

## Charter SELPA Oversight

**February, 2012**

**The Charter SELPA is committed to having practices and procedures in place for program and fiscal oversight.**

**Program and fiscal oversight is accomplished through comprehensive communication, extensive professional development, and individualized mentoring and support. The following document is a compilation of activities performed by the Charter SELPA in the area of program and fiscal oversight.**

### **New Charters Orientation & Application Process**

In order to ensure their success, charters are screened for entry into the Charter SELPA. We recognize that not all charters have the programmatic and fiscal capacity to be successful as a local education agency (LEA).

Our first requirement (not mandatory but highly recommended) is for charters to attend the October potential member workshop. At this workshop we outline the program and fiscal commitments they will have as a charter LEA, and counsel them to consider if they are ready for this level of responsibility.

The application process for Charter SELPA membership requires them to demonstrate how they will complete the programmatic and fiscal requirements of becoming a charter LEA. We require two years of audit reports. In our review of audit reports, we are looking for evidence of financial controls. This is demonstrated by a lack of material findings for internal control and program compliance. We are reviewing the financial data in the audit reports to determine if the entity is fiscally solvent. We are looking for low debt ratios, deficit spending, concern findings, adequate reserves, and adequate cash. For a new start-up charter, without audit report evidence, we are looking at the proposed start up budget to determine if the budget is reasonable and if reserves are adequate.

We also request a special education budget that reflects how they anticipate providing services for the following fiscal year, should they be selected to participate in the Charter SELPA. We are looking for demonstrated ability to create a meaningful budget and understanding of key elements.

In these difficult budget times amidst cash deferrals, small start-up charters are challenged. In September 2011, we added a priority listing to our charter acceptance process, putting these charters on the last priority for entry into the SELPA. Highest priority for entry is given to those charters with demonstrated capacity, e.g. part of a CMO or other organization, with demonstrated ability to be successful in these challenging economic times. This does not preclude small start-ups from entry, but it does help focus our SELPA membership on those charters with more experience and capacity.

# Charter SELPA Oversight

## Mentor Program

A successful charter in the SELPA, with strong special education programs and fiscal accountability, must have its leadership fully engaged. CEO participation is critical. A CEO Mentor program was established in September 2011 to pair new CEOs with an existing Charter SELPA member. The intent is to assist new CEOs in the Charter SELPA understand their commitments and responsibilities as Charter SELPA members and to provide support in the first year. Charter SELPA staff have the first line of responsibility to ensure that new members understand their roles and responsibilities, but this added element of support is anticipated to further strengthen relationships.

## Ongoing Financial Review – Annual Audit

All Charter SELPA members are required to submit a copy of their annual audit to the Charter SELPA. Our office reviews the audit reports to determine if there is a lack of material findings relative to internal control and program compliance, low debt ratios, deficit spending, going concern findings, adequate reserves, and adequate cash. In these difficult budget times, most charters (just like districts), will struggle to have adequate cash and adequate reserves. As a result, we are developing additional standards of measurement that will separate charters in imminent catastrophic fiscal crisis versus the universal budget crisis all districts and charters are experiencing in 2010-11 and 2011-12.

We also require notification if a charter is the subject of an AB 139 audit, a specialized audit that can be initiated by the county office where the charter is located.

## Allocation Plan Guidelines

The Allocation Plan for the Charter SELPA has specific procedures to be followed if a charter does not spend their funds in a given year or does not meet maintenance of effort. Charters could potentially have their funding formula modified if they failed to expend special education funds.

## Professional Development

Charter SELPA fiscal and program oversight depends heavily on training of charter staff. We encourage Charter SELPA members to attend fiscal and program trainings and suggest that a team of program and business is essential to success. Our fiscal trainings focus on understanding the language of program and business relative to special education, how to build a special education budget, and how to perform the specialized income and expenditure accounting, cash flow expectations and management, and maintenance of effort.

Generally the fiscal training schedule for each fiscal year is the following:

August	<u>Special Education Budgeting and Year End Close</u> 4 locations (Same training offered in Sacramento, San Diego, Los Angeles, Oakland)
September	<u>New Charter CEO Orientation</u> (Sacramento)

## Charter SELPA Oversight

October	<u>Potential New Charter Member Workshop</u> (Possible Charter SELPA members for coming fiscal year)
Feb/March	<u>Maintenance of Effort Training</u> Morning sessions in Sacramento, San Diego, Los Angeles, Oakland (same training offered in 4 locations) <u>Special Education Budgeting</u> Afternoon sessions in Sacramento, San Diego, Los Angeles, Oakland (same training offered in 4 locations)

We are also available for specialized on-site support upon request.

SELPA staff provides our charter members with training in the SEIS system and IEP development and implementation. Our charter members are instructed in the IEP process: writing legally compliant IEPs and the process of determining educational benefit for their students. Through the SEIS system, we can review IEPs to assure legal compliance. In addition, we offer all of our charter members the opportunity for training in non-violent crisis prevention, intervention and behavior management, and behavior plan implementation. Further technical assistance is given to schools by SELPA staff reviewing behavior plans online through the SEIS system and providing individual guidance, as needed. These professional development opportunities are offered in regionalized locations and are recorded and placed on our Charter SELPA website for future reference. We identify issues through the evaluation of professional development offerings and by reviewing current legal issues to determine future staff development. A charter special education conference, sponsored by the El Dorado Charter SELPA, will take place in March 2012. This conference is available to charter schools throughout the state.

### Statewide Representation

Charter SELPA is involved with State SELPA, CCSA and several state committees. The Charter SELPA is involved in advocacy on statewide issues. We believe it is important to keep abreast of current issues and to work proactively to strengthen our knowledge base in order to better serve our charters and disseminate timely and appropriate information. In addition, the Charter SELPA advocates for continued options to ensure that charter schools and special education needs are recognized and acknowledged through statewide policies.

### Ongoing Support

The Charter SELPA program staff is comprised of a team of both certificated and classified staff who are highly trained in their fields. Our program staff includes Tammy Watson, the SELPA Director; Amy Andersen, the Assistant SELPA Director; Emi Johnson, Charter SELPA Consultant; Dubravka Tomazin, Tamara Clay, Steve Pedego, and Sadie Pinotti, our Program Specialists; and Kristin Johnson, Behavior Analyst. We are available to consult with charter members by phone, video conferencing, email and through on-site program visitations. Our staff is trained in Alternate Dispute Resolution and can assist charter members with difficult IEPs and challenging situations through IEP facilitation and consultation, as well as addressing programmatic questions and concerns.

## **Charter SELPA Oversight**

Our accounting support team is a critical element of our success. Lisa Donaldson has provided accountant support to the Charter SELPA since the beginning and has established strong relationships with charters in the SELPA. Her responsiveness to our clients translates into charters feeling more comfortable calling and requesting information and clarification. Our belief is that relationships and support enhance fiscal reporting and compliance. Francie Heim, former Deputy Superintendent for El Dorado County and current fiscal consultant, continues to support the Charter SELPA team. In 2011-12, we added Lindsay Whitelaw as an additional member of the accounting support team. This will allow us the ability to ensure we are able to respond timely to charter SELPA client requests for support.

### **Site Visitations**

Our program specialists are a valuable resource for hands-on assistance to consult with charter members to improve the effectiveness of special education through program review and modification.

The Charter SELPA staff visit sites to consult with schools, address concerns, review policies and procedures for the operation of special education programs and offer assistance in resolving difficulties.

### **Technology**

The Charter SELPA has implemented the use of technology to better serve charter schools and enhance our communication. Technology is used in a webinar type format for professional development, meetings and to disseminate information. The increased use of technology has enabled us to effectively communicate and provide professional development offerings to charter school staff that may not be able to travel to trainings and meetings. Additionally, the Charter SELPA website enables charters to access resource documents electronically.

### **Monthly Steering Committee Meetings**

Each month, Charter SELPA members are strongly encouraged to participate in the Steering Committee meetings. The Steering Committee consists of representation from each of the Charter SELPA members. The meetings are held in a central location and are broadcast through our web-based communication system, Blackboard/Elluminate. These meetings focus on current special education program issues, both at the state and local level. The Charter SELPA provides updates on policies and procedures, state law, and programmatic oversight recommendations. Information and training on current practices in program implementation are provided to members. Time is available in the meeting for members to share questions, concerns and to network with one another.

### **Fiscal Committee Meetings**

Charter SELPA CEO Council meets in September and May. We schedule a Fiscal Committee meeting to follow these meetings, typically October/June. The Fiscal Committee meeting is to ensure that any

## **Charter SELPA Oversight**

significant actions taken at the CEO Council meeting are communicated as necessary to fiscal contacts and additional details may be worked through.

### **Participation Expectations**

In order for charters to be successful in the SELPA, they need to fully engage at the governance level, program level, and finance level. Our ability to build working relationships and monitor each charter's level of capacity and expertise is stronger when we can meet face to face or interact in meetings and workshops. In September 2011, we approved a clearly defined member participation standard, with a defined notification process when participation does not meet the standard. This process will allow us to better monitor charter participation in the SELPA at all levels.

### **Self-Review with CDE**

The Charter SELPA participates in the California Department of Education Self-Review cycle, along with all other SELPAs throughout the state. During this review process, the Charters will review policies, student records and develop monitoring plans. The SELPA staff will provide training and on-going support during the Self-Review process, assisting with policy, reviews and corrective actions as needed.

### **Charter Self-Review**

In addition to the formal CDE Self-Review process described above, the Charter SELPA staff and Charter Steering Committee have developed a review document to be completed by each charter school twice a year. This "in-house" self-review will assist charters in identifying their strengths and weaknesses. The SELPA staff and the charter school work collaboratively to identify needs for professional development and support.

### **Parent Involvement**

We offer parents throughout the state an opportunity to participate on the Community Advisory Committee (CAC). The CAC meets three times per year at the El Dorado County Office of Education. These meetings are web-cast to each of our charter members and parents are encouraged to attend and participate. The CAC provides on-going resources on regionalized activities to charter members. A toll free phone number is available to parents whose children are enrolled in our charters to discuss their concerns. Our staff follows-up on all parent concerns by contacting the school, reviewing SEIS records, and, when necessary, providing on-site support.

### **Compliance Complaints**

If a member charter finds itself involved in a compliance complaint by the family of a child with special needs, the Charter SELPA will assist the charter in resolving the situation. If a complaint is filed with the California Department of Education, the SELPA office will receive a copy of the complaint and a member of the SELPA staff will contact the charter school. The SELPA supports the charter in providing information to CDE, reviewing all submitted paperwork, and helping to address the complaint. If the complaint is found to contain valid issues and concerns, the SELPA aids the charter in completing any

## **Charter SELPA Oversight**

corrective actions required by CDE. As with all disputes, the SELPA staff will assist charters in seeking resolution at the earliest opportunity, which may lead to withdrawal of the complaint entirely.

### **Legal Services**

Heather Edwards, Esq., of Girard Edwards & Hance will provide legal updates and answer legal questions for Charter members at our bi-annual CEO Council meetings. In addition, charter members will have access to her expertise via a web-based help-line. Charter members can submit their legal questions to her for a response. A legal newsletter is published on a regular basis to address legal concerns and to keep members apprised of the latest legal topics and decisions.

### **SEIS**

SEIS is a web-based program developed to assist charter member staff in accurately writing and reporting student information on the Individual Education Plan (IEP). All IEPs completed for students enrolled in member charters are available online and are accessible by the SELPA staff. The SELPA monitors this information closely, identifies IEP errors, checks timelines, and ensures that services are being reported correctly. We work with SELPA members to correct reporting errors and to address any programmatic needs identified through this process.

SEIS enables SELPA staff to analyze the special education data of charter members. By doing so, we can identify charters who may be either under or over identifying students for special education and supply increased assistance on these issues. We review with the charters their child find procedures, student eligibility criteria and process, and service delivery models.

Special education services being reported for each of the charter members is reviewed and compared with the identified disabilities at each site. We provide charter members with resources located within their region to assist them in addressing their staffing needs and facilitate IEP compliance

### **Pupil Count Review**

Our current process calls for a review of December special education pupil count data. The data is separated into first year charters and charters with two or more years of experience. Charters identifying less than 4% of their population as needing special education services will be given a second level of review by SELPA staff. This data is to be reviewed by CEO Executive Committee and the full CEO Council on an annual basis.

### **Charter SELPA Dashboard**

Charter SELPA financial reporting is as strong as the individual data elements submitted by each charter. We developed our Charter SELPA Dashboard in 2010-11 as a way of putting special education data into context and to measure program and financial elements. The Dashboard serves as a useful tool for the Charter SELPA and the individual charters to measure against state standards as well as Charter SELPA standards.

## Charter SELPA Oversight

The Dashboard currently looks at the following elements:

- Special education students as % of general population
- Special education students by disability
- IEP compliance statistics
- Charter SELPA special education income compared to state averages
- Charter SELPA special education expenditures compared to state averages
- Charter SELPA special education local contribution compared to state averages

If a charter in the SELPA varies significantly from expected statistics, it serves as an early warning system for the Charter SELPA to initiate contact with the charter to ensure they are in programmatic and fiscal compliance.