



## **Inclusion/Special Educational Needs Policy**

### **Philosophy**

District wide philosophy articulates the rights and abilities of all students to learn and establishes a foundation for which all teachers work together to teach all students. An inclusive approach to education considers the general education environment as the preferred option for all students. In inclusive schools, all educators share responsibility for meeting the needs of all students.

### **Mission**

Students with a wide range of abilities and diverse needs will participate in general education. These environments are interactive and stimulating, structured around principles that acknowledge and celebrate the inherent diversity in a group of similarly aged learners.

### **Federal and State Requirements**

Through the Exceptional Student Education Department, our District offers a free and appropriate public education in compliance with the federally mandated Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). A continuum of services and programs is available to meet the individual needs of students requiring special education, ages 3 through 21. Services and related services are provided per an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and are based on each child's unique needs, as related to present levels of academic achievement and functional performance. The Exceptional Student Education Department (Special Education) coordinates the provision of programs with the District's School Assignment Office. Special education services are provided in all of the three attendance zones - East, West and South. With the exception of very specialized low-incidence programs, students will attend a school within the geographical school attendance zone of residence.

### **Section 504 Overview**

With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is receiving more and more attention. A recent joint memorandum from the U.S. Department of Education and the Office for Civil Rights regarding the eligibility of students with attention deficit disorders reiterated the requirements of Section 504 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

To be eligible for the protection under Section 504, an individual must meet the definition of a handicapped person. This definition is:

*Any person who (i) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person's major life activities, (ii) has a record of such an impairment, or (iii) is regarded as having such an impairment.*

Major life activities include, but are not limited to, self-care, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and walking. Section 504 covers only those persons with a disability who would otherwise be qualified to participate and benefit from the programs or other activities receiving federal financial assistance. All ESE students fall under Section 504 and necessary accommodations are specified in the IEP.

Section 504 assures equal opportunities for children and youth with disabilities in schools receiving federal funds—pre-schools, elementary and secondary schools, and postsecondary institutions. Agencies that persist in acts of discrimination face the loss of federal funds. Along with school districts, this includes colleges and universities, vocational education and adult education programs, state and local governments, places of employment, hospitals and clinics, and public and private groups of all kinds which receive federal financial assistance.

In the state of Florida, all educators are required to earn 20 ESE in-service points in order to apply for recertification of their professional teaching certificate.

## **Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

The continuum of services may be provided in a variety of settings, which include general classrooms, resource rooms, separate full-time or near full-time classrooms, specialized center schools, and hospital homebound. The IEP team, which includes parent input, determines the amount and frequency of special education services and regular education participation. Numerous service delivery models are available in Lee County, including general education, intensive reading, collaborative-teaching, communication disorders, and full-time center schools. Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Behavioral Support, Counseling and Special Transportation are also provided as needed. Special education services are provided for children and young adults with learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, emotional/behavioral disabilities, language or speech impairments, visual impairments, autism spectrum disorder, hearing impairment, other health impairment, and developmental delay.

## **Eligibility**

Students are eligible for accommodations after they have been properly evaluated and determined eligible for services. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is "an assessment and intervention process for systematically monitoring student progress and making decisions about the need for instructional modifications or increasingly intensified services using progress monitoring data" (NRCLD, 2006). As such, the School District of Lee County has created a practice that is designed

to lead a school-based team through the MTSS problem-solving process in order to best address student needs. This practice should assist the team in the problem-solving and decision-making process. It is comprehensive, and allows the team to effectively use data to match research-based and/or evidenced-based interventions with student needs. Additionally, this approach ensures that the district is in compliance with state-adopted rules and federal mandates.

The MTSS framework is built upon the philosophy that instruction and interventions may be intensified to better meet the needs of individual students. Florida has adopted a three-tiered model, with the tiers representing a continuum of student support. The tiers do not represent placements or procedural steps, but rather varying levels of instructional intensity. All students receive the core instruction (Tier I). In addition to the core, some students may require more strategic (Tier II) or intensive/targeted (Tier III) levels of support in order to be successful.

It is important to remember that MTSS is a problem-solving process for addressing the academic and/or behavioral needs of students, not a procedure for getting students evaluated for special programs or services. However, should the need arise, MTSS is part of the evaluation process for ESE eligibility decisions. The goal of this focused attempt is to provide meaningful and specific interventions that clearly address a student's individual needs. Our mission is to ensure that every student is provided appropriate instruction using proven research-based strategies.

At Lexington, the MTSS team consists of the Guidance Counselor, School Psychologist, School Social Worker, Reading Coach, an Administrator, and relevant teaching staff.

## **Accommodations**

Through the IEP or Section 504 planning process, a team of professionals, family members, and the student makes decisions about which accommodations the student needs for instruction and for state and district testing programs. The team will use information from an evaluation and the student's learning and behavioral needs, when determining the type of accommodation that may be necessary. Some examples of common accommodations for ESE and 504 students are:

- Flexible Presentation
  - Colored overlays
  - Highlighters
  - Reading of passages and answer choices for Math and Science and/or directions
  - Verbal encouragement
  - Student reads directions back to you (checking for understanding)
  - Using paper form of test when it is a computer based test
- Flexible Responding
  - Student answers directly in test booklet
  - Checking periodically that student is bubbling answers correctly
  - Dictation
- Flexible Scheduling
  - Testing over several brief sessions
  - Extended time
- Flexible Setting

- Testing with familiar person/place
- Small group or individual setting
- Opportunity for movement

In addition to these accommodations, English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students may be provided limited assistance in their heritage language and use an approved dictionary.

## **Inclusion**

At Lexington Middle School, we believe that an Inclusion Plan ensures the maximum opportunity for the participation of all individuals in every aspect of our community. It guarantees the provision of services and supports necessary for all individuals to participate and be successful in school. Support and services are provided in the general education classroom, and there is collaboration between the general and special educator. The benefits of an Inclusion program include but are not limited to:

- Reduced fear of human differences
- Increased comfort and awareness
- Opportunities for leadership through peer supports
- More time spent working cooperatively
- Positive attitude toward school
- Improved self-esteem
- Improved citizenship

## **Life Skills**

Lexington Middle School houses one of the designated Life Skills program for the South Zone of the School District of Lee County. Students receive instruction based on the Sunshine State Standards Access Points in functional academics. Instruction is also focused on daily living skills, self-care skills, motor skills, pre-vocational and vocational training, social skills, and recreation and the use of leisure time that is age appropriate and community referenced. Community based instruction and vocational education are provided for students as determined relevant for each student.

Our students are integrated into the general education population to the maximum extent possible. They participate in exploratory classes with the general education population, have lunch in the cafeteria, and attend assemblies, and pep rallies. Our Life Skills students are in band, technology, culinary arts, dance, PE and art. Students from the general education population integrate into the Life Skills classroom for Shine Time and work with the students as Peer Mentors.