

# **CHARTER SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE PROCEDURES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION, GIFTED AND STUDENT SERVICES (CHILD FIND)**

The Board of Education assures that a free and appropriate education is available to all eligible students residing within the District. Programs for students in need of specially designed instruction; accommodations to access instruction and extracurricular activities; and enrichment, and/or acceleration within the curriculum are available without cost to parents. The District welcomes and encourages parents to partner with school personnel in the development of educational programming for their children. Parents with questions or concerns should begin by speaking with the building administrator at their child's school, or by calling the Pupil Services Office at 814-480-5809.

## **A. SCREENING**

Every school in the Charter School of Excellence has a screening team that includes a building level administrator, school psychologist, teacher, and counselor. This team routinely reviews individual student's status relative to social, emotional, behavioral, or instructional needs and may make a referral for interventions and supports. Referrals may be made to community service agencies. Parental input and permission is included in designing specific strategies to promote student success.

## **B. INSTRUCTIONAL INTERVENTION**

Data regarding student response to research based instructional and behavioral strategies are routinely gathered and analyzed to determine efficacy of interventions as well as what other supports may be needed. A comprehensive profile is developed to track student progress. Analysis of student response to targeted interventions is a regular education initiative that utilizes Title I and District funded collaborative support. If adequate progress is not evident through the response to intervention process, a referral for formal testing may be considered to determine if the student is eligible for special education. Parents may accept or decline the district's request to evaluate their child for specialized services. Parents may also initiate the referral process at any time throughout the intervention process by contacting their building principal.

## **C. REFERRAL TO SPECIAL EDUCATION**

1. Students who continue to demonstrate academic and/or behavioral difficulties may be recommended by their school team for testing to determine eligibility for special education. Parents of school-aged children concerned about their child's ability to learn or their social, emotional, or physical development may request an evaluation conducted by the District free of charge to determine if their child meets state criteria for special education services. To request an evaluation, please contact your building principal or Pupil Services at 814-480-5908.

2. The referral process begins by a "Permission to Evaluate" form being issued by the District to the parents listing the reasons for referral, the types of assessments that will be conducted, and the dates by which the evaluation will be concluded. Parent input and participation is an important component of this process. A school psychologist will lead and coordinate the evaluation by which data is examined and a recommendation is made to the school team, which includes parents. Written permission from parents is required before a formal evaluation may begin. An "Evaluation Report" will be provided within 60 calendar days of receipt of parent permission (excluding summer vacation) that will be the basis by which eligibility is determined. Parents may decline the District's request to conduct an initial evaluation or the District's offer of Special education for their child.

3. A two-part determination for eligibility is required in Pennsylvania. Students must first be identified according to the disability categories as listed in Chapter 14 of the School Code and must also demonstrate a need for specially designed instruction. Eligible students will have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) developed to

address their specific needs. Students who have been diagnosed as having a disability but are not in need of Special education may be eligible for a Chapter 15 Plan (see section F regarding Chapter 15 Service Plans).

4. Notice of Recommended Educational Placement (NOREP) indicating parental approval is required before services may be provided. Parents who are not in agreement with the District's initial recommendation for the provision of Special education services may decline to accept them by marking 'no' on the NOREP. Procedural Safeguards Notice (PSN) of parental rights is provided at IEP meetings or when a change in identification or placement is being considered. Parents may access the PSN on the District website or may call the Pupil Services office to receive a copy of the Notice.

5. Parents may revoke their consent for the provision of Special education services to their children at any time by submitting a letter to their building principal or the Pupil Services office. The district will issue a Notice of Recommended Educational Placement acknowledging that the parent wishes to remove their child from Special education. Upon receipt of the revocation request, the District will cease services after ten (10) calendar days and the student will return to regular education.

#### **D. LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE)**

1. The Charter School of Excellence offers a continuum of services for students with disabilities that begins with the school and class that the student would otherwise attend through the availability of separate schools for students with disabilities.

2. Placement decisions are made by IEP teams consisting of parents, school staff, and others who have relevant information to contribute. The first consideration for placement always begins with the regular education classroom and an examination of what supplementary aids and supports could be reasonably calculated to facilitate student success. If the team determines that additional supports beyond the regular education classroom are required, consideration is given to incrementally more restrictive environments that will provide appropriate instruction. The District endeavors to support differently abled learners in the general education environment through the provision of differentiated and collaborative instruction in all classroom settings grades K-12, as well as for students up to 21 years of age who elect to continue their education after their typical year of completion with same-aged peers.

#### **E. SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

1. The Charter School of Excellence provides a full continuum of services to meet the needs of individual students with disabilities. Instruction is aligned to state standards utilizing the general education curriculum. Services include:

- a. **Autistic Support (AS)** Students identified along the Autism Spectrum and who need a specialized, highly structured instructional approach participate in these classes. Students may spend a minimal amount of time in this type of classroom or may spend a majority of their school day utilizing the intensive supports, depending on the needs of each individual child. Communication, academic, and behavioral skills are the focus of instruction in AS classes, which have a low student/teacher ratio and specially trained staff.
- b. **Emotional Support (ES)** These weekly classes assist students who demonstrate behavioral and/or mental health issues that interfere with learning in the general education setting. Pro-social and self-regulatory skill development is taught, in addition to meeting target goals identified through Functional Behavioral Assessments and supported by Positive Behavior Intervention plans.
- c. **Hearing / Visual Support (HI, VI)** The District contracts with Intermediate Unit #5 for the provision of services to students with hearing or vision disabilities. The use of assistive devices, training for interpreters, and consultation for specific students are examples of how HI or VI students can be supported in special education and regular education classes.
- d. **Learning Support (LS)** Students identified as needing Learning Support typically spend a majority of their school day in their regular grade level classes with non-disabled peers. Supplemental aids and supports are provided, as is differentiated instruction in the least restrictive environment. Some students may need more individualized services and may receive core content instruction in a special education classroom while continuing to participate in elective classes with typical peers.

- e. **Life Skills Support (LSS)** An emphasis on functional daily living skills via a modified curriculum through a blended curriculum and the use of the Unique Learning System and community-based experiences are provided to students in this program. Job sampling and work exploration opportunities are available through the Work Experience Program. High School students will attend the Skills Center in a self-contained program.
- f. **Speech and Language Support (S/L)** All buildings are served by qualified speech and language therapists who consult with teachers and provide individual instruction to students in special education and regular education class settings. Eligible students typically have vocabulary and/or articulation needs that impact learning and classroom participation. Speech and language therapists collaborate with all kindergarten and some targeted first grade teachers to provide direct instruction and consultative services to students with communication delays. Speech and language pathologists may also provide therapy as a related service to students identified as having other disabilities. Therapy may be provided in a small group therapy session either in or outside of the classroom or as consultative support in the regular education setting.

2. **TRANSITION SERVICES** Students aged 14 and over who have IEPs must have Individual Transition Plans written as a component of their program. Transition services are facilitated by Special education teachers and administrators to develop post-secondary related goals to be included in the IEP. Vocational aptitude, surveys, and career interests are reviewed in the planning of transition related activities. A summary of academic, social, and behavioral performance is provided to parents upon graduation that may be shared with prospective employers. The Student Transitioning to Adulthood Resource Team (START) TEAM focuses on the needs of students of transition age. This is a collaborative effort with community agencies including Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), Stairways, and Erie County Case Management (ECCM), and other local agency providers. Starting with those students closest to graduation and Intellectually Disabled, the team focuses on community and school supports to enhance movement to adult life. Special Ed staff requires the gathering of specific information in the week prior to the three times a year meetings to provide the community team with the most recent information about each student. The support of the principals is essential to the accurate, smooth identification of needs and delivery of services.

3. **PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS** A copy of the Procedural Safeguards Notice is routinely provided to parents at initial evaluations or whenever a change in placement is being considered. Parents may request a copy at any time. The District's policies comply with state and federal regulations regarding educational rights and privacy.

4. **CONFIDENTIALITY** The Charter School of Excellence protects the confidentiality of personally identifiable information regarding students with disabilities. A Release of Information signed by parents is required before school district staff may speak with or share documents with anyone outside the district. Parents have the right to review their child's records and may do so by contacting the child's school. Please call the Pupil Services office if you have questions or need more information about this process.

## **F. CHAPTER 15 SERVICE PLANS**

1. Federal regulations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act call for the provision of services to students with disabilities who are not in need of Special education. These rights and support system are set forth under Chapter 15 of the Pennsylvania School Code.

2. Students who have a mental or physical impairment that "substantially limits a major life activity" are entitled to have written plans developed outlining specific accommodations they need to ensure equitable school access and participation. Parents or teachers may request a meeting with the student's building principal and school psychologist to document the student's diagnosis and need for accommodations in the regular education program. The plan is reviewed annually to determine continued eligibility and student need.

## **G. GIFTED SUPPORT (GS)**

1. Gifted Support services are provided for students who meet eligibility criteria as listed in Chapter 16 of the Pennsylvania School Code. Identification is based upon exceptional cognitive ability, leadership skills, creativity, and other outstanding qualities. In addition to ability and achievement testing, a rubric is used to determine eligibility and to identify those students for whom a Gifted Individualized Educational Program (GIEP) will be developed. GIEP goals are linked to the state standards, and measurable progress monitoring will be reported to parents.

2. A continuum of service offers, but is not limited to, pull out sessions, cluster grouping, and collaborative instruction within the general education setting for the provision of enrichment and acceleration. Secondary students may participate in Advanced Placement courses and Honors College as well as Concurrent College enrollment.

3. The Transition Coordinator serves as case managers for eligible students, collaborate with general education teachers for the provision of acceleration and challenge in various settings, and disseminate written documentation of progress towards goals.