

DIANE M. WILLIS

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EDUCATION

J.D., University of San Diego
School of Law

PRACTICE AREAS

Special Education

BAR ADMISSION

California, 1999

OVERVIEW

Diane M. Willis is Senior Counsel in the San Diego office. Her practice primarily focuses on special education, general education issues, and matters involving charter schools, including special education, MOUs, and oversight. Ms. Willis has successfully represented school districts in all phases of special education disputes including resolution meetings, mediations, administrative hearings, and federal court appeals of special education decisions.

EXPERIENCE

Ms. Willis' expertise in special education over the past 14 years has led to numerous special education decisions in favor of the school districts she represents. Ms. Willis has successfully completed fifteen due process cases in which the school district prevailed on all issues presented for hearing in the vast majority of cases. Ms. Willis represents school districts and SELPAs in all phases of special education including IEP team meetings, resolution meetings, mediations, and due process hearings. Ms. Willis assists school districts in planning and programming decisions to meet a student's unique educational needs in a manner that conforms to the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and has attained in depth knowledge of what is needed in an IEP to meet those requirements. She also represents school districts during Office of Civil Rights investigations and California Department of Education compliance complaint investigations. In addition Ms. Willis has represented districts at expulsion hearings, conducted Title V investigations, and prepared summary reports.

SIGNIFICANT CASES

Student v. Carlsbad Unified School District (SEHO 2004) (District prevailed. Autistic preschool student did not require 40 hour per week in-home ABA program, rather a school based 12 hour per week program was sufficient to meet educational needs.)

Student v. Corona Norco Unified School District (OAH 2006) (District prevailed. Student not entitled to FAPE because parent refused to consent to assessment plan. Parent's request for placement in private school denied.)

Student v. Los Angeles Unified School District (OAH 2007) (District prevailed. Student not eligible for special education under category of emotionally disturbed. Parents denied reimbursement for out-of-state placement.)

Student v. Anaheim City School District (OAH 2008) (District prevailed. Autistic student in 3rd grade did not require an in-home ABA program; rather a school based special day class program with ABA component was sufficient to meet educational needs.)

Student v. Hermosa Beach City School District (OAH 2012) (District prevailed. Autistic student unilaterally placed in private school for 5th, 6th, and 7th grade did not require placement in a private school. District offered appropriate placement in general education classes with support services. Parents request for 3 years of reimbursement denied. Parent appealed decision to federal district court and lost appeal on all issues.)

Student v. Los Angeles Unified School District (OAH 2011) (District prevailed. District not required to conduct vision processing assessment by a licensed optometrist and not required to provide vision therapy.)

Student v. Los Angeles Unified School District (OAH 2013) (District prevailed. District speech and language assessment was appropriate, parent not entitled to IEE, and speech services were adequate to meet educational needs.)

PRESENTER EXPERIENCE

Ms. Willis has presented at the ACSA Special Education Symposium on topics such as conducting appropriate assessments, developing procedurally and substantively appropriate IEPs, and planning for IEP team meetings. Additionally Ms. Willis has been a key speaker at Lozano Smith's Special Education Legal Consortium (SELC) for several years. At the school site level Ms. Willis conducts special education workshops on a variety of topics, including discipline, manifestation determinations, how to conduct IEP meetings, developing appropriate IEPs, and conducting case analysis before hearing (knowing when to hold and when to fold).

EDUCATION

Ms. Willis received her Juris Doctor from the University of San Diego School of law in 1998. Ms. Willis was admitted to the California Bar in 1999 and is admitted to practice before the U.S. District Court, Southern and Central Districts. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from the University of West Florida in 1977 and attended Georgetown University. Ms. Willis also worked on a master's degree in clinical psychology at San Diego State University, completing all coursework, including neuropsychology, analytical statistics, and experimental design.