



Santa Barbara County Education Office

4400 Cathedral Oaks Rd, PO Box 6307, Santa Barbara, CA 93160-6307
Telephone: (805) 964-4711 • FAX: (805) 964-4712 • sbceo.org

Susan C. Salcido, Superintendent of Schools

May 5, 2025

TO: District and Charter School Superintendents
Adelante Charter School, Family Partnership Charter School, Manzanita
Public Charter School, Santa Barbara Charter School

FROM: Dr. Susan Salcido

**RE: **Announcing Dr. Stacey McCrath-Smith as incoming executive director of
Santa Barbara County SELPA****

Earlier today, the SELPA JPA board appointed Dr. Stacey McCrath-Smith as the new executive director of the Santa Barbara County Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA), effective July 1, 2025. Dr. McCrath-Smith brings over 30 years of experience in special education and executive leadership to this role.

Dr. McCrath-Smith succeeds Dr. Ray Avila, who has served as SELPA's executive director since 2018. During his tenure, Dr. Avila has led initiatives such as the G.R.O.W. program, a therapeutic wellness model with classrooms throughout the county, and the creation of the Wrap-Around Services Team, supporting students with emotional and behavioral challenges. He has worked closely with SBCEO on developing the countywide Inclusion Network, helping districts and schools deepen their inclusive practices and learning environments. His last day will be June 30, 2025.



Dr. Avila reflected on his time with SELPA: "It has been an honor to serve the students, families, and educators of Santa Barbara County. Together, we've built programs that prioritize the well-being and success of our most vulnerable students. Throughout my tenure, I've been guided by

a deep belief in the power of inclusive education and the importance of meeting students where they are. I am proud of the collaborative partnerships we've fostered with districts and community agencies, and the steps we've taken to expand mental health supports and wrap-around services."

Dr. McCrath-Smith currently serves as the SELPA director at Poway Unified School District in San Diego, where she has strengthened district compliance with state and federal laws, built fiscally responsible systems, and supported the expansion of inclusive education practices. Her career began in Los Angeles as an elementary school teacher and progressed through roles including non-public school principal, middle and high school principal in Washington state, director of special education in Seattle Public Schools, and director of secondary special education in the Lake Washington School District.

She holds a Doctor of Education degree in Executive Leadership from Seattle Pacific University and a Master's Degree in Special Education from California State University, Northridge. Dr. McCrath-Smith is also a former student of Westmont College and is excited to return to Santa Barbara to continue her advocacy for students with disabilities.

"My passion for special education and leadership drives me to continuously seek innovative solutions and build collaborative partnerships that support the diverse needs of our students and communities," Dr. McCrath-Smith said. "I am thrilled to return to Santa Barbara and look forward to working with dedicated educators and stakeholders to impact and strengthen services for students with disabilities in Santa Barbara County."

The Santa Barbara County SELPA is a collaborative consortium of local education agencies (LEAs) that ensures the delivery of high-quality special education services. SELPA coordinates resources, provides professional development, and supports compliance with state and federal regulations to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

Please join me in welcoming Dr. McCrath-Smith and in extending our deepest appreciation to Dr. Avila, whom we wish the very best in his retirement.