

BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE MATTER OF:

PARENTS ON BEHALF OF STUDENT,

v.

SANTA BARBARA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT.

OAH CASE NUMBER 2021060391

ORDER FOLLOWING PREHEARING CONFERENCE FOR

HEARING BY VIDEOCONFERENCE

SEPTEMBER 20, 2021

On September 17, 2021, Administrative Law Judge Penelope Pahl, 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.

Andrea Marcus, Attorney at Law, appeared on behalf of Student. Karen Gilyard, Attorney at Law, appeared on behalf of Santa Barbara 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 September 29 and 30, 2021, and continue day to day, as needed, including Mondays and Fridays, 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.

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 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 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

The ALJ has slightly altered the statement of some issues as allowed by the holdings in *J.W. v. Fresno Unified Sch. Dist.* (9th Cir. 2010) 626 F.3d 431, 442-443, and

Ford v. Long Beach Unified Sch. Dist. (9th Cir. 2002) 291 F.3d 1086, 1090.) No change in substance has been made. A party believing that an issue has been misstated or improperly omitted shall promptly file a notice in writing stating its concern and referring to supporting portions of the complaint.

At the outset of the prehearing conference, Student's counsel withdrew all issues in the complaint other than the four stated in Student's First Amended Prehearing Conference Statement. The issues to be considered at the due process hearing, as limited by Student, discussed among the parties during the PHC, and as clarified the ALJ and Student's proposed resolutions, are:

ISSUES

1. Did Santa Barbara Unified School District deny Student a FAPE during the 2018-2019 school year, beginning January 17, 2019, by:
 - a. denying meaningful parental participation during the IEP development process by misrepresenting the January 17, 2019 assessment findings;
 - b. failing to conduct a comprehensive assessment of Student to determine Student's needs related to sexual assault and rape;
 - c. failing to offer adequate supports and services in the January 19, 2019 IEP to meet Student's needs resulting from sexual assault and rape;
2. Did Santa Barbara Unified School District deny Student a FAPE during the 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021 school years, through June 7, 2021, by failing to assess Student in all areas of suspected disability, specifically social-emotional and trauma?
3. Did Santa Barbara Unified School District deny Student a FAPE during the 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021 school years, through June 7, 2021, by

failing to consider placing Student in a residential treatment center during IEP team meetings.

Student filed this matter on June 8, 2021, but asserts, claims arising prior to June 7, 2019. Student contends the applicable Statute of Limitations should be extended. The parties will present evidence regarding the applicable statutory period at the outset of the due process hearing. Thereafter, the ALJ will issue an oral ruling regarding the time period at issue in the case. The factual findings and legal conclusions supporting this ruling will be included in the final written decision in this matter.

Student originally articulated issues “to the present” and argued at hearing that the issue should extend to the first day of hearing. Santa Barbara objected to the issue extending beyond the date of filing. The issues articulated as “to the present” have been clarified to end as of the date of filing, that is June 7, 2021. This is a notice issue for Santa Barbara. No facts beyond the date of filing could have been included in the complaint. Therefore, Santa Barbara could not have had notice via the request for due process of any matters claimed beyond the date of filing.

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

The resolutions requested by Student include declaratory relief, reimbursement for private placement in a residential treatment center, compensatory education and prospective placement in a residential treatment center.

EXHIBITS

The parties shall upload their exhibits electronically according to the Order Setting Procedures for Filing Exhibits Electronically.

The parties shall serve their exhibits on each other in compliance with Education Code section 56505, subdivision (e)(7). Timely uploading electronic hearing exhibits five business days before the first day of hearing constitutes that party's timely exchange of evidence on each other in compliance with Education Code section 56505, subdivision (e)(7).

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 e.g. S-1, S-2, etc.. Santa Barbara must use the letter D before the number to identify Santa Barbara's exhibits e.g. D-1, D-2, etc.. 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 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.

Santa Barbara's exhibits must include a copy of the school calendar for each school year in question.

Electronic copies of exhibits filed with OAH shall be filed 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 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. 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 webcam. Witness ability 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. 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 and the time allowed for witnesses' 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 September 23, 2021 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 and electronically viewing exhibits during the hearing, or 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 authenticity and admissibility of documents to shorten the length of time needed for the hearing. As part of the meet and confer process, Santa Barbara shall inform Student which proposed witnesses are district employees.

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 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 Santa Barbara's unless otherwise ordered.

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. Student 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

Student has requested 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:

1. the OAH recording is the only official recording;
2. participants shall not use Teams to record the hearing;
3. 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;
4. operation of the party's recording mechanism will not be allowed to delay the hearing;
5. a parties' recording may not be given, provided or played to a witness, or potential witness; and
6. the recording is subject to the same confidentiality as the due process hearing;
7. use of the chat function in the videoconference is prohibited and shall not be part of the official record;
8. 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. If Santa Barbara wants to record the hearing, the request must be made before the hearing and would be subject to the conditions listed.

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

Student proposes to introduce all or part of a recording of an individualized education program team meeting. Recordings may not be uploaded electronically 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, specifically: 1) The party offering the recording must establish that all or a part of the recording is relevant, identifying the exact minutes or hour(s) and minutes of the recording of the transcript being offered. 2) The party offering the recording must also provide a transcript of the portion of the recording requested. The transcript does not have to be certified. 3) The identities of any person speaking on the portion of the tape being introduced must be established by admissible evidence. 5) 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

MOTION TO DISMISS OR ALTERNATIVELY BIFURCATE

On September 14, 2021, Santa Barbara filed a motion to dismiss all claims asserted prior to June 7, 2019, or alternatively to bifurcate the hearing so that claims related to the extension of the statute of limitations could be ruled upon first. Santa Barbara asserts that Students claims should be dismissed because no facts were stated supporting a basis for extending the statute of limitations.

The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, also called, the IDEA, prescribes a statute of limitations in a special education case that is two years from the date the filing party knew or should have known about the alleged action that forms the basis of the complaint, unless a state has a specific time limitation for requesting a special education due process hearing. (20 U.S.C. § 1415(f)(3)(C).) California has such a statute.

California's special education statute of limitations mandates that claims be limited to those filed two years from the date the filing party knew or had reason to know of the facts underlying the basis for the request. Additionally, California mirrors the two federal exceptions to the limitations' statute. Those exceptions are: 1) in cases

where Student was prevented from filing a complaint due to misrepresentation by the local educational agency that it had solved the problem forming the basis of the due process hearing request; and 2) in cases where Student was prevented from filing a complaint due to the withholding of information by the local educational agency from the Parents or that was required to be disclosed pursuant to Education code section 56504. (Ed. Code §56505, subd. (l).) This is not a statute that is strictly based on the occurrence of Student's claim. (*Avila v. Spokane School District 81*, (9th Cir.2017) 852 F. 3d 936, 941-942.)

Santa Barbara asserts, without citing binding or persuasive legal authority, that Student's complaint must be dismissed because his claims predate June 7, 2019; and no facts were pled stating a basis for one of the applicable exceptions to the statute of limitations as enumerated in California Education Code section 56505, subdivision (l). Prior OAH Special Education decisions are not precedential authority. (Govt. Code § 11425.60; tit. 5, Cal Code Regs, § 3085.) Santa Barbara's interpretation of the special education statute of limitations overlooks the fact that the applicable limitation period is not strictly bound by the date of the filing of Student's claims.

Santa Barbara's position further overlooks the applicable special education pleading standard. Minimal pleading standards apply to requests for due process pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (*Schaffer ex rel. Schaffer v. Weast*, (2005) 546 U.S. 49, 54 [126 S.Ct. 528, 163 L.Ed.2d 387].)

Santa Barbara has been put on notice that Student may raise claims that arose prior to August 29, 2019. Santa Barbara did not file a Notice of Insufficiency asserting more specific facts were required, including the facts that would form the basis for extending or eliminating the statute of limitations (20 U.S.C. § 1415 (c)(2)(A); Ed. Code § 56502, subd. (d)(1).) As a result, Student's complaint is deemed sufficient. (20 U.S.C.

§ 1415 (c)(2)(A); Ed. Code § 56502 subd. (d)(1).) Student shall have the burden of proving entitlement to raise claims prior to June 7, 2019 at hearing.

Alternatively, Santa Barbara sought to bifurcate the statute of limitations from Student's additional issues. Bifurcation in this case would not serve judicial economy. Accordingly, bifurcation is denied. However, as noted previously, a determination regarding the time period at issue in this case will be determined at the outset of the hearing after the parties are given an opportunity to present evidence regarding that narrow question.

No further 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 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. 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 anticipates the need for either an interpreter or for accommodations of a disability for a hearing participant.

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/Accommodations-at-OAH>.

HEARING OPEN OR 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 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.

Penelope S. Pahl

Penelope S. Pahl

Administrative Law Judge

Office of Administrative Hearings