

Norcross IB Cluster

Special Education Needs Policy

Philosophy

The Norcross IB Cluster seeks to provide equal opportunities to include all students in a rigorous education. The Norcross IB Cluster aims to provide appropriate levels of support and intervention to allow students to maximize their abilities and achieve academic success. Our goal as a cluster is for students to be given placement in courses that are in the most academically appropriate setting based on student learning needs.

Categories of Services

Students with Special Assessment needs fall into different categories based on local, state, and national regulations. It is possible that a student will be served in multiple categories, in such the decision on course placement is based on what the most appropriate educational environment is based on individual student needs.

Special Education

Gwinnett County Public Schools' Department of Special Education and Psychological Services works to provide every student with a free appropriate public education that meets each student's unique educational needs in the least restrictive and most inclusive environment possible. The vision and mission of our county special education and psychological services department includes having students placed in the most rigorous academic setting possible based upon services as outlined in his Individual Education Plan (IEP). Students within the special education program are allowed all the accommodations and support that the student's disability requires.

504

Students who are not served by the Special Education Department are still allowed accommodations and services through section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Revised in 2008, all schools that receive federal funds are required to provide a "free appropriate public education" to each student with a disability regardless of the nature of the disability. Section 504 is separate funding not part of the Special Education Program. These students are provided accommodations and services to allow them to receive the necessary support to achieve academic success. Students that suffer a temporary medical condition that limits their ability to perform at the previous level of study will be given accommodations as needed throughout their recovery as outlined by medical professionals.

Multi-Language Learners

Language assistance services are available for those students who speak English as a second language and whose lack of proficiency in English limits their successful participation in the regular classroom. All schools offer academic support to English Learner Program (EL) students. Educators with specialized training provide instruction to second language learners through EL courses; classes are provided in a sheltered learning environment or in a regular classroom with support from the EL department. English language learners in need of support may receive either daily direct instruction from an EL teacher or instructional interventions in the regular classroom as planned by the regular classroom teacher with consultation from the EL teacher.

As is the case with other programs, the goal of our county and school is to ensure students are placed in the most rigorous and inclusive environment as per their level of proficiency with the English language as defined by Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS) test scores, classroom performance and teacher evaluation. Professional learning opportunities and ongoing trainings are available to both EL teachers and regular classroom teachers who work with EL students. EL students are allowed the use of accommodations based on individual needs.

Gifted Program

Students identified as accelerated learners based on assessments of mental ability, achievement, creativity, and motivation levels are served by the Accelerated and Gifted Program under the guidance of a local school Gifted Coordinator. In order to qualify for gifted services students must be referred and evaluated. Students scoring on nationally normed standardized assessments in the 90th percentile and above may be eligible for gifted services and can be evaluated. Students can only be evaluated once in middle school and once in high school to determine eligibility. Students who qualify for gifted services are given accelerated learning and differentiation to allow them to enhance instruction to meet their unique needs for educational challenge and differentiated learning. Students are identified through a combination of teacher and/or parent recommendations and standardized test scores on nationally normed tests (ITBS, CoGAT).

Process for Determining Eligibility

Students who have not been previously identified as requiring additional educational services or students who are not being adequately served in their current educational plan are evaluated using a Response to Intervention (RTI) process. Through the RTI process, a team of teachers, counselors, and administrators, in conjunction with the student's parent or guardian, work to

monitor and evaluate student progress to determine if additional services are required to achieve academic success.

Students who have not been previously identified as qualifying for gifted services may be referred to the Gifted Contact teacher for referral and eligibility screening by the local school Gifted Referral and Gifted Eligibility Committees. Students must score in the 90th percentile or above on normed measures of motivation, creativity, and achievement and in the 96th percentile or above in normed assessments of mental ability.

Responsibilities

In the Norcross IB Cluster, the responsibilities for supporting students within our Special Education program are assigned to set staff members according to our county policies and regulations.

- Within the Special Education Department the student is assigned a case manager that assembles an IEP team including the following participants: at least one of the student's regular education teachers; at least one of the student's special education teachers; one or both of the student's parents; an individual who is knowledgeable about the availability of resources in the school district and who can commit resources; and, at the discretion of Gwinnett County Public Schools or the parents, other persons who have knowledge/special expertise regarding the student, including related services personnel. This team will develop an Individual Educational Plan for the students, providing for specific accommodations, related services, and support for the student with a disability. The IEP is reviewed annually and revised as needed with an IEP team.
- For students eligible for 504 services, each school within our district maintains a 504 coordinator. The 504 Coordinator is responsible for organizing Student Support Team (SST) meetings to address the individual needs of children not experiencing success in the general school setting. The 504 Coordinator will additionally ensure all student 504 plans are reviewed each year, inform teachers and staff of the students under a 504, and maintain a list of all students for each school year with 504 accommodations. For students undergoing temporary medical conditions, a support team will be put in place consisting of a counselor, administrator, teachers, parents, and student. This support team will work with the information provided by medical professionals to develop a plan that allows for temporary accommodations for the student during the period under consideration. Should this condition become on-going, the team will work with parents to refer the student for additional services.
- Students served within the ESOL/Multi-Language Learner department are monitored by

the ESOL Department Chair who ensures that the students are receiving the appropriate amount of support in school to continue to develop proficiency with English in the academic setting. The Department Chair of the ESOL department in conjunction with the ESOL team is also responsible of administering annual assessments (ACCESS test) to ESOL students each year to monitor the student's growth in the acquisition and fluency within the English language and to ensure the most appropriate placement in courses to allow for success in the most rigorous environment possible for each student. The annual assessment tests or ACCESS test measures the student's abilities in the following categories: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

- Students served within the Gifted Program are monitored for grade performance and if grades fall below a 74 in any gifted level class, students are placed on a plan of improvement and potentially removed from Gifted identified classes.
- Within the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP), each service is supported within the scope of the cluster support services as outlined in the previous bullets. No additional support is provided by the IB MYP Coordinator.
- Within the scope of the IB Diploma Programme, the IB Diploma Coordinator works with the personnel designated to support each student receiving special services. The IB Diploma Coordinator will inform IB teachers of the special accommodations each student received and will complete a request of inclusive access arrangements for each student requiring special accommodations in an IB Diploma class.

Process for Review of Policy

A committee will be formed consisting of key stakeholders from all Norcross IB Cluster schools to evaluate the Special Educational Needs policy of inclusion annually. During this annual evaluation the policy will be reviewed for needed updates and revisions, as well as to assess the effectiveness of the implementation and to ensure the policy is communicated throughout the Norcross IB Cluster schools.

Differentiation and Accommodations

As each student's educational needs are different, our cluster uses a differentiated approach to allow for each student to receive the best academic setting possible based on their individual needs. Our cluster works to provide all teachers with ongoing professional development including differentiated instruction strategies and is continuing to receive support to produce classroom environments that ensure academic success through a variety of instructional methods.

Accommodations provided for each student depend on the nature of their educational needs as defined under state, local, and national guidelines. Below is a sample of some accommodations that have been previously allowed for our students, but this is not an exhaustive list. As a school we are open to using accommodations as needed to provide an appropriate and challenging education for all students as determined by their educational needs as defined by supported educational documentation.

Accommodations Provided for students within the Special Education, ESOL, and 504 programs. (Students receiving Gifted Services typically do not receive accommodations, unless they qualify for another program. Gifted Students will receive accelerated learning designed to cater to the unique needs of a gifted learner.)

Students who move from our middle schools to the high schools will have all records of Special Education, ESOL, 504, and Gifted services transferred through our student information system roll over from middle school to high school. Additionally, required supporting documentation may be transferred with permanent records that are transferred by our local school system over the summer.

References:

- Gwinnett County Schools, Department of Special Education and Psychological Services
- Gwinnett County Schools, Department of Accelerated Programs and Gifted Education
- Gwinnett County Schools, English Language Learners (ELL) Program
- *Special educational needs within the International Baccalaureate programmes* (2010)
- *Diploma Programme: Candidates with special assessment needs* (2009)
- *Teaching students with particular special educational and learning needs* (2004)
- *International Baccalaureate From Principles to Practice; Special Education Policy Guidelines*

Reviewed Spring, 2021

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