

**2014 - 15**

**Merrill Middle School  
Inclusion Policy**

Last Updated: October 2014

This document is meant to be read in conjunction with Merrill's Language Policy, Assessment Policy, and Academic Honesty Policy.

## **Philosophy**

The Merrill Middle School community believes that all students can learn in the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP). The school strives to accommodate the needs of all students in order to help them reach their individual educational goals. Regardless of where a student is on the educational continuum, Merrill teachers and staff are committed to work together to support individual needs.

## **Development and dissemination**

The Inclusion Policy was developed in conjunction with parents, students, community members, faculty, and staff. It will be reviewed annually by stakeholders. The policy is posted at [www.merrill.dmschools.org](http://www.merrill.dmschools.org), made available in hard copy form and provided to all Merrill community members as requested.

## **Inclusionary Needs**

Many students have exceptional needs, while other students may have special needs that have not yet been recognized.

Examples of inclusionary needs are as follows:

- Specific learning disabilities i.e. Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism, Dyscalculia, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia
- Speech, language, and communication disorders i.e. articulation, aphasia, and dysphasia
- Emotional and behavioral disorders
- Sensory impairments i.e. visual and hearing
- Medical conditions i.e. asthma, epilepsy, diabetes
- Mental health conditions i.e. anxiety, eating disorders
- Gifted and talented learners
- English language learners

## Definitions

- **Special-educational needs (SEN)**—Any student who requires specialized instruction or differentiation to reach his/her academic and/or behavior goals.
- **Least-restrictive Environment (LRE)**—A placement decision based on each student's IEP, which could include self-contained, collaborative, full-inclusion, or a mixture of all placements.
- **Inclusion**—Students with disabilities are supported in grade-level, general-education classes. Specializing the curriculum to meet their academic needs allows the students to progress academically with their peers.
- **Self-Contained Classroom**—Students with disabilities are removed from the general-education setting and placed in a smaller special-education classroom environment to allow the students to receive individualized instruction.
- **Structured Learning Center (SLC)**- A controlled learning environment for students with significant discrepancies who are pulled from the general-education setting for parts of their day for a community sense of education.
- **Differentiation**—An instructional model where teachers modify instruction to meet the needs of individual students. This may include the delivery of instruction, course content, and assessments.
- **Co-taught Classroom**—A classroom where curriculum is delivered by both a general-education and special-education teacher. This model allows for immediate modifications and accommodations to be made by the special-education teacher.
- **Individual-education Plan (IEP)**—A legal document that guides the delivery of special-educational supports and services for students with disabilities.
- **Gifted and Talented (GT) Students**—GT Students are students who are identified as possessing outstanding abilities and who are capable of high performance. Gifted and talented children are children who require appropriate instruction and educational services commensurate with their abilities and needs beyond those provided by the regular school program.
- **English Language Learners (ELL)**—An ELL student is any student whose home language is not English and whose English language proficiency is considered limited.

## **IDEA**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law that was enacted in 1975; it was reauthorized in 2004. According to the U.S. Department of Education, IDEA “is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services.”

The law is designed to protect the rights of learners with disabilities by ensuring that everyone receives a free, appropriate, public education regardless of ability. Furthermore, IDEA strives not only to grant equal access to learners with disabilities, but also to provide additional special-education services and procedural safeguards.

### **Special-education Services**

Des Moines Public Schools offers a full continuum of services to support students with special-educational needs. The team includes but is not limited to:

- Executive Director of Student and Family Services
- Special-education Supervisors
- Special-education Consultants
- Social workers
- School Therapists i.e. physical, occupational, emotional, speech
- School Psychologists
- Teachers for the visually impaired
- Teachers for the hearing impaired
- Autism Specialists
- Assistive Technology Specialists
- SUCCESS Case Managers
- Behavior Interventionist
- Behavior Coach
- Special Education Teachers
- Academic Support Teachers
- Counselors

The special education department at Merrill provides several different levels of student support as determined by each student’s IEP. Students with special-educational needs may have difficulties or conditions that are a barrier to learning and therefore need specialized teaching strategies for success in the classroom. The goal at Merrill is to place students in the least-restrictive environment, while still allowing students to find academic success. This includes

participating in all facets of the MYP unless students are legally required by their IEP to participate in non-MYP programming.

The most intensive level of intervention is our Structured Learning Center (SLC) which serves students with significant discrepancies in academics, as well as students with difficulties in social perception and interaction. The SLC provides a controlled environment in which students gradually acclimate to the school environment (noise, movement, crowds, etc.) and work on increasing independence. Academic instruction is individualized to the student's instructional level and allows for repeated practice of skills and mastery of work. Students in the SLC are provided social skills training not just geared towards social mechanics but social connectedness, social communication, social review techniques, emotional regulation and reciprocity. The SLC will utilize the same MYP principles and techniques as the general education classroom, but due to the smaller student-to-teacher ratio and the unique needs of the students, teachers are able to provide intense and individualized instruction at each student's instructional level.

Merrill also offers self-contained classes in which students receive specialized instruction in a particular subject area. The self-contained classes will utilize the same MYP principles and techniques as the general education classroom, but due to the smaller student-to-teacher ratio, teachers are able to provide intense and individualized instruction.

Students in special education may also qualify for a period of resource. This course provides additional academic support in specific goal areas. Resource students receive specialized instruction in a classroom with a small student-to-teacher ratio. This class does not produce its own curriculum; rather, it provides students with assistance in the other MYP subject areas.

The least restrictive special-education courses at Merrill are co-taught sections of general-education classes. A co-taught, general-education class contains both general-education and special-education students and is taught using the same MYP units of work as the non co-taught sections. The unique aspect of a co-taught class is that it is simultaneously led by a general education teacher and a special-education teacher, allowing one adult to provide more detailed accommodations for the special-education students.

Special-education students at Merrill may not need any of the specialized courses listed above. In the case that a student does not require that level of service, he or she may simply be allowed accommodations or modifications that are administered by the teacher in the general-education setting.

## Common Practices in Special Education

- Merrill Middle School adheres to all federal, state, and district policies.
- Regardless of the level of service, students with special-educational needs at Merrill Middle School receive the same MYP experience as general-education students. The program is designed to support students as they complete coursework in the MYP subject areas. Every effort is made to fully integrate MYP into the special-education program.
- Parents of special-education students are provided progress monitoring notification every six weeks. IEP meetings are held annually and as needed.
- Special-education teachers are responsible to write, review, and update the IEPs.
- Special education students are continuously monitored to ensure proper placement. Students are provided instruction in the least-restrictive environment.
- Students may be placed in special education if general-education interventions are not successful. Staff may refer students to the pupil-services team to see if they qualify for special-education services.
- The special-education consultant meets monthly with the special-education team.
- Special-education teachers meet regularly with general-education teachers to plan and prepare for students' progress and participation in the general-education classroom. Special-education teachers provide each student's IEP to teachers and assist in making accommodations and/or modifications.
- Special-education teachers will modify culminating tasks according to students' IEPs; special-education students will use the same IB criterion rubrics as general-education students.
- In co-taught classes, special-education and general-education teachers work together to plan for and modify instruction.
- Transition of Student Files
  - When special-education students leave Merrill for high school, special-education case managers hand deliver files and consult with the high-school case manager.
  - When a special-education student transfers out of district, special-education teachers turn over the student's IEP to the special-education consultant.
  - When a special-education student transfers to Merrill, the special-education consultant provides documentation to the student's case manager.

## Rehabilitation Act of 1973

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a national law that protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability." At Merrill Middle School, students who do not qualify for special-education services may be supported through a 504 if they have a formal diagnosis that calls for accommodations to be made in the classroom.

## 504 Supports

The 504 committee at Merrill is comprised of the nurse, administrative representative, and teacher representative from each grade level. Students with 504 plans are supported in the following ways: differentiated instruction, extended time on testing, tests read aloud, and built-in break times to relieve text anxiety. Supports can also meet temporary physical needs of students i.e. extending passing time, assistance with carrying books, and/or moving classrooms.

## Common Practices for 504s

- Initial designation is discussed in a meeting between staff and parents after a medical diagnosis has occurred.
- The 504 in-building committee reviews each 504 annually.
- The nurse and team leaders notify 504 parents as to yearly plan reviews.
- All teachers of 504 students receive a copy of the 504 plan.
- Transition of Student Files:
  - All 504 files are contained within the nurse's files and are transferred from elementary schools to Merrill and from Merrill to the high school by the nurses.
  - All students who transfer to Merrill with a 504 have their plan reviewed and implemented.
  - All students who transfer out of Merrill with a 504 will have a 504 that is included in their cumulative file.

## Pupil Services

The SUCCESS Program is a strength-based dropout prevention program. SUCCESS connects and builds relationships with students and families in order to provide intensive coordination of services. Students are identified and referred to the SUCCESS Program based on the DMPS Early Indicator System (EIS), which identifies students who are at risk of dropping out due to poor attendance, lack of identification/behavior concerns, poor or failing grades and low achievement.

The Pupil Services Team (PST) and Early Indicator System (EIS) Teams are comprised of administrators, teacher representatives, the counselor, SUCCESS worker, school psychologist, social worker, and special-education consultant. The PST problem solves for students who are struggling to find success in school. They develop interventions and individual student plans, refer students to community agencies as needed, and work to develop special-education supports when appropriate. The EIS team monitors data in an effort to identify students at-risk of dropping out. The school uses the data to design interventions aimed at targeting at risk behaviors.

## **Common Practices for Pupil Services**

- Pupil-services Team meetings are held bi-monthly to monitor student progress and concerns.
- Students are referred to PST by teachers, administrators, and/or parents.
- Students are recommended for support and assistance. The team looks at classroom interventions, attendance concerns, recommendations to child-guidance therapists, and reevaluation of 504s or IEPs.

## **Gifted and Talented Services**

Academically and/or intellectually gifted and talented students perform or show the potential to perform at substantially high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience or environment. They require differentiated educational services beyond those ordinarily provided by the regular education program. Outstanding abilities are present in students from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. A variety of settings, service options and instructional models and strategies should combine to create programming to meet the diverse needs of all gifted learners. Services should be integrated into the regular curriculum by the classroom teacher whenever possible. This approach requires support from school administrators and collaboration between general-education teachers and gifted education consultants, and supports the district's mission for equity, excellence, and focus on student learning and achievement.

The GT team at the building level is comprised of the GT Consultant and GT Advocate.

## **Common Practices in Gifted and Talented Services**

- The DMPS Gifted and Talented Department screens students each year in the fall for possible identification and subsequent gifted-and-talented programming and services.
- Transition of Student Files
  - When a GT student leaves Merrill for high school, files are transferred in the same manner as general education students.
  - When a GT student transfers out of district, files are transferred in the same manner as a general education student.
  - When a GT student transfers to Merrill, the GT Consultant will review the data and determine placement and identification for DMPS according to policy.

## **ELL**

The English Language Learners program provides English instruction for students whose mother tongue is not English. Merrill's program serves students at the Intermediate and Advanced level, according to district curriculum standards.

The English Language Learner program provides direct service and support to students with a mother tongue other than English. At Merrill, students are classified in the following ways: direct service in a large group environment (DS), in-class support through collaboration with classroom teachers (ICS), progress monitoring without direct service due to I-ELDA proficiency (MP), and consultation with teachers about sharing strategies and materials to support students (CWT). In order for students to transition out of the program, they must have parent approval by letter of transition, meet criteria standards for levels of proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking English, receive the highest level of proficiency on the most recent I-ELDA, and receive consent from other core classroom teachers in the building based on academic progress.

Please consult Merrill's Language Policy for more information regarding ELL.

### **Common Practices in ELL**

- The ELL teacher meets with elementary teachers within the district each year to discuss the progress of specific ELLs before entering middle school.
- Transition of Student Files and Student Placement
  - Students who transfer to Merrill from other middle schools within the district are also provided with a streamlined a progress monitor specific to DMPS.
  - Students who transfer in from other school districts are tested by the Welcome Center upon entrance, and are placed according to home address, provided appropriate services are available at the neighborhood school.
  - When English Language Learners transfer to Merrill, their portfolios are reviewed by the ELL teacher, and they are placed based on level of proficiency and records given by the previous program. Students are provided with proper services according to their level of acquisition, and progress is monitored by both ELL teacher and all core classroom teachers.

## **Targeted Professional Development**

- Special education teachers engage in the same professional development as general-education teachers. In addition, they attend district special-education professional development.
- Special education teachers attend both subject-area and inclusive-classroom IB workshops.
- The Gifted and Talented Consultant attends subject-area IB workshops.
- The ELL teacher engages in the same professional development as general-education teachers. In addition, the teacher attends district ELL professional development.

**Sources:**

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United States. Department of Health and Human Services. *Your Rights Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act*. United States Government, n.d. Web.