



# PEPP, INC

## Parents Educating Parents and Professionals

Together, We Can Make A Difference  
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## COMPLAINT PROCEDURES AND DUE PROCESS

### How to Avoid a Due Process Hearing

1. Be Assertive
2. Assume the role of equal partner in the IEP meetings.
3. Know the law.
4. Know your child and his/her needs prior to attending meetings.
5. Be familiar with all programs offered to disabled children in your
6. Express anger toward the school system to a friend prior to any meeting or contact.
7. Take someone with you to speak for you if necessary.
8. Discontinue or postpone the meeting if emotions get in the way of deciding an appropriate education for you child.
9. Learn to negotiate. Give the school system time to make changes.
10. Work closely with the school. Get to know the teacher and other school personnel. It is harder to say “no” if the school knows you and your child.
11. Schedule meetings as often as necessary to work toward obtaining a free and appropriate education for your child.
12. Bring needs to the Board of Education members’ attention so they are aware of needs in your system.
13. Volunteer, if time permits, to assist the school with various projects.
14. Feel good about yourself and what you are trying to do for your child and other children.
15. Try mediation first. Mediation is a non-adversarial, confidential conference where parents, school personnel, advocates, and attorneys are directed through a structured negotiation process to discover potential areas of agreement in the dispute and to create options to settle disagreements in a manner that is satisfactory to all parties involved in the dispute
16. Early in the process write a letter to the State Department of Education, Division for Exceptional Students, or the Office for Civil Rights.

## STATE COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

An organization or individual may file a signed written complaint regarding allegations of substance including the review of an appeal from a decision of a Local School System with respect to a complaint or actions taken by any public agency that are contrary to the requirements of IDEA. The complaint must include (a) a statement that the Local School System has violated a requirement of Part B of IDEA and (b) facts on which the statement is based. The complaint will be reviewed and investigated as necessary and appropriate action taken within 60 days by the Georgia DOE, specifically, through the Office of Special Services, to the Director of the Division for Exceptional Students. If the allegation can be appropriately handled through the due process hearing procedure, the complaint officer may recommend that the complainant initiate a request for a hearing and notify the agency involved in the recommendation.

The following steps are outlined in regard to this complaint procedure:

1. Complaints from any organization or individual in regard to the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for a student with a disability or group of students with disabilities should be signed and addressed in writing to:

Director, Division for Exceptional Students  
Georgia Department of Education  
1870 Twin Towers East  
Atlanta, GA 30334-500 1  
(404) 656-3963

2. The complaint shall include a statement that the state or local school system has violated a requirement of a federal statute or regulation that applies to a program and the facts on which the statement is based.

3. The Director of the Division for Exceptional Students will address the issue to the public agency in writing and request a response within 10 days from the public agency directly involved. Copies of the letter will be sent to appropriate office heads, State Superintendent, and the person(s) or group that filed the complaint

4. The local school system involved will be required to respond directly to the complaint, giving in writing any explanations or actions to be taken.

5. The Director of the Division for Exceptional Students will review the local school system's response and a decision may then be made that no further action is required.

6. The complaint on-site team will take steps necessary to make a recommendation to resolve any differences. These steps may include a review of records, interviews and classroom visits. The review team will make written recommendations to the Director, Division for Exceptional Students.
  
7. The Director of the Division for Exceptional Students will give the complainant the opportunity to submit additional information, either orally or in writing, about the allegations in the complaint.
  
8. The Directory of the Division for Exceptional Students will review all relevant information and make an independent determination as to whether the public agency is violating a requirement of federal statute or Regulation.
  
9. The Director of Division for Exceptional Students will issue a written decision to the complainant that addresses each allegation in the complaint and will include finding of fact and conclusions; and the reasons for the final decision.
  
10. The Division Director will send in writing the steps necessary to resolve the complaint. This letter of notification will include specific requirements and tie lines that shall be met in order to continue to receive VI-B federal funds. Copies of the final letter outlining the procedures will be sent to all appropriate parties.
  
11. An extension of the 60-day time limit for resolution may be made by the Director only if exceptional circumstances exist with respect to a particular complaint.
  
12. The complainant has the right to request the United States Secretary of Education to review the final decision of the state.

## **MEDIATION**

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, P.L. 94-142, suggests mediation as a possible step before a due process hearing. In Georgia, school systems are required to offer mediation once a parent requests a due process hearing. The parent may refuse mediation and wait for the hearing. If a parent accepts mediation, it does not affect the twenty (20) day time-line from the time a due process hearing is requested. Mediation is a process of resolving conflict. An impartial third party, the mediator, attempts to help parents and school personnel to reach an agreement satisfactory to both parties. The mediator does not decide who is right, but facilitates the discussion by the parents and school personnel until a mutually agreeable solution has been reached. The mediator then writes out the agreement for both parties to transfer onto the IEP at a meeting called for

such purpose.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 outlines the States' obligations for creating a mediation process in which parents and LEAs may voluntarily participate. Section 615(e) of the IDEA Amendments of 1997 lists the following requirements for the mediation process:

The procedures shall ensure that the mediation process-

- Is voluntary on the part of the parties;
- Is not used to deny or delay a parent's right to a due process hearing under subsection (f) or to deny any other rights afforded under this part; and
- is conducted by a qualified and impartial mediator who is trained in effective mediation techniques.

A local education agency or a state agency may establish procedures to require parents who choose not to use the mediation process to meet, at a time and location convenient to the parents, with a disinterested party who is under contract with-

- a parent training and information center or community parent resource center in the State established under section 682 or 683; or
- an appropriate alternative dispute resolution entity; to encourage the use, and explain the benefits, of the mediation process to the parents.

The State shall maintain a list of individuals who are qualified mediators and knowledgeable in laws and regulations relating to the provision of special education and related services.

- The state shall bear the cost of the mediation process, including the costs of meetings described in subparagraph (2)
- Each session in the mediation process shall be scheduled in a timely manner and shall be held in a location that is convenient to the parties to the dispute.
- An agreement reached by the parties to the dispute in the mediation process shall be set forth in a written mediation agreement.
- Discussions that occur during the mediation process shall be confidential and may not be used as evidence in any subsequent due process hearings or civil proceedings and the parties to the mediation process may be required to sign a confidentiality pledge to the commencement of such process.

In Georgia, the mediation can be done by anyone requested by the superintendent. Parents are free to invite anyone with knowledge of the case to participate. Parents and school systems may request that the Justice Center of Atlanta provide mediation services. The Justice Center has received a Hewlett Grant for this purpose and the services are

provided at no charge to parents and schools. To request a mediation by the Justice Center of Atlanta, call (404) 523-8236.

## **HOW TO PREPARE FOR AN IMPARTIAL DUE PROCESS HEARING**

1. Decide why your child is not receiving a free appropriate public education.
2. Write a letter requesting a due process hearing. (See Appendix, Sample letter).
3. Ask the school system for a copy of all school records (you may be requested to pay the printing cost). Ask to see all your child's school records prior to copying.
4. Keep records (written) of all contacts with the school system. Keep a diary of telephone contacts.
5. Contact all agencies where your child has received services for records
6. After the hearing officer contacts you, you will need to do the following:  
Prepare all written evidence. Within 5 days prior to the hearing the written evidence must be received by the superintendent and the hearing officer. Written evidence may include the following:
  - Record from doctors to support your claim.
  - Diary of your attempts to secure a free appropriate education for your child.
  - Record of observations you have made.
  - School records.
  - Independent evaluations.
7. Prepare a list of witnesses (persons who will support your claim). This should be mailed with the written evidence.
8. Notify the hearing officer if the witnesses need to be compelled to attend
9. Let the hearing officer know if you want the hearing closed to the public.
10. The school must provide information on low cost legal or other services for assistance with the hearing.

11. You may choose to have the child attend the hearing.
12. Keep records.
13. You have the right to mediation prior to a hearing. This is to be done within the timelines for the hearing (20 days) and by an impartial mediator.
14. A decision must be reached within 45 days after the request is received.

## HEARING PROCESSES

### **Impartial Due Process Hearing**

**General:** The impartial due process hearing is designed to provide concerned parties an avenue for resolving difference in the event the mediation process fails to do so. An impartial due process hearing must be provided when the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) or the local school system (LSS/state operated program (SOP) request(s) it with regard to the identification, evaluation, placement or provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to a student with a disability. [refer to 34 CFR 300.507(a)]

**Time lines:** No later than 45 calendar days after the receipt of a request for an impartial due process hearing, the administrative law judge (ALT) shall ensure that a final decision is reached and a copy mailed to each of the parties. [refer to 34 CFR 300.507(a)(1,2)]

**Extensions:** An ALJ may grant specific extensions of time beyond the periods set out in this rule at the request of either party, as long as the rights of the student are not impaired by the delay. Parties may specifically jointly request and receive extensions of time to allow for mediation and other settlement discussions as long as such continuance does not result in undue delay. Upon receipt and granting of any request for an extension, the ALJ shall re-set hearing dates and the time line for a final decision. In no event shall the time line for a final decision exceed 45 days from the date of the extension granted by the AUJ, unless expressly mutually agreed to by the parties. [refer to 34 CFR 300.511 ©(4)]

### **Request for Hearing:**

If either the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) or the USS/SOP requests an impartial due process hearing, the local superintendent or his or her designee shall notify the department's Legal Services report the request for an impartial due process hearing. The

request shall include the name of the student, the address of the residence of the student, the name of the school the student is attending, a description of the nature of the problem of the student relating to such proposed initiation or change, including facts relating to such problem, and a proposed resolution to the extent known and available to the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) at the time. Parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) and LSSs are encouraged to use the form. "Request for Special Education Due Process Hearing" which addresses the required information listed above, to request a due process hearing. A LSS/SOP may not deny or delay a parent's/guardian's/surrogate's right to an impartial due process hearing for failure to complete this form. A parent may request due process orally or in writing. A written request may be made to the departments Legal Services office. If the LSS/SOP request due process, a copy of the request and of all parental rights, shall be served upon the parent and the student, if the student is over the age of eighteen. [refer to 34 CFR 300.508©(4)]

- When an impartial due process hearing is initiated, the LSS/SOP shall inform the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) of the availability of mediation, as described in Rules 160-4-7-. 16 Mediation. [refer to 34 CFR 300.507(a)(3)j]
- The procedural safeguards identified in this rule and in 160-4-7-.05 Procedural Safeguards/Parent Rights **do not** apply to complaint that a LSS has failed to meet the requirements for students with disabilities enrolled by their parents in private schools, including the provision of services indicated in the student's services plan. Such complaints ay be filed under the state complaint procedures (see rule 160-4-7-.17 Complaint Procedures). [refer to 34 CFR 300.457(a) and (c)]
- The procedural safeguards identified in this rule and in Rule 1 60-4-7-.05 Procedural Safeguards/Parents Rights **do** apply to complaint that a LSS.SOP has failed to meet the requirements of Child Find for private school students (see rule 160-4-7-. 15 Private Schools, including the requirements regarding evaluation (see rule 1 60-4-7-.07 Evaluations and Eligibility Determinations). [refer to 34 CFR 300.457(b)J

**Administrative law judge (ALJ) appointment:** In accordance with O.C.G.A. 50-13-40 et seq., the Office of State Administrative Hearings (OSAH) shall conduct impartial due process hearing in accordance with applicable state and federal laws, rules, and regulations. ALJs shall be in good standing with the State Bar of Georgia and attend the training session(s) provided by the department.

- Hearings shall be conducted by ALJs selected and appointed by OSAH. Upon receipt of notification that an impartial due process hearing has been requested, the OSAH shall assign an AU to the case. An AU may decline a case or withdraw from a particular case if the AU has a conflict if interest. In that event, OSAH shall assign another AU.

LSSs and SOPs shall be provided a list of trained ALJs, including their qualifications, through the OSAIT upon request.

Parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) may also receive a list of trained ALJs upon request to the OSAH. [refer to 34 CFR 300.508©j]

• The ALJs appointed by the OSAH shall not:

(a) Have a personal or professional interest that would conflict with his or her objectivity in the hearing; [refer to 34 CFR 300.508(a)(2)1]

(b) Be previously familiar with the student or the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s);

(c) Be an employee of the LSS/SOP or other public agency involved with the education or care of the student; [refer to 34 CFR 300.508 (a)(1)]

(d) Be previously personally familiar with the specific program or services of the LSS/SOP at issue in the grievance. Information arising solely from previous due process hearings shall not impair an administrative law judge's impartiality but information or person knowledge from other sources, including the education or employment of the administrative law judge's family shall impair that particular individual's impartiality in the particular case;

(e) When any factor or event may impair or appear to impair the impartiality of the administrative law judge, such factors shall be timely disclosed to all parties.

(f) Any person who otherwise qualifies to conduct an impartial due process hearing under this rule is not an employee of the state solely because he or she is paid by the state to serve as an AU. [refer to 34 CFR 300.508 (b)1]

(g) Be a local school board official or member.

**Procedures:** Each impartial due process hearing shall be conducted at a time and place reasonably convenient to the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) and student involved and in accordance with the following procedures.

(a) If the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) obtain an independent educational evaluation,

the results of the evaluation may be presented as evidence at a hearing. [refer to 34 CFR 300.502(c)(2)j]

(b) At least five business days prior to an impartial due process hearing, each party shall disclose to all other parties all evaluations completed by that date and recommendations based on the offering party's evaluations that the party intends to use at the hearing. [refer to 34 CFR 300.509(b)(1)]

(c) An AU may bar any party that fails to comply with paragraph b above from introducing the relevant evaluation or recommendation at the hearing without consent of the other party. [refer to 34 CFR 300.509(b)(2)j]

(d) The hearing shall be closed to the public unless the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) request(s) the AU to open the hearing to the public. [refer to 34 CFR 300.508©(ii)]

(e) The decision of the AU shall be mailed to the LSS/SOP and the parent(s)/guardian(s) after conclusion of the hearing as provided in the paragraph (2) of this rules. [refer to 34 CFR 300.511(b)(2)]

(1) The decision of the AU shall be final, unless appealed. [refer to 34 CFR 300.5 10]

(g) Any party aggrieved by the findings and decision of the AU has the right to bring civil action in any state court of competent jurisdiction or in a district court of the United States without regard to the amount in controversy as provided by Section 615 (i)(3) of IDEA and Section 300.513 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The department may charge a party, requesting the transmission of the record of an administrative proceeding to a state or federal court, 5.25 per page and mailing costs which shall be remitted prior to the transmission of the record. Transmission of the record shall not be delayed awaiting payment of the fee. The department may waive the fee on a case-by-case basis and if the fee would present an undue hardship upon the parent or student.

(h) Parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) shall have a right to obtain and receive all documents and records contained in the student's file, including during the pendency of a hearing. The files shall be provided within three days of the systems's receipt of the record request, except in extenuating circumstances, in which case the records shall be produced within five days. The cost of document copying and production shall be charged at 5.25 per page plus mailing charges. The LSS/SOP may waive the fee on a case-by-case basis or if the fee would present an undue hardship upon the parent or student. [refer to 34 CFR 300iO1; 300.5 10; 300.5 12(a)]

(i) The department shall transmit the findings and decisions of due process to the State Advisory Panel for Special Education after deleting any personally identifiable information. [refer to 34 CFR 300.508 (d)(1,2)]

## Hearing Rights

Any party to an impartial hearing has the right to:

- Be accompanied and advised by counsel and by individuals with special knowledge of or training with respect to the problems of students with disabilities. [refer to 34 CFR 300.509 (a)(1)]
- Present evidence and confront, cross-examine and compel the attendance of witnesses. [refer to 34 CFR 300.508 (a)(2)]
- Seek the Administrative Law Judge to prohibit the introduction of any evidence at the hearing that has not been disclosed to that party at least five business days before the hearing. [refer to 34 CFR 300.508 (a)(3)]
- Obtain a written or, at the option of the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s), electronic verbatim record of the hearing, at no cost. [refer to 34 CFR 300.509 (a)(4); 300.509(c)(2)]
- Obtain written or, at the option of the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s), electronic findings of fact and decisions, at no cost. [refer to 34 CFR 300.509(a)(5); 300.509(c)(2)]
- Obtain a list of all potential witnesses at least five business days before the hearing. If the witness list due to its length or other factors, does not reasonably disclose the potential witnesses in the hearing, any party or the administrative law judgment on his/her own motion, may require a party to amend his/her witness list to include only such persons who may actually testify.
- Parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) involved in hearings shall be given the right to have the student who is the subject of the hearing present. [refer to 34 CFR 300.509©(i)]
- The LSS/SOP shall inform the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) of any free or low-cost legal and other relevant services available in the area if the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) request(s) the information or the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) or the LSS/SOP initiate(s) a hearing.
- Parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) shall be informed that in any action or proceeding under 20 U.S.C. 1415, the courts may, in its discretion, award reasonable attorney's fees as part of the costs to the parent/guardian/surrogate of a student with a disability who is

the prevailing party. Funds under the IDEA may not be used to pay attorney's fees or costs of a party related to an action or proceeding under 20 U.S.C.1415. [refer to 34 CFR 300.513 (a); 300.513(b)(1)]

- Parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) involved in a hearing have a right to obtain all records concerning the student from the LSS/SOP more than five business days prior to the hearing. Such records shall include all information used in assessing the student or in evaluating the IEP, including all data as and report or summaries of such data.
- Parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) involved in a hearing have a right to have a right to have the hearing scheduled at a convenient impartial location.

- Parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) involved in a hearing do not waive any rights of confidentiality or privilege which otherwise exist under state or federal law by seeking a hearing or responding to the LSS/SOP hearing request.

- Generally, the LSS/SOP shall bear the burden forward with the evidence and burden of proof at any administrative hearing to establish that the proposed IEP is appropriate and provide FAPE. If the parents propose a placement that is more restrictive than provided by an existing, agreed upon IEP, the parents shall bear the burden of establishing that the more restrictive environment is appropriate consistent with the provisions of Rule 160-4-7-18 (g)(2)(f)(5), in hearings which address the issue of whether a student's behavior in a disciplinary matter constitutes a manifestation of the student's disability, the school system shall bear the burden of coming forward and the burden of proof. The AU shall retain the discretion to modify and apply these general principles to conform with the requirements of law and justice in individual cases under unique or unusual circumstances as determined by the ALJ.

- Parties involved in a hearing have a right to have the other party disclose the address of all potential witnesses and to have the issues or matters upon which they may testify identified as part of the five business day disclosure.

- Parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) involved in a hearing have a right to raise claims under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and under the Americans with Disabilities Act as part of the IDEA and state law due process hearing.

- Parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) involved in a hearing have a right to obtain such relief as the AUJ determines appropriate. This included the right to have the IEP or placement altered and to have FAPE and/or LRE resolved. This also includes the right to obtain payment for independent evaluations, for reimbursement for services, as permitted under law and for compensatory educational services.

### **Student's Status During Proceedings**

- Except as provided in Rule 160-4-7-.20 Student Management, Discipline and Suspension/Expulsion, during the pendency of any administrative or judicial proceedings involving an impartial due process hearing, unless the school system and the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) of the student agree(s) otherwise, the student involved in the hearing shall remain in his or her current educational placement. [refer to 34 CFR 300.514 (a)] If the hearing involves an application for initial admission to public school, the student, with the consent of the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s), shall be placed in the LSS program until the completion of all proceedings. [refer to 34 CFR 300.514(b)]
- A student age three through five who has received preschool services under IDEA may elect to remain in his/her last IDEA placement as public expense if the disagreement arose concerning the initial eligibility, IEP or placement determination of the LSS/SOP.
- Last current educational placement shall include the services provided in the IEP and all related services, including the transportation.
- If the decision of the administrative law judge in a due process hearing agrees with the student's parents that a change in placement is appropriate, such decision shall be treated as an agreement between the State or LSS and the parents for the purpose of subsection (h)(1) of this rule.

### **Expedited Due Process Hearing**

a. **General Information:** The expedited due process hearing is designed to (a) provide an avenue of appeal for parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) who disagree with the manifestation determination decision or with the placement of his/her student in an alternative education setting, and (b) to provide an avenue of appeal for a local school system if it maintains that it is dangerous for the student to remain in the current placement (placement prior to removal to an alternative education setting), all as provided in Rule 160-4-7-.14 Student Management Discipline. [refer to 34 CFR 300.524(c); 300.525(a); 300.526(c)]

b. **Student's Status During Proceeding:** Except when a parent/guardian/surrogate requests a hearing regarding the placement of a student in an appropriate interim alternative educational setting for the same amount of time that a student without a disability would be subject to discipline (but for not more than 45 calendar days) or to challenge the interim alternative educational setting or manifestation determination, the "stay put" provision applies if a parent/guardian/surrogate requests an expedited due process hearing to challenge a determination that the behavior of the student was not a manifestation of the student's disability. [refer to 34CFR 300.524 ©; 300.526]

**c. Time Lines:**

1. The expedited due process hearing shall be held within 10 business days of the receipt of request, unless an extension is agreed to by both parties; however, in no case shall such an extension affect the time line requirement contained in paragraph ©(2) below.

2. No later than 45 calendar days after the receipt of a request for an expedited due process hearing. The AU's decision shall be mailed to the parties, without exceptions or extensions. [refer to 34 CFR 300.528 (b)(1)]

d. Request for expedited due process hearing: If either the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) or the public agency requests an expedited due process hearing, the local superintendent or his or her designee shall notify the department's Legal Services and request the appointment of an AU. Parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) and LSSs are encouraged to use the form "Request for Expedited Due Process Hearing" to request an expedited due process hearing.

e. Administrative Law Judge Appointment: The requirements for AU appointments set forth above, paragraph (1)(e), shall also apply for expedited due process hearings.

£ Procedures: Each expedited due process hearing shall be conducted at a time and place reasonably convenient to the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) and student involved and in accordance with the following procedures.

1. If the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) obtain an independent education evaluation, the results of the evaluation may be presented as evidence at the expedited hearing.

2. At least three business days prior to an expedited hearing, each party shall disclose to all other parties all evaluations completed by that date and recommendations based on the offering party's evaluations that the party intends to use at the expedited hearing.

3. An ALJ may bar any party that fails to comply with paragraph (2) (0(2) above from introducing the relevant evaluation or recommendation at the hearing without consent of the other party.

4. The expedited hearing shall be closed to the public unless the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) request(s) the AU to open the hearing to the public.

5. In reviewing a decision with respect to the manifestation determination, the AU shall determine whether the USS has demonstrated that the student's behavior was not a manifestation of the student's disability, consistent with requirements in Rule 160-4—7-.14 Student Management/Discipline and with 20 U.S.C. 1415. [refer t 34 CFR 300.525(b)QI]

6. In reviewing a decision to place a student in an interim alternative education setting, the ALJ shall apply the standards identified in Rule 160-4-7-.14 Student Management/Discipline and under 20 U.S.C. 1415 [refer to 34 CFR 300i25 (b)(2)]

7. The decision of the AU shall be mailed to the LSS and the parent(s)/guardian(s)/surrogate(s) no later than 45 calendar days after the receipt of the request for the expedited hearing, without exceptions or extensions. [refer to 34 CFR 300.528(b)(1)]

8. The decision of the AU shall be final, unless appealed. [refer to 34 CFR 300.528(d)]

Reprinted from the  
Georgia State Board of Education Rules  
Rules Pertaining to Special Education  
Adopted: August 10, 2000