

Special Needs Policy

Introduction

Inclusion is an ongoing process that aims to increase access and engagement in learning for all students by identifying and removing barriers. (*Learning diversity and the IB Programmes: Special educational needs within the International Baccalaureate Programmes*, 2010:3)

Utilizing the IB Standards and Practices and the beliefs set forth in our mission statements, Academy District 20 IB schools strive to support a diverse student body of learners. Whether it be through teaching and learning strategies, resources, or collaboration with experts and parents, our students are supported throughout their IB programmes. All students should have access to an appropriate education in order to be a lifelong learner.

Special Education Overview for Academy School District 20

District 20's service delivery for children on IEPs is based on individual needs (needs-driven, not driven solely by disability category)

- Students are placed in the least restrictive environment that will provide educational benefit. This is a mandate in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)
- Special education teachers have the knowledge and expertise to assist classroom teachers with accommodations and/or modifications that might be needed for individual students.
- MTSS model is utilized for all students needing interventions.

Talented and Gifted Overview for Academy School District 20

The Colorado Department of Education defines "**Gifted and Talented Children**" as those persons between the ages of four and twenty-one whose abilities, talents, and potential for accomplishment are so exceptional or developmentally advanced that they require special provisions to meet their educational programming needs. Gifted and talented children are hereafter referred to as gifted students. Children under five who are gifted may also be provided with early childhood special education services. Gifted students include gifted students with disabilities (i.e. twice exceptional) and students with exceptional abilities or potential from all socio-economic and ethnic, cultural populations. Gifted students are capable of high performance, exceptional production, or exceptional learning behavior by virtue of any or a combination of these areas of giftedness. Intellectual ability is exceptional capability or potential recognized through cognitive processes in:

- Specific Academic Aptitude - Language Arts, Mathematics, Science
- Creative or Productive Thinking

- Leadership Abilities
- Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Musical or Psychomotor Abilities

The major responsibility for meeting the needs of talented and gifted students at the middle school level is shared by the student's academic team teachers, the Talented and Gifted Coordinator, and the student. School exploratory and enrichment classes also offer students opportunities for further talent development. In addition, some students have classes developed to meet their needs. Identified students are offered opportunities geared to their specific strength area(s).

Students new to the district are considered for TAG services upon entry into the District. Students with highly exceptional needs may learn academic, social emotional, and self-advocacy skills through the use of an ALP (Advanced Learning Plan). In addition, they are provided opportunities to work on these areas through small group instruction with the TAG Coordinator. A building facilitator for talented and gifted programming works with identified students and their parents and teachers to carry out the process of developing an ALP, rich with specific academic and affective learning goals.

The High School

Programming for special education students reflects our philosophy that all students benefit from active involvement in the larger community of Rampart High School and the Pikes Peak Region. Rampart High School provides resource services to students with Individual Educational Plans (IEPs). Each student is assigned a special education case manager who manages the services and resources for the student. Support and services are provided through consultation, direct and indirect support in the mainstream classrooms, and direct support in the special education area. Accommodations and modifications are provided as outlined in the IEP. Students are scheduled in regular education classes with appropriate support in all content areas. Study skills type classes are available, for credit, in the resource area. These classes involve supported and supervised study time, assistance with organization, and close scrutiny of ongoing academic credit progress in classes. Upon meeting graduation requirements, all students at Rampart High School receive the same diploma. District 20 Transition Services are available for some students with more severe disabilities, to the end of the semester in which the student turns 21 years of age. District 20 Transition Services provides for continuing education and training, transitional life skills, coordination of community services and/or vocational/work experiences.

For talented and gifted students, opportunities to enroll in more rigorous and accelerated course work are offered at the high school. For some of our MYP students this includes

advanced math classes. Elective and extracurricular activities provide additional avenues for students with special abilities and talents.

The TAG facilitator at each high school assists students in determining programming that will best meet their individual needs. College counselors also assist high school students as they prepare for college. Student self-advocacy is encouraged and becomes more and more important as goals for the future are decided.

Definition of Inclusion

In the document *Special Educational Needs within the IB Programmes*, “inclusion is more about responding positively to each individual’s unique needs ... (and) “less about marginalizing students because of their differences” (3). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) mandates that districts provide services to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment possible; that is, that they are educated with students without disabilities to the greatest extent feasible. To this end, Academy School District 20 provides special education and related services at each school site. This model increases the possibility of providing an appropriate education to students with disabilities at their neighborhood school.

Each school is staffed with a special education teacher and a speech/language pathologist. In addition, itinerant staff persons (school social worker, school psychologist, school nurse, occupational and physical therapist, and others) are available to complete assessments, participate in the IEP process, and provide services as necessary. All special education professional staff is appropriately licensed through the Colorado Department of Education. Paraprofessionals are often available to assist in implementation of students' IEPs.

Mountain Ridge Middle School and Rampart High School utilize the inclusion model. The Special Education teacher collaborates with general education classroom teachers to provide support and specifically designed instruction to meet the unique needs of all students. Responsibilities of special education teachers include working in the classroom setting, working with individual or small groups of students to reteach/reinforce concepts taught, and modifying curriculum and assessments based on student need. The special education teacher must be an experienced and knowledgeable teacher who can provide leadership to help build teacher capacity for utilizing differentiated pedagogical strategies in the classroom. The special education teachers also teach supplemental classes that focus on academic gaps and are tailored to specific goals and student needs. This class is a time where students track and reflect data

relevant to their individual goals, learn techniques for advocacy, and focus on organizational strategies as well as other approaches to learning strategies.

The Talented and Gifted (TAG) program utilizes a combination of a push-in and pull-out curricular opportunity model. All classroom teachers are responsible for differentiating for identified TAG students in their area of ability. The TAG Coordinator assists in the design and modification of assignments and assessments by presenting to staff and assisting with the development of differentiation through the IB Unit Planners. The TAG Coordinator also teaches courses that focus on the students knowing themselves as learners in topics such as teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

(Standard B2, Practices 8 and 9)

Definition of Differentiation

In the past, differentiation was either for the talented and gifted student or for the struggling learner. Now it is an accepted practice for all students. Tomlinson (1999, 2001, 2003, 2008) states that differentiated instruction may be conceptualized as a teacher's response to the diverse learning needs of a student. The special educational needs within the IB programme guide states, "Differentiation is seen as the process of identifying, **with** each learner, the most effective strategies for achieving agreed goals" (4).

(Standard C1, Practice 6)

Four Principles of Good Practice

According to the guide published by the International Baccalaureate Organization, *Special educational needs (SEN) within the International Baccalaureate programmes*, "Teachers new to IB programmes may require factual and procedural knowledge when teaching SEN students, such as:

- information about factors that affect a student's learning, particularly with regard to inquiry-based learning
- how best to respond to the student's needs
- how to differentiate and match teaching approaches to the student need, as indicated in the school's special needs policy
- knowledge of technology that has assisted in alleviating and removing barriers to learning."

Keeping this information at the forefront and aligning ourselves with IB's requirements, we have identified our own principles of good practice. We have referenced the *IB MYP Standards and Practices* that we support with this policy.

1. Affirming identity and building self-esteem

The Special Education/Talented and Gifted Departments are responsible for evaluating students' needs through IEPs and ALPs. These needs include behavioral, social-emotional, physical, and academic. Goals are written in collaboration with the multi-disciplinary team based on progress monitoring, formal and informal observation, classroom performance, and student's academic achievement. The classroom teachers, special education teachers, and TAG Coordinator work in collaboration to ensure accommodations are met and differentiation is implemented as appropriate for individual students in the general education setting. Extracurricular and co-curricular opportunities are developed and organized to enhance student skills, abilities, and talents.

- We promote an environment that welcomes and embraces the diversity of all learners (*Standard A, Practice 4, 6 and Practice 9, Requirement a.*)
 - utilize an inclusion model with academic and social skills support
 - utilize a co-teaching model in math and language and literature courses
 - implement cooperative learning groups
 - support opportunities to engage in all extra-curricular activities and intramural sports
 - enhance learning by valuing and using the diversity of cultural perspectives
 - encourage student sharing of background and culture
 - celebrate important historical events from other countries that are modified to student ability levels
 - use multi-media to expose students to various cultures and perspectives
- Open and frequent communication includes:
 - reports to parents regarding progress toward individual student goals
 - bi-monthly special education department meetings with itinerants
 - weekly team meetings with general education teachers and administrators

2. Valuing prior knowledge

(*Standard C1, Practices 4, 6 and 7; Standard C2, Practice 3; Standard 3, Practice 3*)

- activate learner's prior understanding
- use students' prior understanding to differentiate tasks and activities to build up further background knowledge necessary for new learning

- record information in learning profiles that support planning for future differentiation and inform teacher practice
- consider the time and strategies necessary for activation and building up background knowledge when planning a unit of work or lesson
- teachers pre-test students to determine level of mastery of previously learned content.
- students often draw on prior knowledge and may choose to develop compacted opportunities to learn new content
- teachers challenge students to remain curious as they investigate and plan for their MYP Personal Project.
- community and service experiences honor prior knowledge, as students explore extended volunteer opportunities.

3. Scaffolding

(Standard C1, Practice 6; Standard C3, Practices 7, 9, 14, 15)

- Teachers collaborate with general education classroom teachers to provide support and specifically designed instruction to meet the unique needs of all students

The special education teachers and TAG coordinator teach supplemental classes and /or co-teach classes that focus on academic gaps or are tailored to specific goals and student needs. These classes provide a time for students to track and reflect data relevant to their individual goals, learn techniques for advocacy, and focus on organizational strategies as well as other approaches to learning strategies.

Teachers work in the classroom setting with all individuals and/or small groups of students to reteach/reinforce concepts taught, and accommodate curriculum and assessments based on student need. The special education teacher and TAG coordinator must be a highly qualified, experienced and knowledgeable teachers who can provide leadership to help build teacher capacity for utilizing differentiated pedagogical strategies in the classroom such as:

- use of differentiated graphic organizers
- use of visual aids, demonstrations, dramatizations
- instruction in small, structured collaborative groups
- adjust verbiage to suit learners ability/understanding
- use of native language or best language to develop ideas

4. Extended learning

(Standard C3, Practices 10, 11)

All classroom teachers are responsible for differentiating for identified TAG students in their area of ability. The TAG Coordinator assists in the design and modification of assignments and assessments by presenting differentiation techniques. Students are supported in advanced learning opportunities in each subject area based on the MYP unit planners.

- Provide multiple opportunities for learner interaction with rich materials and experiences such as:
 - personalized learning through digital tools
 - voice, choice and agency in how they choose to demonstrate their knowledge of content or skills
 - enrichments, electives and/or exploratories and clubs
 - leveled reading materials: non-fiction, novels, short stories, poetry, etc.
 - TAG and Special Education students are grouped together for MYP study halls at the high school level, learning labs, and/or Mountain Time, the middle school's advisory program
 - learning can be extended through the personal project as well as through community and service hours
 - use of assistive technology to enable learners with language needs to access material for metacognitive engagement

Conclusion

Both Mountain Ridge Middle School and Rampart High School are committed to meeting the needs of all students. In collaboration with specialists and parents and by following all mandated laws, we strive to educate and advance all learners to the best of their abilities. Utilizing the learner profile attributes of open-minded, communicators, and caring, our students are nurtured, supported, and challenged to take control of their own education as they become lifelong learners.

Works Cited

Meeting student learning diversity in the classroom. International Baccalaureate Organization. May 2013. PDF file.

Special educational needs within the IB programmes. International Baccalaureate Organization. August 2010. PDF file.

Special Education Services. Academy District 20. August 2014. Web. 22 Apr. 2014. Hyperlink
<<http://www.asd20.org/departments/ls/sped/Pages/sped-services.aspx>>

Reviewed by:

Shawn Reed Parsons, Matt Janes, Cheri Fuller, Jimmi Wright, Sheri Kloster, Kathy Potter, MiKayla Peck, Leslie Hicks, Max Kruse, Christine Draper, Kari Kiser
Updated February 27, 2019