

Special Services

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Special Services Philosophy Helping our students to reach their full potential and to become lifelong learners is the central focus of our program. Our philosophy is one of inclusive education in which our students are educated in a school community where everyone belongs and is accepted and supported. Staff members focus on individual learning styles to engage students in the learning process with instruction encompassing interdisciplinary connections and problem solving skills. The Department of Special Services is dedicated to exploring a full continuum of program options that will assist our students with respect to academic progress and the development of social and emotional skills. Special Services Overview The Department of Special Services is available for those students who may experience academic difficulties. Presently, we have a range of program options from preschool through high school that provide children with access to a free and appropriate public education. Programs are determined and developed on a collaborative and individualized basis as we are mindful of the need to educate students within the least restrictive environment (LRE). General education with supplementary aids and services, in-class support, and resource center support are provided as appropriate. Additionally, out-of-district programs offered by approved schools for the disabled are considered when appropriate. Related services available to eligible students include: speech and language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and counseling. It is to be noted that speech and language services may be made available to some students who are not part of the special education program. When student progress has been limited, intervention strategies are initiated via a conference with the teacher, building administrator, and/or our school-based Intervention and Referral Services Committee (I&RS). Primary support is provided in general education classes through the Intervention and Referral Services Committee. The Intervention and Referral Services Committee is comprised of parents/guardians, teachers, and specialists who review the needs of students and offer suggestions, modifications, and accommodations within the general education program to parents/guardians and staff members. When the supports have been implemented and documented as not having met the individual needs of the student, a referral to the Child Study Team may be made. Parents/guardians may also make a direct referral to the Child Study Team. Once a referral is received by the Child Study Team, a meeting is scheduled within 20 days from when the referral was received. The participants of the meeting are the parents/guardians, the classroom teacher, and the Child Study Team members. The Child Study Team consists of a learning disability teacher-consultant (LDT-C), school psychologist, and social worker. Related service providers may be part of the Team and include speech and language specialists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists. When a student between the ages of three and five is referred, a speech therapist will be included in the meeting. A case manager is assigned upon the written request for an evaluation, and an evaluation plan is developed. During the evaluation process, the student is considered to be potentially educationally disabled. The evaluation process may take as long as 90 days, involving the collection of data, test results, observations, interviews, and any other pertinent information that was agreed upon in the evaluation plan. The process concludes with an eligibility determination meeting. If eligibility criteria have been met, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed with the IEP Team Members within the allowable timeframe. If you have any questions about our services, we encourage you to contact staff members via telephone or e-mail. Project Child Find Project Child Find is a free referral service and public awareness campaign to assist in the identification of un-served and underserved youth with a delay or disability from birth through 21 years of age. Project Child Find also develops and distributes information to the public about early intervention services and special education programs throughout New Jersey. The toll free number for Project Child Find is (800) 322-8174. In compliance with Project Child Find, the Mountainside School District Department of Special Services conducts evaluations for those students who may have learning difficulties relative to cognition, communication, social, emotional, and motor functioning. Further, the Department of Special Services regularly mails and posts Project Child Find information in an effort to identify students who may be at risk. Parents/guardians who suspect their preschool-age student may be delayed or disabled are encouraged to seek assistance from the Mountainside School District's Child Study Team. This includes migrant and homeless students. Evaluation, professional guidance, and an education program are available at no charge through the Child Study Team. The district telephone number to call in this regard is (908) 232-8828 X 216. The New Jersey Department of Education has information posted on its website as well at <http://www.state.nj.us/education/specialed/childfind>. For parents/guardians concerned about an infant or toddler from birth to the age of three pertaining to delays or disabilities, an Early Intervention Service Coordinator can be contacted. The toll free number is (888) NJE-INFO. A Service Coordinator will talk with parents/guardians about concerns and offer referral information. If a developmental evaluation is needed, the Service Coordinator will work with parents/guardians to schedule a multidisciplinary evaluation of the infant or toddler's developmental levels. This evaluation service is provided at no cost to parents/guardians. If appropriate, certain early intervention services may be recommended. Again, children or adult students between the ages of birth and 21 years of age who are found eligible for special education and related services are entitled to a free and appropriate special education program. Special Education Parent Advisory Committee The Special Education Parent Advisory Committee includes collaboration between parents/guardians and the Department of Special Services. By working together, we can help our students grow and help the community to better understand the special needs of our students. Invitations to the meetings will be sent to parents/guardians of classified

students who reside in Mountainside. Our goals are:

- To provide support and advocacy for families with children who have special needs.
- To develop more effective communication between parents/guardians and special services staff members in the schools.
- To provide programs and information for parents/guardians and professionals on current topics in special education.
- To improve the educational, recreational, vocational, and social programs for our students.
- To keep abreast of federal, state, and local legislation that may affect the education of exceptional students.