

Columbia Union Conference

Steps for Testing and Accepting New Students with Special Accommodations

Determining and providing appropriate academic accommodations for students with special needs is important. The following steps will assist schools in the admission process:

Step 1 – Student Application

A student application is filled out by the parent. Somewhere on the application a parent needs to sign-off that his or her child has or has not been diagnosed with a learning disability. The school has the right to ask a parent to withdraw his or her child if the parent knowingly does not disclose that a child has a learning disability and the school is not able to accommodate the child's learning needs. **Note:** (Include a similar statement in your student handbook).

Step 2 – Parent Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the parent to disclose that his or her child needs accommodations and/or special services. If a child has an IEP (Individualized Education Program) from the previous school, the parent needs to request that the IEP be sent to the school.

Step 3 – Assess ALL New Incoming Students

Assessment tools:

- Gesell Developmental Observation for Pre-K – 2nd grade
- Brigance Early Childhood Screener for Pre-K – 1st grade
- Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT4) for 3rd – 8th grade

Step 4 – Admissions Committee

After teachers assess all new incoming students and submit the report to the principal, the administrator takes findings to the admissions committee for formal recommendation to the school board. Once the admissions committee determines grade placement and if special accommodations are necessary, then an accommodation plan should be put in place. The admissions committee takes the official recommendation of all new students to the school board for acceptance on a nine-week probation period.

Step 5 – Probation Period

After the school board has officially voted to accept a new student on a probation period, an official letter is sent out to the parent informing him or her that his or her child has been accepted on a probationary basis. Communication is vital at all times, therefore the teacher needs to make an effort to communicate with the parent on a weekly basis and should begin gathering data from day one. Teachers should keep track of student work and keep a log of when they have communicated with parents during the nine-week probation period. At the end of the probation period the parent should be informed of the status of his or her child.

Step 6 – Teacher Incorporates Reach and Map Resources

Each Seventh-day Adventist school's REACH Team (child study team) can support the teacher in initiating the process for collecting data, implementing strategies and interventions to aid in developing a MODIFIED ACTION PLAN (MAP) to ensure the success of the student. The REACH Team includes the parent or guardian, teacher, student, principal or head teacher, conference support person, pastor, and other significant persons. The teacher is to be the facilitator, scheduling conferences and notifying team members.

The goal of the REACH Team is to develop an effective MAP. The MAP specifically outlines the details of the learning expectations as well as support strategies to reach them. The MAP documentation is essential when seeking further evaluation. To fully understand the process of how to include students with learning challenges and how to implement the **REACH MAP**, go to: REACH.adventisteducation.org.

Step 7 – Teacher Suspects a Child May Need Further Evaluation

If, after working with a student during the nine-week probation period and the teacher suspects that the child may need further evaluation, the teacher should address this concern with the administrator. An appointment should be setup as soon as possible with the parent. Only educational teams are able to diagnose any student with a learning disability.

There are two primary ways in which children are identified as possibly needing special education and related services: 1) the system known as *Child Find* (education assessment service which operates in each state) for children 5 years or younger, prior to entering kindergarten, and 2) by referral of a parent or school personnel to the local public school system.

Each state is required by IDEA (The Individual Education Disability Act) to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities in the state who need special education and related services. When a child is identified by Child Find as possibly having a disability and as needing special education, parents may be asked for permission to evaluate their child. Parents can also call the Child Find office and ask that their child be evaluated.

Referral or request for evaluation. A school professional may ask that a child be evaluated to see if he or she has a disability. Parents may also contact the child's teacher or other school professional to ask that their child be evaluated. This request must be put in writing to the Public Educational system.

Parental consent is needed before a child may be evaluated. Under the federal IDEA regulations, evaluation needs to be completed within 60 days after the parent gives consent. However, if a State's IDEA regulations give a different timeline for completion of the evaluation, the State's timeline is applied.

Step 8 – Evaluation

Evaluation is an essential early step in the special education process for a child. It's intended to answer these questions:

- Does the child have a disability that requires the provision of special education and related services?
- What are the child's specific educational needs?
- What special education services and related services, are appropriate for addressing those needs?

By law, the initial evaluation of the child must be “full and individual” — which is to say, focused on that child and that child alone. The evaluation must assess the child in all areas related to the child's suspected disability.

The evaluation results will be used to decide the child's eligibility for special education and related services and to make decisions about an appropriate educational program for the child.

When parents and the Seventh-day Adventist School agree that the student's special education eligibility can be accommodated and taught with the support of the public school system, a **SERVICE PLAN** can be requested, instead of an IEP. A Service Plan provides a limited amount of resources from the public school system for the special education student while the student remains in the Seventh-day Adventist School. The annual review and triennial review procedures are still followed.

If the parent(s) disagree with the evaluation, they have the right to take their child for an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). They can ask that the public school system pay for the IEE. However, the system determines if they will pay for the IEE on a case by case basis.

A group of qualified professionals and the parents look at the child's evaluation results. Together, they decide if the child is a “**child with a disability**,” as defined by IDEA. If the parents do not agree with the eligibility decision, they may ask for a hearing to challenge the decision.

The **IEP** team in the public sector gathers to talk about the child's needs and write the student's IEP or Service Plan. Parents and the student (when appropriate) are full participating members of the team. If the child's **placement** is decided by a different group, the parents must be part of that group as well.

Before the school system can provide special education and related services to the child for the first time, the **parent must give consent**. The child begins to receive services as soon as possible after the IEP is written and the consent is given.

If the parents do not agree with the IEP and placement, they may discuss their concerns with other members of the IEP team and try to work out an agreement. If they still disagree, parents can ask for **mediation**, or the school may offer mediation. Parents may file a **state complaint** with the state education agency or a **due process complaint**, which is the first step in requesting a **due process hearing**, at which time mediation must be available.

Step 9 - After the IEP or Service Plan is Written

The public school makes sure that the child's IEP or Service Plan is carried out as it was written. Parents are given a copy of the IEP or Service Plan. Each of the child's teachers and service providers has access to the IEP and knows his or her specific responsibilities for carrying out the IEP or Service Plan. This includes the **accommodations, modifications, and supports** that must be provided to the child, in keeping with the IEP.

Step 10 - Progress is Measured and Reported to Parents

The child's progress toward the annual goals is measured, as stated in the IEP or Service Plan. His or her parents are regularly informed (typically the reports are distributed on a quarterly basis around report card time) of their child's progress and whether that progress is enough for the child to achieve the goals by the end of the year. These **progress reports** must be given to parents at least as often as parents are informed of their nondisabled children's progress.

Step 11 – IEP or Service Plan is reviewed

The child's IEP or Service Plan is reviewed by the IEP or Service Plan team at least once a year, or more often if the parents or school ask for a review. If necessary, the IEP or Service Plan is revised. Parents, as team members, must be invited to participate in these meetings. Parents can make suggestions for changes, can agree or disagree with the IEP or Service Plan, and agree or disagree with the placement.

If parents do not agree with the IEP/Service Plan or placement, they may discuss their concerns with other members of the IEP/Service Plan team and try to work out an agreement. There are several options, including additional testing, an independent evaluation, asking for mediation, or a due process hearing. They may also file a complaint with the state education agency.

Step 12 - Child is Re-evaluated

At least every three years the child must be re-evaluated. This evaluation is sometimes called a "triennial." Its purpose is to find out if the child continues to be a child with a disability, as defined by IDEA, and what the child's educational needs are. However, the child must be re-evaluated more often if conditions warrant, or if the child's parent or teacher asks for a new evaluation.

Step 13 – Exit Plan (to include a disclaimer)

If at the end of the probation period (or any time prior) the education team or the parent feels that the school is not able to meet the student's needs, an exit plan should be followed.

The information gathered from exit interviews is especially important because it will come from people who, at the time of admission and for some time after that, were committed to and enthusiastic about your school. You need to know how and in what ways their expectations were met, and in what ways they were disappointed. Even those who left angry can be impressed that your school is interested in their opinion and seeking to better itself.

Conducting the Interview

Exit interviews should be done in person or over the telephone. By talking with the parents, the interviewer can ask for elaboration on unclear answers or pursue an interesting point that comes up during the conversation. It is valuable to know more than just “homework was a problem” (too much or too little?) or how a particular discipline incident was perceived (too harsh or too lenient?).

When to Call

Most calls will need to be made in the evening. Consider sending a postcard with the interviewer’s name, letting families know that the person will be calling. The least disruptive time will be from 7 p.m. to no later than 9 p.m. – after dinner and before bedtime. Keep in mind that families with younger children (under 7 years old) may need to be called before 8 p.m. In the case of answering machines, leave a message as to the reason for the call and say that you will call back another time.

Structuring the Interview

The interviewer should have an introductory script and a series of prepared questions. The script should identify the interviewer as a representative of your school, explain the reason for the call, and ask the respondent for a specific amount of time. (Before the first call, the interviewer should make several “trial” calls, reading the script and asking questions to judge approximately how long a typical interview will last.) On a separate sheet, provide a list of the parents’ and students’ names and the last grade attended. Confirming this information with the respondent at the beginning of the interview can be a good icebreaker. Go over the pronunciation of names with the interviewer so he or she can mark the list appropriately. A mispronounced name makes a negative first impression. The questions will be of two types: characteristics about the school that you want the respondent to rate on a “1” (very negative) to “5” (very positive) scale and open-ended questions designed to encourage the respondent to talk. The rating questions should ask about such areas as academics, co-curricular programs, services, social activities, and school’s location.

The questions will yield valuable information about both your school and the qualities and programs that attracted the family to the new school. You want to know:

- – why the family decided to withdraw the student (if the parent chose to withdraw their child),
- – who participated in making the decision, (if the parent chose to withdraw their child)
- – what the family perceived as the strengths and weaknesses of your school,

- – what could we have done differently to meet the needs of your child,
- – why the parents and/or students chose the new school, and
- – what type of school (public, charter, magnet, private-independent, religious) was chosen.

The value of exit interviews is not in the information gathered in a single instance, but rather in the body of the data gathered over a period of time. This information is an indispensable part of developing a profile of your school's families and helping you understand what they seek from you and what they value about your school.

Glossary of Terms

Child Find – Child Find requires all school districts to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disabilities. This obligation to identify all children who may need special education services exists even if the school is not providing special education services to the child.

IEP – The Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) is a plan or program developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives specialized instruction and related services.

IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ensures that all children with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education, including special education, and related services that are "designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living ..." -

IEE – If a parent of a child with a disability, does not agree with the results of the individualized evaluation of your child, as conducted by the school system, you have the **right to** obtain what is known as an **Independent Educational Evaluation**, or an **IEE**.

MAP – Modified Action Plans outlines the details of the learning expectations as well as support strategies to ensure the success of the student.

REACH Team – Composed of significant potential advocates in the student's life. Parents/guardian, teacher, and student select the REACH team members.

Placement – where the child will receive his or her special education and related services.

Probation Period – Probationary period is the initial period or "trial period" (nine weeks to one year), during which a new student is carefully evaluated.

Service Plan – A Services Plan (SP) is developed and implemented to the extent appropriate for each private school student with a disability who has been designated to receive special education and related services offered by the school district. The SP must be developed by a team and reviewed at least annually. Services Plans are limited and only provide the services determined by the school district.