

BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE MATTER OF:
PARENTS ON BEHALF OF STUDENT,

v.

VALLEY CENTER-PAUMA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT.

OAH CASE NUMBER 2021110449

ORDER FOLLOWING PREHEARING CONFERENCE
GRANTING JOINT REQUEST FOR CONTINUANCE OF
PREHEARING CONFERENCE AND DUE PROCESS HEARING

MARCH 14, 2022

On March 14, 2021, Administrative Law Judge Deborah Myers-Cregar, 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.

Brett S. Allen, Attorney at Law, appeared on behalf of Student. Justin Shinnfield, Attorney at Law, appeared on behalf of Valley Center-Pauma Unified School District. The PHC was recorded. Based upon discussion with the parties, the ALJ issues the following order:

HEARING DATES, TIMES, AND LOCATION

At the PHC, the parties represented they had reached an agreement in principle but Parent was unable to sign it that day. Additionally, the representative for Valley Center-Pauma flew out of town for a family emergency and was unavailable. The parties jointly moved to continue the prehearing conference and due process hearing based on the parties' mutual desire to work on settling the case without a due process hearing, and to accommodate the representative's sudden and excusable unavailability.

A due process hearing must be conducted, and a decision rendered within 45 days of receipt of the due process notice unless an extension is granted for good cause. (34 C.F.R. § 300.515(a) & (c) (2006); Ed. Code, §§ 56502, subd. (f), 56505, subd. (f)(3); Cal. Code Regs., tit. 1, § 1020.) As a result, continuances are disfavored. Good cause may include the unavailability of a party, counsel, or an essential witness due to death, illness or other excusable circumstances; substitution of an attorney when the substitution is required in the interests of justice; a party's excused inability to obtain essential testimony or other material evidence despite diligent efforts; or another significant, unanticipated change in the status of the case as a result of which the case is not ready for hearing. (Ed. Code, § 56505, subd. (f)(3); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 3.1332(c).) OAH considers all relevant facts and circumstances, including the proximity of the hearing date; previous continuances or delays; the length of continuance requested; the availability of other means to address the problem giving rise to the request; prejudice to a party or witness as a result of a continuance; the impact of granting a continuance on other pending hearings; whether trial counsel is engaged in another trial; whether the parties have stipulated to a continuance; whether the interests of justice are served by the continuance or imposing conditions on the continuance; and any other relevant fact or circumstance. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 3.1332(d).)

The Education Code strongly favors dispute resolution. The procedural safeguards promote the parties using mediation conferences and resolving their dispute in an informal, non-adversarial way, even if a due process complaint has been filed, and even if the hearing has commenced. (Ed. Code, § 56503.)

The request for continuance is granted for good cause. Good cause exists because the representative is unavailable for an excusable reason, and because the parties are finalizing a settlement which will help resolve significant issues without a due process hearing, will serve judicial economy, and the interests of justice. Therefore, a continuance of the hearing is warranted. All previously scheduled dates are vacated. This matter will be set as follows:

PREHEARING CONFERENCE will be held on April 11, 2022, at 1 PM.

DUE PROCESS HEARING will be held on April 19, through 21, 2022. The hearing shall begin at 9:30 AM on all days unless otherwise ordered. The hearing shall continue day to day, as needed at the discretion of the Administrative Law Judge. Prehearing conference statements and motions are due to OAH no later than three business days before the prehearing conference or with a showing of good cause why it was not timely filed.

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.

Deborah Myers Cregar

Deborah Myers-Cregar

Administrative Law Judge

Office of Administrative Hearings