



# Parent's Guide to Special Education

Westside 

Community Schools



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# CORE VALUES

The work of the Westside Community Schools Special Services department is inspired by four core values that align to our district mission statement. These core values remain at the forefront and are foundational to the practices we implement each day. Decisions regarding the allocation of resources, teacher selection, professional learning opportunities, and even the content of a child's IEP are all driven by the values upheld by the special services department.



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## EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

We use high-quality, evidence-based instructional methodologies to serve all students in their least restrictive environment; in their neighborhood school to the extent possible.



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## INFORMED & ENGAGED IEP TEAMS

We systematically communicate and strategically collaborate with colleagues and families for the purpose of delivering equitable and appropriate special education services.



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## HIRING & DEVELOPING THE BEST

We select, mentor, and professionally develop special educators, with the goal of putting the best educators in front of children, thereby increasing our impact on student outcomes.



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## COMPLIANT & HIGH QUALITY IEPs

We create, facilitate, implement, and monitor quality, compliant, comprehensive Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that drive student programming.

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## TO OUR WESTSIDE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS PARENTS

Parents, guardians, and families are very important to a child's education. While teachers, and even schools, can change from year to year, parents are the constant connection between children and learning, both at home and at school. When children struggle in school or have identified disabilities, parents face additional challenges to ensure that their children receive the best possible education to meet their needs. Often this means trying to navigate the complicated world of special education. The purpose of this guide is to explain the special education process so that, if your son or daughter does receive special education services, you can work effectively with the school as a member of your child's special education team.

Special education services are intended to meet the unique needs of a child that result from a disability and to assure that students with disabilities receive all needed aids and services. Special education laws and regulations are meant to protect students with disabilities and ensure that they get the services and assistance that may be necessary to make effective progress. The laws and regulations are also very complex. We hope this guide will be helpful to you in understanding the key concepts of the law and how to be an effective participant in the special education process.

Research, history, and experience tell us that when parents are actively involved in their child's education, the child does better in school. We hope this guide will help you become an informed member of your child's special education team so that your child has the best possible opportunity to learn and enjoy school.

Educationally yours,

**Kami Jessop, Ed.D.**

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## THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESS AT-A-GLANCE

There are 5 steps in the special education process and each step builds on the previous one:

**1 Identification & Referral**

When your child is suspected of having a disability, a referral, which is a written or oral request for an evaluation, is given to the school.

**2 Evaluation**

The school then evaluates to determine whether your child has a disability as well as the nature and extent of the special education and related services your child needs.

**3 Determination of Eligibility**

Based on the results of the evaluation, a team decides if your child is eligible to receive special education and related services. To be found eligible, the team must decide that your child has a disability and a need for special education services.

**4 Development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

If your child is eligible to receive special education and related services, a team then develops and implements an appropriate IEP to meet the needs of your child. This team also decides the particular services the child will receive. The IEP must be reviewed and revised at least annually.

**5 Reevaluation**

At least every three years, a team must reevaluate your child to determine whether your child continues to need special education and related services, unless you and the school agree that a reevaluation is not necessary.

Through this 5-step process, all relevant and comprehensive information is gathered and considered by a group of people, including you, the parent, within certain timelines and with certain procedural safeguards. Timelines help to prevent any delay. Procedural safeguards, which are rights entitled to you as a parent of a child with a disability, ensure that your child is provided a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

**Your involvement in each step of the process is important and encouraged!**

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## WHAT IS SPECIAL EDUCATION?

**Special education** means specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. For all eligible individuals aged birth to 21, it includes instruction conducted in a classroom, home, hospital, institution, or other setting, at no cost to you, the parent.

### Special Education Services Look Like...

#### **Specially Designed Instruction**

**Specially designed instruction** means adapting, as appropriate, to the needs of the student, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to:

- address the unique needs of the student that result from the student's disability; and
- ensure access of the student to the general education curriculum.

#### **Related Services**

**Related services** are the developmental, corrective, and supportive services required to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education, including:

- speech-language therapy
- occupational therapy
- physical therapy
- deaf and hard of hearing services
- vision, orientation, and mobility services
- assistive technology
- health services
- counseling
- psychological services
- social work services
- transportation

The list of related services is not exhaustive and may include other developmental, corrective, or supportive services if they are required for a child with a disability to benefit from special education. The type and amount of related services a child needs are determined by the IEP Team.

#### **Supplementary Aids & Services**

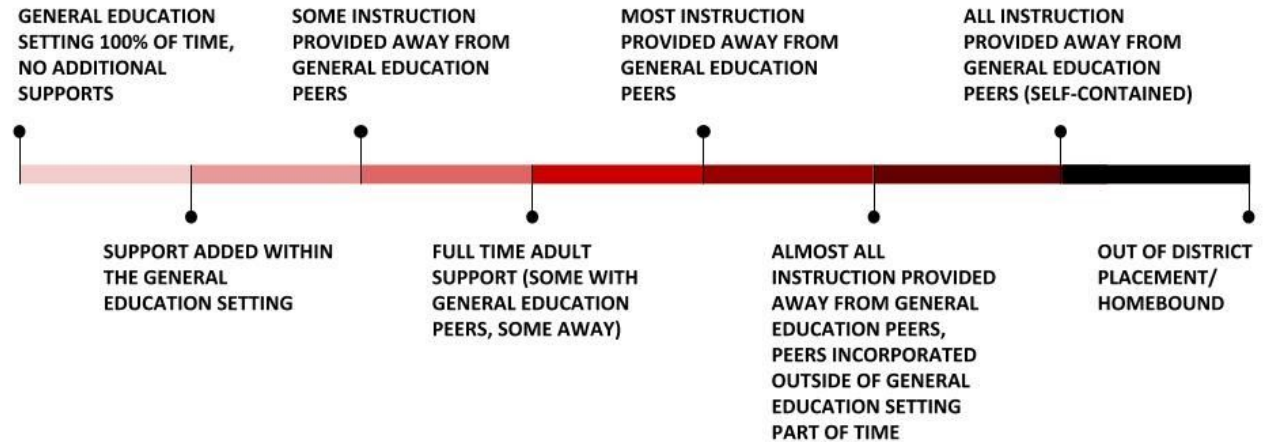
In addition to related services, some students may require additional help to support their learning. These **supplementary aids and services** may include aids, services, and other supports that are provided in general education classes or other education-related settings to enable children with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate. For example:

- in-class support to participate/stay on-task
- lunch and recess support/supervision
- toileting
- health cares
- sign language interpretation

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## **Continuum of Services**

Special education can include a variety of instructional arrangements, often referred to as a **continuum of services**. A student's special education services are individualized and may fall anywhere along the continuum shown below:



## **Special Education in Westside Community Schools**

*The mission of the Westside Community School District, as an innovative educational system, is to ensure academic excellence and to serve the unique needs of all learners.*

**Westside Community Schools relies heavily on the expertise, training, dedication, and resiliency of special education staff to provide quality services to students with disabilities.** Serving students from birth through age twenty-one, roughly one-hundred special educators, including speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, occupational therapists, a teacher of the visually impaired, a physical therapist, a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing, special education “resource” teachers, behavior facilitators, and assistive technology specialists work in Westside Community Schools.

These special educators are responsible for meeting the needs of students eligible under any of the thirteen state-recognized disability categories: autism, deaf-blindness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple impairments, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech-language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment including blindness. Special educators meet the ever-changing and evolving needs of students on a daily basis.

The diversity of the student population requires the provision of numerous specialized services from highly-trained educators. Special education teachers are assigned directly to buildings so that each elementary, middle, and high school has special education professionals devoted to meeting student needs. In addition to the traditional educational settings, special programs, such as the 18-21 year old transition program, alternative high school, or 3-5 year old preschool programs, are similarly staffed.



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As often as possible, services are provided to students in their neighborhood schools, with the majority of services occurring alongside students' same-age peers, in the general education classrooms. When necessary, students who have more significant needs or challenges receive instruction in a special education classroom, self-contained environment within their home-school, or even a separate setting within the district, such as a specialized behavior classroom or hospital setting. In addition to the role certified teaching staff plays, educational assistants ("paras") also support and provide educational services to students with disabilities.

Westside Community Schools special educators are required to wear many hats. Not only are they responsible for designing and providing direct intervention services to students, developing comprehensive IEPs that guide the educational programming, participating in professional development and training sessions, as well as gathering and reviewing data for students on their caseload; special educators are also responsible for meeting the needs of families during the IEP process.

## **Westside Community Schools Special Education Programs**

### **Early Childhood Special Education**

#### **Birth to Age Three**

Early intervention from birth to age three (Part C of IDEA) focuses on empowering families to meet the developmental needs of their children, recognizing that caregivers have the most impact on a child's development at this age. Typically provided in natural environments, such as the child's home, these services and outcomes for the child and family are defined in an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

#### **Preschool Age**

From age three until a child enters kindergarten, Westside Community Schools serves children who are eligible under Part B of IDEA. Under Part B, the IFSP is replaced by an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which contains goals and objectives to address your child's unique needs in the school setting. Children at this age may receive special education services at Underwood Hills Early Childhood Center, or within one of the Westside Foundation early childhood centers, located in many of our elementary buildings, or in a community-based center within our district boundaries.

Westside Community Schools offers several inclusive preschool classrooms within the Underwood Hills location. Typically developing preschoolers serve as role models who have age-appropriate cognitive and pre-academic skills, language skills, social-emotional skills, behavior, and fine and gross motor skills. These experiences in the early learning classrooms are the foundation for inclusive practices in Westside Community Schools.

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### Elementary Special Education

Comprehensive special education services are provided in each of our ten elementary schools. To the extent appropriate, children with disabilities are served in their neighborhood school, alongside their general education peers, regardless of disability. Supports provided vary depending on your child's specific academic, social, behavioral, health, physical, and daily living needs.

### Middle School & High School Special Education

As in all Westside Community Schools buildings, special education services at the middle and high school levels are determined by your child's IEP team.

Common services within the secondary special education continuum include:

- Co-taught or collaborative instruction provided during specific co-taught classes. These classes are taught by both a certified special education teacher and a certified general education content-area teacher.
- Resource or Assisted Learning (AL) periods. Students may be assigned one or more period(s) of Resource or AL each day. Resource or AL time, staffed by the special education department, will be used to work on student IEP goals, provide interventions, or support the completion of assignments.
- Pull-out or supplemental academic instruction provided as needed. Students with more significant academic deficits in the areas of reading, writing, and math may be served in a pull-out model. Decisions regarding participation in general language arts and math classes are made as an IEP team.
- Instruction on alternate curriculum standards is provided through classes specifically designed for students who require extensive support in the areas of academics and/or functional, daily living skills. These courses target both the state extended indicators and students' individual IEP goals.

### West Campus Special Education

Westside High School West Campus, an extension of the main campus, offers a smaller, more individualized learning environment for students.

The Westside Board of Education voted in February 2016 to rename the campus, formerly known as the Westside High School Career Center, to match its renewed focus and facilities. Students transition to WHSWC for a variety of reasons. In the smaller, structured learning environment, students are able to learn skills to help them graduate from high school and prepare for their post-secondary plans of either entering the workforce, military, or college. As in all other Westside Community Schools, special education services are provided at WHSWC in accordance with student IEPs.

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### Transition Program

The Westside Community Schools Transition Program is a community-based program with a wide variety of job training sites and work experience throughout Omaha for students who are approximately 18 to 21 years of age. The program provides opportunities for adult learners to experience several non-paid vocational sites, practice functional living skills in an apartment setting, interact socially, and access recreation and leisure activities in the community so that comfortable routines and relationships can be established.

### Project SEARCH

Westside Community Schools has partnered with Children's Hospital and Medical Center for our Project SEARCH program site. This one-year school-to-work program is business-led and takes place entirely in the workplace during the student's final year of education. The experience includes a combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. In addition to Children's Hospital, Westside partners with Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation, the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Assistive Technology Partnership, and Division of Developmental Disabilities.

### i66 Behavioral Program

The i66 Behavioral Program is an in-district program available at the elementary, middle, and high school levels for students who have significant ongoing behavioral challenges. IEP teams determine placement in this specialized setting based on a child's individual needs and response to a multi-tiered system of supports within their home school. A placement within the i66 program is intended to be temporary with the goal of advancing through the program as behavioral progress occurs.

Key features of this placement include smaller class size and lower staff-to-student ratio in order to support students' individualized behavior modification programs, social skills instruction as well as opportunities to participate with general education peers. The Westside Community Schools general education curriculum also remains a priority.

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## SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW

### Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** was first passed in 1975 (at that time, it was called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act). The primary purposes of IDEA are:

- **To provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities.** IDEA requires schools to find and evaluate students suspected of having disabilities, at no cost to families. This is called **Child Find**. Once kids are found to have a qualifying disability, schools must provide them with the special education and related services (e.g., speech therapy, occupational therapy) to meet their unique needs. The goal is to help students make progress in school.
- **To give parents or legal guardians a voice in their child's education.** Under IDEA, parents have a say in the decisions the school makes about their child. At every point in the process, the law gives parents specific rights and protections. These are called procedural safeguards. For example, one safeguard is that the school must get parental consent before providing services to a child.

### Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

A child who is eligible for special education services is entitled by federal law to receive a **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**. FAPE ensures that all students with disabilities receive an appropriate public education at no expense to the family. FAPE differs for each student because each student has unique needs. FAPE guarantees that for students who are found eligible for special education, school districts must be prepared to provide services.

FAPE also means your child is not only entitled to access the academic portion of school but also to participate in extracurricular and other activities sponsored by the school. Full participation means that students with disabilities are entitled to the aids and services needed to assist them in participating in all areas of school life. FAPE is closely tied to a principle known as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), explained below.

### Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

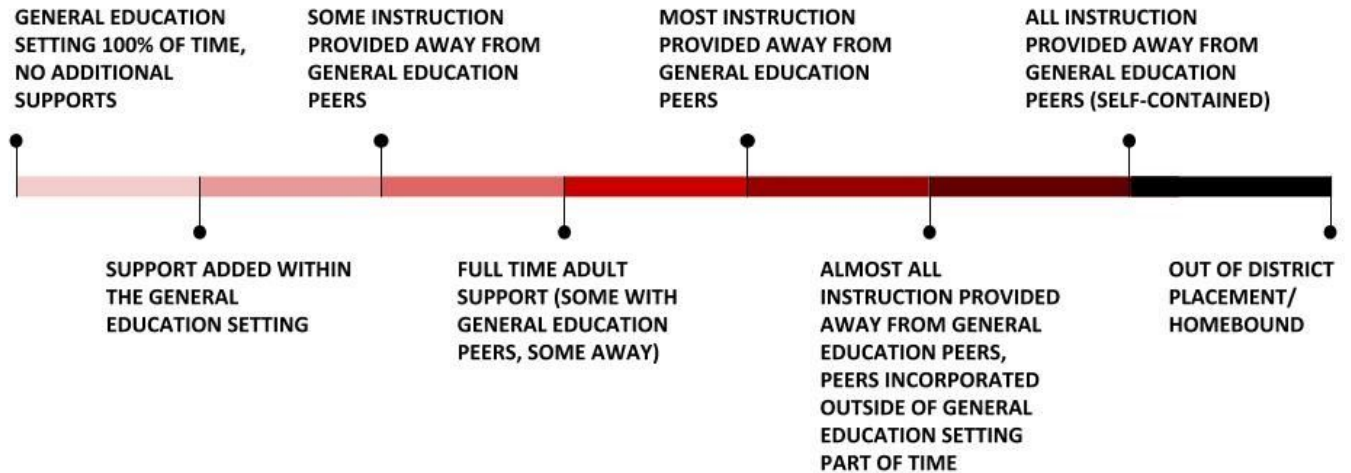
The federal law, IDEA, mandates that students with disabilities must be educated with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate based on the student's needs. This is known as the **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**. The IEP Team (including the parent) determines the placement that the student needs, in order to provide the services described on the student's IEP. The IEP Team must choose the LRE able to provide those services.

FAPE and LRE are closely tied together. Both federal and Nebraska special education laws require that the IEP Team consider appropriate education in the LRE. In order to help your child be successful, the IEP Team must carefully consider whether supplementary aids and services and specialized instruction could make it possible for your child to be educated with nondisabled peers. The IEP Team should look class by class, activity by activity, and only remove your child from the general education setting if supplementary aids and

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services would not make it possible for the student to remain in that classroom and make effective progress.

Determination of the LRE is based on your child's IEP, not on a diagnosis or specific disability label. This determination must be made individually and carefully. After the IEP Team has developed the IEP and understands the needs and goals of your child, the Team will determine the most appropriate setting for your child's services. LRE is an integral part of the placement determination. As referenced earlier as the **Continuum of Services**, a student's LRE placement may fall anywhere along the continuum shown below:



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## **UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF GENERAL EDUCATION**

All schools must conduct **Child Find**. That is, schools must locate, identify, and evaluate those children, regardless of citizenship or immigration status, who are suspected of having a disability and require special education and related services.

In Nebraska, each school district is responsible for assuring that high-quality services are provided to every child. A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a term used to describe an evidence-based model of schooling that uses data-based problem-solving to integrate academic and behavioral instruction in addition to intervention. The integrated academic and behavioral supports are delivered to students at varying intensities (multiple tiers) based on student need. "Need-driven" decision-making seeks to ensure that district resources reach the appropriate students (schools) at the appropriate levels to accelerate the performance of ALL students to achieve and/or exceed proficiency for college and career readiness.

### **MTSS in Westside Community Schools**

Westside Community Schools utilizes the MTSS process of providing instruction and support to promote the academic and behavioral success of all children. Individual children's progress is monitored and results are used to make decisions about further instruction and intervention. The MTSS process is flexible and designed to meet the needs of all students. This process allows for a continuum of support based entirely on students' individual needs. This support may be provided individually or with other students, by the classroom teacher or other support staff, either within or outside the classroom.

#### **How Does MTSS Impact Special Education?**

A key component of the MTSS process is that all children receive high-quality instruction in their classroom. Universal screenings are used to review the progress of all students and are given three times per year. As a result of the screening, students may be identified as needing supplemental intervention in addition to the instruction they are receiving in their classroom. If your child is identified as needing intervention you will receive notification.

MTSS begins with strong instruction in general education, screening, and progress monitoring to have frequent and early identification of any students lagging behind his/her peers. Then a continuum of more intense instruction/intervention is provided in line with student needs. Data on a student's academic and or behavioral progress informs instruction and interventions. Based on IDEA, data from an MTSS system may be used as part of the comprehensive evaluation for special education eligibility.

### **Student Assistance Teams**

Each school has a team or teams to support students. These teams are sometimes called Student Assistance Teams (SAT), Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Teams, Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) Teams, or Problem-Solving Teams. While the names of teams may be unique to each building, the purpose of these teams is to design an intervention plan to address individual student academic or behavioral challenges. Teams also monitor the plan and utilize data to adjust the plan as appropriate. Members

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of these teams differ by school, but typically include members identified as local experts (e.g., school psychologist, speech/language pathologist, counselor, etc.) for the identified concerns for the target student.

### **Problem-Solving Process**

The team uses a problem-solving process to clarify the concern someone has about the student, think about what might be contributing to the problem, propose interventions that address the concern, and identify a way to monitor progress.

The purpose of the problem-solving process is to:

- provide high-quality instruction/interventions matched to student needs;
- examine learning over time and the level of performance; and
- to make important educational decisions.

The steps of the problem-solving process are:

1. Identify and define the problem
2. Generate alternative solutions & develop a plan
3. Implement the plan
4. Monitor progress & follow-up on the plan; repeat process if needed

Using the problem-solving process promotes a shared understanding of the concern about a student by addressing the problem and what is contributing to it. The process allows the team to think creatively about what can be done to make things better for the individual student.

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## DOES MY CHILD NEED SPECIAL EDUCATION?

As a parent, you are uniquely qualified to know your child's learning strengths and weaknesses. If it is determined that your child is eligible for special education services, school professionals will utilize your knowledge in designing a special education program for your child's benefit.

### Determining Eligibility

Your child may be eligible for special education if:

1. The child meets Nebraska Rule 51 eligibility criteria for one or more disability categories **AND**
2. The child's disability/disabilities adversely affect educational performance **AND**
3. The child needs special education, as determined by an evaluation team.

**Your child must meet all three qualifications in order to be eligible for special education.**

**NOTE:** Children with disabilities who are not eligible for special education may qualify for accommodations in the general education setting under [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#). In accordance with Section 504, Westside Community Schools must identify, evaluate, and provide Section 504 services to students who have a physical or mental impairment, affecting one or more major life activities and substantially limits functioning. Teams of staff members, often including parents, collaborate to determine student eligibility and to make decisions in this process.

### Screening

Your child's school has a screening process in place that identifies students who **may** need intervention. This process may or may not lead to an initial evaluation for special education.

### The Evaluation Process

The [Multidisciplinary Team \(MDT\)](#) gathers the information that will be used to determine if your child needs special education and, if so, the types of services needed. Your child may be evaluated by a school psychologist. Other evaluations may include tests by a hearing specialist for a child with a hearing problem, or an evaluation from a doctor for a child with a health concern. The evaluation must also include input from a certified professional if certain services, called "related services," may be needed (i.e., Speech/Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, etc.).

A child may be referred for the first (or initial) evaluation in different ways:

- **You may ask your school to evaluate your child for special education at any time.** This can be done by sending a letter to the principal of your child's school. It is recommended that you keep a record of your written or verbal request. The school's problem-solving team will then meet to review your request, review the data, gather your input and concerns, and determine if an evaluation is appropriate at this time. If the team decides that an evaluation is appropriate, a consent form will be sent home (see below). If



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the team determines that testing is not appropriate at this time, you will be contacted with the reasons as well as what the school proposes to do. This proposal may include gathering more data, implementing interventions within the general education setting, implementing some positive behavior supports, etc. The school will then continue to monitor your student's progress to determine if an evaluation may be necessary at a later time.

OR

- **The school may contact you to request permission to have your child evaluated.** Your written consent is required for a child's initial evaluation. If permission is not received and the school continues to find that an evaluation is necessary, the district may ask for a due process hearing to get approval from an impartial hearing officer to evaluate your child.

To give permission for the evaluation process to begin, you must sign the *Consent for Multidisciplinary Team Evaluation* form given to you. The entire evaluation process must be completed within 60 calendar days from the date your consent is processed by the district.

The evaluation will include information about your child's skills, strengths, and needs. All evaluations and reevaluations (which are conducted at 3-year intervals after the initial evaluation) must include a review of the testing that was conducted, information from the parents, classroom observations, and teacher input. The types of data collected in the evaluation process depend upon your child's educational needs. Someone other than your child's general education teacher may also observe your child in class. Part of the evaluation includes gathering input from parents about their child. **Information that you share about your child is very important and must also be included in the evaluation.**

### **The MDT Meeting**

After the evaluation is completed, the Multidisciplinary Team, **including parents**, will meet to decide if the results of the evaluation show that the student is eligible for special education services. No one measure can be used as the only evidence to decide if a student is eligible. For example, an IQ test score cannot be the only source of information used to say that a student meets the requirements as a student with a disability.

Nebraska Rule 51 considers that a child is eligible if the child:

1. **Meets the verification requirements of one or more of the following disabilities:**
  - Intellectual Disability (ID)
  - Hearing Impairment (HI)
  - Visual Impairment (VI)
  - Deaf-Blindness (DB)
  - Speech-Language Impairment (SLI)
  - Emotional Disturbance (ED)
  - Orthopedic Impairment (OI)

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- Autism (AU)
  - Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
  - Other Health Impairment (OHI)
  - Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
  - Developmental Delay (DD)
  - Multiple Impairments (Multi)

**AND**

**2. The disability/disabilities adversely affect educational performance**

**AND**

**3. As a result of having a disability, needs special education services.**

No one person can decide if the student is eligible for special education services. If the student's learning problems are primarily from a lack of instruction or limited English ability, the student is not eligible for special education services. In those situations, the team should suggest what other services or programs might help the student.

If the team determines your child is eligible to receive special education services, an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** will be developed (see next section).

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## THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)

When your child has been verified with a disability and determined to be eligible for special education services, an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** will be developed. The IEP is **individualized** in order to meet the needs of your child. It must be **educational**, that is, it must ensure your child receives a **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**. It is also a **program**, or a plan for your child's success in learning, and for their future.

As a parent, **you are an important IEP Team member**. You may be asked to provide input via a parent input form prior to the IEP meeting. Your input will be vital in developing, reviewing, and revising your child's IEP. Parents are encouraged to:

- provide critical information regarding the strengths of their child and express concerns for enhancing the education of their student;
- participate in discussions about the student's need for special education, related services, and supplementary aids and services; and
- join with the other participants in deciding:
  - how the student will be involved and progress in the general education curriculum;
  - how the student will participate in state and district-wide assessments; and
  - decide what services the district will provide to the student and in what setting.

The IEP lays out how the student will receive a **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)** in the **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**.

### The IEP Meeting

Your child's first IEP meeting **may** occur immediately following the initial MDT meeting (if scheduled to occur on the same day and time). If not, the IEP meeting will be scheduled to occur no later than 30 calendar days after the MDT meeting, but as soon as possible.

The school must then schedule an IEP meeting to occur at least annually, and **parents may request an IEP meeting at any time between annual reviews**.

#### Notification of Meeting

Parents are to be notified in writing prior to the date of the IEP meeting. The *Notification of Meeting* document will include:

- the purpose of the meeting;
- the proposed meeting date, time, and place it will be held;
- the positions and names of the people the school is asking to attend the meeting.

The meeting should be on a date, time, and place that both the school and parents agree upon. Parents may ask to have the meeting at a different date, time, and place, or to participate in the meeting through a conference call, video conference, or other ways.

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## **IEP Team Members**

Required members of each IEP Team include:

- The child's parent(s) or legal guardian
- At least one of your child's general education teachers
- At least one special education teacher or service provider
- A district representative (typically a building or district administrator) who:
  - is qualified to provide or supervise special education programs
  - knows about the general education curriculum
  - knows about district resources
- Someone who understands evaluation results (Interpreter of Evaluation Results)

A team member may fill more than one of the above roles. Required members of the IEP Team may be excused from the meeting with your consent. If a member is excused and his/her subject area or specialty is being discussed, he/she must provide written input before the meeting.

Every effort should be made to have parents attend the IEP meeting. The IEP meeting, however, can be held without the parent if the school can show that they tried, but were unable to contact the parent, or the parents did not want to attend the meeting. Detailed records will be kept showing the date, time, and person(s) attempting to contact parents.

### **Who Else Can Come?**

If they wish, parents or the student may invite others to attend the IEP meeting. They may invite people they know who can provide support during the process and/or useful information about the student, such as an advocate, or relatives. It can be helpful for parents to let the school know who is coming. In addition, other people who work with the student (i.e., job coach, therapist, etc.) may attend. If parents choose to invite people who charge a fee, the school district is not responsible for paying this fee.

## **Your Role at the Meeting**

Parents can feel overwhelmed when they attend an IEP meeting because so many people are there. The time goes by quickly, and you may feel rushed. The topics discussed can also be hard to understand at times, yet you're supposed to be a full participant at the meeting.

### **Here are some ideas that may help to reduce anxiety, increase your participation, and facilitate the process:**

- Communicate regularly with school staff so that you'll have an idea of what the teachers may be saying.
- Request that school professionals provide evaluation narratives, IEP drafts, notification of team member roles/responsibility documents, and meeting agendas in advance.

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- Ask for an individual meeting with a member of the school team before the initial IEP meeting to gain an understanding of parental rights, as well as learn about the overall process, timelines, and implementation practices associated with an IEP.
  - Understand the role of “parent” in the IEP meeting process, including the ways in which the school expects parents to actively contribute. Inquire about what to expect during the initial IEP meeting (e.g., how to ask questions, ways to share information, how to make suggestions).
  - Prepare your thoughts before the meeting by writing down the important points you want to make about your child.
  - Ask questions if you don’t understand the terms being used. If necessary, arrange to meet with individuals after the meeting to review the discussion and/or reports.
  - Try to stay focused and positive. If you or anyone else becomes frustrated, you have the right to ask for the meeting to continue on another date. It can be hard to develop an IEP when emotions have taken over the process.
  - Remember that you can sign to show you participated in the meeting, but you don’t have to agree to the goals or services at the meeting. You can take the IEP home to review, get input, and return later for a follow-up IEP meeting.

### **What is Discussed?**

At an IEP meeting, the parents, the student if appropriate, and the school staff meet as a team to:

- describe how the student learns best and the learning needs of the student;
- discuss the concerns of the parents for the student to receive a good education;
- describe the student’s academic achievement and functional performance;
- describe how the student will be included in the general education curriculum;
- establish annual goals for the student and describe how those goals will be measured;
- decide what special education and related services are needed by the student;
- describe how the student will be appropriately included in state and district-wide assessments including through the use of alternate assessments; and
- determine what accommodations and/or modifications may be appropriate for the student’s instruction and assessments.

In developing the IEP, the team must consider:

- the parents’ concerns and input;
- whether a child exhibits behavior that interferes with the child’s learning or the learning of others, and the need for a behavior intervention plan or supports;
- the needs of children with limited English language skills;
- the use of Braille for children with visual problems;

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- the communication needs of students, including students who are deaf or hard of hearing;
  - whether the child needs assistive technology devices or services to communicate or participate in the activities at school.

When revising an IEP, the team will also consider if the annual goals are being achieved. The team also revises the IEP to address:

- any lack of expected progress toward annual goals and in the general education curriculum;
- the results of any reevaluation;
- information provided by the parents;
- the student's anticipated needs;
- any other matters, as appropriate.

### **Appropriate Services**

The services for your child will depend upon the amount and type of special instruction or support your child needs. A special education teacher/service provider may be able to give instruction in the general education setting. An example of this is "co-teaching," where a general education teacher and a special education teacher team teach in the same class. The special education teacher/service provider may pull the student from class for a short period of time (e.g., 30-45 minutes) for an intervention.

### **Educational Setting/Placement**

The law requires that children with disabilities be placed in educational settings that will give them as many opportunities as appropriate to be with students who are not disabled. This is called placing the student in the **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**.

For some children, placement outside of a general education class for some of the day is necessary. Students who receive most of their instruction outside of the general education setting will still have opportunities to participate in other activities in school with general education students.

The special education program will be developed completely before the IEP Team decides where the child's program will be provided. The IEP Team will consider supports and services to determine how the program can be delivered in the LRE. By law, the first place the IEP Team must consider is the general education classroom in your neighborhood school.

### **Notice of Initial or Change of Placement**

Once the IEP has been developed, you will receive a *Written Notice for Initial Special Education Services and Placement* document and a *Consent for Initial Provision of Special Education Services and Initial Placement* document. The **initial** placement document summarizes the IEP Team's recommendations, including the educational programs and services recommended for your child. You must indicate your approval of the initial special education placement by signing consent on the initial consent document. There is no

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requirement for these documents after each subsequent IEP meeting, therefore, services will continue without this consent for subsequent IEPs.

If the IEP Team determines that a **change** of placement is needed after the initial placement has been made, a new *Written Notice for Change of Placement* document will be completed.

### **Secondary Transition Planning**

As your child gets older, the IEP Team will design a program to help prepare them for life after high school. This is called secondary transition planning because planning is done through the IEP to facilitate the transition from school to college (or postsecondary education), work, living independently, or other activities in which the young adult may be involved. Your child will begin learning the skills needed in the future while still in school.

Planning for the transition from school to adult living must begin when your child turns 16, or sooner if the IEP Team thinks early planning would be appropriate. The IEP Team (including your child) must discuss your child's post-school plans and goals. These plans must include the kind of education or training your child will receive, the kind of job your child might have, where your child will live, and how your child will spend time in the community. Community agencies are often involved in this planning to give your child the most opportunities to be successful after high school.

### **Graduation**

When students are in high school, the IEP Team should talk about how they will graduate. Most students will graduate with their class; however, students with disabilities may attend school until the end of the school year in which they reach the age of 21. The team should look at the classes required for graduation, and what the student's long-term goals are. These plans for graduation or completion of the program are closely tied to the transition plan in the IEP.

### **Changes to the IEP**

Changes made to the IEP after the annual review of the IEP can be made if the school and parent (IEP Team) agree. The school will give the parent prior written notice of any IEP changes via the *Addendum to the IEP* document and collect a parent signature. Any IEP addendums and changes to the IEP report will be mailed to you after your signature has been received.

It is important to note that a change in the instructional methodology (e.g., teaching method, teaching strategy) used may not require an IEP addendum.

**IEP changes made after the annual review do not change the annual IEP date.**

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## PARENT & STUDENT PARTICIPATION & PARENTAL RIGHTS

**Parents and students are partners with Westside Community Schools throughout the entire special education process.** As a parent, you know your child best. You have seen your child in different ways and in different situations over time. Schools will ask you: "What are your biggest concerns? What do you hope to see your child accomplish?" Special education law provides protections to make sure your concerns are listened to and addressed in the special education process.

**Students are the focus of the special education process.** The team should be aware of the interests and concerns of the student, no matter what their age. Moreover, as the student grows older, the active participation of the **student** is important. In fact, once the student is 16 years of age (or earlier, if appropriate), the law instructs the team to include the student at the meetings as an active participant. **As members of the team, the student and parents have a voice in all discussions.**

### Basic Rights for Parents

Whether you are the parent of a child with a disability, or the parent of a child thought to have a disability, you have the right to be notified of the safeguards that serve to protect the rights of your child. These are referred to as procedural safeguards or parental rights. **The school must provide parents with a copy of the *Procedural Safeguards Notice (Parent's Rights in Special Education)* at least once each school year.**

In addition, the law requires parents to be informed and issued a *Procedural Safeguards Notice*:

- At the time of an initial referral or parent request for special education evaluation
- When the school proposes to change the verification, evaluation, educational placement, or the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
- When the school refuses your request to change the verification, evaluation, educational placement, or the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

The *Procedural Safeguards Notice* includes the procedures to maintain the privacy of your child's education records. Your child's record will be seen only by those who need to work with your child. Detailed information on confidentiality is described in the notice.

### What if My Child Has Problem Behavior?

Behavior problems sometimes are the result of a child's disability. When behavior caused by the disability results in the violation of school rules, school officials must use appropriate discipline.

When the IEP Team determines that a student's behavior is likely to disrupt learning, it must be addressed in the IEP. Programs to manage or change behavior must be designed using positive approaches to help children correct or manage their behavior. Positive approaches include recognizing and rewarding appropriate behaviors and teaching new skills so that they will replace those behaviors that are inappropriate.



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Discipline must not include the use of restraint or seclusion, except in an emergency situation where there is a danger that the child will be harmed or will harm someone else. If restraint or seclusion are used in those situations, the school must notify parents within 24 hours. For further information regarding the use of restraint and seclusion, please refer to Westside Community Schools Board Policy number 5320-R (*Requirements and Procedures for Use of Physical Restraint and/or Seclusion*).

### **Disciplinary Exclusion**

Special protections are in place regarding disciplinary actions for students with disabilities. Once a child with a disability has been removed from his or her current placement for a total of 10 school days in the same school year, the school district must, during any subsequent days of removal in that school year, conduct a **Manifestation Determination (MD)**.

### **Manifestation Determination**

If a student is or will be removed from school as a result of disciplinary action, for more than 10 consecutive or 10 cumulative school days in one school year, the following actions must occur:

1. Within 10 school days of the suspension/expulsion for a student who has or will, as a result of the current suspension, reach the 11<sup>th</sup> day, a meeting must be held with all relevant members of the IEP or Section 504 team to review the IEP or 504 Plan and discuss Manifestation Determination.
  - The school district has the authority to implement disciplinary action immediately following the behavioral infraction, regardless of disability or suspension history.
  - There is no requirement to provide special education and/or related services during the initial 10 days of suspension.
  - If the suspension will exceed 10 cumulative school days within a school year, the district is not required to provide all services in the IEP/504. The IEP/504 team will make an individualized decision for each student regarding the type/intensity of services to be provided. The school district is required to provide services that will enable the student to continue to participate in the general education curriculum and to progress toward meeting his/her IEP goals (i.e., providing the student homework, providing access to instructional staff, etc.).
  - All suspensions occurring after the initial Manifestation Determination consideration will each require a new manifestation determination meeting within 10 days.
2. Parents/guardians will be contacted to set up the IEP or 504 team meeting, during which time, Manifestation Determination will be considered. Once the meeting time/date has been determined, parents should receive a copy of their *Procedural Safeguards*, and an IEP/Section 504 *Notification of Meeting* document informing them of the details (date, time, place, and intent of the meeting). All relevant IEP Team members must be invited.

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3. The District Special Services designee will facilitate the Manifestation Determination meeting and include all relevant team members.
  4. Once the meeting has been conducted, the Designee must send to the following items to Westside Community Schools ABC Building (Central Office):
    - IEP or 504 Plan *Notification of Meeting* document
    - Manifestation Determination document signed by all relevant IEP or Section 504 team members
    - Documentation of any changes in placement or IEP revisions

**For IEPs:** If IEP revisions occur, the Special Services Designee must amend the IEP to make necessary changes and file the MD documentation into the student's cumulative file. Copies will be distributed to the parent(s).

**For Section 504 Plans:** Any change of placement or significant changes in accommodations/modifications of the 504 Plan shall be documented on a new 504 Evaluation summary form, along with necessary signatures. Copies will be distributed to the parent(s).

### **What if I Disagree With the School About My Child's Education Program or Think My Child's Rights are Being Denied?**

If you do not believe your child's special education program is helping your child succeed in school, you should first talk to your child's teacher. You can also request an IEP meeting to discuss changing your child's program if you think a change is necessary. The IEP Team may decide that a reevaluation is needed to gather more information about your child. Anytime school personnel suggest a reevaluation of your child or your child's program, you will be invited to participate in the reevaluation process. You may request an IEP Team meeting, a mediation session, or a due process hearing in order to resolve differences that you may have with school officials regarding your child's education.

### **How Will I know My Child is Making Progress?**

Progress on IEP goals is regularly monitored throughout the IEP year. Written IEP Progress Reports are required four times per year (two times per year for early childhood students), matching the frequency and timing of general education report cards (October, January, March, May).

#### **Why is making progress important?**

Making appropriate progress on IEP goals is the key to meaningful special education. For all students, including those performing at grade level and those unable to perform at grade level, a school must offer an IEP that is "reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances."

IEP progress report information helps the IEP team know if the plan is working for the student. **If the student is not making meaningful progress, the IEP team should meet to revise the plan so that he or she will make necessary progress.**

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## TRANSITIONS FROM LEVEL-TO-LEVEL

Because of their unique situations, children with disabilities may require special planning that will guide them through the educational system and into adulthood. This planning is particularly important in preparation for transitions from one level to another (i.e., early childhood to kindergarten, 6th-grade to middle school, etc.). Westside Community Schools recognizes that each of these transition milestones is both a time to celebrate as well as a time that may come with some uneasy feelings and/or fear of the unknown. In preparation for these transitions, **we encourage parents to reach out with any questions or concerns! You know your child best**, and though the district has transition supports in place along the way, your input and involvement is key in making these transitions as smooth as possible.

### How Can I Plan for My Child's Transition?

One way to prepare for these transitions is to know what resources are available. Below, are a few resources you can expect or request:

- In Westside Community Schools, each level has its own transition brochure or pamphlet with important and helpful information about the next level.
- Each level also has a structure for passing important student information from one team to the next. This structure differs from level-to-level, so please don't hesitate to ask for more information.
- Most importantly, your IEP manager and current IEP team is responsible for helping you and your child prepare for the next level. In many cases, a transition IEP meeting will be scheduled for this planning purpose. **Parents are encouraged to participate, and may request these meetings to occur at any time!**

#### Transition Meeting Planning

- **Questions You May Want to Ask:**
  - What will my child's school day look like?
  - What if my child needs help at lunch or recess or another less structured time of the school day?
  - What kind of communication can I expect?
  - Who will be working with my child?
  - Who do I contact if I have questions or concerns?
- **Questions You Can Expect to Be Asked:**
  - What are your child's strengths?
  - What are your greatest concerns?
  - What do you need us to know to feel comfortable?

#### Easing the Transition

- **Take Advantage of Building Opportunities:**
  - Open House, Meet the Teacher Nights, or Orientations
  - Community activities as the school
- **Visit the School:**
  - Contact building administration to ask about touring the school
  - Check with your child's IEP manager about this. Many times, the school has already planned for group or individual tour opportunities during school hours to occur.

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- **Keep Teachers Informed:**
    - Stay in contact with your child's teachers, especially if:
      - A change in your child's life is causing significant stress
      - Your child starts taking medication that may effect his or her behavior or learning
      - You have any concerns about your child's performance in school
  - **Stay Involved:**
    - Open lines of communication are encouraged and valued
    - Parent input and engagement is key to improved student success

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## FREQUENTLY USED EDUCATIONAL TERMS

### 504

A nondiscrimination protection for students with physical or mental impairments. A child may be 504 eligible for accommodations under a 504 Plan if he or she has a physical or mental health impairment, affecting one or more major life activities and substantially limiting functioning.

### Accommodations

Accommodations are adjustments made in how a student with a disability is taught or tested. Accommodations do not change what the student is taught or what he is expected to know. Accommodations are intended to reduce or even eliminate the effects of a child's disability; they do not reduce learning expectations.

### Achievement Test

A test that objectively measures educationally relevant skills or knowledge; a test that measures mastery of content in a subject.

### Adaptive Skills

Daily living skills needed to function adequately in the community, which may include : (1) communication, (2) self-care skills, (3) home living, (4) social skills, (5) leisure, (6) health and safety, (7) self-direction, (8) functional academics, (9) community use, and (10) work.

### Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

A civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public.

### Annual Goal

A statement(s) of what a student with a disability can reasonably be expected to accomplish in a year's time or the duration of the IEP.

### Articulation

Speech sound production; refers to the movements of the speech organs involved in the production of speech sounds/phonemes.

### Assistive Technology (AT)

A related service that directly assists a student in the selection, acquisition or use of an assistive technology device.

### Assistive Technology Device

Any item, piece of equipment, or product system used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

### Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

**Inattentive Type** (formerly known as Attention Deficit Disorder or "ADD") – A neurological disorder, the typical characteristics of which are short attention span, distractible behavior, difficulty following directions, difficulty staying on task, and inability to focus behavior; frequently presents when the child attends school because it compromises many skills needed for academic success, including starting, following through with and completing tasks, moving from task to task and following directions; distinct from a learning disability and somewhat different from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, hyperactive-impulsive and combined type.

**Hyperactive - Impulsive Type** – A neurological disorder, the typical characteristics of which are short attention span; distractibility; impulsivity; flight of idea; poor organizational skills; social immaturity; variable performance; inflexibility; mood swings; poor short-term memory; excessive activity; fidgetiness and difficulty staying seated.

**Combined Type** – A neurological disorder in which individuals demonstrate characteristics of both Inattentive Type and Hyperactive-Impulsive Type.

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## **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)**

All forms of communication (other than oral speech) used to express thoughts, needs, wants, or ideas.

## **Autism (AU)**

To qualify for special education services in the category of autism the child must have a developmental disability which significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, is generally evident before age three, and that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual response to sensory experiences.

## **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder, refers to a range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication, as well as by unique strengths and differences.

## **Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)**

A Behavior Intervention Plan, which can be part of the IEP, identifies supports and services that will be provided to prevent inappropriate behaviors from occurring and to support desired behaviors.

## **Benchmarking Assessments**

Short tests administered throughout the school year that give teachers immediate feedback on how students are meeting academic standards and progression over time.

## **Benchmarks**

Benchmarks are stepping-stones to meeting the annual goal. For example:

- **Goal:** *Within a 40-minute timeframe, Cameron will respond 80% of the time when given the direction to activate a Big Mac switch.*
- **Benchmarks:**
  - *By October, Cameron will respond 40% of the time.*
  - *By December, Cameron will respond 60% of the time.*
  - *By March, Cameron will respond 70% of the time.*
  - *By May, Cameron will respond 80% of the time.*

## **Case Manager / IEP Manager**

The person at school who coordinates a student's IEP and sees that it is carried out. This person is the first point of contact for any issues or concerns that a parent may have. If parents work with other agencies, they may work with others who are called case managers.

## **Cognitive Ability**

The assessment of intellectual/cognitive functioning including speed and accuracy and efficiency of information processing, reasoning and abstract thinking, strategies used in problem solving, aptitudes, memory, general knowledge base.

## **Consent**

To give your consent is to give your permission. Consent means you understand and agree in writing or verbally to the activity that is being requested, such as an evaluation or an IEP.

## **Consult**

Service providers or other professionals who collaborate with the teacher to provide strategies to use with students.

## **Curricular Adaptations**

Changes permissible in educational environments which allow the student equal opportunity to obtain access, results, benefits, and levels of achievement. These adaptations consist of both accommodations and modifications.

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## **Curriculum**

Coursework being taught.

## **Daily Living Skills**

Skills required for living independently such as dressing, toileting, bathing, cooking, and other typical daily activities of nondisabled adults.

## **Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH)**

A term used to describe an individual with any degree of hearing loss.

## **Deaf-Blindness (DB)**

To qualify for special education services in the category of Deaf-Blindness, the child must have concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes: severe communication needs; and other developmental and educational needs. The severity of these needs is such that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

## **Developmental Delay (DD)**

To qualify for special education services in the category of developmental delay, the child shall have significant delay as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures in one or more of the following areas and, by reason thereof needs special education and related services: cognitive development, physical development, communication development, social or emotional development, adaptive behavior or skills development, or a diagnosed physical or medical condition that has a high probability of resulting in a substantial delay in function in one or more of such areas.

## **Direct Services**

Services provided directly to the student from the professional.

## **Dyslexia**

A specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

## **Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)**

Free, appropriate, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, three years of age until the age of eligibility for kindergarten, where instruction is provided in any of the following settings: home, hospitals, institutions, schools, etc.

## **Early Intervention (EI)**

A system of coordinated services that promotes the child's age-appropriate growth and development and supports families during the critical early years.

## **Emotional Disturbance (ED)**

In order to qualify for special education in the category of emotional disturbance the child must have a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance or, in the case of children below age five, development: (a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, health factors. (b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. (c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. (d) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression. (e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

## **Evaluation**

Testing and observations used to determine the eligibility of the student for special education services. The evaluation looks at how the child learns, the kinds of instruction that would be successful, and the kinds of instruction that have been tried and have not resulted in success.

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### **Executive Function**

The ability to regulate one's behavior through working memory, inner speech, control of emotions and arousal levels, and analysis of problems and communication of problem solutions to others; delayed or impaired in people with ADHD.

### **Expressive Language**

An individual's written, oral, or symbolic communication.

### **Extended School Year (ESY)**

Extended School Year is an extension of the school term and is designed for the purpose of addressing the individual needs of students whose education will be significantly jeopardized if the student is not provided an extended educational program beyond the traditional school year. It may include instructional services, support services, or both. Approved ESY programs are funded through state and district procedures. Extended School Year is the exception, not the rule.

### **Fine Motor Skills**

Small movements such as picking up small objects and holding a spoon, that use the small muscles of the fingers, toes, wrists, lips, and tongue.

### **Fluency**

Refers to the smooth, uninterrupted, effortless flow of speech; normal rate and rhythm of speech.

### **Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**

Special education and/or related services designed to meet the individual needs of each student at no cost to the parents, guaranteed to all students with disabilities by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

### **Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)**

Functional behavior assessment is a problem-solving process for addressing student problem behavior. It relies on a variety of assessments, techniques and strategies to identify the purpose of specific behavior and to help teams select interventions to directly address the problem behavior. FBAs can be used, as appropriate, throughout the process of developing, reviewing and, if necessary, revising a student's IEP.

### **Functional Curriculum**

A curriculum focused on practical life skills and usually taught in community-based settings with concrete materials that are a regular part of everyday life.

### **Functional Vision Assessment**

An assessment done to determine the manner in which a child functions visually in the everyday world, particularly in the educational setting, and administered by an educator endorsed to teach a child with visual impairments.

### **Generalization**

The ability to apply a skill or behavior learned in one setting to another setting or ability to apply a learned skill or behavior in new situations.

### **Gross Motor Skills**

Large movements involving movement and coordination of the arms, legs, and other large body parts.

### **Hearing Impairment (HI)**

To qualify for special education services in the category of hearing impairment, a child must have impairment in hearing which: is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing with or without amplification, or is permanent or fluctuating, and adversely affects the child's development or educational performance.



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### **IEP Team**

The group of people responsible for defining a student's educational plan. The team must include: a parent, a representative of the district who is authorized to assign resources, at least one of the student's special education teachers/service providers, at least one of the student's regular education teachers, and a person to interpret evaluation results. There may be more team members as appropriate.

### **Indirect Service**

Consists of work on the student's behalf that ensures access, accommodations and service coordination. It is not a direct service, as it does not occur face to face with the student on a daily basis.

### **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**

IDEA is the federal law requiring school districts to provide students with disabilities with a free and appropriate public education.

### **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

An IEP is the written plan that details the special education and related services that must be provided to each student who receives special education. Parents and school personnel should work together to write and IEP during an IEP meeting. The IEP must be reviewed and revised at least once per year.

### **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**

A written plan for providing early intervention services to an eligible child with a disability (from birth to 3rd birthday) and to the child's family.

### **Individualized Health Plan (IHP)**

A plan written for students with health impairments that could affect them in the school environment.

### **Instructional Setting**

The location and physical characteristics of the area in which instruction takes place.

### **Intellectual Disability (ID)**

To qualify for special education services in the category of intellectual disability, the child must demonstrate: significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational or in the case of a child below age five, a child's developmental performance.

### **Joint Attention**

Communication intended to share focus with others – commenting, requesting information, or providing information.

### **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**

The term used in IDEA to refer to a student's right to be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with students who do not have disabilities and as close to home as possible.

### **Limited English Proficiency (LEP)**

Students who are identified as English Language Learners (ELL).

### **Manifestation Determination (MD)**

A process required by IDEA which is conducted when considering the exclusion of a student with a disability that is the subject of a disciplinary action.

### **Measuring Academic Progress (MAP) Test**

MAP assessments are computer-adaptive and produce accurate, reliable data that reveal the precise learning level of every student, regardless of the student's ability or grade level. MAP identifies areas of strength and opportunity at the goal level of a subject, as well as overall performance. Educators use MAP data to inform in-the-moment instructional practices, gain insights into college readiness, and view grade independent academic growth.

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### **Medicaid in Public Schools (MIPS)**

State law requires public schools to access federal Medicaid funding for IEP and IFSP direct therapies (OT, PT, SLI) provided to children eligible for Medicaid. This does not affect services, but allows the school district to access funds that may be available with parent permission.

### **Modifications**

Modifications, unlike accommodations, change the level of instruction provided or tested. Modifications create a different standard for the student receiving them.

### **Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)**

A group composed of members with varied but complimentary experience, qualifications, and skills that contribute to a student's success at school.

### **Multiple Impairments (Multi)**

To qualify for special education services in the category of multiple impairments, the child must have concomitant impairments (such as mental handicap-visual impairment, mental handicap-orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe developmental or educational, or in the case of a child below age five, a child's developmental needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments.

### **Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)**

MTSS is an instructional framework that includes universal screening of all students, multiple tiers of instruction and support services, and an integrated data collection and assessment system to inform decisions at each tier of instruction. The framework can be used for academic subjects or positive behavior supports.

### **Natural Environment**

The natural environment is different for each child and refers to settings that are natural or normal for same-age nondisabled peers.

### **Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS)**

The Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS), pronounced "en-skass," is a statewide assessment system that embodies Nebraska's holistic view of students and helps them prepare for success in postsecondary education, career, and civic life.

### **Occupational Therapy (OT)**

School-based occupational therapy is a related service designed to enhance a student's ability to fully access and be successful in the learning environment. This might include working on handwriting or fine motor skills so the child can complete written assignments, helping the child organize himself or herself in the environment (including workspace in and around the desk), working with the teacher to modify the classroom and/or adapt learning materials to facilitate successful participation.

### **Other Health Impairment (OHI)**

To qualify for special education services in the category of other health impairment, the child must have: limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems which adversely affects the child's educational, or in the case of a child below age five, a child's developmental performance such as: asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, Tourette syndrome.

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## **Outcomes**

Outcomes as part of a child's IFSP, are measurable changes a family wants to see for their child or something they want for their family. These are sometimes referred to as "goals."

## **Parent**

The definition of parent in IDEA includes: biological, adoptive or foster parents; guardians (unless the child is a ward of the state); individuals acting in the place of natural or adoptive parents, such as grandparents, stepparents, or other relatives with whom the child lives; individuals responsible for the child's welfare; and assigned surrogates.

## **Peer Model**

In an early childhood Peer Model Classroom, a peer model is a neurotypical child of a similar chronological age group who serves as a model of typical behavior in the areas of speech/language, cognition, fine and gross motor and social skills.

## **Percentile**

In common use, the percentile usually indicates that a certain percentage falls below that percentile. For example, if you score in the 25th percentile, then 25% of test-takers are below your score.

## **Personal Care Nurse (PCN)**

In Westside Community Schools, a PCN is a nurse hired by the district to provide both health cares and academic support to medically fragile students.

## **Phonemic Awareness**

Is the ability to manipulate sounds, such as blending sounds to create new words or segmenting words into sounds.

## **Phonological Awareness**

The awareness of how words sound and how they are represented in written language or print; ability to identify and manipulate the sounds of language. Many children with learning disabilities cannot readily learn how to relate letters of the alphabet to the sounds of language

## **Physical Therapy (PT)**

A special education related service provided to support the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students ages 3-21, who have a disability that interferes with their educational performance and ability to benefit from their education program.

## **Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)**

The Picture Exchange Communication System, or PECS, allows people with little or no communication abilities to communicate using pictures.

## **Placement**

The unique combination of facilities, personnel, location or equipment necessary to provide instructional services to meet the goals as specified in the student's IEP. placement is a set of services, not a location.

## **Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)**

PBIS is a proactive systems approach for creating and maintaining safe and effective learning environments in schools and ensuring that all students have the social and emotional skills needed for success in school and beyond.

## **Pre-Referral Interventions**

Before referring a child for an evaluation, the classroom teacher may plan strategies to see if the child's performance improves with simple changes in the curriculum or environment. These are called "pre-referral interventions."

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### **Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)**

The section of the IEP that summarizes all aspects of a child's present levels of performance and provides the foundation upon which all other decisions in the IEP will be made. PLAAFPs contain information that ranges from very broad to highly specific.

### **Prior Written Notice (PWN)**

A notice supplied to the other party that includes a description of the action proposed or refused by the school district or by the parent.

### **Progress Report**

A report of student progress toward IEP goals and objectives, written by IEP service providers once per quarter of school (in alignment with quarterly report cards - October, January, March, May).

### **Rate of Improvement (ROI)**

The rate of a student's growth, most commonly calculated to indicate the amount of growth per week or the rate at which the student will need to make progress per week to meet their goal.

### **Receptive Language**

The language understood; listening is receptive.

### **Related Services**

Services required to assist an individual with disabilities to benefit from special education, including but not limited to: transportation, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language therapy, mental health services, and medical care.

### **Section 504**

Section 504 is the common name for the federal law that prohibits discrimination against students with disabilities. Section 504 (of Public Law 93-112, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) applies to any agency, including a school district, which receives federal money.

### **Sensory**

Relating to sensation or the physical senses; transmitted or perceived by the senses.

### **Service Provider**

Special Education Teachers, Speech-Language Providers, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Hearing Consultants, Vision Consultants, Augmentative Communication Specialists, Job Coaches, etc.

### **Services Coordinator**

A Services Coordinator is a central contact person who helps families with children with special needs below age three. A Services Coordinator supports the child and family through the IFSP process and in accessing services to achieve family and child outcomes.

### **Short-Term Objectives**

Short-term objectives are mini-goals that lead to the overall goal. Objectives are identified through a task analysis of the goal behavior. For example:

- **Goal:** *Bill will demonstrate the ability to use a checkbook with 90% accuracy.*
- **Short-Term Objectives:**
  - *Bill will write dollar amounts up to \$500.00 in words with 90% accuracy.*
  - *Given a date, Bill will write the date using numerals with 90% accuracy.*
  - *Given a blank check, Bill will fill in all necessary information.*
  - *Bill will record amounts of checks in the registry with 90% accuracy.*
  - *Using a calculator, Bill will identify the account balance with 90% accuracy after writing a check.*

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### **School Psychologist**

School psychologists are uniquely qualified members of school teams that support students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach. They apply expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior, to help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. School psychologists partner with families, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community.

### **Social Skills**

A social skill is any skill facilitating interaction and communication with others. Social rules and relations are created, communicated, and changed in verbal and nonverbal ways. The process of learning these skills is called socialization.

### **Special Education**

Specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of an eligible individual, including the specially designed instruction conducted in schools, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings. Special education provides a continuum of services in order to provide for the education needs of each eligible individual regardless of the nature or severity of the educational needs.

### **Specific Learning Disability (SLD)**

To qualify for special education services in the category of specific learning disability the child must have a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The category includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

### **Speech-Language Impairment (SLI)**

A speech-language impairment (SLI) is diagnosed when a child's language does not develop normally and the difficulties cannot be accounted for by generally slow development, physical abnormality of the speech apparatus, autism spectrum disorder, apraxia, acquired brain damage or hearing loss.

### **Standard Deviation**

A measure of the degree of dispersion [or spread] in a distribution of scores; the square root of the variance.

### **Stay Put**

The ruling that permits a student to remain in their current placement during any dispute concerning special education services.

### **Student Assistance Team (SAT)**

A school team, which includes parent input and when appropriate, the student, in a positive, problem solving, intervention process. It assists students by ensuring that the school and community are doing everything possible to make students' school lives successful.

### **Supplementary Aids and Services**

Supplementary Aids and Services means aids, services, and other supports that are provided in regular education classes, other education-related settings, and in extracurricular and nonacademic settings, to enable children with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate.

### **Surrogate**

A surrogate parent is a person who is appointed to act in the interests of an exceptional student who does not have a parent who can make educational decisions. The surrogate parent works with the school to plan the child's special education services.

### **Transition**

A student moving from one placement to another. For example, preschool to elementary, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to post-graduation plans.

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### **Transition Plan**

A plan to coordinate a set of activities that promote movement from school to post-school education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. Transition goals are determined by the IEP Team beginning at least by age 16 and are based on student and family vision, preferences, and interests.

### **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)**

To qualify for special education services in the category of traumatic brain injury, the child must have: an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both that adversely affects a child's educational, or in the case of a child below age five, a child's developmental performance.

### **Visual Impairment (VI)**

To qualify for special education services in the category of visual impairment, including blindness, the child must have: an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational, or in the case of a child below age five, a child's developmental performance. This category includes children who have partial sight or blindness.

### **Voice**

Voice refers to the production of pitch, loudness, resonance and vocal quality appropriate for an individual's age and/or gender.

### **Ward**

Someone placed under the protection of a legal guardian. A court may take responsibility for the legal protection of an individual.

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## RESOURCES

### Westside Community Schools Resources

The WCS Special Services Department is continually working to improve district resources for parents. **Please don't hesitate to reach out to your child's team to request additional information.** In addition to this guide for parents, other district materials created for parents currently available include:

- A Parent's Guide to Developing an Individualized Education Program & Community Resources
- WCS Special Education Transportation Handbook
- WCS Transition Resource Guide (full of numerous useful resources for all ages)
- Level-to-Level Transition Brochures (to provide information to parents when children transition from one level to the next)
  - From birth to age 3 services (IFSP) to age 3 to 5 services (IEP)
  - From early childhood to elementary
  - From elementary to middle school
  - From middle school to high school
  - From high school to transition or Project SEARCH

### Other Helpful Resources

#### Nebraska Early Development Network

<https://edn.ne.gov/cms/>

1-888-806-6287

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#### Nebraska Department of Education - Office of Special Education

<https://www.education.ne.gov/sped/>

402-471-2471

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#### Child Find

<http://www.childfind.ne.gov/>

402-471-1640

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#### Nebraska Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Network

<https://www.unl.edu/asdnetwork/home>

402-472-4194

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#### Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services

<http://dhhs.ne.gov>

402-595-1178

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#### Social Security Administration Office

<https://www.socialsecurity.gov>

1-866-716-8299

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#### Vocational Rehabilitation Services (Voc Rehab)

<https://www.vr.ne.gov>

402-595-2100

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**PTI Nebraska – Parent Training & Information**

<http://pti-nebraska.org/>

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**Assistive Technology Partnership**

<https://atp.nebraska.gov/>

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**Early Childhood Training Center**

<https://www.education.ne.gov/oec/early-childhood-training-center/>

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**Center for Parent Information & Resources**

<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/>

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**Peak Parent Center**

<https://www.peakparent.org/>

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**Special Olympics of Nebraska**

<http://www.sone.org/>

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**Council for Exceptional Children**

<https://www.cec.sped.org/>

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**Federal Office of Special Education**

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osep/index.html>

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