BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE MATTER OF:

PARENTS ON BEHALF OF STUDENT,

v.

REDONDO BEACH UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT AND

TORRANCE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT.

OAH CASE NUMBER 2019090067

ORDER FOLLOWING PREHEARING CONFERENCE FOR HEARING BY VIDEOCONFERENCE

APRIL 27, 2020

On April 27, 2020, Administrative Law Judge Rommel P. Cruz, Office of Administrative Hearings, held a prehearing conference by videoconference. The Administrative Law Judge is called an ALJ; the Office of Administrative Hearings is called OAH; and a prehearing conference is called a PHC.

Attorney Jane DuBovy and Mandy Favaloro appeared on behalf of Student. Attorney Sundee Johnson appeared on behalf of Redondo Beach Unified School District and Torrance Unified School District. The PHC was recorded. Based upon discussion with the parties, the ALJ issues the following order:

HEARING DATES, TIMES, AND LOCATION

DUE PROCESS HEARING

The hearing will take place on May 5, 6, and 7, 2020, and continue day to day at the discretion of the ALJ. The hearing shall begin at 9:30 AM each day and generally end at 3:30 PM, unless otherwise ordered. Additional hearing dates will be discussed with the ALJ during the hearing.

HEARING LOCATION

OAH is authorized to conduct due process hearings by videoconference or telephone. (5 C.C.R. § 3082, subd. (g).) Based on state and federal guidance to address safety procedures due to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, OAH will conduct the due process hearing by videoconference using the Microsoft Teams application. Unless otherwise ordered, participants are required to appear by videoconference using a webcam and Microsoft Teams.

The parties shall immediately notify all potential witnesses of the hearing dates, and shall subpoena witnesses, if necessary, to ensure that the witnesses will appear to testify. A party's failure to notify or subpoena a witness to testify will not be considered a showing good cause to continue the hearing.

ISSUES AND PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

The issues at the due process hearing, and proposed resolutions, as alleged in the complaint and clarified by the parties and the ALJ during the PHC are:

ISSUES

1. Did Torrance Unified deny Student a free appropriate public education, referred to as a FAPE, from October 1, 2015, through the 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 school years by failing to meet its affirmative child find obligations to locate, identify, and serve Student?
2. Did Redondo Beach Unified infringe on Parents' right to meaningfully participate and cause a loss of educational benefit resulting in procedurally denying Student a FAPE during the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2019-2020 school years by:
    a. Failing to hold an annual individualized education program, referred to as an IEP, team meeting; and
    b. Failing to provide Parents with prior written notice of its decision not to hold an IEP team meeting or make an offer of FAPE?
3. Did Redondo Beach Unified infringe on Parents' right to meaningfully participate and cause a loss of educational benefit resulting in procedurally denying Student a FAPE by failing to have an IEP in effect at the start of the 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 school years?
4. Did Redondo Beach Unified and Torrance Unified infringe on Parents' right to meaningfully participate and cause a loss of educational benefit resulting in procedurally denying Student a FAPE by failing to complete assessments and hold an IEP team meeting to review assessments within 60 days of Parents' February 9, 2018 consent to the December 2017 assessment plan?
5. Did Redondo Beach Unified infringe on Parents' right to meaningfully participate and cause a loss of educational benefit resulting in procedurally denying Student a FAPE in the October 12, 2018 IEP by:

a. Failing to ensure that Parents were members of the IEP team that made decisions regarding FAPE and unilaterally determining the offer of placement outside the IEP process;
b. Failing to take into consideration Parent's concerns and results of recent assessments in determining the offer of FAPE; and
c. Failing to provide prior written notice with all required information based on Redondo Beach Unified's refusal to offer training to teachers in the IEP when requested by Parents?

6. Did Redondo Beach Unified and Torrance Unified deny Student a FAPE by failing to conduct triennial assessments within three years of the November 2014 initial assessments?
7. Did Redondo Beach Unified substantively deny Student a FAPE from November 2015 through the October 12, 2018 IEP by failing to hold an IEP team meeting to offer an appropriate program to meet Student's needs and provide an educational benefit?
8. Did Redondo Beach Unified substantively deny Student a FAPE in the October 12, 2018 IEP by failing to offer appropriate goals, program and related services to meet her needs and provide her with an educational benefit during the 2018-2019 school year and extended school year, and 2019-2020 school year?
9. Did Redondo Beach Unified substantively deny Student a FAPE during the 2019-2020 school year and extended school year and 2020-2021 school year by failing to hold an IEP team meeting to offer and provide Student with an appropriate program to meet her needs and to provide her with an educational benefit?

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

The resolutions requested by Student include reimbursements for placement at Mr. J's Academy, Lindamood-Bell programs, assessments, educational therapy services, counseling services, and transportation.

Redondo Beach Unified and Torrance Unified filed their responses to Student's second amended complaint on January 31, 2020. (*M.C. v. Antelope Valley Unified School Dist.* (9th Cir. 2017) 858 F.3d 1189, 1199-1200.)

EXHIBITS

Each party shall file one copy their exhibits with OAH at 2349 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite 200, Sacramento, CA 95833, by noon on the Friday before the first day of hearing. The parties shall also upload their exhibits electronically according to the instructions provided.

Except for good cause shown, or unless used solely for rebuttal or impeachment, any exhibit not timely exchanged as required by Education Code section 56505, subdivision (e)(7) shall not be admitted into evidence at the hearing unless the ALJ rules that it is admissible.

PAPER COPIES OF EXHIBITS

The paper copies of exhibits shall be shall be pre-marked and bound or placed in three-ring binders before filing with OAH. The exhibits shall contain a detailed table of contents which clearly identifies tabs and the document page numbers.

TAB AND PAGE NUMBERS

The parties must place a letter followed by a number on each tab to identify each exhibit. Student must use the letter S before the number to identify Student's exhibits. Redondo Beach Unified must use the letter R before the number to identify Redondo Beach Unified's exhibits and Torrance Unified must use the letter T before the number to identify Torrance Unified's exhibits. For example, S-1 means Student's exhibit tab 1 and R-1 means Redondo Beach Unified's exhibit tab 1. If Redondo Beach Unified and Torrance Unified submit a joint evidence binder, they will use the letter D before the exhibit number. Parties may either number each page within each tabbed exhibit or number each page in the binder consecutively beginning with the first page of the first exhibit through the last page of the last exhibit. For example, if there are 100 total pages in the binder the first page of the first exhibit is 1 and the last page of the last exhibit in the binder is 100.

CONTENT

Each exhibit must consist of one document. Separate documents may not be combined into one exhibit. Emails or letters may be consolidated into one exhibit if they are part of a single chain of messages. Exhibits should be in chronological order.

Parties should include resumes or curriculum vitae for each witness who is expected to testify as an expert.

Redondo Beach Unified and Torrance Unified's exhibits must include a copy of the school calendar for each school year in question.

ELECTRONIC COPIES OF EXHIBITS

Electronic copies of the exhibits filed with OAH shall be filed by noon on the Friday before the first day of hearing. The electronic copies must be an exact duplicate of the paper copies filed with OAH. OAH will issue a separate Order Setting Procedures for Filing Exhibits Electronically that includes instructions for how to file exhibits electronically.

WITNESSES

The parties shall serve their list of witnesses on each other in compliance with Education Code section 56505. No party shall be permitted to call any witnesses not timely disclosed except for good cause shown, supported by written declaration under penalty of perjury, and at the discretion of the ALJ.

Parties are responsible for ensuring that all participants are familiar with and follow the Instructions for Joining the Online Due Process Hearing provided with this Order. Participants that have not previously used the MS Teams platform, may also find informative videos available like the one at this link from Microsoft: https://support.office.com/en-us/article/join-a-teams-meeting-078e9868-f1aa-4414-8bb9-ee88e9236ee4.

The parties are responsible for ensuring that witnesses join the virtual hearing room at the designated date and time to testify. Witnesses are required to join the due process hearing by computer and appear by videoconference unless they do not have the necessary computer equipment. In that situation, the ALJ may permit the witnesses to appear by audio only or by telephone. "Audio only" means using a computer without webcam. Witness ability to attend the hearing by videoconference shall be discussed at the start of the hearing.

Parties are responsible for producing their own witnesses unless otherwise ordered by the ALJ. Parties shall make witnesses under their control reasonably available. The parties must schedule their witnesses to avoid delays in the hearing and to minimize or eliminate the need for calling witnesses out of order. Neither party will be permitted to call any witnesses not timely disclosed except for good cause shown, and at the discretion of the ALJ.

The ALJ has discretion to limit the number of witnesses who testify and the time allowed for witnesses' testimony. Education Code, section 56505.1, subd. (h), empowers the ALJ to set a reasonable limit on the length of the hearing after consideration of four factors. The first two factors are the issues to be heard and the complexity of facts to be proven. The second two factors are the ability of the parties or their representatives to present their respective cases and the parties' estimates of the time needed to present their cases.

MEET AND CONFER

The parties are encouraged to review and shorten their witness and exhibit lists before the hearing. Evidence may be excluded if it is repetitive, cumulative, or insufficiently probative to justify the time it would take to hear.

The parties are ordered to meet and confer no later than April 29, 2020, to discuss scheduling witnesses and how much time each witness will take. The parties shall discuss any issues pertaining to the parties, counsel and witnesses appearing by videoconference for hearing and electronically viewing exhibits during the hearing. The parties should attempt to eliminate duplicate exhibits from their hearing exhibits. The parties shall discuss whether they can produce a written stipulation as to pertinent facts,

contentions, resolutions and authenticity and admissibility of documents to shorten the length of time needed for the hearing.

As part of the meet and confer process, Redondo Beach Unified and Torrance Unified shall inform Student which proposed witnesses are district employees. Redondo Beach Unified and Torrance Unified shall also identify the witnesses on the respective witness lists that require a subpoena, and agree to accept service or provide Student with the witness' most recent contact information.

UPDATED PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

Both parties shall have an ongoing obligation to ensure that the information on the Participant Information Form filed with OAH is current, and shall file an updated Form as necessary. The ongoing obligation to ensure that the Participant Information Form filed with OAH is current does not change the parties' statutory obligation to timely disclose their witnesses to the other party(s) at least five business days prior to hearing. The parties must file an updated Participant Information Form to inform OAH of any changes, additions, or deletions, and include the required information no later than 5:00 PM at least two business days before the first day of hearing.

Any contact information provided by Redondo Beach Unified and Torrance Unified shall be used by Student for the limited purpose of issuing subpoenas or for contacting the witness(es) for purposes of attending the hearing and shall not be disclosed to any other person(s).

EVIDENCE PRESENTATION

In an administrative proceeding, the burden of proof is ordinarily on the party requesting the hearing. (*Schaffer v. Weast* (2005) 546 U.S. 49, 62.) In this case Student

requested the hearing and bears the burden of proof. Student's case-in-chief shall be presented first, followed by Redondo Beach Unified's, then Torrance Unified's, unless the ALJ orders otherwise.

Student alleges issues beyond the two-year statute of limitations. At the beginning of the hearing, on the first day, the parties shall call any and all witnesses, and present their documentary evidence, on whether any exception applies to the two-year statute of limitations in this matter. The parties shall call their witnesses on exceptions to the statute of limitations first, regardless of whether it will involve calling those witnesses again later in the hearing on other issues. After both parties have presented their evidence on this issue, the ALJ will take a break for 30 minutes, or longer in his or her discretion, to decide whether Student will be permitted to go forward on issues predating September 3, 2017, or whether those issues are barred by the statute of limitations.

The statute of limitations for special education due process claims in California is two years, consistent with federal law. (Ed. Code, § 56505, subd. (l); see also 20 U.S.C. § 1415(f)(3)(C).) The statute of limitations operates to bar claims based upon facts outside of the two-year period. (*J.W. v. Fresno* (9th Cir. 2010) 626 F.3d 431, 444-445 (*J.W. v. Fresno*); *Breanne C. v. Southern York County School Dist.* (M.D. Pa. 2009) 665 F.Supp.2d 504, 511-512; *E.J. v. San Carlos Elementary School Dist.* (N.D.Cal. 2011) 803 F.Supp.2d 1024, 1026, fn. 1.) Title 20 United States Code section 1415(f)(3)(D) and Education Code section 56505, subdivision (l), establish exceptions to the statute of limitations in cases in which the parent was prevented from filing a request for due process (i) due to specific misrepresentations by the local educational agency that it had resolved the problem forming the basis of the complaint, or (ii) by the local educational agency's withholding of information that was required to be provided to the parent.

A claim accrues for purposes of the statute of limitations when a parent learns of the injury that is a basis for the action, i.e., when the parent knows that the education provided is inadequate. (*M.D. v. Southington Board of Ed.* (2d Cir. 2003) 334 F.3d 217, 221: *M.M. & E.M. v. Lafayette School Dist.* (N.D.Cal., Feb. 7, 2012 Nos. CV 09–4624, 10–04223 SI) 2012 WL 398773, ** 17 – 19, reversed on other grounds (9th Cir. 2014) 767 F.3d 842, 858-59.) In other words, the statute of limitations begins to run when a party is aware of the facts that would support a legal claim, not when a party learns that it has a legal claim. (See *El Pollo Loco, Inc. v. Hashim* (9th Cir. 2003) 316 F.3d 1016, 1039; see also *M.M. v. Lafayette School District* (9th Cir. 2014) 767 F.3d 842, 858-59.)

WITNESS LISTS

The parties must provide a joint proposed witness list to the ALJ on the first day of hearing. The list should include the first and last name of the witness, which party(s) are calling the witness to testify, and include dates and time estimates of each witness' expected testimony. In the event an agreement cannot be reached, each party shall prepare a separate written list. Redondo Beach Unified and Torrance Unified must have witnesses available in case there is no agreement.

At the beginning of the hearing, the ALJ and the parties will discuss the length of time anticipated for each witness and scheduling issues for individual witnesses. The ALJ will finalize the witness schedule. Parties must be prepared at the end of each day to discuss the witnesses to be presented the next day and the estimated time for the testimony each witness.

SCOPE OF WITNESS EXAMINATION

Each witness will be called to testify only once, except for rebuttal purposes. All parties must examine witness on all issues when the witness is first called. Requiring a

witness to appear only once takes priority over the order in which parties present their case in chief.

AUDIO ONLY OR TELEPHONIC TESTIMONY

Whether a witness may appear by audio only or telephone instead of videoconference is a matter within the discretion of the ALJ. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 5, § 3082, subd. (g).) Any party seeking to present a witness by audio only or telephone shall request permission to do so before the hearing. Any party seeking to present a witness who cannot access exhibits electronically must inform the ALJ at the beginning of the hearing.

ELECTRONIC RECORDINGS

AUDIO RECORDING

A party may request permission to make an audio recording of the hearing. Permission to make an audio recording is subject to the ALJ's discretion and based upon certain conditions. The conditions are:

- the OAH recording is the only official recording;
- participants shall not use Teams to record the hearing;
- the parties shall turn their recording device on and off at the same time that the ALJ is on and off the record to avoid recording conversations while off the record;
- operation of the party's recording mechanism will not be allowed to delay the hearing;
- a parties' recording may not be given, provided or played to a witness, or potential witness; and

- the recording is subject to the same confidentiality as the due process hearing;
- use of the chat function in the videoconference is prohibited and shall not be part of the official record;
- participants shall not take screenshots of the videoconference, or share or publish any portion of the videoconference or audio recording.

Student's request is granted, subject to these conditions. Redondo Beach Unified and Torrance Unified may audio record the hearing subject to these conditions.

VIDEO RECORDING

No party, witness or anyone else may make any video recording of any part of the proceedings or stream live through any means.

RECORDINGS AS EXHIBITS

The ALJ has discretion to admit or exclude evidence in the form of a recording. Any request to submit a recording shall be considered at the time of hearing. The ALJ may grant or deny the request, or grant the request subject to certain conditions. The party offering the recording must establish that all or a part of the recording is relevant. The ALJ may request a transcript of the portion of the recording requested or have the party offering the recording to provide an exact identifiable portion of the recording the party seeks to admit. The identities of any person speaking on the portion of the tape being introduced must be established. An ALJ may allow the opposing party to offer additional portions of a recording to establish the context, or to rebut, the recording.

COMPENSATORY EDUCATION OR REIMBURSEMENT

Any party seeking reimbursement for expenditures shall present admissible evidence of these expenditures, or a stipulation to the amount of the expenditures. A party seeking compensatory education should provide evidence regarding the type, amount, duration, and need for any requested compensatory education. Documents offered as evidence to support a request for reimbursement must be separated by vendor.

MOTIONS

Student moved to compel Redondo Beach Unified to provide Student with the names and titles of each person who attended the October 12, 2018 IEP team meeting. At the PHC, Redondo Beach Unified did not object to the request. Redondo Beach Unified shall provide Student with the names and titles of each person who attended the October 12, 2018 IEP team meeting no later than April 29, 2020.

No prehearing motions are pending or contemplated. Any motion that was not filed three business days before the PHC, shall be supported by a declaration under penalty of perjury establishing good cause why the motion was not timely filed.

STIPULATIONS

Stipulations to pertinent facts, contentions, resolutions and authenticity and admissibility of documents are encouraged. Any proposed stipulation shall be submitted to the assigned ALJ in writing prior to the start of the hearing.

CONDUCT OF COUNSEL AND HEARING ROOM DECORUM

All participants to the videoconference should observe the same decorum as in an in-person due process hearing. Counsel, all parties, and all witnesses must conduct themselves in a professional and courteous manner at all times. Cellular phones, telephones and computer notifications must be shut off or set to silent during the hearing unless the ALJ grants permission otherwise. Counsel, parties, and witnesses shall appear from a private location, unless otherwise ordered. Participants should take reasonable efforts to minimize background noise maintain adequate room lighting. Use of virtual background images are at the discretion of the ALJ. Witnesses are prohibited from reading exhibits, documents, notes, text messages, telephones or computers while testifying, unless permitted to do so by the ALJ. Parties, counsel and witnesses are prohibited from passing notes to, exchanging electronic messages with, or signaling the witness in any way while the witness is testifying.

LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS AND REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Neither party requested accommodations. A party or participant to this case, such as a witness, requiring reasonable accommodation to participate in a mediation or hearing may contact OAH at (916) 263-0880, or send an email to OAHADA@dgs.ca.gov as soon as the need is known. The e-mail should have "Request for Accommodation" in the Subject Line. Additional information concerning requests for reasonable accommodation is available on OAH's website at: https://www.dgs.ca.gov/OAH/Services/Page-Content/Office-of-Administrative-Hearings-Services-List-Folder/Accommodations-at-OAH.

HEARING CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC

The hearing is closed to the public. Special Education hearings are closed to the public unless Student requests the hearing to be open to the public.

SETTLEMENT

The parties are encouraged to continue working together to reach an agreement before the due process hearing. The parties shall inform OAH in writing immediately if they reach a settlement or otherwise resolve the dispute before the scheduled hearing. In addition, if a settlement is reached within five days of the scheduled start of the due process hearing, the parties shall also inform OAH of the settlement by telephone at (916) 263-0880. At the same time, the parties should send the signature page of the signed agreement or a letter withdrawing the case to OAH at https://www.applications.dgs.ca.gov/oah/oahsftweb.

If a full and final written settlement agreement is reached after 4:00 p.m. the day prior to hearing, the parties shall leave a voicemail message regarding the settlement at (916) 274-6035. The parties should also leave contact information such as cellular phone numbers of each party or counsel for each party.

Dates for hearing will not be cancelled until the letter of withdrawal or signature page of the signed agreement has been received and processed by OAH. If an agreement in principle is reached, the parties should plan to attend the scheduled hearing unless different arrangements have been agreed upon by the assigned ALJ. The assigned ALJ will check for messages before the hearing.

If the matter settles subject to board approval, in addition to a signed copy of the signature page of the settlement agreement, the parties shall provide the date of the next board meeting. The hearing dates will not be cancelled without this information.

FAILURE TO COMPLY

The failure to comply with this Order may result in the exclusion of evidence or other sanctions.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

DocuSigned by:
Rommel P. Cruz
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Rommel P. Cruz
Administrative Law Judge
Office of Administrative Hearings