Network: Timberly shared a handout covering the services provided. Parenting Network is the only agency in Tulare County funded in part by the Department of Developmental Services to provide parent education and support.

C. Annual Luncheon subcommittee will meet immediately after today’s meeting at 10:30am.

D. **Next Meeting:** The next CAC meeting will be—**March 10, 2022, at the Maple Learning Complex, 509 W. Maple, Tulare**—no zoom option available

E. Malinda Furtado shared the upcoming IEP trainings on zoom from 6-8pm: March 1st in Spanish and March 8th in English.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Tiffany Stark and seconded by Stephanie Caldera. Meeting Stands Adjourned at 10:19am.