BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE MATTER OF:

TAHOE TRUCKEE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT,

v.

PARENTS ON BEHALF OF STUDENT.

OAH CASE NUMBER 2024020469

# ORDER FOLLOWING PREHEARING CONFERENCE FOR HEARING BY VIDEOCONFERENCE AND CONTINUING HEARING

FEBRUARY 28, 2024

On February 26, 2024, Administrative Law Judge Christine Arden, 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. The prehearing conference is called a PHC.

Matthew P. Juhl-Darlington and Nicole Mirkezami, Attorneys at Law, appeared on behalf of Tahoe Truckee Unified School District, called Tahoe District. Dr. Annamarie Cohen, Executive Director of Student Services for Tahoe District, also appeared at the PHC.

Mother appeared on behalf of Student. A Spanish language interpreter provided by OAH also attended the PHC.

The PHC was recorded. Based upon discussion with the parties, the ALJ issues the following order:

## SUMMARY OF ORDERS MADE AT AND FOLLOWING THE PHC

1. The PHC scheduled for March 29, 2024 at 1:00 PM is hereby vacated because all PHC matters were addressed at the February 26, 2024, 1:00 PM PHC, and no further PHC is necessary.
2. Tahoe Truckee's motion requesting a mediation and continuance of hearing was denied because Parents do not want to participate in a mediation.
3. The hearing was continued to April 9, 2024, at 9:30 AM, through April 11, 2024, because the parties disclosed an American Sign Language, called ASL, interpreter is required during the due process hearing for multiple witnesses. The continuance provides necessary time for OAH to arrange for an ASL interpreter at hearing. OAH shall provide the ASL interpreter during the due process hearing.
4. Mother's request for an "in-person" due process hearing was denied because good cause was not established for an "in-person" hearing.
5. Tahoe District was ordered to make a private room equipped with a computer available to Parents for their use during the due process hearing to provide Parents access to the online due process hearing and exhibits uploaded to the Case Center online electronic evidence file. That room shall be located at either Del Oro High School or the Tahoe District administrative office. Tahoe District shall inform Parents of the location of

such room with computer by April 2, 2024. By 5:00 PM on April 3, 2024, Tahoe District shall file written notice with OAH acknowledging it has informed Parents of the location of the private room with computer to be used by Parents during the due process hearing.

6. Parents will deliver Student's hearing exhibits to the Tahoe District administrative office by noon on April 2, 2024. Tahoe District will upload such exhibits to the Case Center electronic evidence file for this case by 5:00 PM on April 2, 2024.
7. Tahoe District will provide hard copies of its hearing exhibits to Parents by 5:00 PM on April 2, 2024.
8. Tahoe District shall either upload the parties' joint witness list to the Case Center electronic file, or file the joint witness list with OAH, prior to the first day of hearing.
9. A Spanish interpreter will be provided by OAH for Parents during the due process hearing.

## HEARING DATES, TIMES, AND LOCATION

### DUE PROCESS HEARING

The hearing was continued to April 9, 2024, through April 11, 2024, to allow time for OAH to arrange for an ASL interpreter to attend the due process hearing. The hearing shall 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. The parties anticipate it will take six days to complete the hearing. 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. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 5, § 3082, subd. (g).) OAH will conduct the due process hearing by videoconference using the Zoom application. Unless otherwise ordered, participants are required to appear by videoconference using a computer or device with video capability and Zoom. Tahoe District will provide Parents with a private room with a computer located at either Del Oro High School or at the Tahoe District administrative office for the duration of the hearing.

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 good cause to continue the hearing. Instructions for issuing and responding to subpoenas and optional forms for subpoenas can be found on the website at https://www.dgs.ca.gov/OAH/Case-Types/Special-Education/Forms/Subpoenas?search=special%20education%20subpoena.

## ISSUES AND PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

An individualized educational program is called an IEP. A free appropriate public education is called a FAPE. The issue at the due process hearing, and proposed resolution, as alleged in the complaint and clarified by the parties and the ALJ during the PHC are:

## ISSUE

1. Did the IEP developed on September 21, 2023, and continued on October 11, 2023, offer Student a FAPE, such that Tahoe District may implement that IEP without Parents' consent?

A party believing an issue has been misstated or improperly omitted shall promptly file a notice in writing, prior to the first day of hearing, stating its/their concern and referring to supporting portions of the complaint.

## PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

The resolution requested by Tahoe Truckee Unified School District is an Order finding that the IEP developed on September 21, 2023, and continued on October 11, 2023, offered Student a FAPE, such that Tahoe District may implement that IEP without Parents' consent.

## EXHIBITS

The parties shall serve their exhibits on each other in compliance with Education Code section 56505, subdivision (e)(7). Tahoe District shall electronically upload its exhibits and Student's exhibits to the Case Center file according to the Order Setting Procedures for Filing Exhibits Electronically. The parties' delivery of hearing exhibits to each other, as specifically addressed in paragraphs numbers 6 and 7 above, at least five business days before the first day of hearing constitutes each party's timely exchange of evidence in compliance with Education Code section 56505, subdivision (e)(7). Tahoe District shall upload exhibits for both parties to the Case Center electronic evidence file at least five business days prior to the first day of hearing. If further assistance is needed, please contact OAH at OAHSEOps@dgs.ca.gov.

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.

## IDENTIFYING EXHIBITS AND PAGE NUMBERS

Each exhibit must be identified by a letter and number. Student must use the letter S before the number to identify Student's exhibits. Tahoe District must use the letter D before the number to identify its exhibits. For example, S-1 means Student's exhibit 1 and D-1 means Tahoe District's exhibit 1. A cover sheet with this identifying letter and number should be the first page of each exhibit. The electronic evidence program will automatically number the exhibits and additional page numbering or bates stamping should not be added.

## CONTENT

Each exhibit must consist of one document. Separate documents may not be combined into one exhibit. Emails 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 expected to testify as an expert, or about their education or professional experience.

Tahoe District's exhibits must include a copy of the school calendar for each regular and extended school year in question.

Electronic copies of both parties' exhibits shall be uploaded by Tahoe District to the Case Center electronic evidence file by 5:00 PM at least five business days before the first day of hearing. Please refer to the General Order OAH issued with the Scheduling

Order that contains the Order Setting Procedures for Filing Exhibits Electronically. It includes instructions for how to file exhibits electronically. Beginning three business days before the hearing, the electronic evidence system will not allow parties to upload exhibits unless permitted by the ALJ during the hearing at the ALJ's discretion.

## 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 who have not previously used the Zoom application, may find informative instructions on at by visiting, Getting Started with Zoom at https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/categories/200101697.

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. If a witness does not have the necessary equipment, the ALJ may permit the witnesses to appear by audio only or by telephone. "Audio only" means using a computer without video. A witness's inability to attend the hearing by videoconference will be discussed at the start of the hearing.

The 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.

The ALJ has discretion to limit the number of witnesses and the time allowed for testimony. Education Code, section 56505.1, subdivision (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 5:00 PM on April 3, 2024, to discuss scheduling witnesses and how much time each witness will take. The parties shall discuss any issues related to counsel and witnesses appearing by videoconference for hearing, electronically viewing exhibits during the hearing, and subpoenas, if any. 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 the authenticity and admissibility of documents to shorten the length of time needed for the hearing.

As part of the meet and confer process, Tahoe District shall inform Student which proposed witnesses are Tahoe District employees. Tahoe District shall also identify the witnesses on Student's list that require a subpoena. Tahoe District may agree to accept

service for a witness under its control or provide Student with the witness's most recent contact information.

Tahoe District shall upload the parties' joint witness list to the Case Center electronic file, or file such list with OAH prior to the first day of hearing.

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

Both parties have an ongoing obligation to ensure that OAH has current information on the Participant Information Form filed with OAH and shall file an updated Form as necessary. The Participant Information Form is not served upon the opposing party. 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, including the required information no later than 5:00 PM at least two business days before the first day of hearing.

Any contact information provided shall be used for the limited purpose of issuing subpoenas or for contacting a witness to attend the hearing. Any contact information shall not be disclosed to any other person.

## 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 Tahoe District requested the hearing and bears the burden of proof. Tahoe District's case-in-chief shall be presented first, followed by Student, unless otherwise ordered.

## WITNESS LISTS

The parties must provide a joint proposed witness list to the ALJ on the first day of hearing. Tahoe District will either upload this list to the Case Center electronic evidence file, or file it with OAH prior to the first day of hearing. The list should include the first and last name of the witness, which party is calling the witness to testify, and include dates and time estimates of each witness's expected testimony. In the event an agreement cannot be reached, each party shall prepare a separate written list. Tahoe Truckee District 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 of each witness.

## SCOPE OF WITNESS EXAMINATION

Each witness will be called to testify only once, except for rebuttal purposes. All parties must examine a witness on all issues when the witness is first called to testify. Requiring a witness to appear only once takes priority over the order in which parties each 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 the following conditions:

1. the OAH recording is the only official recording;
2. 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;
3. operation of the party's recording mechanism will not be allowed to delay the hearing;
4. a party's recording may not be given, provided or played to a witness, or potential witness;
5. the recording is subject to the same confidentiality as the due process hearing; and
6. participants shall not take screenshots of the videoconference nor share or publish any portion of the videoconference or audio recording.

Both Tahoe District's and Student's requests to make an audio recording of the hearing are granted, subject to the above six conditions.

## VIDEO RECORDING

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

## RECORDINGS AS EXHIBITS

Student shall be permitted to upload the recordings of the IEP team meetings held on September 21, 2023, and October 11, 2023. Student shall also include in Student's exhibits written transcripts of the portions of those recordings Student intends to raise to the attention of the ALJ.

No other recordings may be uploaded electronically to Case Center without the ALJ's permission. 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

Tahoe District timely filed a Motion to Set Mediation and Continue the Due Process Hearing For Good Cause. Student did not file a written response to the motion.

The motion was denied because Parents do not want to participate in a mediation. However, the hearing was continued to April 9, 2024, through April 11, 2024, to allow OAH needed time to arrange for an ASL interpreter to attend the due process hearing.

No other 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 PARTICIPANTS AND HEARING ROOM DECORUM

All participants to the videoconference should observe the same decorum as in an in-person due process hearing. Participants 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. Participants should appear from a private location, unless otherwise ordered. Participants should take reasonable efforts to minimize background noise and 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. The parties, their representative 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

Parents require a Spanish language interpreter be provided for them at hearing. An ASL interpreter is required by witnesses who will be called to testify at hearing by both parties. OAH will provide both the Spanish language interpreter and the ASL interpreter.

A party or participant in 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/Request-Reasonable-Accommodations-for-OAH-Legal-Proceedings.

## HEARING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

The hearing is open to the public. Special education hearings are closed to the public unless a student requests the hearing to be open to the public.

An ALJ may restrict attendance because of the physical limitations of the hearing facility or take other action to promote due process or the orderly conduct of the hearing. (Cal. Code Regs., Tit. 1, § 1030.) Government Code, section 11425.20 empowers the ALJ to order an open hearing to be closed or make other protective orders to the extent necessary or proper to ensure a fair hearing in the circumstances of the case.

## 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 by visiting OAH Secure e-file at https://www.applications.dgs.ca.gov/oah/oahsftweb.

If a full and final written settlement agreement is reached after 4:00 PM 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.

## ORDER INCLUDES ALL RULINGS

This Order includes all rulings made at the prehearing conference. Any discussion and conversation not referenced in this Order is not binding on the ALJ conducting the hearing and may not be relied upon by the parties. The parties should be aware that, at hearing, the ALJ conducting the hearing has discretion to reconsider any part of this Order.

## IT IS SO ORDERED.

*Christine Arden*

Christine Arden
Administrative Law Judge
Office of Administrative Hearings